# The Silenced Generation

## The "black children" of China's one-child policy

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# Abstract

This research illustrates a very little-known social phenomenon of "black children" (*hei haizi*) who experienced their daily concealment under the one-child policy in China. Challenging existing scholarship of critiquing the state-sanctioned harm against individual families, especially parents' sufferings and illegal children's denial status in documents, this research reveals the family as a key figure in distinguishing the "black children" from other "normal" population with the support of state power. It repositions the "black children" as the primary victims of losing their family membership, continued identity, stabilized childhood, reciprocal human respects and freedom in a given society. Details of their lived experiences from day-to-day base was limited touched. The term of "black children" was used to mainly suggest this population's lack of formal legitimised personhood (*hukou* registration) in existing studies and documents, however, this research aims at expanding meanings of the label of "black" on levels of formal identity, physical presence, and emotional recognition, so we can have a better understanding what "black" really meant (and still means) to them. This research explains why the "black children" were born, how they were concealed in given families and communities, and what impacts left on their sense making of the identity, belonging, and recognition. Narratives of their displaced childhood, discontinued family membership and disruptive recognition signposts my argument of their triple "black identity" constructed throughout: not only the formal denial against the "black children" on the level of abstract legitimacy, but also family exclusion and social alienation. Furthermore, this generation was not only silenced by the policy's coercion and family injustice, but also doubly muted by the rapid policy changes in modern China.

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# Chapter One: Introduction

## 1.1 A personal journey of being a "black child".

I called many women "Mum" and their husbands "Dad" when I was little as I was moved from door to door like an unsigned-for parcel; but, across two decades, I hardly recall a moment when I was allowed to call my *own* mother "Mum" in the public presence of my family's friends, colleagues, acquaintances in my motherland. I was born a "black child" (*hei haizi*) (this is how I was referred to) when only one child was permitted in my family due to China's one-child policy. During the era of the strictly implemented one-child policy, my existence and talk about my existence were forbidden. As the two-child and later three-child policy were implemented nationwide after 2016, people largely assumed us to automatically become the same as other "normal" children overnight. However, two points were overlooked here: firstly, the time lag between the state policy's announcement and implementation locally; and, secondly, the continuation of trauma after the end of the restrictions. We had been metaphorically quarantined in a zone of "silence" for over two or three decades. We could not be talked about. There our opportunities and choices were shaped by our limited access to acceptance, love, and respect. The end of the one-child policy did not necessarily lift the silence, it merely allowed someone like me to exist in a society where there was no authorized force to punish our existences, but it was hard to say to what extent our existences had been acknowledged and protected as "normal" people.  Little attention was paid to our emotions and identity, just like how our experiences of moving around and being hidden were overlooked.

In this thesis I want to bring back the voice of the "black children" (*hei haizi*) and explore how they lived outside the rules of the one-child policy in China - from their day-to-day interactions with family, neighbourhood and community, local officials, schools and peers, and how these have affected them socially and emotionally in later life, to the larger world beyond those individuals, such as the public discourse surrounding their illegitimacy. The one-child policy was officially introduced nationwide in China at the end of 1979, permitting one couple to have one child only. Exceptions were applied to couples with twins/triplets or a disabled child,

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or from ethnic minority groups (Croll, Davin and Kane, 1985a). A new two-child policy came in 2016 and a later three-child policy in 2021 further liberalised the restrictions (Gu *et al.*, 2018; Mullen, 2021; Tatum, 2021). However, as I will argue here, while the policy itself was abolished, the effects on those children who had lived with the "black" label throughout their infancy, childhood, adolescent, and adulthoods did not disappear. The term "black children" itself was mediated by the family, community, mass media and local governments to describe children who were born without legal personhood registration – *hukou* – and thus lacked the access to entitled public resources such as school, medical care, migration, etc. (Hao, 2014; Wan, 2015). Nevertheless, as will be shown in this research, the meaning of being "black children" in this research goes beyond the loss of identity in paperwork.

## 1.2 China's "black children"

The one-child policy became a "basic state policy" (*jiben guoce*) in 1982 to serve the policy's "correctness" because it was seen as "economically essential, political correct, and worth all human sacrifice it has exacted" for decades, even though feelings of injustice about it have grown astronomically in number and size (Greenhalgh, 2010, p. 35). Harms against parents, especially mothers, have been well researched across a variety of aspects, and include financial penalty, health damage such as forced sterilization or abortion, negative impacts on jobs and assessing Party engagements (Croll, Davin and Kane, 1985b; Greenhaigh, 2008; Ebenstein, 2010), confiscation of children (Pang, 2015), family separation (Johnson, 2016a), and the consequences of losing the only-child once childbearing years have passed (*shidu*) (Jiang, Li and Sánchez-Barricarte, 2014; Y. Song, 2014; Fu *et al.*, 2020). Studies on the children themselves have mainly focused on the documental denial against those who were born without legal permission, and on the only-children who were stereotyped as selfish, less cooperative, spoiled or delicate personalities, or 'little emperors' as they became known (Jing, 2000; Cameron *et al.*, 2013; Cheng, 2013; Zheng *et al.*, 2022). The term "black children" was mediated post 1990s to describe those who were born without *hukou* – the fundamental household registration system that documented people's legal personhood and thereby allocated entitled resources, such as public education, medical care, legal transport, migration, marriage and childbearing (Li, 2008; Hao, 2014). Birth registration facilitated the family

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planning's implementation and population migration control; therefore, avoiding registration became a way to circumvent the family planning regulations and reports on unregistered children (Zhou and Lavely, 2004).

Other terms, such as "black kids" (*hei wa*), "black people" (*hei ren*), "extra children" (*chao sheng*), "out of plan" (*ji hua wai*) have also been variously used (Lin, 1994; Wang, 2010b; Zheng, 2013; He, 2022). In these various studies, the lack of *hukou* and associated public resources has been argued as the main suffering of the "black children". As such, efforts taken to register them on their family *hukou* booklet might make them appear like other "normal" citizens who have had a legitimized position in the country. However, this research aims to expand the meaning of being "black" to more than just that of formal documentation. I argue that we also need to consider family recognition and social solidarity. I have personally chosen to use the term "black children" in this study for two reasons: firstly, I was personally referred to by this term for over two decades as I grew up, thus it was the most convincing term for me to explore my cohort's lived experiences. Secondly, in the public discourse, the politics of colour in China –specifically being "red" and "black" – had become particularly prominent during the Cultural Revolution (1966 to 1976), thus marking the cultural stigma of being "black" in generational memories (Jiang, 1998; Jian, Song and Zhou, 2006).

It is necessary, therefore, to briefly describe the historical context of "red" and "black" categories of persons before we understand why the term "black" mattered to citizenship and human freedom. The Cultural Revolution was launched in 1966 as a socio-political movement with the goal of purging remnants of capitalists and enemies from Communist China (An, 1976). It was characterised by violence and chaos, even mass killings, all of which were encouraged by the state government (Hayford, 2006; Song, 2011). "Redness" was related to positive classes of Chinese persons, including the five categories of poor and lower-middle peasants, workers, revolutionary soldiers, revolutionary cadres, and revolutionary martyrs. They were regarded as trusted revolutionary members with political privilege. The "black Five Categories" referred to landlords, rich farmers, bad influencers/elements, counter revolutionaries, and right-wingers such as academics. They were classified and labelled as traditional enemies, persecuted, and remained downtrodden across the entire decade.  Their children of were seen as "born-blacks" (*zilai hei*) who were supposed to be treated in line with

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their parents' categories (Jian, Song and Zhou, 2006). Such politics of "red" and "black" sponsored structural discrimination and violence against those who fell into the "black five categories". The meaning of "black" was thereby associated with being illegal (e.g., "black market" or "black gang"), disgraceful ("black materials"), wrong or bad ("black element"), traditional enemies, unacceptable by the mainstream culture of value, or under the table (Deshpande, 1966; Deliusin, 1967; An, 1976). Individuals who were categorised as "black" experienced systematic discrimination against their legal rights and human freedom in the name of the "collective good" or "justice for people" (Heberer, 2009). Forms of physical and mental violence against persons who fell into "black" categories appeared right and fair in the discourse of the state campaign.

Therefore, when we look to understand the meaning of "black children", it should be understood as something deeply embedded within these children's very daily lives with their families, neighbourhoods and community, school and peers, and other significant relationships encountered in their adulthoods. Besides their absence in the family record, what other treatments did they experienced from day-to-day? Where did they live? With whom did they live? What happened between them and other members in the family? What changes did they feel and experience between the one-child policy and the new policy changes? Answers to such questions will facilitate our understanding of what "black" really meant (and still means) to them. Little is known about details of their lived experiences for various reasons. For instance, their lived experience was overlooked in studies based on the national census, or some researchers noticed their multi-level "black" treatments but faced with challenges to recruit them into their research (Jin, 2009; Johnson, 2016a; Wang, 2018). This research aims at filling three gaps in our knowledge of this very hidden population: firstly, uncovering more about their journeys, why they were born and the ways in which they were hidden from day to day; secondly, understanding the human costs of those journeys at the time in terms of physical presence (or more accurately, absence), emotional identity, and social recognition; and thirdly, revealing the legacy on these "black children" who have reached their adulthoods in the era of the state now encouraging a three-child policy.

In this way, the research challenges the existing scholarship on the one-child policy which has, until now, focussed more on the trauma and costs experienced by parents (and especially

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mothers), as well as the loss of infant life through abortion and infanticide. Where they do appear, it is often in relation to their illegitimate status alone. This study repositions the "black children" as primary victims and reveals the family as a key figure in co-producing their diminished status with the support of state power. It is very important to understand these children's loss of citizenship and human freedom from the *inside* of family because they were concealed in so many ways away from public view and interventions. Their bodies, formal identities and feelings, were confined as part of a strategy for the family to negotiate their own fertility demands within the state policy. Going beyond the lack of document registration and how it became the main problem of processing the "black children" as citizens, this research aims to illustrate how their lack of access to continued, stabilized, and reciprocally recognized motherhood, childhood, and familyhood framed their very ideas of who was worthy and unworthy, how they were differentiated from "normal" people through day-to-day interactions with their family and community, and how such discrimination was repeated into "norms" of family, community, the society, so the injustice against population like the "black children" was not considered a moral wrong.

As this research will show, the family-sanctioned harms on the "black children" were not exceptional stories nor particular individuals' choices. These were collectively chosen and processed on a nationwide scale by families in order to cope with the dilemma between fertility demands and policy punishments. We need to understand who was involved in the strategy and benefitted from such "negotiation", and who did not benefit. The voices of the "black children" were never heard because they never had any chance to present themselves in public discourse. This silenced generation have reached their adulthoods and fertility ages now. They have experienced problems with human trust, intimacy, ideas about family and childbearing. Their victimhood was neither terminated by their return to the biological family residence, nor by changes of policy. Shifting from being a hidden generation that appeared to be considered as less than "normal" people, to a generation of being encouraged to build up families and comply with the three-child policy, these "black children" were caught between the state sovereignty and familism culture. Their displaced childhood, discontinued family love and nurture, destabilized family identity and community engagements, were not understood nor acknowledged by either the family, or the state. They were pushed to be "black" then forced to reconceptualize themselves as "black" no-more without appropriate

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respect or preparations. Traumatized humans cannot be fixed by a one-time event overnight, such as the policy abolishment or changes. So, we should care about these "black children" more than ever because their voices remain silenced.

As the following chapters will explain, the "black children" in this research are defined by three characteristics. Firstly, these children whose formal family relationship was denied on the registration in document, either by tactics of unregistering (e.g., no *hukou*) or disguised registration (e.g., registered as niece/nephew of the family). Secondly, these are children who were physically removed from their biological parents' identifiable networks, such as the daily family residence, by tactics of foster-care, adoption, or hiding indoors. Thirdly, these are children whose emotional identity around biological parent-child relationships were denied in their daily interactions, for instance, calling the mother as "aunt" or aunt as "mother". It is important to stretch the existing meaning of "black children" beyond their lack of legal registered personhood in this way because their identity was formed and deformed within relationships, particularly their family relationships that inducted them to further socialization. Being removed from their biological families' acknowledged relationships at the levels of formal registration, physical presence, and emotional identity constitutes the meanings of being "black" in this research, and this research discusses how their status of being "black" was processed as a hidden and floating journey *inside* and *outside* the family.

## 1.3 Research objectives and questions

To summarise, then, the umbrella objective of this study is to explain how "black children" experienced their daily lives *inside* and *outside* the family with the one-child policy as a backdrop. To be specific, I want to explore what the "black children" can tell us about their lived experiences in relation to the status of being "black", from their births, infancy, childhood, adolescent, now-reached adulthoods, including also their imagination or expectations of what might happen in future. To achieve these objectives, the project sets out three major areas of exploration and enquiry with specific questions as set out below.

Firstly, how can we understand the "black children" phenomenon? To be specific, when the family and public media used the term of "black children", which category of children are/were referred to? What is the meaning of "black" in Chinese political contexts and societal understanding? What made some children become "black" whilst others not? When people distinguished the "black" children from "normal" children, what did "normal" mean? Who decided the meaning of "normal" and how its meaning was internalized by people?

Secondly, what did it mean to be a "black child" on a daily basis? What happened to them after they were born? How did their experiences affect them at the time? How have their experiences affected them since? To understand their lived experiences on multiple levels of formal identity, physical presence, and emotional recognition, this research goes deep into their very daily interactions in multiple settings of relationships – relations between parents and children, between siblings, between the family and neighbours, between the family and local cadres, between the officials and state government policy, between the state agenda and globalization context.

Thirdly, what can the phenomenon of "black children" reveal about concepts of children, family, and citizenship in China? The one-child policy and newly changed population polices have been in accordance with the establishment, as well as opening and reforming of Communist China, therefore, a comprehensive understanding of the meaning of "black children" cannot be divorced from a contextual understanding of generations *inside* and *outside* the family.

## 1.4 Structure of this research

This research explains the generation of "black children" across seven chapters. Chapter Two, which follows this Introduction, presents the Literature Review. Here I review existing studies relating to three aspects: the one-child policy and related state policy power; familism and neo-familism in relation to traditional Confucianism and modernity in Communist China; and children and childhood in China and the worldwide context. The chronology of the one-child policy and changes related to family planning explains the origins, implementation, negative

outcomes and controversial benefits of the various policies on individuals, families, and the state. Studies on familism and neo-familism in traditional China and in Communist socialism are essential for us to understand the mixed logic of Confucianism, Marxism, and Capitalism, all of which have been involved in impacting on the family pattern and structure. Regarding the father-son relationship as the foundation of the familism ideology in traditional Chinese culture is the key argument. The virtue of filial piety has been seen as the basic principle to ground the family unit and build community. Furthermore, this section will explore how political campaigns undermined, or to some extent, even dismantled traditional familism leading to the structural shifting from ancestral cult to children centred. The third section explores theoretical understandings of children and childhood in the family, community, and society. What is the nature of children and childhood in the culture of familism? What makes them different from adults and why should we care about traumatized children? Within China, many empirical studies on the left-behind children whose migrated parents worked in urban areas but left them living with other caregivers in rural China, have revealed the ways in which they have lacked education equality, family connection, and suffered harm. Marginalized or excluded children have also been studied in other contexts. For example, Jewish children who suffered or survived from genocide and the Holocaust in World War II, and Rohingya children who lost basic human rights under Myanmar's two-child policy are two relevant examples to illustrate how widely the structural harm against innocent children could be. All of these aspects will form the empirical and theoretical foundations for this particular study.

Chapter Three outlines and discusses the Methodology of the research. Here I explain my inductive logic in researching the phenomenon of "black children". Firstly, three big research questions are presented: Why the "black children" were born? What did they experience from day-to-day? What impacts have they lived within throughout the one-child policy and beyond its dismantling? Secondly, beginning from my ontological thinking of how the reality of being "black children" can be socially constructed, an interpretative stance follows to justify my use of qualitative research. Analysing the narrative of these "black children" therefore became the key element to reveal the voices of these "black children" from their own perspectives. Thirdly, I justify the use of semi-structured interviews to collect the data. Snowball sampling was decided by the nature of this sensitive research, as well as the nature of this very hidden population. Here I detail the participants' recruitment, the way in which semi-structured

interviews were conducted online instead of face-to-face due to the Covid-19 pandemic, and the way I ensured anonymity and privacy for my participants. In total, 20 participants from both rural and urban China, including 15 female and 5 males, were recruited. Fourthly, the diversity of my data has been well-considered in my sampling to generate an in-depth understanding of the researched generation, based on very solid stories of people's lived experiences. Fifthly, I justify my analysis of the narrative from an interpretative approach. Both the content of their storytelling and the contexts within which they storied their lives play important roles in understanding what happened then, who were involved, for whose benefits and for what purpose. The last section explains my positionality and reflexivity as an insider researcher, including challenges in my relationships with the participants, data confidentiality between different participants, and vulnerability as an insider researcher. While my position was a methodological advantage, it also posted significant ethical challenges to my question design, narrative collection, and interpretation of findings.

Chapter Four answers my first research question regarding why the "black children" were born. It demonstrates the becoming and being of the "black children" by analysing how it started with their births, or even pre-birth. My analysis begins by looking into why the family decided to give birth to more babies than the policy permitted, to explain why a "black child" was born even though the publicised environment conflicted such a decision. Including who demanded that the couple give birth to more babies? What role did the couple, especially the mother, play in such family decision-making?  Who was involved in demanding and deciding that a baby was needed? For what benefits was this decided and who benefited from it in the family? Secondly, this chapter explores how it became possible to conceive the baby and gave birth to him/her at local levels, within all of the state policy's constraints. This includes the tactics used to hide the mother's pregnancy from the neighbourhood's or community's (e.g., work colleagues) surveillance, or local investigations from official cadres; as well as the tactics used to give birth to a baby without legalised identify. The gender dimension is noticeable at this stage as the mother's body was the subject that carried out all the concealment tactics, and the baby's gender played a significant role in leading the family's decision. Prenatal gendered violence against female babies is highlighted in understanding the moral hierarchy between parents and children. Foucault's conception of "biopower", Agamben's "life" and "bare life" are used here to explain how the "black children" were evaluated in their families,

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what really defined the family membership, or legal personhood. It aims at answering why and how the birth became possible, to explain the power dynamic between the state policy and family agency, grandparents and parents, parents and "black children". It illustrates what reproduction really meant and what benefits it was planned for.

Chapter five answers the question of what happened to these children. My analysis maps out the "journey" of being "black" drawn from their narratives of what happened to them after they were born. The main strategy used was to remove the "black children" from their biological parents so they could not be identified. Tactics here included being physically hidden (residential separation between the parents and children, denied registration) and emotional distance (for example, many children were trained to call their mother as "aunt" to disguise their mother-children's relations in daily interactions *outside* the family). The first phase covers their primary separation from the biological parents, being hidden in some rural relatives' families (often grandparents') on a physical level and being trained not to call their biological parents as "mother" or "father". Displaced childhood, shifting caregiving, maltreatment, and emotional disconnection were presented in their recounted experiences with significant others, and feelings of being "outsider" began to emerge in their ideas of family relationships. The second phase covers the readjustment made by the "black children" and their biological families after they returned to their natal families. The key aspect of understanding their experiences is to note the continued concealment tactics after these "black children" returned to their biological parents' residence, such as disguised *hukou* and family status or being physical hidden. These "black children" often experienced very different family treatment, reconceptualised different identity and recognition from their "homed siblings", and categorised themselves as different from other children they understood as "normal" in the larger society, for instance, the only-children of their peer families. This chapter explains the processed differencing or othering of the "black children" in relation to Bowlby's attachment theory and Honneth's philosophy of recognition, arguing the challenges in establishing the family solidarity and recognition between the "black children" and their biological families. It demonstrates how the victimhood of these children was jointly produced by the state policy power and family injustice *inside* the family realm.

Chapter Six answers the question of what impacts the "black children" had lived with throughout. It continues explaining how the "black children" were influenced and framed by their experiences and reflections on their practiced family interactions, school lives, and connections with the larger world at the level of emotion. Apart from being hidden on a physical and documental level, the "black children" were also silenced in the family conversations about their discomfort in being a concealed child. Themes of emotional abandonment, fear and insecurity, blame, shame, guilt, love and hate are presented in narratives of their reflections on what they sensed about being displaced, hidden, and differentiated. Also, my analysis reveals how they tried to make sense of all these happenings with the idea of it being reasonable, even fair, to treat them in those ways because the policy power endorsed all harms, at least based on what they were told by the family and society. Therefore, both family shame and public shame played significant roles in normalising the repetitive discrimination against the "black children" and generating structural violence against them with impunity. In relation to Galtung's violence theory, this chapter illustrates how the "black children" constructed their understandings of being identified as "black" and normalized the difference between "black children" and "children" in the public discourse of the one-child policy. It explores how the "black children" evaluated themselves based on how they were treated by the families, communities, and public voices. It reveals how these children gained the very idea of their self-worth, identity, and recognition in accordance with how much of their voices could be accepted and acknowledged *inside* and *outside* the family, how this generation was doubly silenced not only by the family but also public narratives of this family planning, victims, and legacy, and why their victimhood went beyond the timescale of the one-child policy.

Chapter Seven concludes by summarising what constituted the social phenomenon of "black children" across contexts and time – what it meant to be "black" whilst others were "normal", and how lives were impacted by this distinction at the levels of citizenship rights, freedom, and respect. I argue that the narratives of this whole generation were silenced *inside* and *outside* the family and propose the term "double silencing" to explain two things: firstly, from the level of individuals' lived experiences, the "black children" were not only jointly silenced by the state policy and family injustice, but also silenced by the sharp policy changes across time. Secondly, from the level of reflecting on the one-child policy, the master narrative of its

impacts on China and Chinese people was very western-led and there were few inside voices of what really happened to these people from day-to-day, from local environments to the whole society, from the policy changes to its aftermath. This chapter also shows how this study might change our understanding of the meaning of children and family in relation to the modernity in China, what forms or deforms Chinese citizens in accordance with the civilising process, and what makes humans get respects, freedoms, and the citizenship rights of "full humans" within the larger world of modernisation and globalization.

# Chapter two: Literature review

## 2.1 Introduction

This chapter explains how the term of "black children", and other related terms such as "hidden children", have been understood in the academic literature, and what previous studies have explored in terms of their experiences. In order to build the key conceptual and theoretical foundations for the study and to clarify the empirical gaps in our understanding, this chapter reviews three key areas of literature. Firstly, it explains the history of China's family planning policies, and in particular the one-child policy, to understand why it came into being, how it was implemented, modified, and abolished in urban and rural China, and what we now understand were the consequences. Through this we can understand how the state power was practiced at levels of the person, family, and local community. Secondly, this chapter explores how the family dynamic has been practiced and understood within the contexts of the modernity professed by Communist China since 1979. It looks at family and children from a more theoretical level to explain what makes sense of family status. Thirdly, this chapter explores how children and childhood have been interpreted by the political campaigns and familial interactions under the one-child policy. Finally, I explore how China's modernisation has influenced the meaning of reproduction, shifted the family central relationship from the patrilineal base to a conjugal bond, and nurtured different ideologies of childbearing from previous generations. In doing so, I reflect upon distinctions between "normal" children (e.g., the only-child) and "other" children who experienced systematic exclusion, such as the left-behind children of China's urbanization, the Jewish children of the Holocaust, and the Rohingya child refugees' stateless crisis.

## 2.2 The one-child policy and "black children"

### 2.2.1 The chronology of the one-child policy, its implementation and controversies.

To understand the history of one-child policy is necessary to explain what happened to individual families, why the "black children" were produced, and how they were talked about in the existing narratives of Communist China, its modernisation, and the state policy. As will be shown below, the social phenomenon of "black children" could only be introduced by a collective campaign that justified the structural force to regulate individual families' reproductive practices and endorsed its subsequent outcomes within the implemented periods.

### 2.2.1.1 Top-down state power: the one-child policy's implementation within China's modernisation

China's population had increased from 540 million to more than 800 million between 1950 and 1970, following the governmental encouragement of a baby boom post World War II to support the development of Communist China (Zeng and Hesketh, 2016a). Problems of imbalance between population and economy were seen as the main crisis that hindered China's "four modernisations" in aspects of agriculture, industry, science and technology, and national defence since the 1960s. Later childbearing, longer spacing between children, and fewer children (*wan, xi, shao*) were initially encouraged. This was promoted not only to reduce the rate of population growth, but also to promote investment on those fewer children's health, education, and ethics to enhance the quality of the  labour force (Greenhaigh, 2008; Raven *et al.*, 2015). The population was noted as a catastrophic threat to China's modernisation and globalization in the end of 1979, therefore, the one-child policy, also known as the single-child family policy, was initially introduced to rural and urban China to permit one couple to have one child regardless of gender (Croll, 1985). Exceptions were permitted for certain couples who had twins/triplets or a disabled child, those from ethnic minority groups, or disabled servicemen (Croll, Davin and Kane, 1985a; Hu and Shi, 2018). Enforcing the one-child policy was taken by the state as "the only solution" to start the nationwide economic reform campaign regardless of social costs (Croll, Davin and Kane, 1985a; Greenhaigh, 2008). The responsibility to develop the state was thus burdened onto party committees and governments at all levels from 1979 to the 1990s, such as measuring local officials' political performances by how much birth penalty they annually collected, or

how many forced sterilizations or abortions were conducted for the purpose of implementing the family planning (Greenhalgh, 2010).

Limiting all couples to one child was seen as "one of the most sensitive decisions of the post-Mao era" and the Communist party had to work especially hard to restrict public discussion of its huge conflict and controversy (Greenhalgh, 2010, p. 45). Couples were essentially required by the Marriage Law to subordinate their reproductive desires to those of the state. The state coercion was backed by the force of law and party authority (Greenhalgh, 2010). In 1984, a second birth was permitted if the first was a girl in rural areas and this was known as one-child-and-a-half policy. Birth planning was then declared as "a fundamental duty of the socialist state" in the 1987 Constitution. In the late 1990s, the policy was relaxed further such that two children were allowed in some urban areas if the couple were both singletons (Gu *et al.*, 2007). The one-child family pattern was embedded in national law in 2001, and it was announced that it would remain in place for at least another decade by China's minister of population and birth planning in 2008. Although some exceptional regulations started to encourage singleton couples to have two children in some urban areas, for instance, Shanghai, the one-child rule policy still ruled in most of urban China before 2010 (Greenhalgh, 2010; Yan, 2018). The fertility rate fell from 5.9 births per woman in 1970 to 1.5 births per woman in 2015 (Zeng and Hesketh, 2016a). Thus the government claimed success in reducing births and contributing to economic growth (Feng, Cai and Gu, 2013a). However, some studies suggest that rapid economic development had reduced fertility substantially as in other developing countries (e.g., Thailand from 1970 to 1990) (Wang and Mason, 2017).

In this way, population governance dominated social policy since the 1980s. Discourses around China's people, economy, and environment were framed by how China's population were managed and cultivated on all levels – medical, educational, psychological, political, economic, social security, intergenerational, etc. The globalization and modernisation of China pushed its economic growth to be prioritized over any other agenda throughout the 1980s and early 1990s. Lowering the number of people was framed as one of economic modernisation and many scholars concluded that the one-child policy was more an economic plan than a population one (Croll, Davin and Kane, 1985a; Greenhaigh, 2008; Greenhalgh, 2010). The size of the population was reframed as a problem  of social and human

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development from 2003 to 2013 when the government focused first on addressing the social dislocations caused by rapid change in the global economy, calling for "putting people first" (*yiren weiben*) (Greenhalgh, 2010). However, the human trauma and social suffering were still not addressed, even though some efforts were made to uncover this. As I will show below, more attention was paid to rural families' resistance against the coercive campaigns from 1980s and 1990s by scholars (He and Akkerman, 1999; Greenhalgh, 2010); fewer voices were heard from urban people as they were seen as those who relatively suffered less (Milwertz, 1997).

Enforcing the one-child policy in urban families encountered less resistance in the 1980s and the reasons are four-fold. Firstly, according to Greenhalgh, the ideas of children and childhood cost urban families more money and effort to raise children, which lowered their fertility preference though most urban residents considered two children as the ideal. Secondly, son preference was weak in cities and, in some families, daughters were even preferred as they were believed to attach to their parents closer than sons. Thirdly, the government's economic and political incentives and disincentives framed couples' sensible decision-making. To be specific, the workplace (*danwei*) system structured urban life that tightly tied couples to their employers who were the source of jobs, housing, health care, children and elderly support, as well as other necessities of life. Therefore, such social control mechanisms enabled the one-child policy to dominate urban families' institutional and ideological thinking and their decision-making (Greenhalgh, 2010). Female bodies were highly disciplined by birth cadres in the workplace and neighbourhood, such as monthly periods, premarital health, marital status, contraceptive and pregnancy practices, and neighbourhood' relentless surveillance (Greenhalgh, 2010). In-depth research suggests women's "conscientious acceptance" (*zijue jieshou*) of the one-child policy was due to their sense of their civic duties to be "advanced" citizens who sacrificed their needs for the national good (Milwertz, 1997). Fourthly, the political climate following the recently finished Cultural Revolution saw urban residents submitting to government dictates, in which questioning official policy equalled challenging the party, resulting inevitably in political sanctions (Greenhalgh, 2010).

Material benefits and political rewards showered couples who signed a lifetime one-child pledge, while those who broke the policy were punished by their loss of jobs, houses, party

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membership, and children's education and other public benefits. However, the demand for "small families" was not mirrored in rural families (Croll, 1985), and the real problem of this population policy lay here (Greenhalgh, 2010). Sons were needed for labour and elderly support, not seen as heavy burdens even with rapid rising costs, such as food, clothing, schooling, health care, weddings and houses for marriage, etc. (Gupta *et al.*, 2003; Greenhalgh, 2010). A lack of public elderly support and a fast-changing environment made people treat sons as vital and irreplaceable keys to family survival and economic security. The scientific norm of the state and the community reproductive norms of Chinese villagers clashed here (Greenhalgh, 2010). The rule of using no physical force was forgotten in the rural campaigns, where aborting all unauthorised pregnancies, confiscation of property, house demolishing and other violent methods were reportedly used by local officials after socio-political pressure did not work. "Heartrending forms of violence against baby girls by couples desperate for a son" were caused by the campaigns, and Greenhalgh suggests women's humanity was suppressed in which their bodies were forcedly controlled  but their minds were not (Greenhalgh, 2010, p. 50). From 1984, the state began to back off and negotiation room was created between local cadres and villagers, through the one-child-and-half policy at local levels, which was then implemented nationwide in 1991. All departments and social forces took their parts in governing China's family planning, such participation was relatively small and usually embedded in the health ministry in most other third-world countries (Greenhalgh, 2010).

The era of strong-armed enforcement of the state policy on rural society ended in the early 1990s, alongside a fall in fertility numbers (He and Akkerman, 1999). Following decades of insistent state propaganda and practices in changing productive culture, a real decline in family size preferences was found in all but the poorest places in demographic data in the early 2000s. Also a decline in sons' willingness to honour "their most fundamental obligation" of elderly support was observed (Greenhalgh, 2010). The new socialist market economy played a remarkable role in normalizing the two children ideal into the family desires, because the costs of childbearing increased with the spreading consumer culture to ensure the bodily and mental quality of the young (Greenhalgh, 2010). However, the continued gender violence against baby girls coupled with the lowered desire for fertility: prenatal sex determination and sex-selective abortion were largely used to ensure the family ended up with a son (Chu,

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2001). "In many parts of the country, abortion of female fetuses is simply part of the everyday culture of family formation " (Greenhalgh, 2010, p. 52). The gender gap changed from 120 boys to 100 girls in 1999 (Greenhaigh, 2008), the highest in the world at that time (Greenhaigh, 2008), to 105.2 : 100 in 2010. It peaked at 140: 100 in some rural parts (Hesketh, 2011), then dropped to 104.7 : 100 females in 2020 (Wu *et al.*, 2022). A balanced sex ratio is usually under 100 for men in most societies (Janoski, 2014). Therefore, the one-child policy's implementation and negotiation in local contexts became a rather gendered process.

### 2.2.1.2 Two-child policy and three-child policy nationwide

China is now facing huge challenges with declines in new births and a quarter of the population expected to be aged over 60 by 2030 (Mai, Peng and Chen, 2013; Wang and Chen, 2014; Chen, Huang and Li, 2018). The proportion of the population aged 60 years and over will increase from 12.4% in 2010 to 28% by 2040, and women are outliving men (Liu, 2014; Wang and Chen, 2014). With the outcome of an aging society and a shortage of adult workforce, the universal two-child policy officially replaced the one-child limitation in 2016, encouraging couples to have a second birth and even the third birth to address the aging issues. Ironically, the new generation have taken to the birth limitation more readily than their parents' generation, and their low fertility desires have not led to the new baby boom the central government expected. China today has about 150 million families with only one child, accounting for more than a third of all families (Feng, Cai and Gu, 2013a).

The rapid socioeconomic development has now lowered childbearing desires in both urban *and* rural areas (Greenhaigh, 2008). When the two-child policy came into implementation nationwide at the end of 2016, factors that influenced births became complex. To be specific, when the constraint was one child, parents with strong son-priority manipulated the birth process and the rest did not. However, when the constraint was two, some parents manipulated both of their births to get sons, some let nature decide their first child's gender but manipulated the second if the first was a daughter, or some tried to get a son first then let the nature decide the second, and some did nothing. Therefore, the gender ratio under the two-child policy was also influenced by their parents' gender-manipulation decisions (Attane, 2016). Empirical studies show no significant promotion in rebalancing the gender

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ratio even with a fully implemented two-child policy, as long as the underlying son-priority remained in China  (Xu and Pak, 2015). Chinese couples express their hesitation about enlarging their families (Attane, 2016). Young couples indicate their willingness to delay or even forego childbearing under their heavy economic burden in a fast-changing and highly competitive society (Cai, 2010), in particular women who experience inadequate protection in the labour market and lack state support for the cost of childbearing (Attane, 2016). A lower social value has been continuously attributed to women, but paradoxically, motherhood is still highly valued in the ideal of parenting and family. Women's ambivalent situation was suggested by the significant decreased women's employment rates in urban areas in the last three decades (Attané and Guill, 2012). Childcare support, financial support for the elderly, and greater protection for women in the labour market have all been suggested as ways to convince Chinese couples to have more children (Attane, 2016).

### 2.2.1.3 Discussions on the state policy's impacts on women, family, and children

Western media reports into the human costs of this policy appears to have influenced the ways in which scholars, journalists, and audiences think and talk about the population work in China since the mid-1980s. A master narrative of brutal communist coercion with the emphasis on totalitarian state force and state-society struggle (people's desires for childbearing were opposed by the state force) has dominated media, political and scholarly discussions (Greenhalgh, 2010). Implementations of the one-child policy were largely critiqued in terms of its disincentives: (a) forced sterilization or abortion for mothers, (b) financial penalty and political punishments on the family, (c) no legitimatized registration and associated welfare for children.

### 2.2.1.3.1 Impacts on women: health damage and emotional devastation

Women have often been central in academic discussions of the state policy's impacts over the past four decades. Nationwide, mothers had to undergo mandatory sterilization after their first legal birth, otherwise they were subjected to forced abortions for their illegal pregnancies. The physical and mental devastating effects on women who had forced

abortions have been well-studied (Croll, Davin and Kane, 1985a; Greenhalgh, 2008b; Chan, 2013), even late-term maternity abortions in some extreme cases (Aird, 1990; Mosher, 1994; Fong, 2004a; Jian, 2013). 336 million abortions and 196 million sterilizations had been performed since the early 1970s according to governmental report (Tasch, 2015). Women's health was threatened by rough methods almost everywhere (Greenhalgh, 2008b). To be specific, health damage from the ineffective contraceptive methods used, forced abortion, and gender selective abortion (Hesketh, Lu and Xing, 2011; Nie, 2011; He *et al.*, 2012). It is important to note that not only the policy's coercion, but patriarchal violence played roles in threatening, or even damaging mothers' health. Secondly, financial and political disincentives were exercised over women as well, such as getting fired from their jobs, or losing Party membership because of unpermitted pregnancy (Aird, 1990; Feng, Poston and Wang, 2014; Fong, 2016). Thirdly, mental devastation has been frequently revealed in studies of mothers' narratives of losing children under the policy coercion, including the grief of forced abortion (Fong, 2004b; Littlejohn, 2011; Barboza, 2012), giving away a daughter or female infanticide (Yuehanxun, 2004; Johnson, 2016a), and losing their children through confiscation or kidnapping (Pang, 2015; Huang and Weng, 2019). We can see that wherever women embedded themselves in (family, workplace, culture), they were the main subjects that carried on the practical negotiations between the state and family.

Controversial "benefits" have also been documented in discussing the consequences of this policy. Firstly, reproductive-aged women have benefited from fewer pregnancies and deliveries because of the birth limitation, which improves their health welfare, as well as offering more opportunities for such females to pursue their personal development such as through education, employment and mental well-being (Hesketh and Zhu, 1997; Fong, 2002; Huang, 2017). However, compared with urban women, it is important to point out there was no remarkable change for rural women in terms of socioeconomic status, education, and personal promotion during the period of the birth control's implementation (Fong, 2002; Kim, Brown and Fong, 2018). Consequently, whether women suffered or benefitted from the one-child limitation has generated vigorous scholarly debate. Much of the literature on China's one-child policy has emphasized the harms to women from compulsory fertility limitation, through surveillance, gynaecological exams, mandatory contraception, fines, and the loss of benefits or jobs. Their reproductive characteristics cost them the deprivation of their

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reproductive freedom, not only in family size, but also in contraceptive choice (Bongaarts and Greenhalgh, 1985; Fong, 2002; White, 2006a; He *et al.*, 2012). As a consequence of forced decisions by their husbands' families, or a complication driven by the boy-priority, women have suffered from sex-selective abortions and sterilization and have been shown to suffer a lifetime of ill-health as a result. In the early 1980s, there were many campaigns that forced surgery on women in the villages and had lasting and terrible consequences (Fong, 2004b; Pang, 2015; Whyte, Feng and Cai, 2015).

## 2.2.1.3.2 Impacts on the family: penalty fines, parent-children separation, only-child loss

Discussions of an individual family's loss is also often combined with critiquing the state policy's coercion. For those "black children" who were born without birth certificates, penalties were applied by local cadres on their parents, including substantial fines and loss of employment, especially for public sector workers (Greenhaigh, 2008; Fong, 2016). But there were wide variations across the country down to the most local level (Kane and Choi, 1999). For instance, the local cadres in rural areas usually punished peasants by tearing down their houses, taking goods such as land, furniture, crop, poultry or rice, etc., and any political campaigns could be related to economic interests in the 1990s (Zhang, 2005; Greenhalgh, 2008b; Johnson, 2016b, 2016a). After 2000 the local cadres began to confiscate illegally born children in some areas. These children were taken and packed off to orphanages where they were put up for adoption (Pang, 2015). In some studies, foreign adoptive parents paid around 20,000 -30, 000 yuan (GBP 1,500 – 2,500) for a child in the 2000s, and the bureaucrats were criticized for collecting a kickback (Johnson, 2002; Dowling and Brown, 2009; Pang, 2015). For those families who wanted to keep their children away from being taken by local governments, mandatory penalty fines became the key. Usually the amount of fines were regulated as two to six times the family annual income (Croll, Davin and Kane, 1985a; Greenhaigh, 2008; Guo, 2014), but it varied across most local levels due to the local agenda associated with such financial benefits. Most families found it challenging to pay off the penalty, whereas some local cadres even encouraged couples to violate the policy and "sold" the birth quota for 3000 yuan (around GBP300) so they benefitted from the collected fines (Lin, 1994; Wang, 2010a).

With a rapidly declining fertility and an aging society, the smaller number of filial sons and the burden of the elder security system since the early 2000s has had a great impact on relaxing the one-child control in some areas, and on a rethinking of the population policy (Greenhalgh, 2010). "China got old before it got rich" has been argued frequently (Fong, 2004b; Li, 2011). According to the 2010 national census, there are 110 million people aged over 65 and this will rise from 18.5 percent (which already outnumbers the predicted 16.5 percent in 2030) of the total in 2019 to 25.6 percent in 2050 (Myers et al., 2019). A "4-2-1" family pattern has emerged and this has affected couples who are responsible for four older parents above them and one child below (Li, 1995, 1995; Hesketh and Zhu, 1997; Nie and Wyman, 2005). Because state support is limited for the elderly in rural areas, the family burden on their adult children is increasingly heavy and this has resulted in many social issues such as neglect and abuse. Some rural elderly people even commit suicide because of a lack of necessary support. Additionally, an overburdened health-care system and social security could mean profound and comprehensive challenges for multiple layers of governments in China (Li, 2011; Feng *et al.*, 2012; Woo, 2013; Li and Lin, 2016; Zhang, 2017).

Another negative concern under the one-child policy is the most feared family tragedy – the premature death of the only-child in families, known in China as the "only-child loss" (*shidu*) phenomenon. Data from the 2000 census showed that the average probability of the only-child's death was 4% before their mother reached age 45 years, 12% before they reached 80 years, 16% before 85 years, and 21% before they reached 90 years (Fong, 2004b; Zeng and Hesketh, 2016b). Demographers have estimated that there were about 1 million permanently childless families in 2010 because of the death of their only child, and the number has been increasing by about 78,000 every year (Walfish, 2001; Cai, 2013). Losing the only-child was significant in understanding the human cost of families. Over one million families were documented with the loss of their only-child in 2012, and 76,000 families was estimated to join this grief each year thereafter (Wu and Dang, 2013). Although it was permitted to have a second birth after losing the first one, many factors made it impossible for couples to do so such as age and health limitations (Pan, Liu, L. Li, *et al.*, 2016).

A strong gender imbalance is the first structural problem that has continuously harmed children and women. The issue of the rapidly increased sex ratio at birth (120 boys to 100 girls) was placed on the agenda by the Central Committee and State Council after it remained publicly silent for years. Instructions for normalizing the sex ratio at birth within ten years intensified the anxiety and was surrounded, for instance, by the problems of increased unmarried poor rural men who turned violent and disrupted the social harmony (Greenhalgh, 2010). An excess of boys had resulted in a highly skewed sex ratio. Female infanticide has been a cultural violence against female babies since 1960 or even earlier in China's history (Fuse and Crenshaw, 2006; Reed, 2011; King, 2014). It was never intended by the one-child policy, but commonly used by families to tactically negotiate their reproductive desires with the state policy power. The main causes of the skewed sex ratio are sex-selective abortions pre-birth and abandonment of female babies after birth. Some researchers suggest that villagers and local cadres have an interest in underreporting births and this may explain a larger proportion of the missing girls (Coale and Banister, 1994; Shi and Kennedy, 2016; Cai, 2017). This preference for sons has led to an increased skew in the sex ratio at birth. Before the policy was introduced in 1979, the sex ratio was 106 males per 100 females, however, by 1988 the sex ratio had increased to 111 males per 100 females and by the late 1990s, it rose steadily to 120:100 (Goodkind, 2011; Zhou et al., 2011).

Secondly, the generation of only-children, also called the singleton generation, has been discussed in academic literature. Only children are often viewed as disadvantaged as a result of "sibling deprivation", which may lead to their being self-centred, less cooperative, and less likely to get along with peers (Walt, 1999; Jing, 2000; Zhang, 2001; Cameron et al., 2013). The "quality" (suzhi) (primarily genetic makeup, health, and education) of singleton generation was encouraged by the state policy to transform China's backward situation into a modernized labour force in a competitive global market (Greenhalgh, 2010). Being obsessed with creating one perfect child became a common phenomenon among urban couples due to the only-child control (Greenhalgh, 2010). The downsides of being an only-child, for example, being narcissistic, selfish, less co-operative, "little emperor", etc, however, have

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been examined in empirical studies as stereotypes (Polit and Falbo, 1987; Falbo, 2018; Zheng *et al.*, 2022).

The policy has been seen by some to empower girls who were born as the only-child in their families. Daughters were considered inferior culturally and also perceived by most families as a net economic and emotional loss (Fong, 2002; Reed, 2011; Kim and Fong, 2014; King, 2014). Without the competition from their brothers, only daughters could get all their household resources, especially their educational development, including their access, aspiration and achievement. The chances of well-paid and career advancement for women have increased greatly alongside with the birth limitation (Milwertz, 1997; Fong, 2002; Ji, 2015; To, 2015). Singleton daughters enjoy unprecedented parental support because they have no brothers for their parents to favour, therefore, they are more likely to be encouraged to pursue advanced education and demanding careers that tend to reduce fertility (Huang and Wei, 1985; Fong, 2002; Ji, 2015; To, 2015; Brandt *et al.*, 2018; Hizi, 2018). Improvements in gender equality have contributed to improved health outcomes for young and middle-aged women. Compared with urban women and girls, rural females benefited less because families with only a female singleton were unacceptable to peasants, and were named "hopeless family" or "desperate family" (*juehu*) (White, 2006b; Johnson, 2016b).

Thirdly, the most critiqued harm against the children who were born and survived in existing studies was their lack of the systematic national household registration—*hukou* document. *Hukou*, the fundamental registration system adopted by the state government to distribute all information and resources to individuals in authorized ways. It not only legitimises nationality in the legal sense but also enables the rights and resources that are associated with full citizenship. A *hukou* booklet accompanies each family including all approved members, documenting their identifiable information including date of birth, gender, kinship such as parents, siblings, off-spring and spouse, education, career, and migration. (Mao, 1994; Wang, 2005a; White, 2006a; Greenhalgh, 2008a; Johnson, 2016b). Without this registration, a child would have no access to a school, would not be able to take a long-distance bus, train or flight, to get a job, to get engaged or married, or even get his/her own child registered (Gordon, 2017). At least 13 million children were affected by their lack of *hukou* in the 2010 census data (Cai, 2013). Studies conducted before the two-child policy replaced the one-child

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planning suggest the true number was probably closer to 30 million (Buckley, 2015; Gordon, 2017). The two-child policy encouraged local governments to support the registrations of those members of the population who had no *hukou* since 2016 (L. Wang, 2016; Yuan, 2016; Y. Wang, 2016), however there were still 2 million population missing from 2020's registered number in the census data (He, 2022). Terms such as "black children" (*hei haizi*) and "black *hukou*" (*hei hu*) thus appeared in media and governmental reports to specifically describe those children's lack of *hukou* status.

Fourthly, baby buying, abduction and human trafficking of children were extensively practised across the nation but have not been widely studied. Problems of human trafficking of women or sexual trafficking have been discussed as a widespread cultural practice in human history. Children were largely involved in baby selling/buying and human trafficking at the era of the one-child policy because of the gender preferences. Not only were there forced marriages to meet unmarried men's needs, but also the sale of out-of-plan babies to avoid the punishments. Approximately 200,000 children were sold annually for international adoptions (Zheng, 2018). It is difficult to say the number of how many babies were sold or kidnapped each year in China (Custer, 2013). Besides babies who were sold by local institutions, biological parents also played their parts in selling their *own* babies to some other families who wanted a child. They actively contacted the "agent" to arrange the selling of their own babies and negotiated prices in accordance with gender and age (Neuman, 2007). Phrases of "I hope she/he (children) can understand me, I have reasons/no choice" was very commonly used in parents' self-explaining in Neuman's study. The financial burden was normally phrased as the reason by the parents interviewed in Neuman's documentary (Neuman, 2007; Bao *et al.*, 2019). Not only "missing girls", but also boys were commercialised in line with their ages, for instance, a boy under one year old could be priced around 10,000 to 11,000 yuan (close to GBP 1,200) in the 2000s, but a boy between one and two years old would rise to 17,000 yuan to 18,000 yuan (about GBP 2,000) because buyers might be able to engage less with his nursery needs (Neuman, 2007).

Last but not least, when the first generation of the one-child policy have reached their adulthoods and reproductive ages, most studies have focussed on the issue of "bare branches" (*guanggun*), meaning men unable to find a wife and forced to stay childless (Custer,

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2013). Subsequently, the skewed gender ratio has encouraged the growth of a massive industry of "mail-order brides" being imported from neighbouring countries and a considerable number of men have been infected by sexually transmitted diseases (Edlund et al., 2007; Zhu, Lu and Hesketh, 2009). They are more prone to aggression or violence towards women, especially young women of fertility age (Heidi Stöckl et al., 2017; Hesketh, 2011; Qiu et al., 2019). A huge number of "bare branches" offers a potential threat to social order. According to Hesketh (2011), this makes it very difficult to prevent and eliminate forced prostitution, human trafficking, and mercenary marriages in areas with serious gender imbalance. Violence and property crimes against vulnerable women, children and even young men who had no connection with criminals have also increased due to a surplus of adult males, who blame their unmarriageable situations on women and other marriageable social members (Edlund *et al.*, 2007; Hesketh, 2011; Greenhalgh, 2013). The gendered violence against women and children was highlighted here in reflecting the consequences of the state policy.

### 2.2.3 Summary

#### *2.2.3.1 Silenced narrative of the one-child policy from individual's storytelling*

When we reflect on the chronology of the one-child policy and its impacts on persons, families, and the society in the past four decades, it is undeniable that the main narrative was largely influenced by Western-dominated story. State coercion and social resistance featured overwhelmingly in accounts of how the program worked (Greenhalgh, 2010). It is necessary to understand the introduction of the state policy within its particular political and cultural contexts. American political culture that shaped anti-communist sentiment contributed to a narrative of "communist coercion" throughout the 1980s and 1990s, mediating China as "totalitarian Other" as a foil to the "democratic West" in cold war notions. The emphasis in critiques shifted from anti-communism to human rights after the end of cold war, and binary East-West lenses continuously saw China as different from or "less than" the United States. The othering discourse on China, characterising it as intellectually backward and politically repressive, impeded understanding and close connections between we-them, United States-

China (Greenhaigh, 2008, p. 2). Critiques of the Chinese policy conveyed a message that only abuses such as missing women, female infanticide, forced abortions, or trafficking of children were worth noting in studies of how the government controlled its population. Such critiques remain important in drawing our attention to the terrible human cost among certain categories of citizens, especially in the 1980s and 1990s when human rights abuses were commonplace, yet are partial in understanding what we can see, say, and think about changes of China and its program (Greenhalgh, 2010).

Many studies argue the policy must be harshly judged because of the social suffering and human trauma it caused on a vast scale (Feng, Cai and Gu, 2013a; Tasch, 2015). Some studies focused on governmentality to explain the origins of the one-child rule, and how the policy could be understood as the crystallization of authoritative norms when it was created and carried out by public entities at multiple levels on family size, child education, work and health, etc., if modern society dominated the science-based norm (Greenhaigh, 2008). It is important to acknowledge negative and positive impacts (e.g., benefits for women, female only-children, and urban daughters) however controversial these appear, because the core of this research is to gain a closer understanding of what the one-child policy really meant to persons, families, and generations. Also, we need to understand what it really meant to everyone who was taking part, in compliance or resistance. Without a solid understanding of the state policy's influences on personal physical health, mental and emotional situations, political and cultural identities, legacies for further lives and succeeding generations, we cannot generate a good understanding of the real cost and losses in that era, and what harms still continue through subsequent social policies.

The focus of this research's concerns is the "black children" who were usually documented as suffering from being excluded from legitimatized citizenship through *hukou*. Drawing on existing studies on them and their families, it seemed that there was little room for the family to negotiate with the state policy power because master narratives often concentrated on how parents were punished, how the children were excluded from institutional entry, like school. However, when we look into local contexts to understand how families interacted with their local officials, how these local officials and cadres negotiated with the upper layers of government regarding the family planning campaign, we have found that negotiation space

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became possible due to the political characteristics in China's modernisation. As the agents between individuals and the authority, local officials faced up to their dilemmas when they had to make a balance between the state and the community. On the one hand, local government officials had to improve their annual records in birth planning work to cope with pressures from above, with enforcement from top to bottom secured by rewarding local success and punishing local failure. On the other hand, officials had to negotiate with local families and sometimes tactically protect them for the sake of the social bond. As the family policies of the state changed, local officials had to balance the conflicts and the interests between their bureaucratic identity and social identity. It is significant to rethink who were victimized by the one-child policy and who benefited, to reflect on non-Western narratives of the state policy, the family, and children so a comprehensive meaning of children in Chinese society can be uncovered.

Furthermore, what was the meaning of citizenship attached to the *hukou* of "black children"? What made someone a full member of a given community within the one-child policy while a "black child" was not? Citizenship was seen as a set of practices that constituted encounters between the state and citizens through institutional frameworks, and enabled memberships of situated individuals to find themselves between cultures and politics (Woodman and Guo, 2017). To understand the complex, multi-layered character of the Chinese state is significant for explaining how citizenship worked beyond the level of formal paperwork for a hidden population, how practices of citizenship emerged across rural and urban areas, and why the loss of these children's full membership in both individual families and in society can be seen as an institutional feature of the nature of citizenship.

### 2.2.3.2 Gendered violence against mothers and daughters

Gendered violence against women and children was noticeable in so many aspects when we reviewed existing documents on the policy's implementation, harms and benefits, and legacy. Firstly, mothers' health and mental damage was always positioned at the centre of human cost in critiques of the state sanctioned harm. Either through forced abortion and sterilization under the policy constraints, or via sex-selective abortion under the patriarchal power, mothers' physical and mental health carried the main harms in any aspect. Secondly,

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highlighting mother/motherhood whilst relegating concerns about father/fatherhood in family discourse has received some attention. The "motherhood penalty" and absent fatherhood in Chinese families have been studied as associated within globalization and modernisation of the state (Mu and Xie, 2016). Thirdly, woman themselves accepted and endorsed sex-selective abortion or abandonment. But the decision is often revealing of how intense pressure was placed upon women (e.g., implicit threats of violence or husband's remarriage) (Oomman and Ganatra, 2002). Last but not least, intense pressure on women's reproductive autonomy has been remarkable regardless of the one or two or three child policy employed. For instance, studies on contraceptive use in the era of the one-child policy, second-birth decision making and taking, prenatal and postnatal health problems under the newer two-and-three children policies always touched the dark side of harms against women's health, mental wellbeing, and personal development (e.g., employment equality) (Chen *et al.*, 2019; Guo *et al.*, 2020).

The attention paid by existing studies to the impacts and after-effects on children, in particular daughters, was patriarchal in the following respects. Firstly, female infanticide and abandoned daughters were very common in any studies related to the one-child policy, and reproductive culture pre–Communist China. Critiques were always made of the state policy whilst such gender violence was usually carried on by members of the family (Reed, 2011; King, 2014). Secondly, sons were prioritised over daughters regarding issues of the birth penalty payment (Yuehanxun, 2004; Johnson, 2016a), resources and investment in personal development (Goodburn, 2009; Murphy, 2020b), cultural virtue (Hesketh, Lu and Xing, 2011; G. Song, 2014; Kim and Fong, 2014), and commercialised value (e.g., the sale price from human trafficking) (Neuman, 2007). Abandoned daughters were very common in Johnson's research on China's "hidden children" (Johnson, 2016a) and in documentary evidence on "missing girls" nationwide (Cheng, 1995; Smolin, 2011; Cai, 2017) . Children's gender has been presented as a key impact on the family's decision and on their financial, cultural, and political thinking. Thirdly, even the state policy responded to the gender violence against female babies by introducing the one-child-and-half policy in rural areas. The negotiation between the demands of modernisation and of patriarchal power showed how challenging it was to reframe families' ideals of children. This modification of the policy in fact legitimatized the

coercion over daughters within the patriarchal contexts and implicitly endorsed the family's unjust treatment of them, whatever the ostensible purpose of contemporary policy.

The recently two-and-three child policy furthered this violence against daughters, (Jiang, Li and Sánchez-Barricarte, 2015; Attane, 2016; Zhao and Zhang, 2019), which can be evidenced by the re-skewed gender-ratio at birth: 113.17 male to 100 female at the first birth, 106.78: 100 at the second, and 132.93: 100 at the third in 2020 (Tu, Zeng and Liu, 2022). In short, the reinforced gender violence against women and daughters were directly practiced more by the *inside* family than the state policy's power.

## 2.3 Citizenship, norms, and identity: who belongs?

### 2.3.1 Citizenship in Western modern politics: "Biopower" and "bare life"

To do this, this chapter now brings social theorists Michel Foucault and Agamben into a conversation to demonstrate the power and rights practiced over individual bodies and live. Foucault proposed that the power of the modern political era concentrated on the disciplinary institutions of medicine, education, and the law rather than on governmental institutions. This power is grounded in modern science and technology and works through the biological body: regulating the population as a whole and disciplining the individual body (Foucault, Rabinow and Faubion, 1997; Foucault and Hurley, 2008). Therefore, biopower is modern power over life, modern governance is governance of human life that employs techniques and knowledge to shape conduct according to specific norms so as to achieve particular ends (Merquior, 1991; Sawicki, 1991; Ray, 2018). Governance of human life concentrates on other domains instead of the state, including state bureaucracies, professional disciplines and self-governing individuals (Greenhaigh, 2008). Agamben (1988) agrees with Foucault that modern politics is biopolitics --- when power exercises control not simply over the bodies of living beings, but regulates, monitors, and manufactures the life and life processes of those living beings (Agamben, 1998).  Agamben constructs his theory based on an ontological idea that treats sovereignty as a primary aspect of social life. Sovereign power firstly constitutes itself through the exclusion of "bare life". The state of exception

suspended the normal legal and political order, including people who were excluded from the political community such as refugees, migrants, prisoners, etc (Agamben, 2005). "Bare life" is referred to a state of existence in which the person's entire social and political rights were stripped away. A form of "bare life" can be reduced to mere biological beings by various mechanisms such as camps, ghettos, and states of emergency (Agamben, 1998).

The fundamental distinction between political life (seeing people as fully human) and "bare life" is seen as the base of the concept of citizenship. The state claims the entitlement to give and take away the status of being more than "bare life" at will. Humans share a common vulnerability that serves as the normative basis for rights claims. (Turner, 2022b). Citizenship is associated with exercises of rights and duties in the political community, where individuals' participation defines their political life. The ability to declare someone as human with no value is fundamental to the state sovereignty based on Agamben's ontological thinking of the construction of sovereignty. One of his long and hard reflections is the Holocaust, though some have argued that his theory reduced the moral significance of Holocaust to generalised modern politics, and to some extent, we "normalize" or "assimilate" the Holocaust (Eaglestone, 2002; Christiaens, 2021). Therefore, Agamben's paradigm of the modern has been argued as colonization – it relies on a discourse of race; modernity emerging from the return of colonial processes and their discourse of power to colonize the people (Eaglestone, 2002). He notes that every society decides who its "sacred men" will be and who can no longer enjoy the rights and recognition conferred by legal status, for instance, stripping the citizenship from Jewish people facilitated their genocide without the commission of a crime (Burke, 2019). In relation to the Holocaust discussions, "who and what is (not) German" became the essential characteristics of modern biopolitics to distinguish citizenship on the base of race (Agamben, 1998; Ownbey, 2013).

To define citizenship requires knowing it as a contested site of social struggles and understanding it is about political subjectivity. It can be conceptualised as a bundle of rights and obligations that formally define the legal status of a person within a state. This formal status is important because it is from this legal basis that individual citizens claim entitlements to national resources through such institutional arrangements as retirement, unemployment provisions, social security and welfare (Stevenson, 2001). This political subjectivity is forged

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through social struggles over identity, inclusion, resources and memory (Turner, 2022a). Having citizenship involves having a family name, which is inscribed upon one's passport as a legitimate status within a kinship system and the state. It is for this reason that citizenship is normally a patriarchal legacy of households, where names are handed down from father to children. This right to citizenship through community membership defines one's identity as a public person. It is derived ultimately from membership by birth within an ethnic community, where the entitlement to citizenship is typically inherited from parents (Stevenson, 2001). In looking at the circumstances of the "black children" who are the focus of this research, it cannot be said that they experienced their lack of rights and entitlements in the same manner as the "bare life" argued by Agamben, such as Holocaust Jewish or other genocide victims. But when we re-examine the "black children" phenomenon, challenges in being acknowledged with their legal status became the primary discussions in existing concerns about these children's sufferings. The question of "Who and what makes a family" initiated this research to explore the lived experiences of this generation, so an understanding of "who and what makes a Chinese citizen" can be analysed based on the family identity.

### 2.3.2 Chinese modern narrative of citizenship: hukou, rights, and worth

The concept of citizen is often considered as a product of western politics and culture, and citizenship is seen as a specific status of the urban dweller. But China has developed its concept of "citizen" since the late nineteenth century (Guo and Guo, 2015). The concept of "citizen" has been translated into terms like *gongmin* (citizen), *guomin* (nationals), *shimin* (urbanite) and *renmin* (people) (Harris, 2002). Guo (2015) discusses such chaos as a warning about the necessity to focus on the background of the host country other than the language. Chinese intellectuals on one side tried to cultivate citizenship by learning from their western counterparts, on the other side they tried to shake off western oppression which was turning China into a Western colony (Guo and Guo, 2015). Marshall (1964) regarded citizenship as the individual's full membership of a certain political community, and summarised civil, political, social as the evolution of citizenship rights (seen as the basic elements of citizenship). His theory focuses on ideas of "membership" and "rights" (Guo, 2022). With the advent of globalisation towards the end of the 20$^{th}$ century, issues of foreigner, migrant, refugee, exile entered Western consciousness, and put pressure on acts to understand new social groups'

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citizenship's creation and change (Isin, Nyers and Turner, 2009). Chinese people thought about their native modernity on the basis of western examples, and the concept of *guomin* formed a bridge to their imagination of China's nation-state. In this light, the core issue of such understanding of "citizen" in the early twentieth century was the nation-state rather than individual freedom (Guo and Guo, 2015). This reinterpretation process not only "reconstructed the power distribution matrix between the state and society, but also transformed the psychological and cognitive modes of the individuals, shifting them from an identity based on home, family and local communities to that based on national, state and political institutions" (Guo and Guo, 2015, p. 17).

The discourse of "class" dominated Chinese politics from 1949 to 1979, and the concept of "citizen" was suspended until the Chinese Communist Party formally adopted the Reform and Opening policy (Guo and Guo, 2015). The policy of Reform and Opening was aimed solely at economic boost by structurally reforming a more market-based economy and opening it to the global market. The concept of "citizen" was translated from *guo* (state, nation, country) *min* (individual) into *gongmin* since the mid-1980s. *Guomin* regarded a state as its basic meaning and goal, *gongmin* takes min (the individual) and rights as its basic meaning instead (Guo and Guo, 2015). Janoski (2014) discusses China's concept of "citizen" which tends to emphasize obligations over rights. Citizenship developed with markets' development in the western sense – urbanization forms citizenship. Emperors, kings or princes either ruled their lands or warlords controlled the most troublesome areas – they could impose control if they wished in China and most of the East (Janoski, 2021). The Maoist period imposed a similar emperor-like arrangement with the "paramount leader" and extensive citizenship was hard to detect (Janoski, 2014). China recognizes the constitutional right of local government in law, which operates in parallel through local community resident committees (*jumin weiyuanhui*) in urban areas and villager committees (*cunmin weiyuanhui*) in rural areas. The 1982 Constitution institutionalised the mechanism of such autonomy and self-government in both rural and urban areas, then both resident and villager committees were rebranded as "communities" (*shequ*) in the 2000s. Local governments determined their territory and administrative functions (Woodman, 2022). This institutional framework "blurs the distinction between the personal and the political, between neighbours and cadres, and makes people legible to the state at an intimate scale" (Woodman, 2022, pp. 714–715). Both

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formal and informal local leaderships in neighbourhoods or villages mattered greatly in determining the committee's jurisdiction: they shaped "the local social norms around what kinds of claims and entitlements were seen as legitimate". It became a source of authoritarian control without any official orders being given (Woodman, 2022).

The *Hukou* household registration system has attached individual's citizenship to specific places, and has been discussed in many studies (Chan and Zhang, 1999; Woodman and Guo, 2017) as an institutional barrier that individuals faced to full citizenship (Woodman and Guo, 2017). Educational qualifications had a hegemonic position in evaluating the worth of citizens in accordance with these national policies and local state regulations (Kipnis, 2011). Birth control was a priority policy for local officials and limiting the allowed number of births within the local cadres' jurisdictions was an important measure of their performance (Zang, 2017). The interpretation of laws is therefore open to subjectivity. The spaces of ambiguity between politics and implementation can be appropriated by both bureaucrats and citizens (Short and Fengying, 1998; Gordon, 2017). Usually, children who lived without *hukou* were those whose parents had yet to pay a "social compensation fee" (*shehui fuyu fei*) – a fine for having their child without permission. People who refused to pay could be detained for 15 days, taken to court, have their assets frozen, or have money taken from their bank accounts. They could be harassed until they paid. Unsurprisingly many parents decided to willingly postpone obtaining the *hukou* for their children rather than open themselves to these risks (Feng, Cai and Gu, 2013b; Cassiano, 2019).

Local cadres played their parts as "middleman" in negotiating between families' resistance and the state sovereign power. Rural members were connected strongly by their shared family ties and geographical supports, so most local cadres were more than the representation of the local authority, in most cases, they were from local privileged families and they benefitted from local social supports (Cai, 2010). County and township/town governments is the lowest and basic level of administrative government in Communist China, tending to depend more on village organizations in the policy-implementation process (Chung, 2003). The village-level committee is officially designated as an "autonomous" and "self-governing" body by the Chinese constitution to respond to such challenges in policy-implementation. Village officials are not officially state employees or civil servants and

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referred to as "grassroot cadres", commonly serving their particularly native villages (Chung, 2003). Township/town governments in reality supervised and guided the village officials to carry out the policies of the higher governmental authorities (Judd, 1994; Loh and Remick, 2015). However, the geographical distance between the township/town governments and village officials and the less modernized communication between them made the supervision difficult. Therefore, performance contracts, site visits and work reports were three ways of monitoring the policy implementation, and exercising power over village officials' personnel and financial compensation. In short, village cadres and township/town government officials were mutually dependent on each other. This is why township/town officials often turned a blind eye to the village cadres' wrongdoings (Friedman, 1991; Chung, 2003).

The state power is disaggregated in three ways: firstly, there are disparate priorities between local state authorities at different levels or between different departments. The municipal government is more concerned with local stability, whereas lower-level governments are more concerned with their own interests. Secondly, the departmental interests of state agencies may also become a potential source of support for those taking action. Interests between district government and the two municipal government agencies can conflict each other. Thirdly, the media can be a credible threat to local officials. Some documents noted that local cadres do not fear citizen appeals but are afraid of media disclosures (Cai, 2010). Janoski (2014) therefore argues that China's theories of citizenship are an amalgam of western ideas of citizenship, Confucian ideas of social order and obligation, and the declining influence of Communist ideas of justice in governing (Janoski, 2014). Citizenship in China "has gone from a Confucian society under a crumbling emperor system to a communist system that has provided a dictatorship of the proletariat with mainly social rights for urban citizens but much fewer rights for villagers" (Janoski, 2014, p. 40). China has been seen as a growing but still very partial citizenship regime concentrating on legal and social rights, where its social value system is largely Confucian (Janoski, 2014). The discourse of Chinese citizenship's "intrinsic purpose was to extricate China from Western colonialism and build a strong modern nation-state, rather than to develop the individual's citizenship rights" (Guo, 2022, pp. 484–485). Acts of citizenship in China tend to be non-confrontational and lawful, and citizenship rights are increased in local governments' consciousness throughout the de-Westernism

trend (Guo, 2022). China illustrates that a comprehensive understanding of a country's citizenship can only be achieved by examining its specific context.

### 2.3.3 Normalcy, belonging, identity and stigma.

Following the understanding of power and citizenship rights, it is necessary for this research to explore divergences between the groups of "normal" and others, who are defined as "normal" and what does this really mean to a given society. Then we can understand who were included or excluded from the given relations, and for what reason. Norms are socially and culturally constructed, expected, and judged to regulate individuals' behaviour and ideas (Owens, 2000), function as forms of discipline and power and enforced by knowledge (Foucault, 1975; Wong, 2007). Operating "normalising judgement" ensures that individuals conform to established values and patterns of behaviours, and often results in hierarchies, homogeneity, exclusion, and punishment (Bell, 1993). Foucault discussed concepts of "normalization" or "normalizing power" in his working on biopower and governing population. Norms are produced and enforced by setting standards of what counts as "normal" or "abnormal" in a given population (Foucault, 1982, 2010). Although the meaning of "normal" has varied depending on scholars' interpretations, Foucault's work on normalization built up a foundation for this research to further the discussion of hierarchies between "normal" children and the "black children" in later narrative analysis.

Social norms "certainly require an authorization that makes them recognizable as norms". Formalization authorizes subjects to produce norms, for instance, customs (Möllers, 2020, p. 225). Individuals must be organized in a manner that permits them to be identified, observed, counted, aggregated, and monitored. In Scott's (1998) argument, "legibility is a condition of manipulation" (Scott, 1998, p. 183). Internalizing norms signifies an important element of cohesion in societies, forming ideas of what is good and right. It fosters unity in a given group, by defining standards of membership, and stabilizing the community (Durkheim, 1915; Hsu, 1973). If the purpose of power is to produce obedient subjects, then power (a) only operates in negative ways -- by prohibition with the threat of punishment as a back-up, and (b) works through normalization that individuals are judged and placed in an array of positions in line

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with a set of norms to which they must conform. Family planning is one of examples that interconnect these two poles (Bell, 1993; Genel, 2021).

When we discuss a social norm, it always necessary to look into elements of what constitutes norm and value, rule and judgement, rights and obligation, because ideally fundamental norms are meant to "serve as the basic for an entire normative order" (Möllers, 2020, p. 264). The concept of belonging relates to a sense of connection and membership within the given community and its normative order. It is a statement that we are part of a social nation and become human beings through our relationships with others. Concepts of norms and belonging are always intertwined with each other as the boundaries of relationships and community are shaped and reinforced by norms (Hearst, 2012b; May, 2013; Broom *et al.*, 2021). Belonging shapes our perceived subjectivity – selfhood, and how we think about relations with other humans in social connections (Hearst, 2012c; Dolezal, 2017). A sense of belonging is intimately linked to a sense of solidarity and shared purpose in studies on social movements and collective actions. Narratives of belonging or perception of self-worth, self-esteem are always social and political. Belonging in fact is a social and political matter because we become human beings by connecting our self to relationships and society.

Our first step to be human is through belonging itself. We are defined and distinguished from others by a set of characteristics, such as gender, age, nationality, religion, occupation or personality traits, etc. and our sense of identity can be shaped and reinforced by norms, for instance, expectations about motherhood (Lawler, 2015). Narratives of our own lives and stories place us within a historically constituted world (Moore, 1994), they are stories of how we came to be as we are, and we produce our identities within that framework. We know ourselves only through interpretation of our narratives (Lawler, 2014). Identity, it has been argued, is always political: socially sustained discourses about who it is possible/appropriate/valuable to be inevitably shape the way we look at and constitute ourselves (Calhoun, 1994). It is a project based on belonging to one or more groups and not to others. The question of recognition therefore lies at the heart of identity politics (Lawler, 2014). Getting the identity recognized and validated by others is essentially linked to social inclusion, which can enhance individuals' sense of self-worth and self-esteem. Feelings of

exclusion, marginalization, and discrimination can be resulted from not belonging (Honneth, 1995; Anderson, 2006).

Understanding stigma is critical to understanding how identities have been socially processed through the lives of people who were positioned differently from "normal" groups. Goffman defines stigma as "the situation of the individual who is disqualified from full social acceptance" (1963/1986, preface). He discusses the term stigma from two perspectives: firstly "the stigmatized individual assumes his differentness is known about already or is evident on the spot", this deals with the plight of the *discredited*; secondly "he assume it is neither known about by those present nor immediately perceivable by them", which deals with that of the *discreditable* (Goffman, 1968, p. 11). It is important to examine the "processes of power and profit" that might motivate the production of stigma by ascertaining where and by whom stigma is crafted, and to what ends (Tyler and Slater, 2018). Tyler conceptualises stigma as a history rather than a self-evident phenomenon (Tyler and Slater, 2018), and it involves the machinery of inequality between races, nations, genders, and any other human's characteristics (Tyler, 2020). A question of "what is accepted" summarises the central feature of the stigmatized individuals' situations (Goffman, 1968). It functions "as a means of formal social control" (Goffman, 1968, p. 139), and the heart of it is a "fundamentally a social phenomenon rooted in social relationships and shaped by the culture of society" (Pescosolido and Martin, 2015, p. 101).

Self-identity is the "self as reflexively understood by the person in terms of her/his biology", and the best way to analyse self-identity is by contrast with individuals whose sense of self is fractured or disabled (Giddens, 1991, p. 53). The assumption that individuals with stigma were believed to be "not human" furthered various exercises of discrimination and reduced life chances. Specific terms were used and normalised in our daily discourse as "a source of metaphor and imagery" that anchored the stereotype (Goffman, 1968, p. 13). Public stigma endorsed by the general population refers to persons who consider themselves as undesirable or socially unacceptable (Vogel *et al.*, 2013). Someone who is socially unacceptable tends to apply negative public attitudes to themselves and suffer diminished self-esteem (Corrigan and Shapiro, 2010; Kranke *et al.*, 2010). Self-stigma is explained as a person's internalization of public stigma, including feeling shame and limiting integration with

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others (Kranke *et al.*, 2010). The key for a person's identity is to keep a particular narrative going, not only to understand how they have become, and where they are going (Giddens, 1991).

### 2.3.4 Summary

Most existing studies on the meanings attached to the label of "black children" focused on the institutional barrier – *hukou*, and reflections on the loss of these children were thereby located more about fixing their *hukou* registration than thinking about their identity attached to the family membership, inclusion, and acceptance within the social "norm". It is essential to explain the citizenship rights and freedom attached to the registration of *hukou* because it classifies individuals into "legal" and "illegal", "normal" and "black" at the formal level. It is notable to understand the role of "middleman" played by local officials in negotiating between the state coercion and individual families' desires, so we can have a mind of how the space for keeping these "black children" was possible. The identities of these children emerged in the middle space based on the social norms of "children", "family" and "citizens", however, their statuses were normalized as something outside the "normal" family pattern by authorized political power and cultural violence. The ideal of lowering the "black" category served as a normative order to build up family membership and community belonging. Distinction between "normal" and "black" children stigmatized the identity attached to the label of "black", signifying the marginalized or even excluded status of these children from the full citizenship.

## 2.4 From the state to family

### 2.4.1 Familism and neo-familism in China

Chinese familism is understood as a familial ideology based on the father-son relationship, demonstrating hierarchy in interpersonal relationships and social structure. Its proximity to filial piety (*xiao*) is the principal virtue to adopt, systematize, and integrate familism into the ideology of harmony (Mulligan, 2020; Paper, 2020). Chinese religious beliefs and practices grounded the concept of filial piety to form the ancestral cult, which guaranteed the

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functioning of society and the state (Paper, 2020). Confucian ideology was a central influence on emphasizing family relationships, loyalty and obligations to prioritize the collective well-being over individual needs and desires (Yan, 2023). Filial piety was cast as a static set of beliefs and practices to anchor traditional norms (Bedford and Yeh, 2021). Personal identity in the Confucian sense cannot be understood without reference to a personal's familial kinship, and every person bears a specific title that denotes their status (Ward, 1961). Confucian thinking thus affirms the reality that human relationships are intrinsically unequal in status, and it reinforces the imbalance through filial piety. It led to a society where individuals seek family benefit while ignoring the benefit of the larger community. However, the top-down and bottom-up process of nurturing relationships provide a solid pathway to effective teamwork to build community beyond family (Mulligan, 2020). Yan argues the family "has gained new salience for the Chinese state as a tool of governance and a substitute provider of welfare in several key areas" at the macro level (Yan, 2018, p. 183), especially as the state has promoted filial piety as a cultural asset and delegated elderly care to adult children by laws.

The complexity of the relation between familism in Chinese culture and individualism in China's modernisation was highlighted in China's rapid policy changes (Watson, Watson and Yan, 2019). Individuals were dis-embedded from the traditional concepts of "the ancestor's shadow" and re-embedded in the collective organisations of the state, such as rural communes or urban work units (Yan, 2010). Economic reforms furthered the disembedding of individuals - from collective presence, and they were required to make their own path in the society while remaining loyal to the state and party (Murphy, 2020b). Themes of filial piety and obedience, however, continued to be discussed throughout small family grouping post the 1990s. Hansen observes that China's "nonsocialist" education system is flawed as it resonates with individuals' perceived interests such as "their own social and economic investments in the private sphere" other than "seeing any need for collective action to change it" (Hansen, 2015, p. 184). Mixed logics of Confucianism, Leninism, Maoism, social Darwinism, and other elements justified their power in decision making and taking within the realm of family, and thus a historical approach to understand familism in China is necessary.

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Yan proposes neo-familism to describe the tension between collectivism and individualism. Individualism is not only about material and sexual desires but also desires to be recognised, to be respected, and to have certain rights. But the traditional familism (e.g., idea of delayed gratification) is in direct conflict with individualism in its strong form because it denies all of those desires, at least for the present (Yan, 2016; Watson, Watson and Yan, 2019). So, for Chinese people, on the one hand, they are deeply embedded in the familism value system but on the other hand, they are attracted to the increasing individualism in a very dynamic sense. The form, structure and nature of the family is in flux (Watson, Watson and Yan, 2019). Yan suggests the idea of "descending familism" to explain how the focus on family life has shifted at both the spiritual and material levels from ancestral to the current generation (Yan, 2018). This phenomenon has also been discussed in relation to the "little emperor" or "only hope" of the only-child family (Jing, 2000; Fong, 2002). This structural shift not only redefines each family member's functional role but also alters the patterns of intra-family relations, for instance, shifting the family focus from the patrilineal tradition to the conjugality relation (Yan, 2018).

Isomorphism between the family and state has been suggested as the core understanding of Chinese traditional culture. For instance, the emperor was regarded as the mother and father of the people, the local magistrates were appointed by the emperor --- and were therefore called parent-officials (*fumu guan*), and the people were considered as children of the magistrates (Cao, Zhong and Kebin, 2010). The sovereign was "simultaneously emperor, father, and teacher, and the people were considered children, the emperor's power resembled that of the family's authoritative patriarch: he was sole arbiter of an autocratic monarchy" (Cao, Zhong and Kebin, 2010, p. 107). This is different from the distinct boundaries between families and society in the West, although it is very ambiguous in Chinese cultural understanding (Fei, 1992). R*enlun (human relationship)* is expressed as the basic characteristic of Chinese social structure, meaning proper arrangements, classifications, and order. The basic structure rests precisely on such hierarchal differentiations (Fei, 1992). A sociological observation of Chinese culture since early 1900s noted that "the other was more important than the self" as a mutually considered principal appeal transcending all relative relations of society (Cao, Zhong and Kebin, 2010). Therefore, when we look into family and

familism in China, in fact we must also rethink the isomorphic between the family and state, parents and ruler, who benefits and who sacrifices.

## 2.4.2 Reproduction and parenting in China.

Families are nested in communities and children are presumptively nested in families. Children's interests are presumed to be protected and advanced, and also assumed to be congruent with those of the family. "Moreover, families themselves are assumed to hold fixed loyalties to the identity groups in which they are rooted and to the nations in which they are located." (Hearst, 2012a, p. 14). Thomas Hobbes similarly understood familial "generation" as one of the two ways in which "dominion" may be acquired: children owe loyalty to their parents, since "every man is to promise obedience to him in whose power it is to save or destroy him" (Daub, 2011). In contrast to Firestone's (1974) account of reproduction that conflates the social aspects of child rearing with the biological aspects of pregnancy and childbirth, Rich (1977) considers children to be women's and motherhoods' major source of joy, although the patriarchy can cause a number of problems for the institution of motherhood (Walby, 1990).

Sangren argues that Chinese family life, kinship, and values constitute "a patrilineal mode of production of desire", which is culturally particular to China (Sangren, 2017, p. 59). In the culture of patriarchy and the associated virtue of filial piety, children's bodies were regarded as extensions of their parents' bodies. The culture of filial piety proposed the conception of "*shenti fafu shou zhi fumu*", which means "our every hair and bit of skin originally come from parents" and any self-motivated injury or damage would be seen as unfulfilled filial responsibility towards the family (Perry and Selden, 2003). The patrilineal system has been seen to define social identities, relationships, and responsibilities in the context of governance and cultures, and has been translated within women's studies to argue that Western patriarchy causes particular social ills for women's liberation (Barker, 2017). Walby (1990) defines patriarchy as a "system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women (Walby, 1990, p. 20). Reproduction and households were seen by Firestone (1974) as central to women's subordination by men. "The biological hazards surrounding reproduction, such as pregnancy, menstruation, childbirth, breast-feeding, and

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child rearing, make women vulnerable and dependent on men. This creates two classes based on sex, men and women" (Walby, 1990, p. 66). As we can see how gendered a process the one-child policy was, the understanding of family power dynamics is gendered throughout as well. Both traditional culture and modernisation play their roles in reframing the interactions between men and women, parents and children.

Chinese parents' parenting styles have changed under the influence of social changes, especially the population policy. For instance, the generation who were born as part of the "baby boost" to develop the newly established Communist China after World War II were raised up mainly as family labour and elderly insurance and thus, scholars have argued, there was relatively limited emotional investment in the parent-children bond, or conjugal relations (Chang, 2003; Yan, 2003; Fischler, 2004). When this generation reached their reproductive ages under the one-child policy, these parents expressed their parenting styles as "highly demanding with appropriate support of their children's autonomy and significant emotional investments" with only children (Lu and Chang, 2013). It is significant to note changes in parental style and in parent-children's relationships in accordance with the population policy and urbanization of families in China, to understand generational issues from a historical approach. Individuals without siblings obtained all child-related resources in the family and this persisted into adulthood (Fan and Chen, 2020). Fathers were traditionally considered as someone who maintained emotional distance from their family members to assert their authority over them (Lamb, 2012), however, the one-child policy also affected fathers' parenting styles and they emotionally invested more in their only children (Fan and Chen, 2020).

### 2.4.3 Summary

The processed modernity in Communist China not only reshaped the instrument of governance but also the family's complexity. The one-child policy was implemented on the basis of the family unit to serve the national agenda, and it was critiqued as the dominant cause of human suffering in reflections on the harm against individual families. Isomorphism between the family and state has been suggested as the foundation of and understanding of the structure of relationships. Similar to social control in its normalisation of judgements

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about citizenship and belonging (see section 2.3), the familism and neo-familism between generations serve as the moral order to regulate the family reproduction, parenting, and filial piety. Echoing Agamben's notion of "bare life" whose citizenship was suspended by the "state of exception", the conflicted benefits between the state policy power and family fertility desire led to a family "crisis" situation--- where the full family membership of "black children" was suspended in the name of "crisis". The patriarchal power dynamic has been discussed as the core cultural value underpinning Chinese family life, kinship, production of desire. Conflicts between the conventional model of filial piety and increasing individualism, ambivalence in grandparenting, the intersection between the state policy power and family patriarchy, all these issues have been sharply influenced by the rapid social changes since 1979.

## 2.5 Children and childhood in Chinese society and the larger world

Adults have authority over children in the home, on the street, in political institutions, policies, etc. As sociologists Prout and James have argued, children place their trust in them and thus childhood becomes "a social space in which children learn to explore their environment and to experiment with their agency" (Prout and James, 2015, p. 4). It is a particular cultural phrasing of the early part of the life course, historically and politically contingent and subject to change. How we see them and "the ways in which we behave towards them necessarily shape children's experiences of being a child and also, therefore, their own response to and engagement with the adult world" (Prout and James, 2015, p. 13). Children grow up embedded in dynamic social contexts of relationships, systems and cultural values (Prout and James, 2015). Children actively shape their identities from the very beginning of their lives (Hearst, 2012a). They "habitually and disturbingly emigrate from the world of their parents" (Berger, 1974, p. 92). Psychologists have also emphasised that children need love, security, and tolerance (Bowlby, 1979). Methods of condemnation and punishment enable them to imagine pathological guilt and ruthless self-punishment, as Bowlby wrote, "nothing more damaging to a relationship than when party attributes his own fault on the other, making him a scapegoat" (Bowlby, 1979, p. 12). Children have the capacity from the moment of their births to exercise a degree of agency however adults seek to control them. Particular kinds of

social and educational policies are introduced not only to protect them but also socialise them, and shape the pattern of their childhood (Prout and James, 2015). Regarding the one-child policy, just as Johnson (2016) has noted, "the main object of the struggle between families and local representatives of the state power were children, the products of reproduction that the state sought to limit" (Johnson, 2016 P.2).

## 2.5.1 Precarious and left-behind children in China

The children of the generation of only-children have been viewed as "independent" persons rather than mere "appendages" to their families, society or the state in some ethnographic fieldwork. Parent-child communication is now stressed which was rarely heard of in previous generations. However, the new freedom to negotiate individual privacy, respect, or small conflicts, etc, were not taken for granted because parents still expected filial piety. The growing communicative intimacy replaced the hierarchal obedience in the young generation although it may also serve parental control (Liu, 2016). Parents and children's ties were culturally embedded over a life course in Chinese society because of the value of filial piety (Liu, 2014). Parents and children have maintained their interdependent relationships whether the cultural norm of filial piety decreased or not, because economics played a significant part in framing and reframing their family bonds. The emotional value of children was complex in the family relationships. On one side, the only child generation experienced more love and companionship than their parents' generation because "so many children so they were not precious anymore", also "hardships and poverty killed" their parents' psychological attachment to them (Liu, 2022, p. 611). On the other side, the progressive modernisation placed great pressure on parents and thus children became their parents' emotional outlets (*chuqi tong*), and the pride they give to their parents is associated with the psychological value they can get (Liu, 2022, p. 612).

Not only a generation of only children, but also other population groups (for instance, the "black children", parents who lost their only-child, "missing girls", or left-behind children whose parents migrated to urban areas) have been created alongside modernity in Communist China. Family relationships between parents and children, previous generations and young couples have been well discussed in relation to the migration from rural to urban

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China (Goodburn, 2009; Liu, 2014). Tens of millions of rural children lived separated from their parents because of labour migration in the 2010s, and only saw their migrated parents once or twice a year. The experiences of children left behind in circumstances of internal migration affected a vast numbers of families (Murphy, 2020b). The rural parents encountered multiple factors that institutionally discouraged their settlements in their new working places, such as low wages, and the *hukou* system that distributed public goods and services (Koo, Ming and Tsang, 2014; Murphy, 2020b). Subsequent efforts were made by China's authorities to make education available to these "left behind" children to address escalating socio-economic inequalities as part of responses to a "people-centred" state agenda, as well as supporting urbanisation at provincial and municipal levels (Murphy and Johnson, 2009). Nevertheless, measures on institutional efforts on behalf of the "left-behind" children only went so far, and more exclusionary measures that reserved educational resources for urban residents were enacted (Goodburn, 2009; Murphy, 2020b). The exclusion of migrant children from urban education was intensified in many large cities after 2014 (Chan and Ren, 2018). Housing was related closely to the distributions of educational resources (Lu, 2019) and a logic of public goods provisioning in line with children's registered residence would still hinder his/her access to equal education resources as urban children after grade 9 (Xiang, 2007).

The work of daily childbearing is entrusted to at-home adult family members when the children were left in the village by their migrant parent(s). Schools also form part of the "care mix" for families in which both parents migrated to the cities' labour market (Murphy, 2020b). Migrant parents from China's rural regions want to maintain an emotional connection with their children and communication technologies' rapid developments have helped, such as mobile phones and visiting at Chinese New Year (Murphy, 2020b). A series of high-profile tragedies involving left-behind children began to gain attention from China's public discourse in the late 2000s and early 2010s, for instance, children's suicide and murder-suicide, multiple reports of sexual abused left-behind children, abusers including teachers, neighbourhoods, and relatives, extreme neglect, etc (Murphy, 2020b). The generalised vulnerability, suffering and potential ruin of this large population drew the public's attention and the value of rural parents' migration for the next generation was questioned (Murphy, 2020b). A great number of studies have focused on the wellbeing of left-behind children, their educational outcomes, emotional benefits and physical health. Left-behind children's psycho-emotional well-being

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was mostly negative, such as lower life satisfaction, greater depression, more loneliness compared with children who lived with one migrated parent, and all left-behind children fared worse than children who lived with both parents, because parents' guidance and involvement played the biggest part in such wellbeing (Qin and Albin, 2010; Wang and Mesman, 2015; Yaojiang Shi Yu Bai Yanni Shen, 2016; Mordeno *et al.*, 2019).

Parent-children communication is highlighted in influences on left-behind children's psycho-emotional wellbeing, and those who lived with grandparents manifested more symptoms of illness than other children (Murphy, 2020b). The pressure of adjusting to the changing environment may result in mental health problems such as withdrawal, anxiety, and depression. Lack of communication between migrated parents and their children also risked their attachment (Xu *et al.*, 2018). Murphy (2020) conceptualized some of such families' linked lives as lived in *abeyance*, meaning "a state of suspension" and a legal term to describe a promised title or property. A state of abeyance expresses the situation that members of multilocal families "lived their lives while waiting for promised 'recognition' and economic security to arrive", the problem was that both "recognition" and economic security were "yet to come" (Murphy, 2020b, p. 221). The trade-off between economical income and parent-children's relationships was discussed as problematic to prepare the left-behind children for their further communities.

## 2.5.2 Children institutionally excluded in the wider world.

Children as victims of institutional marginalization, exclusion, or even elimination as legal citizens can also be found elsewhere in the world and across history. Children of the Holocaust in Nazi Germany during the World War II, Rohingya children under the two-child policy in Myanmar have shared some similar characteristics of being the institutionally excluded with my researched "black children".

### 2.5.2.1 Holocaust children

One of the most prominent examples of children being excluded by the state at the level of policy and law was during the Holocaust. To understand Jewish children's loss of full membership in their given community is helpful in explaining how someone's citizenship rights and freedom were stripped from them through cultural and political practices, and how could such structural harm be practiced with impunity. Agamben takes the totalitarian experiments of the Nazi as a paradigm to display the biopolitical transformation of modernity (Agamben, 1998). When the "human" precisely operated as political formation in the theories of biopolitics, how should we understand the "bareness" of victims in genocide? When the radical transformation of politics legitimated the total domain of modern politics, what constituted the foundation of citizenship rights and freedom?

The Holocaust was committed by Nazi Germany during World War II to eliminate ethnic groups of Jews, Roma, disabled individuals and political dissidents by incarcerating these groups in concentration camps. Millions of children experienced abrupt family separation, forced movement, shifted shelters, disguised identities to run away from being camped (Samuel, 2002; Vromen, 2008a; Rabinovitch and Kass, 2016). The narrative of Holocaust and genocide against Jewish victims has been well documented but child survivors have been recognized as a distinct group who survived the genocide differently from adult survivors. Nearly 1.5 million children did not survive and a much smaller number were saved (Heberer, 2011a). The Nazi regime enacted the law and state policy to institute a school segregation system, establish ghettos of minority ethnical groups, then to use death camps or killing centres to eliminate Jewish people, including children, to demonstrate its ideology of race from 1933 to 1945. Non-Jewish children were not spared, as, for instance, with the mass death of Romani children (Marion, 2006; Heberer, 2011a).

The authors of these literatures can be categorized into four groups: survivors who experienced the wartime and documented their memories (Valent, 2002; Heberer, 2011b; Rabinovitch and Kass, 2016); the second generation of the Holocaust survivors such as their children and in-laws (Berger, 1997; Kertzer, 2002; Wiseman, 2008; Bailly, 2010); scholars whose families worked with Jewish hidden children (Samuel, 2002), or who worked as teachers or helpers to help hide children during the wartime (Vromen, 2008a); scholars who interviewed survivors and the second generation in-depth (Berger, 1997; Friedman and

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Berenbaum, 1999; Valent, 2002; Wolf, 2007; Hirsch, 2012; Sliwa, 2014; Gordon, no date; Rogow, no date). These documents have illustrated the experiences of child survivors during and post the devastating genocide period, as well as those who did not survive, discussing the meaning of remembering these voices and elaborating what future generations could do, for instance, the importance of education about the Holocaust in schools.

Narratives of children's survival from the Holocaust focus on the stories told of their hidden experiences. Hidden children ranged from infants only a few hours' old to teenagers hidden and transferred by their families (Vromen, 2008a; Sliwa, 2014). The main strategy for their survivals was to eliminate their Jewish identity, using tactics such as assuming non-Jewish identities on paperwork, religious belief, and physical appearance; or inhabiting unseen spaces -- hiding with individual families or institutional shelters (Gordon, 2002; Bailly, 2010; Gorman, 2010). Many of them experienced being transported to one place to another for hiding. Parents approached the shelters through their personal connections such as non-Jewish friends, colleges, employers and neighbours; or resistance organisations such as the Catholic Church which were untouched by the Nazi's occupation of Belgium and Children's Aid Society in France (Kertzer, 2002; Vromen, 2008a). Problems of instability and mistreatment were very frequently found in their narratives, such as unwanted sexual advances on female hiders, punishment for bedwetting, deprivation of their supportive resources, or some "foster parents" regretting taking hidden children considering the risks to themselves (Samuel, 2002; Vromen, 2008a; Bailly, 2010). Some Jewish children were hidden with their siblings or families, while some were hidden separately, and it became challenging for families to reunite after the war. Some parents or children were denounced, arrested, or killed (Dwork, 1991; Gorman, 2010; Sliwa, 2014).

One of the key areas for discussions in researching the Holocaust and its related human history has been not to miss the significant piece of its legacy – how lives were formed and deformed in its aftermath (Wolf, 2007; Hirsch, 2012). Being forced to keep silent about their real identity continued from the war to long after its end, thus preventing longing for lost people, places, memories and even the childhood language (Vromen, 2008a; Rabinovitch and Kass, 2016). For the generation of survivors themselves, their very traumatized experiences damaged their capabilities to restore feelings of being safe, stabilized, and happy with their

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new lives, or building up reciprocal recognition with their families after long-term separation and hiding. For instance, one of the after-effects of being hidden at young ages is that some Jewish hidden children continued their hidden beliefs such as a Catholic identity even when their parents did not favour it after they were reunited (Vromen, 2008a). Also, in efforts to align the victimhood of Holocaust children with their first-hand perspectives, some societies have expressed a tendency to maintain cultural denial as a way to assuage their guilt because they survived whereas others did not, so these hidden children have been silenced again after the events (Vromen, 2008b; Wiseman, 2008; Hirsch, 2012). For the second generation of these survivors, their parents' cultural trauma made their family constitution and kinship development problematic between parents and children (McGlothlin, 2006; Grimwood, 2007; Wolf, 2007). Challenges in representing the Holocaust in publishing for new generations, such as critiques of emotionally disturbing children literature have also discouraged the remembrance of this event (Kertzer, 2002; Gorman, 2010)

### 2.5.2.2 Rohingya children in Myanmar under the two-child policy

Another example of children being systematic excluded by the state law and publicised regulations is the case of the Rohingya children, who live outside the two-child population policy to restrict Rohingya Muslim couples. These Rohingya people live on the margins of society across the region since Myanmar's Citizenship Law in 1982, and pass their deprived nationality onto the next generations (Brinham, 2012; Mahmood *et al.*, 2017). Since 2005, Myanmar has imposed a strict two-child policy for Rohingya in the townships of Maungdaw and Buthidaung in northern Rakhine State. Arakan authorities added the two-child rule that required Rohingya couples to state in writing that they would not have more than two children, or children out of wedlock, with the expectation that fines and imprisonment would be applied to violators otherwise (Hookway and Mahtani, 2015; Beyrer and Kamarulzaman, 2017). The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child called for this policy's abolishment (Stephen, 2018) but due to the enforced movement of the Rohingya people in 2017 over one million stateless Rohingya still remain in temporary shelters away from home in 2022 (Kean, 2022).

Women and children were especially harmed by the absence of health care and education. To avoid punishments, family tactics such as illegal abortion or unregistered children were used and resulted in international criticism of the state persecution (Kashyap, 2013). Health and mental damage on women and children were critiqued in similar manners to Western narratives of China's family planning (Khan *et al.*, 2019). Births of children who were conceived as unpermitted pregnancies led to their status of being officially unregistered in the home document, "blacklisted" in essence. These children had to bear with the state's policies of exclusion, restrictions, and arbitrary treatment, such as no access to legal education (Rayburn, 2019; Shohel, 2022), health care (Sarker *et al.*, 2020; Rahman *et al.*, 2021), food, and travel (Farzana, Pero and Othman, 2020). Not only was their physical and mental development gravely impaired by such systematic exclusion, but also their long-term identity within the community was affected (Magan, Sanchez and Munson, 2022). Without a legal family status, the child was not permitted to stay in his/her community (Wade, 2012). These children were also exposed to forced labour in the camps of Nasaka and the army because of widespread poverty (Wade, 2012; Rahman, Shindaini and Husain, 2022). The official Rakhine Inquiry Commission report estimates that there are currently 60,000 unregistered children in Rakhine State. Though the government mooted a program of registering blacklisted children, the process is slow despite international advocacy efforts (KPN, 2012; Corbit *et al.*, 2022).

This narrative of the Rohingya children shares similar features with other systematically excluded children, like the Holocaust Jewish and the "black children" in the present research, such as identity, belonging, and citizenship. These populations have struggled constantly to meet their most basic needs while living in the regulated regions, and little assurance of their human rights in the camps can be made by the responsible authorities. The narrative of communal violence and internal displacement has much in common with the Holocaust children –where the population were reduced to what Agamben argued was "bare life" based on race, and all forms of violence could be carried out upon them with impunity because the harm has been sanctioned by the state. Rohingyas' citizenship rights of legal access to food, shelter, health, safety, education, and mental well-being have been stripped away based on their ethnical identity, even in camps (Shohel, 2023), something that also suggests their lower status than other people's in the state legitimacy. The terms "blacklisted" children and my researched "black children" imply a similar colour of politics across race lines. Beyond the

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meaning of skin or appearance, it is always about the loss of citizenship rights, identity of who and what makes a person human, where and how to belong to his/her community at levels of documental, physical and emotional.

### 2.5.3 Summary

Studies on how the left-behind children were marginalized and traumatized in their lived experiences influentially bring attention upon reflections on how to develop the educational equality and mental well-being for them. Women and children have always been the noticeable victims of most forms of violence whatever the policies implemented. Comparatively little is known about these "black children", their lived experiences with their parents, caregivers, neighbourhoods and peers, and further connections with the larger world. Research on the Holocaust Jewish children and Rohingya children facilitates our understandings of what forms of violence can be inflicted upon children when their legal personhood has been excluded by the state's will. Not only at the formal registration level, but how they experienced daily lives at the level of physical body, such as hiding themselves away from public views, mistreatments from family shelters or institutional camps, etc. From this we can understand what the trauma meant to their identity's formation and deformation even at its dismantling.

### 2.6 Summary

What we know about the one-child policy and subsequent population policies is that family planning has gone in line with the priorities of China's urbanization, modernisation, and globalization since the 1980s. The one-child policy was introduced to cope with conflicts between economic burdens and population growth, which was discussed as an "economic plan other than demographical policy" in Western narratives of it. Gendered violence against women and daughters were common features stemming from the policy's implementation, modifications, and family's negotiations with local governments. Although enforcement of the one-child policy differed in urban and rural areas, the human cost for parents was remarkable. Controversial benefits for urban women and daughters have been discussed regarding their health, education, and employment opportunity developments. However,

studies of women's willingness to have second births under the two-child policy suggest the harm against women's employment equality and physical health. Parents' sufferings, especially harms against mothers were largely critiqued in studies of the policy-breaking births, and collective resistance against the state policy power. Son-priority was highlighted in studies of families in rural areas, regardless of severe punishments like house demolishing, confiscation of children or property, penalty money, etc. The terms "black children", "hidden children", or "extra children" were used by Chinese and western journalist reports, as well as local governments to describe these children who had no *hukou*. Existing studies have focused on their victimhood that resulted from their lack of access to *hukou,* which however was found as one of minor impacts on these children's socialization at a documental level.

Compared with detailed narratives of children from the Holocaust and Rohingya children, and the children left behind in China's great parental migration, little is known about what the "black children" experienced from their births, infancy, childhood, youth, adulthoods, and after the policy. The first major gap this research aims at bridging, then, is to broaden our understanding of "black children" on levels of formal registration, physical body, and emotion. How these children experienced their daily lives with significant relationships in the family, community, and society, how their constructive identity, belong, and recognition *inside* and *outside* the family were related to their status of being "black" are all absent in existing scholarship.

The second major gap this research intends to bridge is, therefore, the relation between "black children" phenomenon and ideas of citizenship, identity, and belonging. Theoretically, Bowlby's attachment theory is significant for this research to explain parenting experienced by the "black children", and Honneth's philosophy of recognition is central to understand the family relationships experienced by them throughout their concealment and its aftermath. Agamben's conceptions of "bare life" and state of "exception" will be employed to explicate my findings, alongside with Foucault's notion of biopolitics and citizenship rights to illustrate how the identity and self-worth was processed. This research explains what forms of discrimination the "black children" experienced, who jointly produced the harm, and how it was endorsed in the name of state policy.

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# Chapter three: Methodology

## 3.1 Introduction

This chapter details the specific ways that I have approached the research design, collected the data, and analysed it to understand what happened to the "black children". I will first discuss the paradigm including my ontological thinking, epistemological stance and methodological benefits. Following this, I will describe the method I used to collect data and how I analysed it. As both a researcher and an insider of my own research, reflexivity of doing this research has been throughout in my attempt to constitute the process as neat and scientific, capable of letting my participants' voices come through. Emotional and methodological challenges have been an inextricable part of this research and I hope to illustrate the complex nature of doing qualitative material-driven research as an inside subject too.

## 3.2 Paradigm: the interpretive qualitative approach

A paradigm can be seen as a framework of viewing the world and understanding it within a set of specific guiding assumptions and principles. It shapes the foundation for approaching and generating knowledge (Cohen, 2015). Paradigms encompass the idea of ontology – the researcher's perspective on the nature of reality and what can be known. The ontology shapes the researcher's choice of epistemological stance – how to conceptualize and investigate the phenomenon (Bryman, 1988, 2016). Interpretivism regards the nature of reality as socially constructed and emphasises discovering the meanings as observed empirical phenomena (Farrow *et al.*, 2020). The researcher's position on what knowledge is leads to a choice of a methodology that supports the researcher's belief about the claimed knowledge. In short, methodologies are highly contingent on epistemological positions (Lukenchuk, 2017).

The qualitative approach employed in this research brings five benefits for generating and justifying the knowledge of "black children". Firstly, the very individual experiences and perspectives of the researched children are respected, heard, and understood from their very

inmost ideas of "family", "children", "life", etc. Different from studying atoms, chemicals, it is essential to understand human beings "from the inside" through empathy, shared experience and culture. Secondly, it is difficult to build up a solid understanding of what these "black children" really experienced without comprehending how family, parent, children, local cadres, and other significant agencies interacted with each other. From the interpretive stance, the primary focus of understanding the social world must be on "trying to understand particular people and events in specific socio-historical circumstances" (Hammersley, 2013, p. 27). Thirdly, the focus of respecting the "black children" in this research is to reveal knowledge of their lived experiences based on newly exposed descriptions and interpretations, instead of taking existing master narratives of the policy and Chinese society for granted as a basis. Interpreting meanings of "black", "family" and "citizen" is central to my analysis of their narratives. Acknowledging the subjectivity of the researcher and researched is essential to understand the research with located contexts and history, because the same story told by children might differ from the narratives of their parents or community, and this research repositions children's voices as the central material to understand how children thought about the world they had experienced.

As the idea of interpretivism suggests, realities can be multiple with multiple interpretations of meaning (Cohen, 2015). Agencies of the state government, local cadres, and family constructed their representation of the one-child policy and its implications differently, and ways of understanding the phenomenon of "black children" can be described in different ways in different narratives. A qualitative approach explores a social phenomenon as constituted and sustained through the processed interpretation and social interaction in which people engage. Not only the participants but also the researchers have a role in influencing the research design and process, interpretation and analysis of findings (Hammersley and Campbell, 2012; Bryman, 2016). Therefore, it is significant to highlight this research's purpose of respecting what the "black children" presented in their storytelling, how the agencies like family or local cadres performed in these stories, and how these children made sense of everything (or indeed made no sense of it). Because narratives of their lived experiences are closely dependent on particular context and history, and the "reality" of what happened to them changed across time in their very minds of family, life, and the policy, especially when they went through rapid policy changes from one-child control to the

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official encouragement of three-child policy. Notably, not only a researcher, but also as an insider who has been through experiences like those of the "black" children, my reflexivity is essential to design, interpret and present this research throughout (this will be further explained in section 3.6).

The fourth benefit is that rich and detailed data can be revealed through a qualitative approach because it values individual experience, contextual understanding, interpretive meanings and acknowledges the complexity and nuances of social phenomenon. This research therefore used semi-structured interviews to create a space for these "black children" to talk about themselves, to talk about what they have remembered, believed, questioned, responded to, and how they felt about it. Last but not least, it is hoped that the research can also contribute to theoretical developments regarding the knowledge of "black children", the one-child policy, Chinese family and society because findings and interpretations are related to existing narratives of the state policy power, population study, family and children in China across time and contexts, children's victimhood (not only in China but worldwide), and understandings of identity and recognition more broadly. Though generalisation, or "external validity", is one of the debates about the interpretive research's statements due to its nature of acknowledging the complexity of social phenomenon (Williams, 2000; Hammersley and Campbell, 2012), the "thick description" enables the research to generate meanings by selecting particular features and interpreting what it might symbolise. In this research, the inductive logic specifically benefits us to understand what was going on according to the captured nuances and characteristics of the family and society under the one-child policy's power. When these participants talked about themselves, they were also taking about the children of individual families; when they talked about families, the storytelling always mentioned the community as well; when they talked about the community, the state and society were frequently involved. Therefore, not only the understandings on the horizontal level of spread space but also virtual level across time contribute a much bigger picture --- meanings of being "children", "family", "Chinese people" and "black" in the society across time and areas.

The interpretative qualitative approach was, therefore, seen to be best way to capture the voices of the "black children" with dense, detailed and contextualised descriptions,

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acknowledging the subjectivity and complexity of the social phenomenon's interpretations, revealing the meanings concealed in ideas of daily experiences, but with the potential for revealing a bigger picture of a silenced generation. Given the emphasis on awareness in studies on individuals' lived experiences, and the absence of knowledge of interactions between the "black children" and the world, this research focuses on the life narratives of my participants based on data collected through semi-structured interviews.

## 3.3 Method: Life narrative and semi-structured interviews

### 3.3.1 Narrative research design

Sociological thinking about lives has paid attention to the relationship between the lives themselves and how to *present* lives (Lawler, 2015). This research positions narratives at the centre of understanding the meanings of being "black children". Narrative refers to a set of signs, like written, spoken or visual stories that convey meaning (Squire *et al.*, 2014) and can be presented to illustrate individuals' perspectives and give them a voice (Petty, Jarvis and Thomas, 2019). Contemporary narrative research spans "stories" from personal to political levels; for instance, President Barack Obama's skilful speeches and his presidency were important elements "in the United States' highly racialized national narrative, and in broader narratives of globalization and transnationalism" (Squire *et al.*, 2014, p. 3). Frank (2002) sees the foundation of politics begins in the cultivation of personal stories，hearing personal troubles, it tells what we shall do and how we shall live (Frank, 2002). This research focuses on narratives of what stories of being "black children" are told, how they are structured, who produces them and by what means, how these narratives have been silenced, contested, or accepted and what effects they have had.

I hope to demonstrate the utility of three key features of narrative research on understanding the lives of "black children". Firstly, it is significant to acknowledge that these children construct the meanings of their lives through storytelling. As Hacking argues, the self and other are linked and embedded in the social world, and the social world can itself be seen as stories. People construct identities by locating themselves within stories. The social context

influences what we remember, and the best analogy to remembering is storytelling. The real role of our memories is the creation of a life, a character (Hacking, 1995). Plummer argues that narrative contains our identities because each of us constructs and lives "a narrative" (Plummer, 2001). Participants are, therefore, encouraged to speak openly to the researcher about their lives outside of historical documents and secondary sources (Galletta and Cross, 2013), thus declaring their feelings about and constructions of these lives. As I argued in the Literature Review (see chapter 2), Johnson's insightful work on "hidden children" who were concealed under the one-child policy did reveal some first-hand details of the "black children" through these children's own voices. However, various limitations screened her access to them, for instance, parents expressed unwillingness to allow their children talk too much about themselves in her fieldwork (Johnson, 2016a). As a researcher, who was also an international mother who adopted a Chinese daughter during the era of the one-child policy, she has significantly contributed to our knowledge of children who were hidden away from the family, neighbourhoods, and local cadres, particularly mothers' sufferings and agonies of losing and keeping their children to negotiate with the state policy power. Yet, storytelling from children was largely missing from the documented conversations in their families, and therefore this research needs to listen to their stories first.

Secondly, this research aims at understanding these children's experiences within their specific familial, local, and historical contexts. For the "black children" who had reached their adulthoods now, they were talking about their remembered experiences, meanings constructed in their storytelling which may have changed over time or movement. The story we tell of life is reshaped around us by memories. History becomes a resource in constituting our own narrative identities (Lawler, 2015). For these "black children" who participated in this research during their early adulthoods that had closely followed the policy changes, their storytelling cannot be divorced from the contextual changes. What these children storied moved across time and accreted meaning as it went. Taking the contextual approach, we can understand the narrative of "black children" as a form of power that framed the people they had been and become, and how this process worked. Thirdly, interpretation puts a level of symbolic work into storytelling (Squire *et al.*, 2014). Narrative is an interpretation because he/she constructs earlier events from memories, he/she interprets these memories and engages "in a larger interpretation in selecting which event will make up a particular story"

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(Lawler, 2015, p. 29). Listening to the narratives of the "black children" and trying to understand their experiences in the associated contexts in which they lived, it is therefore essential to build a knowledge of the "black children" phenomenon as it developed across time and spaces.

### 3.3.2 Semi-structured interview

This research employed the method of semi-structured interviews because, as noted above, this can offer insight into individual experience, and a key benefit is its attention to lived experience. Interviewing is a conversational interaction and has to be planned and prepared for the researcher to get the data that will help them to answer their research questions. (Wengraf, 2001). The interpretive approach employed in this research led to my use of semi-structured interview for three reasons. Firstly, because of the significance of storytelling in generating thick description with rich details, in-depth data, personal perspectives and interpretations within participants' particular backgrounds. Prepared questions with sufficient openness allowed my participants to talk about themselves freely without my losing sight of my research objective. Flexibility and creativity were essential in my preparation to enable my participants to engage with our conversations, and also to address the relevant areas. Secondly, semi-structured interview can capture contextual understanding of my participants' specific social, cultural, and familial experiences. Follow-up questions can go into something "in depth" by getting a more detailed knowledge about it (Wengraf, 2001). My participants' narratives of their lived experiences were not "raw" but "processed" alongside with changes in their living areas, state policies, and modernisation in China. As such, not only key historical moments could be explored, but also the most intimate stories of participants could be pictured through detailed daily practices (Galletta and Cross, 2013). Thirdly, interpretive analysis of their storytelling, how it was storied and when it happened was significant to get a deeper understanding of their lives. Their narratives from their own perspectives of growing from infancy, childhood, adolescent to adulthood with being "black" were presented and interpreted in their own words. Not from parents', journalists', or scholars' voices who observed these children from *outside*, but voices from *inside* to explore their perception of the meanings of being "black" beyond the lack of registered documents.

### 3.3.2.1 Participant recruitment and challenges

This research originally aimed to recruit around 20 participants from both urban and rural China who had lived at some point in their lives as "black children". The number of 20 was decided by the nature of my interpretive qualitative approach, the timescales of the doctoral thesis, and other factors such as the Covid-19 pandemic. As this research focuses on the depth of participants' reflections on what they believed they had experienced as "black children", a relatively small sample was also recognised as the way to achieve full immersion within a meaningful and timely analysis (Clarke and Braun, 2016). In order to identify and recruit participants, I developed three key criteria based on my primary knowledge of the "black children", including my own experiences as one of them, and related literature on the one-child policy. The first group would include participants who were illegally born and hidden, however long the hiding lasted. The second group would include participants who were illegally born but never hidden either on documental or physical levels. The third group would include participants who were legally born but hidden either in documental or physical ways. My targeted participants were those who were born between the late 1980s and the early 2010s, the period when the one-child policy and its modifications were implemented with force in both rural and urban China.

After ethical approval for the research was granted by the University of Nottingham School of Sociology and Social Policy Research Ethics Committee in December 2019 (see Appendix 1), the first step of the recruitment process was to seek agreement from one of my acquaintances who met the criteria of "black child". The reason I approached my participants via personal connections is twofold. Firstly, "black children" have been hidden and difficult to identify. Thus, primary knowledge of who may fit these categories would help this research to locate targeted participants more efficiently. Secondly, it would be challenging to let them be interested in my interviews and talk about their very personal experiences due to the sensitive topic. In fact, I tried to invite several individuals whose experiences met the criteria but were unwilling to take part in my interviews or any further conversations. It was rather difficult to recruit participants without an established network or previous rapport with them.

Therefore, a snowballing sample became my sampling technique to recruit new participants. Snowballing sampling, also known as chain referral sampling or network sampling, is beneficial to recruit additional participants but care needs to be taken to ensure their privacy (Kowald and Axhausen, 2012). Participants were recruited non-randomly and approached through those initially identified members. The sample size gradually expanded with additionally recruited participants through 2020 to 2021 and I stopped with the number of 20 due to two reasons. Firstly, though detailed stories of being "black children" varied from one to another, key features of their storytelling started to be presented with repetition in various narratives, such as the main experiences of their childhoods, interactions between them and families, relationships between them and the larger world, or reflections on the connection between them and the state policy. Secondly, my doctoral study time suggested the number of 20 as an appropriate sample size to enable this interpretive qualitative research. Issues of diversity and generalisation are in dispute regarding the conflict between non-random samples and hidden individuals in a population of interest. Though it has been suggested that snowball samples tend to underrepresent potential participants who are less keen to cooperate, or belong to smaller networks (Shaghaghi, Bhopal and Sheikh, 2011), there are steps to enhance diversity within the sample, such as beginning with initial diverse participants, expansions on perspectives or experiences, multiple networks, ongoing adjustments to reduce gaps or biases, etc (Kirchherr and Charles, 2018; Parker, Scott and Geddes, 2019).

This research was looking for both male and female participants, and both urban and rural areas were covered to expand the diversity in samples. It was much easier to locate female participants than male throughout the recruitment because many more "black daughters" than "black sons" existed in individual families whatever the policy said about gender equality. Towards the end of the recruitment period, in recognition that only two of the participants recruited so far were male, my efforts specially focused on finding male participants with relevant experiences of "black children". The aim was to gather more diverse experiences to explore gendered aspects of family. The sampling process also became purposive in terms of location --- not only rural "black children", though it was easier to find them, but also urban families' policy-breaking that reflected my primary knowledge of this social phenomenon. In

total I recruited 15 females and 5 males, and their characteristics are presented in the table below:

| Pseudonym | Biological parents' residence | Foster family's residence | Gender | Biological siblings | When family separated | When family returned |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| An | Urban area | Rural area | Female | N/A | Before 1 year old | 10 years' old |
| Bao | Urban area | Rural area | Female | One elder sister, one younger brother | Around 4 or 5 months old | 7 or 8 years' old |
| Cai | Rural area | Rural area | Female | One elder sister, one younger brother | younger than 2 months old | 10 years' old |
| Chun | Rural area | Rural area | Female | One elder sister, one younger brother | Occasionally hidden in relatives' homes | Stop hiding around 8 or 9 years' old |
| Ding | Rural area | Rural area | Female | One elder sister, one younger brother | a few weeks old | 9 or 10 years' old |
| Fang | Rural area | Rural area | Female | One elder sister, one younger brother | A few days old | 10 years' old |
| Gao | Rural area | N/A | Male | Three elder sisters | N/A | N/A |
| Han | Urban area | Rural area | Female | One younger brother | 15 days old | 8 years' old |
| Hua | Rural area | Rural area | Female | One elder sister, one younger sister | 2 or 3 months old | 9 years' old |
| Hong | Rural area | Rural area | Female | One elder sister, one younger brother | Before 1 year old | 4 or 6 years' old |
| Jiang | Urban area | Rural area | Female | One younger | Around 6 or 7 months | 5 or 6 years' old |

| | | | | brother | old | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Kang | Urban area | Urban area | Female | One elder sister | A few days old | 4 months' old |
| Tilan | Urban area | N/A | Female | One elder brother | N/A | N/A |
| Maomao | Urban area | Rural area | Female | One younger sister and one younger brother | A few months old | 14 or 15 years' old |
| Nan | Urban area | N/A | Male | One elder sister | N/A | N/A |
| Pan | Urban area | N/A | Male | One elder sister | N/A | N/A |
| San | Urban area | Rural area | Female | One elder sister | Younger than 1 year old | 6 years' old |
| Tao | Urban area | N/A | Female | One elder sister | N/A | N/A |
| Xiao | Rural area | Rural area | Male | Four elder brothers | N/A | N/A |
| Zhao | Urban area | Rural area | Male | One elder sister | 1 year old | 4 years' old |

### 3.3.2.2 Semi-structured online interviews

Face-to-face interviewing was my original plan so I could not only hear my participants but also observe their unspoken clues in their reflections. However, the pandemic began in 2020 and intervened in my research design, so I had to alter some aspects. I reviewed my interview preparation and conducted virtual interviews instead so I could approach my participants at their conveniences during the quarantined periods in China. This method, on the one hand, enabled my remote accessibility to various participants regardless of geographical limitations and other external disturbances, such as lockdown; on the other hand, it meant that I lost some potential participants who sensed it would be difficult to take part in some sensitive conversations without our direct physical interactions. Online interviews rely on technical facilities and most of my participants used platforms such as WeChat or Zoom to carry out video or voice calls with me. All interviews were arranged with their consent. The nature of this research was explained to them, as well as how their interviews might be used for my doctoral thesis. Participants were reassured that the full recording of their interviews would

be kept secure in my own laptop and working pc with encrypted access. It would be only available to the researcher and her supervisors and permanently deleted within six months of my doctoral research being completed (see Appendices 2 and 3).

In terms of collecting data, due to the convenience and flexibility of scheduling interviews with these participants, it was very common for us to sustain our interviews over one hour because they continued talking about what they thought mattered to my research. At the start of each interview, participants were briefed on the research topic, purpose and what it would entail. Confidentiality was important to highlight and the opening few minutes of an interview were clearly pivotal to build up rapport (Clarke and Braun, 2016). My plan was to invite all participants to tell their stories following the same question pattern so they could have an insight into where the interview might go and generate the stories of lived experiences that this research looked for. Follow-up questions were prepared to be asked when some significant episodes were raised (see Appendix 4 for full interview questions' list). Many of my female participants talked freely about what they wanted to share because they were longing to be heard. For many stories involving forms of trauma, the participants started talking about their own interests after my simple question "Can you tell me something about your life?". Responses like "You are asking the right person, my life is like a movie", or "My life is beyond your expectation, it's even more unbelievable than any TV series." It was important to put participants at ease and this continued throughout the interview by attentive listening and an unconditional positive regard for what they shared (Kvale, 2006). Closing the interview by ensuring the participant had the opportunity to add any extra information or ask questions was also important (Kvale, 2006).

The challenges I experienced were twofold. Firstly, there was the issue of absent non-verbal clues and contextual observations when we could not see each other in the same setting. Nuances of my participants' mood, communications, instant non-verbal responses, or environmental factors were largely missing in our interviews. For instance, sometimes I was struggling to figure out whether a silence meant something, or my participant had just been distracted by her/his own thoughts. Secondly, although I informed participants of the possibility of them having unsettled feelings during the interview, and regularly reminded them to look after their own emotion, some unsettling moments still happened when they

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talked about a range of distressing experiences, from being displaced to attempted suicide. Participants reacted with various emotions, some expressed their indifference about the traumatized others in their stories, some presented their strong feelings of anger, shame, sadness, etc in our interviews. Whatever reactions encountered, it was important for me to remain calm, acknowledge their storytelling, reassure them that emotional responses were understandable, and encourage the participants to say more about their feelings and what danced in their minds then. Traumatic narratives are chosen to fit a coherent story of victimisation and define a large-group identity (Haahr, Norlyk and Hall, 2014). I respected their decisions about what to talk about and when to stop. The interview provided a supportive and empathetic space for participants to talk openly as far as possible, and available local support services were included in the participant information sheet (see Appendix 3).

Privacy and anonymity were ensured throughout the data' recording and analysis. Any identifiable information of participants such as names, gender, ethnicity, location or specific personal features would be eliminated in the later analysis of the data. Participants' names were anonymised in transcripts and pseudonyms used in the analysis. Although it is difficult to guarantee complete anonymity (Swain, 2010), it would not be possible for someone who does not know the participants to be able to identify them from this thesis or related publications.

## 3.4 Transcription and narrative thematic analysis

### 3.4.1 Transcription

Following the completion of the interviews, audio recordings or written notes were subsequently transcribed by myself manually. The process of transcribing was undertaken as an attempt to capture important given features (Hammersley, 2010). As many details about the interview as possible, and some correspondence between the level of transcription and analysis should be included (McLellan, MacQueen and Neidig, 2003). Not only what was said and how it was said guided the intention of carrying out narrative analysis (Riessman, 1993).

The process of transforming spoken language (with its particular set of rules) to the written word (with a different set of rules) is necessary for the data to be managed, sorted, copied, examined, evaluated and quoted (Irit, 2011). It is necessary to balance the transcript's completeness with its readability to make the narrative flow naturally (Squire *et al.*, 2014). Two main methods of naturalized transcription and denaturalized transcription are applied in research (Davidson, 2009). Naturalized transcription is as detailed as possible and less filtered, retaining features such as breaks in speech, laughter, mumbling, involuntary sounds, gestures, body languages, content, etc. Denaturalized transcription removes the socio-cultural characteristics of the data such as accent or involuntary sounds. The descriptions of details during the interview may enable a complete and valid picture of the researched, but the "laundered" data from denaturalized transcription can be coherent and easy to read. Therefore, most researchers use a combination of both methods (Oliver, Serovich and Mason, 2005; Davidson, 2009).

Two things were noticeable in my transcription. Firstly, it is inevitable that some certain attributes characteristic of oral language will be lost whichever method researchers use (Poland, 1995). I interviewed my participants in the Mandarin language and transcribed all their talks onto the paper, including many details such as sighs, silence, pause, laughing, or reluctancy in this transcription, but still some specific meanings of their oral presentation were lost between speaking and writing, Especially when I translated their talking to English later manually, the gaps in meaning between Chinese and English unavoidably lost or distorted the participant's original emotions. Though all my participants were interviewed in Mandarin, their storytelling included some dialect in relation to their local contexts' description. Also, spoken intonation, contemporary emotions' influence on their voice qualities, or the ambience/rapport created with me were difficult to be captured accurately in written English words. Hence, I have attempted to capture the sound of the participants' conversations to ground the narrative in their own settings. In an interview with a male participant who spoke about his stories with indifferent attitudes, I indicated this by line breaks at each end of his contributions. For some conversations which included anger or related strong expressions, I used exclamation marks in bracket to suggest this. Another participant was very passionate about telling her stories, more than most others in this research, so I kept the transcription of her talks as a whole block to differentiate it from my

other transcriptions. This approach was taken because it seemed significant to note the data of emotion in order to understand their narratives in particular settings.

Secondly, it is significant to acknowledge my influence on the transcription as I took the roles of the researcher, interviewer, and transcriber throughout. As the researcher, I was aware of my potential impact on emotional content and selecting privileged data, what to include or filter from the transcript. For instance, some participants mentioned their neighbours' stories and said it had nothing to do with our interview topics, but I defined the data as useful pieces to map out the local context. As the interviewer, my primary knowledge of "black children" influenced my ability to perceive the participants' storytelling, to some extent this assist my transcribing to capture some implicit clues. As the transcriber, it was advantageous for me to transcribe features such as what my participants talked about, what they seemed reluctant to say, and how they interacted with me. On the other side, I needed to be aware that my assumptions or attitudes may have impacted upon the transcription quality, particularly when I coped with stories that were too different or too similar to my experiences. Whose voices exactly? Mine or my participants? Who was representing whom? For what purpose and for whose benefits? My choices were integrally related to my interpretive stance and how I located myself and my participants in the whole process. My transcriptions encompass what would be selected for narrative analysis, in what way, with what outcome.

### 3.4.2 Analysis

Qualitative data analysis involves a general process of identifying codes and concepts, identifying patterns from categories and creating themes that link similar patterns (Kim, 2016). Some researchers are interested in the narrative *truth* --- the accurate representation of physical realities, psychic and social realities. In all these cases, stories can be seen as *resources* to tell about the narrators and their worlds (Squire *et al.*, 2014). Some researchers take stories as the *themes* of research and will be less concerned with the truth of stories even if they think such truths exist (Plummer, 2001). Elliott has described this dichotomy as an epistemological division between *naturalist* (i.e. viewing narrative as a resource to observe an available external reality) and *constructive* (i.e. exploring narrative as a theme to uncover

meanings constructed in relation to available cultural, social and interpersonal resources) approaches (Elliott, 2005). Viewing the reality of being "black children" as socially constructed and interpreted, this research employed thematic analysis to articulate findings. Narrative thematic analysis focuses on themes that are developed across stories, rather than just on themes that can be picked out from stories (Squire *et al.*, 2014). We can trace many historical and current lines of storytelling around the Communist Campaigns, China's modernisation, the family and the state power when we look at narrative context, analysing how context works across narratives as they develop.

To make a narrative research go beyond personal importance, qualitative researchers need to go through a data analysis process involving a detailed description of what they discover from the analysis, a classification of emergent themes for the reader, an interpretation of the findings in light of their theoretical perspectives (Kim, 2016). Therefore, in this research, a core story of each participants' birth, significant events in their recounted episodes after birth, and changes pre- and post- the one-child policy's end was firstly created in chronological form. Secondly, thematic analysis focused on what was spoken, especially those episodes highlighted, and repeated in relation to their experiences of being born, hidden or not hidden, raised up, and prepared for socialization with the world beyond family. Events detailed in the participants' recounted experiences and contexts took up a large part of the emerging themes. For instance, events such as being hidden after the baby was born, foster care, some important conversations between the participant and foster family, or conflicts between the participant and other family members in stories, etc. Contexts such as the local cadres' interactions with the individual family, community environment between parents and children, and historical culture of the family pattern, etc. Narrative analyses such as these are always interpretive at every stage and do not stand outside in a neutral, objective position, merely presenting "what was said" (Riessman, 1993; Josselson, 2006). Beginning from the events in the recounted physical experiences of participants, an interpretative approach led to a number of themes emerging at a higher level of how the participants perceived themselves, in other words, what all these recounted experiences meant to them? Analysis of identity therefore followed their recounted experiences of "reality" and will be illustrated with examples in the following empirical chapters.

## 3.5 Quality evaluation of research: trustworthiness

How can I persuade my audiences and myself that the narratives of "black children" are worth paying attention to, worth taking account of? What arguments can be mounted, what criteria invoked, what questions asked, that would be persuasive of this issue? Though the subjective nature of the findings and problems of generalization to wider settings are commonly critiqued in the use of a qualitative paradigm (Cope, 2014). A distinction is usually made between external validity – a measure of how far the findings can be generalised from a particular sample to a broader population, and internal validity – the ability to produce results that accurately measure the cause-and-effect relationship (Elliott, 2005). Some researchers emphasize that narratives give meaning to storied experience as individuals reflect upon them and select the salient aspects to order them into a coherent whole. This evaluative dimension of narrative is understood as an important advantage for the qualitative researcher (Ferber, 2000; Elliott, 2005). My research, analysis, and presentation seek for in-depth knowledge of the "black children" that is significantly shaped by the researcher's cultural and subjective assumptions. This research aims at interpreting the little-known social phenomenon of "black children" and digging out the voices covered under the seemingly common-sense ideas of "family", "children", "one-child policy". Furthermore, validity can also be achieved within a qualitative paradigm due to its open and flexible nature (Clarke and Braun, 2016; Yardley, 2016). Life stories regarding individual experiences can be analysed to tell us about different lives, and the use of stories in relation to cognition, social and cultural contexts (Squire *et al.*, 2014).

The narratives told in interviews are closely related to participants' daily life and their extended experiences, and Linde has argued that life story can be used as a major means of self-presentation and is therefore quite robust (Linde, 1993; Elliott, 2005). This would lead to greater confidence in the validity of the qualitative approach. A narrative "will not capture a simple record of the past in the way that we hope that a video camera might" (Elliott, 2005, p. 12). However, narratives provide an ideal medium for researching and understanding the meanings attached to individuals' experiences in social context from the view of constructivists' questions. The validity of how many "truths" or "realities" my participants told is crucially dependent on what questions I wanted to be addressed in this research, and

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what types of insights I was hoping to gain from their interviews. As Portelli suggests, the strength of oral sources is that inventions and myths lead us through and beyond facts to the meanings (Portelli, 1991). The close analysis of narratives may produce intersubjective meanings shared by the whole of a community based on relatively small samples' evidence, while the narratives' forms also tell us something about the cultural framework within which individuals make sense of their lives. Studies on what delineates the boundaries of the community or culture will demonstrate the external validity or generalizability of the evidence (Elliott, 2005).

## 3.6 How to present the researcher's self: positionality and reflexivity.

The relation of the researcher to the research process, and his/her relations with the participants require the researcher to explicate his/her *positionality* – key features such as gender, ethnicity, perspectives, etc that might influence the construction of meanings. The researcher's positionality includes their capacity for *reflexivity* – the process of critical self-reflection of one's biases, theoretical predispositions, and so forth, to validate qualitative research (Lukenchuk, 2017). Reflecting back on my past four years' research on the "black children" and on around three decades of growing up as a "black child", it has been rather complex and ambivalent as my shifting and floating identities have settled down. These are the master narratives of this research in which I was a "black child", female, traumatized, doctoral researcher. I have been working through, with, and against my twin-identities of researcher and insider. "Recognizing and casting a reflexive gaze on who we are as socially constructed beings not only focuses the lens on what we research but also on the ways in which we research" (Giampapa, 2011, p. 133). To construct my identity as a researcher, I positioned my research both conceptually and methodologically – making links to existing studies on the children, trauma, and state policy, theorizing narratives about what this meant, and building in an understanding of the positives and negatives of my own role in shaping the research process and presenting others' "voices".

Power dances between the researcher and the researched is manifested in interviewing and representing. Researchers begin with a power position to set the state and rule the interview

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in accordance with their research interests. For instance, posing the question, critically following up the answers and closing the conversation (Kvale, 2006). However, participants can also control the power of interview by, for example, withholding information, actively listening and asking questions (Riessman, 1993; Kvale, 2009; Vähäsantanen and Saarinen, 2013). The desire to speak my mind often came into conflict with the fear of alienating my participants' willingness to talk more. I chose to keep my opinions to myself in our interviews because it felt wrong to tell the other "black children" that I knew better than they did. Nevertheless, it has been a challenging journey to look after my own emotional well-being whilst I was trying to encourage my participants to talk more. Any stories told with less or more traumatized memories than my own experiences were functioning as triggers for memories that I have lived with. I felt sympathy for the traumatized children in some extreme stories from the perspective of a researcher, but it also felt very unsettling to be aware of my own victimhood as an *insider*. Therefore, it was unavoidable that I would shift my positionality inwardly and outwardly throughout, so my participants' stories could be heard first, then a picture of a silenced generation could emerge and be reflected upon. It was also necessary for me to take a closer look at what I brought to this research to heighten my self-awareness and self-disclosure. A reflexive approach suggests that I should acknowledge and disclose myself in the research, aiming to understand my own influence on the process; rather than eliminate my effect (England, 1994; Holland, 1999; Bourdieu, 2004; Gould, 2015). No research can possibly reveal the full single truth through an interpretative approach.

When I look into this research, emotional difficulties were threefold. Firstly, my relationship with my participants challenged their idea of rapport throughout. My insider position helped the relation building in the initial stage of interviews, enabling this research to dig out really in-depth data; however, the connection between both sides possibly confused participants to understand the academic interview as a personal chat, thus leading some participants to perceive the connection between us as personal friendship and to ask for further emotional support. Some participants began expecting me to engage with more personal conversations that hardly involved this research, such as their daily life updates, the break-up of relationships, opinions on current events, and many moments involving emotional expressions. Although the consent form informed them that I would be out of their lives after the interview, some participants acted as if they saw this only as a paperwork routine. My

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insider position helped me to make participants relax and comfortable to narrate their personal traumas and deep emotions, but also, this bond misled them to interpret the interviews as personal daily chats between friends and it was difficult for me to stop them abruptly when they expressed a desire for more continued emotional support after the interviews finished. Both insider and researcher positions helped my data collection in earlier stages, but also helped my participants to misunderstand our relationship. The researcher position required me to hear, respect and understand participants' stories, which could make some participants sense me as a more patient listener and who agree with them more than other listeners. Some participants expressed their appreciation for being heard with respect and patience, but, although I clarified this as my project demanded, they still described our connection as friendships and expressed how they needed such supports to make them feel better. Virtual interviews make participants perceive the interview more casually and personally as well. Due to the pandemic and my virtual interviews with participants who contacted their friends via virtual tools as well, they perceived my follow-up interviews as a catch-up between friends.

Secondly, the challenge of keeping the data confidential was exacerbated by two dilemmas. Firstly, some participants misunderstood our relation as close friends and asked for more details about my research, such as my process and other participants' data. The data had to be confidential, and I needed to disappoint my participant. Sometimes this cost some details that participants wanted to share with others. It would have been good to have more details but not at this price. This problem barely disturbed my research, but I have made a paper record of it with a view of reflecting on it to further enhance my interview skills for the future. Secondly, some participants narrated their experiences and feelings in a very aggressive manner, leading us to take a break to allow the interviewee to calm down (which did not always work). And I was wondering whether I should let such interviewees know that something worse had happened to other people, but I did not feel it was my place to do so. I worried that my approach to interviews could encourage unsettled feelings among my participants before any interview had begun. In fact, the very uneasy experiences were often narrated in a relatively easy manner; however, the most uneasy manner was employed by some participants who expressed some aggressive comments about family and society. I tried to respect each story and the way in which it was narrated, nevertheless, I was sometimes

confused with options to calm someone down or letting them continue with the sad feelings which had been engendered. Sometimes I wanted to comfort my participants that being concealed by their parents was relatively normal in such a circumstance and not evil, that such experiences were shared by many "black children" and were not unique to them, or that some other "black children" had experienced worse within the same situation, but I had to protect the data. Although I could, perhaps, have made such participants feel better or calmer by saying something, intimating that I could understand some participants' uneasy feelings from an inside position, yet I could not help that from a researcher position.

Thirdly, there was some vulnerability for the researcher in responding to participants' emotions. Sometimes it hurt to sense my participant's anger towards their family members or other groups, however, their aggressive comments introduced rich data to map out a bigger picture and I felt that I should not stop them from my researcher position. I was free to disagree with my participants, naturally, but in fact, it was difficult to do so if I wanted them to talk freely. Some participants commented on my questions and my research with undelightful words because they were tired of my detailed questions, expressing their disrespect clearly and sometimes responding rudely. This happened mostly to narratives about being "ordinary/normal" when some participants sensed that I was asking some questions whose answer was "obvious". It was not an enjoyable experience to receive comments of this nature, but it did result in wonderful data, therefore, I was happy to write down responses like this to record and keep as narrative data. Some participants expressed something really inhospitable about my culture-crossing experiences, my personal status or my responses to their curiousness, which set me back a little at first, and sometimes it felt uncomfortable to listen to some rude stories because such data could pop up at any point. Some interview experiences enraged me from the inside position because I had some knowledge of the story's other side, however, my researcher position required my respect to all data and to divorce my emotion from the story collection.

## 3.7 Summary

To conclude, this research is positioned within a qualitative paradigm to illustrate that the "black children" phenomena can be socially constructed. This ontological belief led to my

interpretative approach and use of semi-structured interview to collect, analysis, and present the narratives of being "black children". This chapter has outlined the research site and the snowballing method to gather participants, the data sources and how they were collected, the data analysis and interpretation, the trustworthiness of my findings, and the researcher's reflexivity. Serving to bridge the literature on the relation between the one-child policy and a hidden population like the "black children", this research sought to uncover what was storied by these children themselves, how it was told, for what purpose and for whose benefit. Hearing their real innermost narratives and generating contextual understandings could impact not only reflections on the one-child policy and other related state policy power, but can also evoke our thinking about children, family, and community in a wider context that goes beyond the Chinese society or some certain policies.

# Chapter Four:  The births of the "black children"

## 4.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the lead up to and birth of these "black children", starting from explaining why families demanded more children than their local authorities permitted in the first place, when the family decision was made and by whom, and for what purpose.  I then describe how the birth of "black children" became possible from the process of mother's unpermitted pregnancy to the concealment of the delivery, both physically and through the manipulation of official documents. A historical approach to understanding the decision making and taking is necessary because the previous generation's family planning, fertility culture, social transmission of economic system and political policies were in play. Ideals of family and fertility in generations of grandparents and parents were shaped, constructed, and reframed in accordance with social changes from pre-Communist China, newly established Communist China, and the beginning phase of China's modernisation. Long before my first interview question ("Why did your family give birth to you?") was put to the participants of this study, it appeared to have already haunted many of them throughout their childhoods as they asked their families, "Why did you give birth to me?" As children, they wanted to know the meaning of their births to the family within a context where their existences seemed to conflict with the family's interests. As citizens, they have kept questioning the legitimacy of their rights and obligation in a society where they were referred to "black". This chapter will respond to this based on these children's narratives of what happened around their births in the family.

## 4.2 Why a "black child" was born.

The following two questions guide this section to present the power dynamic dancing around the birth of this group of children. Firstly, who demanded, and decided that the family should give birth to the baby? Secondly, what forces decided that the baby was to be a "black child"?

Although mothers were active participants in terms of childbearing when the decision to have more babies was made, not every narrative suggested that they were the decision-maker in terms of their own fertility.

### 4.2.1 Who demanded the baby? Who decided the baby should be born?

From my analysis of the ways in which the families responded to my participants in their memories, there appear to have been four main decision-makers: mothers, fathers, or the couple jointly, paternal grandparents and maternal grandparents. Though the proportion of each category weighed differently (for instance, more than half participants noted "paternal grandparents" but less than a quarter mentioned "maternal grandparents" in demanding a boy after having a girl, which will be explained in further parts), it is important to fully hear these family stories to understand what pressures the birth of the baby was delivered in response to – whether it was a personal desire for motherhood or as the result of coercion. Therefore, my explanation will start from the mother, then father or the couple combined who made the decision, to paternal grandparents' direct power over the young couple, and more indirect power from maternal grandparents or senior siblings. First, however, it is important to note that not all "black children" were born outside the one-child policy and its local modifications. Over half of my participants (approximately 12 out of 20) were actually *born legally* as the first or second child of the family within the legal parameters; it was only afterwards that it was decided that they would be the "black" one to reserve the space for the next baby. Therefore, wanting the birth of the baby did not necessarily equal wanting the baby, neither did keeping the baby inside the family. It is important to highlight the decisions made and changed during the postnatal period to illustrate how new-born babies were given different statuses merely based on their births.

#### 4.2.1.1 Mother's decision

It is interesting to find that participants' attitudes differed largely according to their answers to the question about family decision-makers.  For those who said they were born because their parents, especially their mothers, demanded more children than the policy-permitted number, some expressed uncertainty about the reason, such as "I don't know, never asked

her about this. She possibly just wanted one more child (Han)." or "Well, she always wanted two, she told me so, but we didn't think why before you asked me (Chun)." Or "I guess for their generation, it's difficult for them to stick with one child only because they grew up with multiple siblings. (Tilan)" Some of the participants suggested that their mothers, in fact, were the primary decision-makers. This suggests that these particular women may have had some autonomy over their fertility decisions around giving birth to or aborting a baby.

As noted in the Introduction to the thesis, the generation of parents involved here were born during the "baby boomer" period and the ideal of a big family was encouraged by the newly established Communist China (Greenhalgh, 2008); however, they were asked to comply with the one-child policy when they reached the age of having children, all of which conflicted with their established family ideology and cultural ideals. Many of my participants actually responded to the question "Who decided to give birth to the baby" with an answer that seemed to stem from a different question "What were the children born for". They seemed to understand their parents had difficulty in transferring their fertility ideals from many children to fewer children. They said, "Everyone wanted more children, people just did that" or "Parents gave birth to children because they wanted children, your question is silly." What was surprising across the board was the almost complete lack of mention of how the policy constraints might have affected the parents and children, as well as what the birth would entail. This may remind us of rethinking how far the state policy really went in reframing a family's ideal of fertility? And what was the meaning of children in accordance with the changeable contexts? We may only have answers to it after we have a full understanding of what the "black children" experienced.

Of the participants who said their mothers wanted more children because they "had to give a boy" to the father or the broader paternal family, they were quite certain in their answers. Some said their mothers claimed the motivation to have a second or third baby would "complete my own expectation of the picture", "give my child a companion", "fulfilling my task of the family" or "wholeness to be a wife/in-law". Son-priority was usually presented in their interpretations of their mothers' responses. For instance, "My mom had my (elder) sister first, apparently, she had to have a boy, so she decided to go for a second baby, but regrettably she got me." Or, "I know my mother was busy with planning for her next baby

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right after me". The virtue of traditional familism in China has been argued as patriarchal, patrilocal, and patrilineal by Watson though Yan notes the conception of neo-familism to explain structural change in family patterns (Watson, Watson and Yan, 2019). Giving births to more children than permitted in pursuit of these mothers' son-priority was apparent in this research; their residence and employment were in urban areas, away from the traditional patrilocal pattern. But still when it came to the issue of fertility or reproductive rights, little was mentioned about these mother's perceptions of womanhood and motherhood. For those mothers who appeared to have some part in the decision-making and decided the birth-giving in line with son-priority, their autonomy and freedom of their physical bodies were still constructed, or conditioned around male notions of desire, not women's. Sometimes not even their husbands', but of his parents' generation.

In contrast to those mothers who were very determined to give birth to babies in response to their family ideology, some participants reported that their mothers experienced changes from "not having the baby" to "having the baby" due to influential episodes. For instance, some mothers were said to have conceived the baby at first but aborted it due to their own considerations, or objections from the family or close relatives. Such episodes were described in narratives of their "black children" to mark the timepoint of their change of minds – from uncertainty about having the baby to a determination to give birth to the next conceived baby.

> My mother aborted twins before she had me. My elder sister was born as the first
> child, then she had the twins but everyone around her said "no point having the
> twins, they are two girls, what use are they good for?", and my mother knew the
> twins would not survive considering her financially poor family. However, it turned
> out to be two boys after she had the abortion, my mother felt so heart broken. All
> people around her started to say something bad about my mother again, saying
> "what a good set of twins, she did this purposely, selfish woman". Therefore, my
> mother gave birth to any baby she conceived ever since, so here came me and my
> little brother. I didn't know why my parents could have my little brother, my
> mother was given the contraception after my birth, but later she got pregnant
> anyway.

--Ding (pseudonym), the second daughter of a rural family with three children, two children permitted.

From the above quote we can see the timepoint of Ding's mother's mind change was her loss of twin boys, which only happened after her abortion of the assumed "twin girls". People's (those who said "no good for having girls") attitudes toward the mother's abortion differed sharply from devaluing "twin girls" beforehand and valuing "twin boys" afterwards, and the mother's determination to keep the next conceived baby was jointly boosted by her boy loss, and also affected by others' blaming her "selfishness". In this light, Ding and her brother were born to fulfil or repair her mother's expectation of motherhood. Gender here played a more significant role in affecting the mother's decision to keep or lose the baby than other considerations such as her financial, bureaucratic and cultural stresses. Prenatal discrimination against daughters was firstly presented in this narrative to illustrate how the decision to have a baby was made, changed, and evaluated. In contrast to Yan's discussions on increasing individualism and the change of power dynamic between the elder and younger couples (Yan, 2016), being blamed as "selfish" by the family when the mother did not devote her body to boy-making was very common in this research, even when the mother worked and lived far away from her in-laws in different areas. In this case, the patrilineal benefits overrode concerns about women's physical and mental health, and these mothers chose to continue presenting their patrilineal value by continuing giving more babies in pursuit of a boy.

In contrast to these mothers who experienced a change of mind, some participants told stories about mothers who aborted baby girls or who never knew the aborted baby's gender, presenting continuous decision-making in giving birth to a boy. The following quote from Fang's story demonstrates this:

My mother said she aborted two babies before I came, she thought they were girls, and people said, "what's the good for having girls?". But she had very strange pregnancy sickness when she conceived me, so she believed me to be a boy and delivered me to the world. It turned out to be a girl and she kept trying, then my little brother came. I'm not sure whether any other little sisters were aborted after

my birth, because I remembered people said my mother seemed pregnant when I was two years old and this was why I was sent back to my paternal grandparents' village then, but later nothing happened, and my brother was born when I was five.

--Fang (pseudonym), the second daughter of a rural family with three children, two children permitted.

We can see a similarity between the above two extracts. Both mothers made their decisions to keep the baby based on their fear of losing a boy. There was a discrepancy between the mothers' motivation to conceive a baby and deliver a baby when the baby's gender did not conform to the standard of "good". The meaning of "good" was rarely explained in the family but parents kept referring to it as "having a boy" when they recounted others' attitudes around them, including grandparents, relatives, neighbourhoods, and friends. Phrases like "xxx gave birth to a boy (after three girls) and people said, 'look at what a good result the family got'." Or "it would be good if xxx could get a boy this time" are not exceptional in narratives of parents' attitudes towards gender.

When the mother acted as the decision maker of such prenatal violence against the daughter, she was presenting her loyalty to the patriarchal virtue through sacrificing the girl's living opportunity and worshipping a boy's physical presence in the family. Following this, postnatal violence against daughters was noted in such family power dynamic and practised as a familial norm. The following extract comes from the interview with a male participant whose family gave away one of their daughters to bring in the boy, which highlights how the gender violence against daughters was normalised in their biological families' daily interpretations of "family" and "children".

Gao: I once heard that I've got another sister who came before I was born. My mother gave her away to some family outside our village, people said it's over the big plain area and a friend of my mother took her there. None of my family had been there. I had no idea of her order, the second or third sister? Maybe, not sure. People in my family barely talked about her.

Interviewer: When did you know about this sister?

Gao: I didn't know about her until the end of my high school. Just a casual family chat and my mother said I actually have one more sister, but I've never seen her.

Interviewer: How did this topic come up? Any reasons?

Gao: Just a chat, no reasons. Possibly because one of our neighbours got their daughter back when she turned 18, or 19? Quite old anyway. She was given away for adoption when she was born but then our neighbour got her back, I didn't know why. Then my mother said I have another elder sister all of a sudden, saying something like she gave away the sister very far away purposely, but she missed the sister sometimes, and said things were not very good for the sister, also said I should not forget about her if I got rich one day.

Interviewer: How did you feel when you firstly heard about these?

Gao: Feel? Felt nothing, what do you mean my feeling? You mean how I felt about the neighbour's daughter coming back?

Interviewer: No, that you had a sister who had been given away and what your mother said.

Gao: Um, what feeling could I have? Nothing, why should I feel anything, I still don't understand your question. I didn't know that sister at all, what kind of feeling could I have toward her?

Interviewer: Was your father there when your mother talked about this? Your other two sisters? How did they react to this story?

Gao: My father? can't remember, it was lunch time, and we were just having a lunch, and a chat, I can't remember my father said anything, my mother said something that we didn't know before, nothing else. Then we continued the lunch, I guess.

Interviewer: Was anyone curious about the give-away sister? Were you?

Gao: The sister? Why? I told you already, I didn't know her at all, you know, I've never met her in my life. We didn't talk about her any more after that, no one in my family really knew her.

Interviewer: Did you ever ask why the sister was sent away?

Gao: Why bother to ask? How could my mother give birth to me otherwise? two sisters at home already and she had to pay a penalty for two children if she did not send away the sister.

Interviewer: Why did your family want to give birth to you after the sister? who made the decision?

Gao: Because I am a boy, you know it already, how could it be any other reason? I admit my place had the son-priority but not my family. I was treated equally with my two sisters and the only speciality I got was my mother turned to be a Christian after she got me, because she took it as a miracle.

Interviewer: Any reason to be a Christian?

Gao: She said she tried for several times but no good news, then she donated 500 yuan (approximately £50) to the local chapel and here I came. Very lucky in that winter, she got a boy. Then she decided to be a Christian.

Interviewer: Do you believe in Christianity as well? Or anyone else in your family, too?

Gao: I never believed in it, nor else in my family. My mother possibly didn't really understand it as well, but it helped her to get what she wants, it worked.

Gao (pseudonym), the third child of a rural family with three children, two children permitted.

The reason I put this long interview conversation here is twofold. Firstly, it is helpful to illustrate how one baby's entrance presupposed another baby's exit from the family though the sister came earlier. In the above extract, everyone played a role in the gender violence against the "out-daughter": the mother initiated the family event when she heard about another family's daughter's return – a family that abandoned the daughter as her family did but brought the adult daughter back in. The reaction of the father and other two sisters were largely absent in Gao's descriptions. Gao presented this episode of his family life with few emotions; most times he said that he "felt nothing", "it's usual" or "why should I react" in his storytelling. Gao's mother was presented with a very determined mind to give birth to the daughter, and so she was when the daughter was given away. Though she expressed her feelings about this daughter when the neighbour's given-away daughter returned to her biological parents, the conversations noted nothing relating to wanting the daughter back or any intention to parent her. In the end of the interview with Gao, I questioned whether he or his family had sensed any influence from the one-child policy on the family members, and he responded as follows:

Gao: No influence on anyone in my family, I think, I have been living like a normal kid, no different from my other legal-born friends or schoolmates. So, my story must be nothing of interest, very normal. The only thing that my mother once said was, it would be good to have the new two-child policy two decades ago, then we would not need to pay for the penalty.

Interviewer: Mothers in my place sometimes said something like, it would be good to have the new policy two decades ago, because they needed to abort the conceived babies. They complained about the penalty as well.

Gao: Yeah, people in my place only talked about their money-loss, no one talked about the baby-loss. People only cared about something that they really lost, I heard no one had forced abortions in my place, possibly it's different from your hometown.

--Gao (pseudonym), the little brother of a rural family with three children, two children permitted.

The second reason I need to present these two long extracts with details is to explain how the gender violence against daughters could be normalised into an everyday occurrence in a person's mind, in the family, in a community, and in a larger society. Gao's sister was absent in his idea of "family" and "we" each time he thought about his family. She was included in the family chat as a short topic only with an external reminder (the neighbour's daughter returning), her story got little response or interest from her mother, father, and siblings though they knew "things did not go well for her". More notably, her suffering was not only unseen by her brother but also (in his telling) by her mother, who was presented as the only person who cared about her ongoing life, when her mother reflected on the family loss caused by the birth policy. This daughter was so absent and invisible in her biological family's definition of "family": losing her was not even included in the family "loss". Therefore, each person's indifference towards her suffering is significant for this research to demonstrate the postnatal gender violence in the discourse of a family even beyond state power.

The full invisibility of such daughters suggested that my research needed to take a closer look at those children who were overshadowed by their siblings who had lived like Gao. Here I propose two terms to describe the different ways in which new-born babies were treated: the "black children" who were chosen by the family to be sent away and the "homed siblings" who continually stayed with their biological parents. Three criteria (drawn from the narratives) define the difference between these two categories of children: living with the biological family daily during early childhood or not, being claimed as the family's child within the parents' identifiable networks or not, children and parents reciprocally recognising the bond (for instance, mother-and-child relation in their minds other than disguised relations, e.g., aunt-niece) or not. The distinction between "homed sibling" and "black children" runs through the narratives of all participants' journey, some were telling their experiences of being "black" in a direct manner, some were telling stories that shadowed a sibling's presence in the family. Just like the story of Gao, his given-away sister was, in practice, the "black child" while Gao himself was presented as the "normal" child.

It is important to illustrate how mothers took the role of decision-maker at the very primary stage of producing the "black children", because of the unique relation between mother and children throughout prenatal and postnatal periods. In some narratives, the mother demanded more babies than permitted regardless of gender because she personally wanted more children in the family; while stories of mothers who terminated the procedure when they thought they were having girls and thus terminated the pregnancy were responding to patriarchal virtue other than personal desires to mother children. In some narratives, mothers decided to give birth but also decided the daughter should be removed from the family relations when she found the gender failed her expectation of a boy. In short, the "black children" were born either as the mother's response to her desire to mother children, or through devotion to patriarchy (this will be specifically explained in section 4.4).

### 4.2.1.2 Decision of father or the couple

Several narratives reveal that it was fathers who demanded more babies than the policy permitted, but in most narratives the participant described the mother as a joint decision-maker as well. Similar to the decision made by mothers explained earlier, births were

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demanded by the father, or the couple, in full awareness of the illegal status and possible punishments which would follow. No baby was conceived accidently in such narratives, there was only a difference between whether the baby was demanded mostly by the father or jointly wanted by the couple. Two questions guided my analysis of the following narratives: first, why did the father demand the birth of another baby? Second, how did he demand it?

> My father wanted a second baby after he had my sister, he convinced my mother to conceive me, but it turned out to be a girl. He burst out of crying right after knowing this, nagging himself as useless and ashamed to face his ancestors. Because I am the second daughter and this birth took up my parents' legal fertility quota, he had no legal chance for another birth. His father told him to give me up and then get another try. He rejected and took me home.
>
> --Tao (pseudonym), the second daughter of a rural family, two children permitted.

In Tao's family conversation, her mother was not mentioned as the one who demanded the baby, though a daughter failed the father's expectation of this birth. It implies the rise of conjugality and its central axis in family relations in Tao's family. When Yan (2003) questioned who controls the family resources and makes decisions (grandparents or the young couple?) and what was the position of a married son when his wife conflicted with his parents, he was looking into the parental power and authority in stem families to illustrate the waning of patrilineal control over the young couple regardless of the specific structural composition of the household (Yan, 2003). Therefore, the father's demand for a baby and his decision to register the daughter represented the conflict between patrilineal power and conjugal relation when the generation experienced the transforming family ideology. Two more examples suggested the centrality of conjugal relations in deciding the birth giving and parenting.

> My story is normal, no hiding nor separation. I grew up with my parents because they wanted a daughter after having a son. One boy and one girl make a complete family in their minds. My birth brought them a penalty, but they must have been ready for this, because they always wanted a second child, and the girl will be most ideal following a boy. They were aware that a second child would definitely cost

them something, so the paying some money for it might be the most acceptable option for them compared with unemployment or career damage. I am very close to my parents, but my brother is not, he grew up with my grandparents when my parents were busy with their careers. He went back home and joined us at his six or seven, not very small, so he was closer to our grandparents but not familiar with us. He has a very quiet personality, I guess that's the difference between boys and girls, we girls attach to parents, the boys do not show such affections.

--Tilan (pseudonym), the second daughter of an urban family, one child permitted.

The extract above contributes a much more positive episode from the perspective of "black daughters" compared with those who had to remain unregistered or be separated from their biological parents. Two distinctions between this and other family plans for "black children" should be noted here. First, the couple jointly looked to have a girl following a boy whereas other families wanted a boy following girls. Second, the couple had similar consciousness of punishments following the birth of the baby, but they were very prepared for the financial penalty in exchange for the baby. This contrasts with the story told by Gao, the boy whose mother gave away a daughter for permanent adoption and paid for his birth penalty. Also, in Tilan's family, her elder brother was sent away for short-term foster care while she was homed by her parents. In this instance, she turned into the "homed sibling". On the contrary, her brother was excluded from the family's day-to-day nursery even though he was legally born. Tilan attributed such difference between two children to parents being busy with their careers and having "not enough time to look after both at this time", which was what her parents claimed to be the reason in the family chat. Her brother was overshadowed by her presence within the family patterns to some extent, and thus he became the "black child" in a similar way to other "black daughters" who were sent away. It is important to discuss the familial mode of "one child in presupposed another child out" that has been represented by all narratives so far, because this highlights how incompatible the parents' desires were with the political constraints, particularly structural surveillance to which they responded by removing or distancing the "black children" from the parents' identifiable networks (family, workplace, neighbours, community, and friends). There was always an overshadowed story behind the "normal" life of the "homed sibling".

Different decisions were made by couples who got a baby girl even though they were told it definitely would be a "boy". A baby being sent away for foster or adoption as soon as the gender was confirmed was mentioned as the most used tactic for "problem-solving" (in my participants' language, "*jiejue wenti*"). This indicates that the couple responded to their patrilineal family ideology more than to the parenting virtue of respecting, loving and nurturing children. Postnatal discrimination against daughters occurred with both parents' active participation as the following extracts reveal:

> I was born because some "fortune teller" said I must be a boy; my parents were so happy and decided to give birth to me. My mother hid herself, going from relative to relative for several months until the baby was born. But I am a girl and thereby was sent to a maternal relative's family for short-term foster care when I was less than two-month-old. My mother left me nothing, not even the baby wrapping, only because the "fortune teller" told her that I would bring bad luck to my biological family if I couldn't get over alone.
>
> --Cai (pseudonym), the second daughter of a rural family, two children permitted.

We can see from the above extract that some baby girls would not have been born without predictions that the baby would be a "boy", either based on medical tests or individual beliefs. This was another kind of prenatal violence against daughters though without medically terminating their lives, and postnatal discrimination against them followed to respond the couple's false gender predictions. Though the centrality of a male heir was undermined within some of these accounts, the prenatal and postnatal violence against daughters could not be overlooked when the girl could only be born with a predicted "boy" identification, which echoed the sex-selective abortion as systematic elimination of girls. Socialization proceeds with a set of rewards and punishments and institutions from family to media are carrying out the process to differentiating the gender (Walby, 1990). The distinction of entitlements and rights between genders was inducted and normalised into the family ideology of those "black daughters", through their cognition of "only boy was decided to be born". To demonstrate the family-sanctioned harm on them, I describe these daughters as children who were physically born but metaphorically aborted in terms of their identity.

### 4.2.1.3 Decision of paternal grandparents

It is surprising to find a young couple's subordination to the older generation though no patrilocal marriage happened within these families. In some cases, parents were urban residents and employed there while the grandparents lived in rural areas. For families in rural China, the stem family household was not presented in these narratives either. Parents' households were separate from those of the paternal grandparents. My analysis reveals four categories of power relations crossing over the conjugal bond and intergenerational relationships: paternal grandfather-father, paternal grandfather-mother, paternal grandmother-father, paternal grandmother-mother. The paternal grandfather's domination over the father was in practice exercised over the mother regarding the issue of fertility, and the paternal grandmother's power over the father was practiced through the control over the mother as well. In a classic patriarchal family pattern, "older women have a vested interested in the suppression of romantic love between youngsters to keep the conjugal bond secondary and to claim sons' primary allegiance" (Walby, 1990, p. 280). Particularly in this research, the paternal grandmother actively participated in not only manipulating the father's affection but more important, expropriating the body of the mother to reproduce her allegiance to patrilineal desire.

In contrast to those children who were born as a result of their mothers' own decision, some participants said their mothers were pushed into law-breaking births either by their fathers or grandparents, paternal and/or maternal grandparents. It is essential to distinguish the birth desired by the father and the birth desired by the grandparents regardless of the parents' unwillingness, because it reveals who had the freedom to desire, the power to decide, and who were the beneficiaries. For those births desired by the father and decided either by him alone or the couple together, we can see that the conjugal relation took the primary role in relation to family production and reproduction within the transition from a patrilocal community to the increased trend towards the nuclear family since the 1970s. Age, generation, and sex served as the three basic elements in constituting the hierarchy system in patrilineal domestic domains (Yan, 1999), while separation from the parental household (*fen jia*) empowered the freedom and power of young couple's decision-making to regulate their family ideology (Yan, 2003).

Some participants' narratives implicated their paternal grandparents as very active participants in presenting and even recalling the patriarchal extended family, because the emergence of the patriarchal extended family gives the senior man authority over everyone else, including young men. Kandiyoti (1988) proposed the concept "classic patriarchy" to discuss the patrilineal control over men and women in North Africa, the Muslim Middle East, and South and East Asia (Deniz Kandiyoti, 1988). Some participants described episodes of their mothers' parents pushing mothers into giving one or more grandsons to fulfil their "duty" or "value" as women. Mothers in such accounts normally presented their resistance against this pressure, such as "I didn't want to give birth to another baby in the beginning, but I had no choice because of filial piety". Let us take an instance of the participant's understanding of the primary role played by paternal grandparents in demanding and deciding the parents' fertility practice:

> I was once a "black daughter" for ten years, when my parents wanted a second birth for a boy, and they sent me away to a maternal relative's family. In fact, it was just my paternal parents who wanted a grandson, I can tell my mother didn't want it at all, maybe my father was reluctant as well, but what could they do? They couldn't disobey their parents, otherwise villagers would accuse them of being unfilial. My grandparents even asked my parents to come back from the city to the village to have regular family meetings with them each month to discuss the baby-making. My parents tried for ten years and then they became too old to make a baby, I guess, so they gave it up and brought me back home. Thank Goodness they failed to have a son, otherwise who knows where I would be now.
>  --An (pseudonym), an only daughter of an urban family, one child permitted.

An's situation as an only daughter might sound initially outside the remit of this research on "black children" – who are normally from families with both legally permitted "homed children" as well as unpermitted "black children"; but her "black daughter" story was powerful in elaborating the patrilineal manipulations over the young couple when we take a closer look. An unborn brother would go on to usurp the place of the legally born sister. It is striking to see how gendered violence against daughters was processed through the family

even without a sons' physical presence. An's story as one of the "black children" in her family in practice had no big difference with others who shifted their "imagined" sons to physical ones. Additionally, An's interpretation of her mother's decision-making suggests whose desire had the say about women's bodies and the young couple's family planning regardless of the state coercion. Her paternal grandparents dominated the power over her parents' fertility desire and practice although the traditional patrilocal household in agrarian societies had, theoretically, already been dismantled by societal modernisation. Her parents handed over their fertility freedom and An's entitlement of being a legitimatized child to the patrilineal tradition for fear of being against filial piety, although they lived independently from the patrilineal material support.

The key to operate the patrilocally extended household is associated with the peasantry's reproduction in agrarian societies (Kandiyoti, 1988), so it is interesting to hear from An's story that this was also happening in urban areas too. Her parents voluntarily gave their daughter, An, as a pledge pending the fulfilment of their allegiance to the patriarchal culture. An said "they couldn't disobey their parents" and explained their concern about losing the "filial piety" in order to defend their decision-taking, which was repeated by more than half of my female participants when talking about why they were born. Those parents prioritized the role of son and daughter-in-law over the role of father and mother to their own children in collusion with the patriarchy power. Parents considered the necessity to fulfil their "filial piety" as larger than their obligation to properly parent children with equal affection and resources. A moral hierarchy has been noticeable in their representations of "filial piety" and parenthood – children were ranked lower than the grandparents' generation in relation to the patriarchal power.

In her account, An suggests the incompatible benefits between her and the never-conceived "brother" by expressing her thankfulness to her parents' infertility. She implied her possible loss of family love, nurture, resources, and opportunities when she said, "otherwise who knows where I would be now". Similar phrases were used by some female participants who described they felt fortunate that their parents failed to have a boy after trying, "otherwise I might have no chance for university/master's degree/study abroad", "otherwise I wouldn't have got all their supports/resources/efforts", "otherwise I would be as same as her (some

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daughters with miserable experiences)". It is ironic to sense the fear from these "rejoicing" narratives that daughters expressed how much they were thankful for the co-constraints of their parents' infertility and the state policy.

> I feel grateful for the one-child policy, seriously. if my parents got me a little brother, I might be forgotten forever. You don't know how I lived for those ten years, I thought I possibly would never get back to city, my home.
>
> --An (pseudonym), an only daughter of an urban family, one child permitted.

It is not rare to hear some urban daughters reflect An's expression of gratitude for the one-child policy – though they were discussed as the one-child policy's unintended consequences as one of the main beneficiaries of the birth.

> I feel grateful that my parents didn't abandon me because this was normal in my hometown. I heard that some infant girls were found drowned in the village river, the parents of these infants said it's a traditional way to decide whether they kept the girl or not: if she survived, they would take her as it was fate but would still try again for a boy. If she died, they would say it was her fate and go home. My parents desired a boy and then my younger sister came, then the cousin took my sister as her foster daughter. I never met my sister because her foster mother cut our connection to stop her returning to us. People tended to keep the eldest children as their security of fertility, just in case they lost the ability to have babies afterwards. So, I stayed, and my sister left. My parents still wanted a boy, so they left me at my maternal grandparents' home and ran to some remote provinces to have another baby. Sometimes I hated the policy, sometimes I thought it at least stopped my parents having more. I don't think my situation would be the same with four or five siblings.
>
> --Bao (pseudonym), the first daughter of an urban family, one child only permitted.

It is not exceptional to hear phrases from female participants who said "I feel grateful for being alive/not abandoned/registered with a *hukou*" when they compared their family

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treatments with some other female who experienced the loss of basic needs, such as Bao's story of getting acknowledged as the family daughter, or female infanticide. All their narratives suggest how they interpreted their basic needs as some privilege over their entitled rights as humans born into a given society. They conceptualised the loss as "normal" because "everyone did so", and they built up their very ideas of worth of a daughter to the family based on that "norm". They hated the policy because they saw it as the power that distinguished them from other "normal" children, but they also believed it to be the fundamental reason that protected their family position, or even more basic needs.

> My paternal grandma told me that she "destroyed" (hui) several babies with rather calm tone, what did she mean? She told me people just did it, everyone did it, she had six daughters and her mother in-law suffocated one to death, she herself drowned one to death, maybe threw away another one but I can't remember. Later when her daughter gave birth to a granddaughter, she said she did it again because her daughter couldn't have a girl. That's their generation. No constraints on the number of babies and people just kept having them then drowned the daughter. My paternal grandma told me she wanted to throttle me after I was born, but I smiled at her and survived. I'm not sure about the one-child policy, I don't like it, but my grandma said she would have no hesitation of "getting rid of" (jiejue diao) me if no such policy existed.
> --Cai (pseudonym), the second daughter of a rural family with three children, two children permitted.

Such classic patriarchal violence against women was not unique in my participants' narratives, like how much the paternal grandmother demanded that a mother conceive a baby but blamed her for providing a girl. In such narratives, some fathers, or paternal grandfathers appeared in the wings. In this light, women's fertility was expropriated by her in-laws by establishing the conjugal relation. In these extracts from both Bao's and Cai's stories, we can see the daughters' imagined losses as well as their desires to be alive, to be raised up by their biological families, and to be provided with opportunities for personal development. As the first daughter of Bao's family, she was supposed to be legal in line with the state policy as applied to an urban family, as was Cai's situation in rural areas. However, they were instantly

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decided to be removed from the family (either politically or biologically) so the family could move on to the next birth. It is very important to note the family injustice against children like these two, instead of suffering imposed by state policy. Their families' decisions and behaviours in trying to eliminate their family existences in fact evidenced the state policy's protection over them – legally having one child in urban or two children in rural areas whatever gender they were.

Bao compared her reduced family status with other abandoned daughters' loss of life, and Cai differentiated her survival from victims of "sex-selective massacre",[1] both perceptions of "loss" and "privileges" presenting a state of mind that "it is the state policy, my family already did something more than other families for someone like me". We can tell from Bao's and Cai's narratives that they conceptualised their citizenship rights to be fully family children, and legitimised citizens as a privilege over other children in their positions, beyond the basic needs of humans in the society and citizens in the state. Parents could bestow on children as well as deny them. Little notion of children's rights as separate beings from the parents' physical bodies and emotional unity was mentioned in such narratives. The family's political and patriarchal rationality was presented as exercising the biopower over their daughters' bodies. When the "normalization" of the patriarchal violence against female children's rights to stay alive was regulated as the dominant family practices, the "bareness" of their lives was even seen as a privilege by the victims themselves. These daughters' expressions suggest they perceived having their pure, naked lives as something beyond their rights as "humans" in the given communities and cultures.

Many participants said their parents "had no choice" or recounted that their parents said they "had no choice" in response to the perceived differential family treatments between the "black children" and "homed siblings". However, what did they mean by "choice" when the parent explained their subordination to paternal grandparents as a compulsory moral responsibility without mentioning their parental obligation to their children? It is challenging to say to what extent these individuals really had the agency of decision-making and taking,

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[1] The concept of 'sex-selective massacre' was argued by Carpenter (2002) to investigate gender-based eliminations (Carpenter, 2002).

but they indeed made a choice and brought the consequences onto children who had much less agency power than adults. For parents who reserved the daughter's family status for a son based on the patrilineal ethic, they did not mention what they thought the state policy wanted them to do, though they were aware that it was intending to regulate parents to nurture their legally born children. This suggests social structures and practices in which parents dominated, oppressed and exploited children by giving birth to them. Sangren (2017) claimed that Chinese family life, kinship, and values constituted "a patrilineal mode of production of desire", which is culturally particular to China (Sangren, 2017, p. 59). In the culture of patriarchy and the associated virtue of filial piety, children's bodies were regarded as extension of parents' bodies. When children like Bao or Cai interpreted their rights and freedom of being alive as children, they were suggesting they regarded their everything as personal belongings of their parents, such as the physical body and family title. Their parents' domination over their needs and rights was thus normalised and justified by such moral hierarchy.

### 4.2.1.4 Indirect push from maternal grandparents

Maternal grandparents or senior relatives also played notable roles in persuading the mother to try for a boy regardless of the policy's constraints, while the mother expressed her uncertainty about demanding a boy in some stories. The following narratives illustrate who persuaded the mother to have a boy after she had one or two girls, for what, and how the rest family adjusted to the new pattern.

> My mother didn't want a third baby after she had me, she said she's so tired and never recovered well from the last maternity and delivery. But her mother and elder sister came from the village to persuade her into adopting a boy from another province, otherwise she'll have a "bad late life as she had no son". My elder aunt brought my brother to my mother one day, my mother kept him. When I was little my aunt and neighbours kidded me that I was the adopted one, I didn't know the truth, so I took this as reality for a while. But you know when you get older of course you know the brother is adopted.

--Chun (pseudonym), the second daughter of a rural family with three children, two children permitted.

First, fathers and husbands were often absent from the narratives, but all decision-making circulated around giving a son in response to women's patrilineal "duty". The roles of men were indicated as background when the maternal mother and sister pushed the mother to give birth to or adopt a son, but the male privilege was placed centrally within the family relations. Second, the maternal grandmother and senior sister pushed the mother to invest her late life with a son and fulfil the patrilineal "duty" or "obligation" according to the local social-cultural system. Again, women primarily took active roles in reproducing patriarchal power by their own fertility and other women's bodies. Third, even the adopted son was positioned higher than the biological daughter within the parent-children relation, like the joke told to Chun that "she was adopted while her brother was biological", suggesting gender violence against girls in the family discourse – make her make room for a boy.

## 4.2.2 Summary

In conclusion here, some mothers had more children than permitted due to their maternal desires, having their desired number or gender of children regardless of any state intervention in their lives. Their "black children" could be either girls or boys, and the conjugal relation played the primary role in the family construction. Other mothers who had more births than permitted due to their responses to the patriarchal allegiance, they took the desire of husbands, parents in-law or parents as their moral responsibility in the cultural ideal and allowed their "less desirable" children to be selected and determined to be "out" to necessitate their brothers being "in". Their "black children" commonly were daughters, and the conjugal bonds were reduced to a secondary relation when the father-son power dynamic represented this system. It is important to stretch the definition of "black children" as the children who were "illegally" born without registration. Women voluntarily devoted their bodies and autonomy to the patriarchal production of desires similarly with the religious dedication, when they interpreted themselves as patriarchal beneficiaries. Fathers and grandfathers did not need to practice the "sex-selective massacre" by their own hands when their wives and mothers voluntarily exercised it for them, therefore, much of their family

practices as well as the identity of the perpetuator were largely absent from these children's narratives though they dominated the benefits. I argue that the core of familism in China is always about fertility and reproductive rights, and it has barely changed whatever state policies have been implemented, or however modernisation, urbanization, and globalization has developed in China nationwide. Issues of who has the say about whether to use the reproductive right or not, when and how use it, and how it should be carried on, have always taken up the core attention of the family power dynamic. The power of reproductive autonomy weighs more than factors of financial, physical, and emotional well-being in the family's evaluation system.

## 4.3 How was the birth possible?

Following the motivation to give birth to a baby, and how babies were distributed into the different status of "black" and "homed" before and after the birth, it is necessary to demonstrate how the birth became possible under the bureaucratic constraints and community and neighbouring surveillance throughout the maternity period and birth itself. Here, mothers were the main actors who experienced the concealment of their pregnant bodies and delivery of unpermitted babies within the family, therefore, following narratives focused on two points: how mothers concealed their pregnancy and protected the conceived baby, and how the baby could be delivered without the policy's permission.

### 4.3.1 Concealment of the pregnancy

My analysis revealed three tactics used by individual families to hide the mother's pregnancy: physical concealment to hide the pregnant shape from public views, like local cadres, neighbourhood, and workplace; bureaucratic collusion with local cadres or officers to hide the pregnancy from upper layers of authority; and unreported agreement as the informal community supported the hiding of the mother's pregnancy from bureaucratic punishments. Tactics were applied differently on families with different resources and opportunities and changed over time when the power relation between the family and external world changed as well. Take the instance of physical concealment for instance:

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It was winter when my mother got pregnant with me, so she wore thick clothes every day, people didn't notice her big belly even in her seven-months' maternity. She said she had no desire for food or water during her working days due to the pregnancy sickness. Then she asked for a leave to give birth to me back at her home village and got back to work within a month. I think people could easily have realised her situation, but no one reported her, she had a friendly network. That's how I survived.

--Hua (pseudonym), the second daughter of a rural family with three children, two children permitted.

Mothers were moving heaven and earth to run away from the official investigations. However, it is worthy to note that Hua said she was born because of a hypothesized "boy" identity" when her parents assumed her to be a boy. Running away from local cadres' investigation was related in many narratives of concealing a mother's pregnancy when the baby was born around the 1990s, a period in which the one-child policy got more restrictive but individual families still tried to have more babies than permitted regardless of the bureaucratic constraints.

My mother said it was frequent and normal to have unexpected visits from the Women's Association's leader or other cadres at home during her concealed pregnancy. She hid herself very well and kept the pregnancy safe for a few months. She recounted that once in the home during her late maternity, the investigation officers came again but she had difficulty to hide herself as sharply as before, hence she prayed for not losing me with tears. Nevertheless, it was fortunate that she had her friend at home and she flipped over the bed storage cover to hide my mother in. Thank God those investigators left after checking the mattress. My parents were very proud of these experiences because not many people went through this adventure for their children (of course most children were left in the garbage station). My parents regard me as their badge of honour: fighting against that "unreasonable" world.

--Hong (pseudonym), the second daughter of a rural family with three children, two children permitted.

We can see from the above quote that the parents expressed their pride in breaking the policy constraints and keeping the illegally born daughter. Though her mother experienced daily invasion from local investigations of her illegal pregnancy as something "frequent" and "normal", the birth of Hong was evaluated as an "honour badge" by the family in recognition of their resistance to the policy. In narratives of physical concealment, supports from extended family and close friends were noted as necessary to help the mother to protect her unborn baby. Also, the physical concealment of pregnant mothers was not a one-time-event, according to approximately 12 participants, as mothers experienced multiple times of running and hiding to continue the pregnancy.

The second tactic was bureaucratic collusion with local cadres or investigation officers to stop the unpermitted pregnancy being reported to the upper layers of governments, such as using personal connections to the local cadres and officers, or other benefits that complied with the local official agenda. The third tactic used was unreported agreement between the individual family and community, such as neighbourhoods or workplace when the mother's pregnant appearance was noticed but not reported to local authorities.

My family said once a neighbour in a lower floor inside our block noticed my mother's pregnancy, he definitely knew about it, but he didn't report us. Then I was born and when I was two, the neighbour was competing for a promotion with my father in their factory, and he reported me to their committee. So, my father got dismissed and he got the position.

--Pan (pseudonym), the younger brother of an urban family, one child permitted.

The different attitudes toward Pan's family noted the changes of such tactic which was according used to the resources' distribution between the individuals who broke the policy, and who did not. Pan thought his mother's colleague did not report the pregnancy because he "did not care that much to report it" – unspoken community support from his neighbourhood, though the neighbour withdrew this agreement when he competed for a

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career promotion with Pan's father. Both communal alliance and conflict between individual families were presented throughout the concealment of maternity, which suggested the power relations between individual and individual, individual and bureaucracy, local bureaucratic practices and the state agenda.

### 4.3.2. Concealment of the delivery

It is also important to discuss how the baby was delivered regardless of bureaucratic constraints and social surveillance following the mothers' efforts to conceal their pregnant bodies. The baby had to be delivered in secret to protect the family from being reported and punished. Therefore, my analysis revealed two tactics used by individual families. First, delivering the baby within inclusive relations only where only grandparents, close relatives and reliable friends were included. For instance, giving birth to the baby at home without being noticed or reported by family outsiders, where no documents such as birth permission or certification were required to register the delivery, and thus there was no registered birth after the baby was born. Babies who were born at home were not officially registered until their parents documented them purposely or under pressure from local investigations. For instance, some participants recounted that their registrations only happened after the local demographic investigations into of families were filled in correctly by local cadres. Many local cadres or officers were not aware of what the registration was for or how to do it properly. Mistakes such as registering the younger as the elder or filling in all categories including making up used names for children who had no used names all occurred.

A second tactic to conceal the baby delivery was to divorce the birth from parents' identifiable networks, such as places of their employment or residence. Both mothers and other family members took essential roles in concealing the unpermitted pregnancy at the bureaucratic level and hiding the process of delivering the baby without being officially reported. Prenatal and perinatal violence against mothers were presented throughout as a conflict between individuals' demands on "protecting the unborn baby" and bureaucratical constraints on "punishing families with an unpermitted baby". Medical and political support was very limited to mothers who delivered their babies at home or used degraded hospitals to run away from close investigation from upper layers of governments, and few narratives mentioned the

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aftercare of these mothers. More focus was placed on how the baby was distributed to "given away", "sent away" or "keep him" when the family storied such experiences.

### 1.3.3 Summary

Concealing the mother's pregnancies and baby-delivery required three parts taken into the "hide-and-seek" game. Firstly, the mother's own efforts to hide her physical pregnant appearance in places with public views, like her workplaces, neighbourhoods, and local communities. Secondly, individual supports such as using the extended family, mainly grandparents or the couple's siblings to provide the mother with places to hide herself away from local investigations or neighbourhood surveillance occasionally during the tense periods of the policy. Thirdly, communal cover between the family and community such as "no-report" recognition when the family did not conflict someone others' benefits within the local community. Mothers' sufferings from the hiding and running experienced in terms of health and emotional well-being were highly suggested but little was mentioned about what types of prenatal or postnatal healthcare was given. The gender imbalance between a mother and an unborn boy was strikingly suggested when the gender itself was valued more than concerns about the mother's safety and health. Also, it is essential to note that many baby girls, whose mothers made many efforts to protect them throughout the maternity and delivery time, were selected to be given away after their gender was revealed by the birth. This suggests the criteria of keeping or leaving a baby was dominated by gender instead of other factors, including the state policy's force, or mother's instinct for love and nurture. Concealing the delivery of a baby on one hand facilitated the family to hide his/her physical existence, but on the other hand hindered the mother's access to continued medical care and children's opportunities of being included in the formal family registration.

## 4.4 Who was the main subject of the decision?

Mothers and children, in particular daughters, were identified as the main subjects of narratives about family reproductive rights, decisions, and consequences. Parents wanted children either for their desires to parent more children than one, or to demonstrate their

loyalty to the family in some way. The gender dimension was noticeable in understanding the relationship between decision-maker and decision-taker. Husbands, or paternal grandparents expropriated mothers' reproductive rights and freedom to resurrect their control over the mother or the younger generation. Drawing on Kandiyoti's argument of a "patriarchy bargain" that cut across cultural and religious boundaries of Hinduism, Confucianism, and Islam (Kandiyoti, 1988), I propose the concept of "patriarchal devotion" to illustrate the way in which women conspired to commit violence against women in China. Kandiyoti elaborated older women suppressed the youngsters' romantic love to keep the conjugal bond secondary due to a vested interest in maximizing their security and benefits. They passively resisted the subordination to men in the form of a patriarchal bargain: submissiveness and propriety in exchange for protection (Kandiyoti, 1988). I argue however that, in my Chinese sample, they actively conspired to exert control over their daughter in-laws, daughters and granddaughters, to perform their agreement with the moral hierarchy between men and women, senior and young, and testify their loyalty to sustain such a family pattern.

I argue that these mothers' bodily autonomy was reduced or lost in a similar way to which senior parents dominated the body of mother or children as a family-held apparatus to produce and reproduce the patrilineal desire. However, the aim of the state birth policies was to govern the size of the population; it had no overt concern with gender. The agency of the family took over the role of selecting which child(ren) would be "black" and which would be legal. The analysis presented in this chapter suggests that the family desire in fact outweighed the policy in the form of "black children" leading to millions of children being selected and determined as "black" even though they were born as the *legal* first or second child. Some families in urban China unregistered the eldest daughter to reserve the family document for their next try; the daughter was normally sent back to the grandparents' household for concealment or resided with the couple as a hidden family member. If the second was a daughter again, some parents sent her away for adoption, or short-term foster care, then they tried for another time and registered the son as the permitted child. If the second was a son as desired, the couple registered him as the only child and raised up him in their household. For instance:

> My biological mother gave me away to my maternal grandma at fifteen days old because they (parents) were only permitted to have one child. I saw my grandma as my mother, and I really love her.
>
> --Han (pseudonym), the elder sister of an urban family with two children, one child permitted.

We can see the family pattern of "one-in and one-out" from extracts such as the above. It was the devotion to patriarchy that pushed mothers or grandmothers to dismiss these daughters' family memberships, which these daughters would have been entitled to by being born. Therefore, I propose the term of "trial birth" that, along with "patriarchal devotion", demonstrates women's expropriation of younger women's body to testify to their patriarchal loyalty. "Trial birth" here means the family gave birth to a baby as a gender test to assess whether they would keep him/her as the family child or not. Like some participants said, "I was just the side-product of their [parents] boy-producing line". In this light, what did children really mean to the family? To look into this, this research needs to question why the family pattern of "one child-in one child-out" was never seen as exceptional? In the narratives the sample subjects repeated phrases such as "they had no choice" to make sense to themselves. This phrase might have been used as the parents' self-defensive mechanism against their self-examination of parenthood, but it was barely explained thoroughly at all. The problem with this phrase ("I had no choice") is that the state policy never forced them to give birth to the "black children", its intention was the opposite – to reduce the number of births. What matters to this research is that the participants repeated this phrase to make their own sense of their parents' relationships with their children. In their interpretations, parents did not want to choose other siblings over them but were forced to by some external accountability – the state policy.  A similar logic can be observed in parents' use of this phrase as well: they chose the patriarchal value over their parenting obligation for all children not because they wanted to but because it was demanded by the dense virtue of "filial piety" and by a tense state policy.

## 4.5 Summary

This chapter has explained why the "black children" were born when their families were conscious of the conflicts between fertility desire and state policy. It has illustrated where the decision came from, for what benefits, who were involved, and how the "black children" were delivered by concealing the mother's pregnancies and labour. It has highlighted prenatal and postnatal gender violence against women and children, as well as women conspiring to harm younger women. When we look into the birth of "black children", three generations were involved in what decision was made, and what made the birth possible. Mothers, the couple, paternal and maternal grandparents engaged in dominating or cooperating with the reproductive process with different weights. The only person who had no say in the decision making and taking was the new-born baby – he/she would become either "black" or "homed" simply by his/her birth gender or order. These children had to live with the consequences of this ever since even though they bore no responsibilities for what happened then. It was not the "black children" who chose to violate the law and policy, nor the "homed siblings" who removed their siblings from the family and turned them "black". Mothers and children carried out most of the harms from the tension between the state policy power and local cultural ideology even though their voices were not much presented in the family discourse.

What made sense of womanhood and motherhood was closely tied up with the reproduction of a patrilineal system, and the value of children was tightly linked to the revealed gender. A distinction between "I wanted to give birth to the baby" pre the birth and "I wanted to keep this baby" after the birth is highlighted by my proposed term "trial birth", coupling the understanding of "patriarchal devotion" to demonstrate how the family responded to the perceived conflict between their desires and the state policy power. Though emancipation of son from father did not necessarily mean more baby girls were wanted or equally valued as boys, the postnatal violence against baby girls was undermined in some stories that a father did not make girls make room for a boy, for instance, the father who registered legally born daughters instead of reserving the room for future imaginary boys. However, it is significant to note the prenatal violence against many girls who were only born with a hypothesized "boy" identity.

Johnson proposed the term "longsided negotiation" to describe the imbalanced power between the family and government when they negotiated about fertility under the one-child

policy (Johnson, 2016a). However, I do doubt whether she would argue for the production of the "black children" as a form of negotiation if she knew more about the daughters who were born as the "trial birth". I would like to reiterate that Johnson's book was very significant for the development of what I researched, but I want to reposition our discussions on the birth of "black children" back *inside* the family realm other than simply as illustrating a relationship between state coercion and family victimhood. New-born babies were evaluated based on their gender or birth order, then distributed to different family statuses of "send away" and "homed", with differential resources of love, nurture, legal access to public welfare and protection granted to them. The family pattern of "one-in and one-out" was constituted and employed nationwide as a major strategy to conceal the "black children". The narratives of births around the "black children" suggest that the family's evaluations of whether the baby was worthy of being kept, the penalty paid, hidden for foster-care, sent away for adoption, or abandoned without further arrangement, were determined *inside* the family other than by the state policy although the family always used this policy to respond to their children's questions.

The concealment of "black children" discussed in this chapter was suggested as a means of stopping the public from knowing the babies' arrival at the levels of physical body, formal registration, and the family's emotional preparation. As noted in Chapter One, Agamben refers to a form of stripped life with no rights or legal protection as "bare life" to distinguish it from "proper life" or "political life", and these individuals are reduced to their most basic functions. Agamben argues that modern state sovereignty can only be practiced by the mechanism of a state of "exception" --- the power to suspend legal protection and citizenship rights of those in a "bare life" (Agamben, 1998). Though it would be too strong an accusation to refer to my researched "black children" as having "bare life", as being hidden by families is very different from living in ethnic cleansing camps or refugee shelters, I employ this concept to explain similarities between the power overused by the family and state sovereignty when it prioritised collective security and stability over individuals' rights and freedom in the name of emergency or crisis. The population policy has been discussed as an example of Foucault's (1976) notion of biopolitics, or biopower, and Agamben (1998) argues that modern politics relies on sovereignty and biopolitics, and "bare life" was presented as the extreme form of biopolitics (Ojakangas, 2005). Life has been taken as the subject of administering populations

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to ensure, sustain, and end it in order (Foucault and Hurley, 2008). Mirroring what the state policy did to the family reproductive rights and consequences, the family took up children's prenatal and postnatal lives to regulate conflicts between their desires and the state policy, and normalized stripping the basic needs from these "black children" as a nationwide strategy.

# Chapter Five: The "journey" to becoming and being "black children"

## 5.1 Introduction

This chapter explores what happened to the "black children" *after* they were born – how they conceptualised and made sense of individual figures and roles such as "mother", "child", the "family" more broadly, as well as notions of "self-worth" constituted through their everyday experiences. This chapter follows their journeys which, for many, included biological family separation, foster caregiving, conceptualizing and reconceptualizing family relationships, and return to biological families and readjustment. Contexts of biological and foster families, local neighbourhoods and community, school and peers are significant for this research to explain how the "black children" were raised as a hidden population, what challenged their family practices and social preparation, what affected their further readjustments to the relaxations in policy. In doing so, this chapter gives a picture of the ways in which the "black children" experienced lives differently to their "homed siblings", foster siblings, friends and peers in their local environments, and how such difference was normalised by daily repetition and internalised as a social "norm" not only by others, but also by the "black children" themselves. A key argument of this chapter is that the "black children" experienced structural exclusion at the level of family registration, physical presence, and emotional recognition. All these profoundly impacted the ways in which they conceptualised their statuses between foster and biological families, reconceptualised their kinship relationships, formed or deformed their sense of self-worth and respect *inside* the family. Furthermore, being shifted between families and communities attributed to the feeling of being on the margins as "black children", both *inside* and *outside* the family. Being alienated by the society followed the family exclusion in their narratives of "journey" to illustrate their problems of constructing identity, belonging, and recognition.

A central dilemma of growing up as "black children" was suggested by a common question emerging in the narratives of their experiences: "If they couldn't keep me by themselves, why did they give birth to me in the very beginning?" Though this question was asked in various

tones (from anger, frustration, desperation, to indifference), it reminds us of the family pattern of the "one-in and one-out" strategy used to resolve conflicts between the family desire and state policy constraints. The dominant strategy to structure the "one-in and one-out pattern" was removing the "black children" from their biological parents' identifiable relationships at the same time as cohabiting with the "homed siblings", and registering these "homed siblings" only on the family document. Based on my analysis of my participants' narratives, the family conceptualised such a pattern as solving the problem; however, the key argument of these children's reflections is how to live a life and not just survive. This reflects the distinction between "bare life" and "life" discussed in chapters two and four and will be discussed in relation to intergenerationally changed ideals of "children", "parenthood", and "family" in this chapter. What distinguished the "black children" from "children"? Why did the family's understanding of problem-solving conflict with children's expectations of family lives? How far were differences between the identity of "black children" to that of "children" reconstructed *inside* and *outside the* family? To explore these questions, this chapter employs attachment theory, especially Bowlby's and Grossman's studies on maternal deprivation of young children to and how it significantly impacted on the development of their further relationships. Notions of identity, recognition and belonging are central to understanding the divide between the "black" and "normal" children, therefore, it is critical to explain Honneth's philosophy of recognition to discuss how the "black children" developed their identity and self-worth in associated with the respect and recognition they received from foster and biological families' treatments.

## 5.1 Concealment with foster families

### 5.1.1 Residential separation from biological parents

Residential separation was the most common tactic taken by the family to conceal the physical existence of "black children" from the public view, from neighbourhoods, colleagues and friends, and local cadres or officials. Sending the "black children" back to village relatives, such as paternal or maternal grandparents or their parents' siblings, was commonly employed in response to local surveillance and investigation. Collective resistance against birth control

was implicated in my researched contexts, such as narratives like "everyone in my family did it, even the cadres", which so undermined the demographic investigation from upper levels of government and the community surveillance in such rural areas, that it was often usual for the family to accommodate more children than legally permitted in these villages.

Three points are noticeable throughout the residential separation tactic. Firstly, babies were primarily separated from mothers before they could even conceptualise who their "mother" might be. These babies were sent away for short-term foster care, some from the second day after their births, some at several months old, and some at closer to one year old. Secondly, the main caregiver might have also shifted from time to time, which made family bonding discontinuous. Paternal or maternal grandparents often took the main role of foster caring the "black children", and some "black children" stayed with them until they returned to their parents, while some children were moved to other relatives' families for further concealment. Parents' siblings were the second main caregivers to foster the "black children", but again, some children also experienced shifting concealment from one family to another. Thirdly, many "black children" experienced physical confinement to cope with local investigations in rural areas. These children described how they were hidden in several places such as wardrobes, barns or somewhere up in the hills, and how they found it difficult to make sense of such happenings, as well as the difference between them and other children in the area.

### 5.1.2 Calling mother "aunt" and calling aunt "mother".

> It was hard when I was little. I was with my mother's brother and his wife; I knew they were my uncle and aunt, but they forced me to call them "mother" and "father". I was reluctant to do so because I missed my own mother. She came to see me a couple of times when I was with them, but she had my brother at home and was struggling to make time with me. Every time my mother left, I sobbed for a long time, then my aunt turned angry and impatient, saying I should leave her home and follow my own mother in a sarcastic tone. I was so afraid of being kicked out, I knew if I left my uncle and aunt I would go nowhere, possibly live on the street as a homeless. But when I called them "mother" and "father", they mocked

me and saying they didn't deserve this title. They laughed but I turned scared, I didn't know what they really wanted, whether they could still take me in or not.

--Han (pseudonym), a daughter of an urban family with one boy and one girl, one child permitted.

Calling the foster parents "mother" and "father" was, therefore, a common practice employed by the family of "black children" to conceal the real relationship between parents and children. There were two tactics here. First, training them to call the foster family their biological family even though they knew who their real biological parents were; or, second, keeping the children unaware of who their biological parents were but instructing them to consider their foster family as their own biological family. Disguising relationships through calling concealed the real family relationship between the "black children" and their biological family and reduced the risk of being discovered by community surveillance and local investigation. However, little thought was given to the child's own early conceptualisation of "mother", "child", "family", etc., or how the later switch back to biological identification would affect the children once they reached primary school age. Participants who experienced confusion between their "named mother" and "real mother" felt very negatively about such a strategy: "I would rather be my foster mother's child---after all, what did it mean I am not her child whereas I lived with her all days?" or "I would rather they told me who my parents were before I mistook my aunt as my mother. People laughed but I didn't understand what was going on, didn't feel good at all."

I was sent back to my paternal grandpa's household on the second day of my birth. He (grandpa) was nice to me and looked after me like a father, he was nicer than my grandma or anyone else, so I took him to be my father and followed him every day in the village. No one told me he was not [my father], no one told me who was [my father). He said I was his little tail because I followed him wherever he went.

--Ding (pseudonym), the second daughter of a rural family with three children, two children permitted.

Narratives like the above were common in my researched families. The young baby was separated from their biological families' residence and, later, trained to call their foster

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parent(s) "mother" and "father", and their biological parent(s) "aunt" and "uncle". The residential separation between children and their biological parents happened at a very early stage in the lives of the "black children" (e.g., the second day after they were born, a couple of months old, four or six months old), which appears to have profoundly affected or determined the children's initial conceptualisations of "mother" and "father". Similar to Ding's idea of a "father", someone she took as the dominant caregiver in the foster family, another participant naturally considered her grandma to be her "mother" despite the community questioning their real family relationships:

> I thought my paternal grandma was my mother when I was two or three years old, can't remember my exact age then, as I had lived with her since I was fourteen days old. People in the village kept asking me where my parents went, and I had no answer. I only lived with grandma, and I thought she must be the person whom villagers talked about because she looked after and protected me. I followed her wherever she went. Once I asked my grandma as if she was my mother and the villagers burst out laughing then told me how silly this mind was. They joked with me that my parents abandoned me. I cried back home and asked my grandma for a mother. But she said nothing and sighed.
>
> ---Jiang (pseudonym), the elder sister of an urban family with one girl and one boy, only one child permitted.

Many narratives resembled above two extracts, suggesting that the concealed "black children" voluntarily formed attachments to the dominant caregivers and conceptualised them as their primary "mother" or "father", particularly when they were separated from their biological parents as very little infants and not informed about who their real "parents" were. Both Ding and Jiang mentioned the gap between "no one told me who is my mother/father" and "people asked me who is my mother/father", and how the little children's fear or avoidance of adults' questions on "who is your mother/father" pushed them to conceptualize their primary attachment relationship as a parent-infant bond. What I mean by "attachment" here is referred to these children's dependency, feelings of safety or security and primary affection towards their caregivers. Faced with their biological parents' unavailability, these caregivers were involved in these children's feeding, sleeping, playing, and social learning from day-to-

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day experiences, and the children returned to these caregivers when they sensed threatens or insecurity from the outside, for instance, the joke that "my parents abandoned me". Such jokes were also common in narratives. When the "black children" interacted with the neighbourhood or people in the community, they often heard words such as "Your mother didn't want you", "She abandoned you", or "she (foster mother) is not your mother", etc. Such talk in the community confused or affected the children's primary conceptualization of the "mother", "family" and how they related themselves to these people. Receiving no response from their caregivers also harmed the children's self-confidence in their family positions.

Formed or disrupted attachment between the foster-cared "black children" and their primary caregivers was central to children's very ideas of "family" and "mother" in the above contexts. According to attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969), the development of an attachment figure in a secure relationship provides a "secure base" from which to explore and return for comfort, and the child thereby learns how to regulate negative emotions and strategic ideas when faced with stressful situations (Bowlby, 1969; Bovenschen *et al.*, 2016). The secure attachment can not only reduce anxiety about danger in the context of a secure base, but also develop the child's cognitive reflections on minds, behaviour and selfhood (Schofield, 2006). Attachment relationships enable the children to reflect on the self and learn to regulate mutual social relationships in their infancies, then, their increased individuation and sociability drives can develop their definitions of themselves and others in more sophisticated ways when they move through the toddler and pre-school years (Schofield, 2006). Drawing on Ainsworth's *dimensions of caregiving* and Schofield's added thinking in understanding security for children in foster care and adoption, availability, sensitivity, acceptance, co-operation and family membership are significantly in the framework. (a) Caregivers' availability helps children to trust so they can safely venture to explore, play and learn, (b) sensitive responses enable children to manage feelings and behaviour, (c) acceptance and value of the children from the important people can develop positive self-concept and raised self-esteem, (d) co-operative caregivers can actively promote children's effectiveness and autonomy, allowing the child to direct play and supporting their choices, (e) promoted family membership can secure the children a place where they belong, where they have both rights and responsibilities in relation to other family members (Ainsworth, Bell and Stayton, 1974;

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Schofield, 2006). However, it was rare that I heard "black children" suggest that their physical needs were satisfied alongside with their emotional wants equally. They wanted to understand who they really were, why they were there and what people's talk meant in the local places, where they really belonged, and where could be really safe for them.

The following excerpt is another example of how the community's response interacted with the child's conceptualisation of motherhood and daughterhood:

> I was given away for adoption for a few weeks right after my birth but then my mother regretted it and took me back. She said she missed me too much. Then I was sent away to my maternal grandparents' village and lived with them for several years. I knew who my mother was yet people in the neighbourhood kept joking "she's not your mother, otherwise why has she left you here instead of bringing you back home?", or "you were fooled, you were picked up from the street and you will never know who your mother is". I was easily annoyed by these and sometimes cried back to my maternal grandma, who cuddled me and comforted me with, "bad people, they are fooling you, your mother of course is your mother". But she always had no words as soon as I asked, "if she's my mother why she can't be with me?" Sometimes I hated people joking and reckoned them as nonsense; sometimes I felt lost and full of worries: was there any possibility that she was not my mother?
> ---Kang (pseudonym), a second daughter of a rural family with two girls and one boy, two children permitted.

As distinct from Ding and Jiang who were unaware of their biological mothers and conceptualised their primary caregivers as parents, Kang was aware of her family relationship throughout her short-term foster care. However, her self-confidence as a daughter was harmed by the neighbours' reactions to the family concealment, which was further reinforced when her caregivers failed to assure her of her biological mother-child relationship. This indicated the problems of parents' irregular visits or unavailability when the "black children" sought proximity. Proximity here means protection and care in moments of special vulnerability such as sleepiness, danger, illness, or exhaustion, and this function was termed

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"heaven of safety" in attachment theory (Grossmann and Grossmann, 2021). Proximity is critical to the establishment of social bonds "due to the ability to navigate across physical distance via voluntary behaviour" (Shang, 2008, p. 36). The young "black children" were therefore, greatly disadvantaged in terms of finding their secure base to cope with the disturbing environment. In fact, it was not rare to find narratives of how irregularly the participants remembered their biological parents visiting them in the foster-cared family. Notably, some mothers said they came and visited their "black children" more frequently than the children could remember; therefore, the mothers' versions of the story might be different from the following excerpts in which the children recounted the disconnection between their mothers and themselves. Whichever version of the story was true, the focal point of this section is to represent what the "black children" kept in their memories of pursuing the emotional security, and how their desires for child-mother attachment were regulated.

> My mother came back and see me for a few times when I was little. I knew she was my mother, and my aunt was not, though people told me to call my aunt "mother". Because people gossiped around, and every time my biological mother rang the phone, my aunt passed it to me and asked me to say more to my own mother, so I sort of understood I was the child of the woman on the phone. But I had nothing to say, I didn't know much about my mother, and I didn't want to upset my aunt because every time I put down the phone, she or her family would say something sarcastic, like "who cared about her aunt when she got her own mother" or asking me purposely "will you forget me after you return to your mother?". Though I said no she continued saying "you are a little kid and it's just your childish talk". I could easily get anxious about this and tried hard to comfort her so her family could stop being sarcastic, it felt uneasy [….] I can remember my mother came back to see me during some vacations, but still I felt unfamiliar and awkward with her. We didn't spend much time together and she in fact was unfamiliar with me as well. Usually, she stayed with me for a few hours and then left, leaving me some clothes or snacks, I was happy with this.
>
> --Tao (pseudonym), the second daughter of an urban family, one child permitted.

From the above extracts we can see the complexity for those foster-cared "black children" to form a clear and firm idea of who their mother was, when their primary conceptualizations of a "mother-children" relation were impacted by three factors. Firstly, the biological family's demands to conceal the real relation between parents and their "black children". Secondly, foster mothers who wanted these children to express some emotional attachment similar to the mother-children's bonds. Thirdly, other significant adults like neighbours or relatives who said something disturbing that conflicted these children's cognition of their relationships with their "families". Consequently, the "black children" began to sense their difference from siblings and other children they knew, and so their feelings of being unsecure and unstable began to emerge in the foster family. As the story of Tao reveals, her foster mother on one hand seemed to try to push her to reconceptualize the biological mother as her mother, but on the other, punished her for not recognizing the aunt as a "bonded" mother, suggesting a threat towards the foster mother-daughter relationship. When the foster family like Tao's questioned the "black children" about their loyalty to the relationship, it made children anxious and worried about the stability of this relationship. However, connections between their biological parents and themselves made them feel more awkward and thus these children fell into a gap between family bonds.

Bowlby (1969) stated that maternal behaviours complement child behaviours and thus parenting experienced by the child is encoded into the child's character. Also, child-mother attachments take a long time to become organised and stable, and are more dependent on supportive parental behaviour than have been originally assumed (Ahnert, 2005, p. 231). What we see from the parenting experienced by the "black children", particularly the maternal caregiving, was that it was characterised by an absent stable connection, ongoing support, and instant response from either the mother-substitute figure or the biological mother herself. Sensitivity has been argued as the most important characteristic in establishing mother-child attachment, especially the mother's ability to recognise distress cues and maintain positive interactions (Ainsworth, Bell and Stayton, 1974; Ahnert, 2005). But the lack of regular biological parents' visits and the neglected foster-caring experienced by the "black children" led their narratives to show little sensitive response to their emotional insecurity. Stress, fear, insecurity were notable in their memories of their childhood, pushing them to wander between families without affectionate interactions. The key to the child's

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successful engagement with the social world is that he/she merges his/her reflections on his/her own mind with the minds of other people (Fonagy, 2002). It is for this reason that scholars suggest it is important for the foster-cared children to have access to caregivers' physical touch and minds, so they can make sense of and manage feelings. Discontinued caregiving and destabilised family interactions were two main aspects of the childhood experiences of the "black children" in this research, which severely disadvantaged their access to attachment security. Attachment disturbance can be observed from their behaviours such as being withdrawn and reluctant to seek out bonding with either the mother-substitute figure or the mother.

Attachment formation can only be appropriate for a dependent infant to seek safety, protection and a secure base from an adult caregiver because bonding "is about the caregiver's sense of commitment, concern, responsibility and love for the child", other than the other way round (Schofield, 2006, p. 30). However, the problem for fostering the "black children" was the difficulty of allowing their access to foster parents' full minds of "who you are" and "what our real relationship is". The "black children" found it difficult to negotiate relationships *inside* and *outside* of the family when too many conflicted voices were present in their contexts: "you are my child" – "you are not her child", "she is of course your mother"— "she is not your real mother". Responses from their foster families were rarely clear nor confirmed in caregivers' explanations of what was going on. Phrases like "you little kid should not care about this" or "don't care about what other people say" were broadly found in their family narratives, detailed communications on why these situations happened, what was going on currently and what should be expected in following years were very absent in family responses. Children develop an awareness of the contingencies between their behaviour and social responses from the adults' positive emotion (Thompson *et al.*, 2005), however, what the "black children" got in their presented narratives were filled with conflicted response and little consistency. They were discouraged from recognising the biological mother nor maintaining the connection with her, and the consistent separations made young children feel stressful to recognise themselves as same as other "normal" children, like their foster siblings or children in the neighbourhood who experienced stable and consistent parenting.

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From the above excerpts that present very similar stories among many participants' narratives, we shall note three problems the "black children" encountered during their early interactions with biological and foster families. Firstly, irregular communications and interactions with the biological parents, in particular the mother who was described most frequently as the person who brought the children resources and attention. The children's lack of regular access to the mother's attentions, affections and availability disconnected the biological mother-child bond, forming a foundation of reciprocal unfamiliarity between mother and children that undermined their readjustment to the later family return as I shall show later. Secondly, the foster family competed for the children's identification of mother and attachment. Although the foster parents were aware of the temporary purpose of providing the "black children" with a safe home whilst their biological parents were unable to do so, there was ambiguity and vagueness in the biological family's arrangement and the foster family's commitment. Issues like when the foster cared child would return, how often the biological parents would come for a visit, whether and when to let the children know about their biological family, how to process their family identification or confusions, and how to respond the children's growing curiosity about their "different" situations, were rarely described or resolved in these narratives of how the family arranged the concealment of their "black children".

Thirdly, the children's conceptualised and continuous family bonds were disrupted by primary family separation and later revisits. The initial family separation removed the infants from their biological family's daily interactions and relocated them within the foster family relationships, then the children formed their attachment to the foster parents and conceptualised "mother" and "family" based on their regular access to them. However, these children were placed for temporary foster care and their foster parents, especially mothers, felt their "motherhood" threatened by such temporary arrangements, which in turn harmed the self-confidence in the children's sense of their own "daughterhood", particularly in the face of sarcastic responses from their foster family. The foster mother wanted the child to re-establish their mother-child bond after the biological mother's revisit and connection, and the child wanted to be accommodated by the foster family without feeling "fear and anxiety" and to continue the foster family's protection and affection.

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The central problem of disguised calling and residential separation that characterised the concealment of these "black children" was that they had limited opportunities to establish continued and stabilised ideas of "family", and their senses of belonging to the "mother". Children were physically removed from their biological parents' residential places at their infant stage, which facilitated the parents, especially mothers, to return to their identifiable social networks such as workplaces and neighbourhoods, without their baby-delivery and childbearing being perceived. However, the problem for the children's initial conceptualizations of "mother" and "family" was nourished in such disconnection between mothers and children. The very idea of an established motherhood was dismantled in these children's growing understandings of "whose child I am", which planted the seed of family maladaptation when the "black children" returned to their biological parents' residences. Lack of regular visits from the biological parents was notably very common in narratives of how they spent their days with their foster-carers. Biological parents were mentioned much less frequently than foster parents, siblings, other relatives and neighbourhoods involved. Narratives of agreements between the foster and biological parents were absent here. Describing the biological parents and siblings as "strangers" or someone they were very "unfamiliar with" was not exceptional.

> Based on my memory, my mother only visited me once when I was fostered, and she stayed with me less than two days. I could barely remember their faces after four years' separation, not to talk about our connections. It felt like being floating duckweed and I always tried to be better behaved, then some attention might come and then some love followed. I ended up having very low self-esteem. Everyone told me I should call them "mother" and "father", so I did so.
> --Bao (pseudonym), the elder sister of an urban family with two children, one child permitted.

What all of this shows, therefore, is something quite different to the experiences of officially temporarily foster-cared children in many other studies based in other contexts. The participants in those studies were encouraged to *sustain* their continuous tie with biological families and remember it (Bellamy, 2008; Baker *et al.*, 2016). By contrast the "black children"

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in my study were faced with complex family demands that sought to conceal real relationships and, at times, discourage developments of any bonds with the biological family. Demands from both foster and biological parents were puzzling for these young children: in some cases, they were required to reconceptualise their biological mother as "mother" in private but were forced to call her "aunt" when in public. In some other narratives, the young children were trained to call and conceptualize the foster mother as their biological mother, but other adults from their surroundings pointed out that the person they called "mother" was actually their aunt.

> I knew my foster mother was not my mother since I was very little. They talked about this in my presence – there was no pretence even. They probably didn't think children could think, remember, and feel. My biomother is my foster father's sister, but she gave me to her. People said I had an elder sister then, but I was not interested. I lived with my foster parents in a small store, they ran it for business. I slept on a bunk bed in the warehouse, moving packages every day to help living. It was hard for me to call my foster parents "mother" and "father", so they were unpleasant about this and sometimes kicked me.
>
> --Cai (pseudonym), the second daughter of a rural family, two children permitted.

Maltreatment in foster families, such as this described by Bao and Cai, was depicted in some narratives alongside their puzzlement at family relations. Self-awareness or consciousness of being different from the foster family's own siblings was suggested in descriptions of how the children attached to parents differently too: compared with their foster siblings who were able to bond with their own parents, the foster-cared "black children" found it challenging to attach to their "parents" and physical abuse (including swearing, battery, kicking, slapping or other physical punishments) followed. Their puzzlement in correctly identifying the "mother" or "father" was evoked and continuously reinforced by parental refutation or denial, which contributed to their sense of "difference" and low position in the family.

Child maltreatment is unfortunately not exceptional in foster care regardless of context, nor in stories of the "black children" in China here specifically. Physical abuse such as bruises and broken bones might be most visible in studies of child abuse, ignoring children's needs,

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putting them unsupervised situations, or making them feel worthless but can also leave deep, lasting scars (Juntunen, 2013). Studies of children who were removed from their dysfunctional families with problems such as alcohol or drugs and placed in social fostering and residential care, suggest that these children were a group "at risk" of abuse, neglect, abandonment and inadequate care at home (Bolton, Laner and Gai, 1981; Benedict *et al.*, 1994). Young children, children with a disability, or behavioural and emotional difficulties tend to be more vulnerable (Chernoff *et al.*, 1994). Children in foster care can be subjected to maltreatment either by their caregivers (Biehal, 2014; Kong and Moorman, 2015) or within the foster care system itself (Hobbs, Hobbs and Wynne, 1999; Xu *et al.*, 2020). When the child-caregiver relationship was the source of trauma, insecure attachment patterns were largely evident in studies of children's adaptation and their further lives in adulthood. Themes of helplessness (e.g., abandonment, betrayal, failure, dejection) or coercive control (e.g., blame, rejection, intrusiveness, hostility) were involved in their disorganised attachment behaviours (Lawson and Quinn, 2013). Reporting child abuse in medical settings only affects a small portion of protection, but the observation and involvement of neighbourhoods, friends, family, the general public services can bring the effective protection system to children (Dhooper, Royse and Wolfe, 1991). Child maltreatment can therefore be seen as an unfortunately common social issue in foster care due to its own set of challenges.

Although there are limited national prevalence data on child maltreatment, empirical evidence suggests physical abuse, emotional maltreatment and neglect, and sexual abuse as pervasive public concerns in China (Ji, Finkelhor and Dunne, 2013; Xu *et al.*, 2020). Foster care was imported to China in the late 1990s to cope with orphans and abandoned children, including foster families and institutional care (Zhao, Hämäläinen and Chen, 2017; Xu *et al.*, 2020). Challenges such as maltreated children being placed in family-like environments (Zhao, Hämäläinen and Chen, 2017), shortage of foster care families and difficulties to recruit qualified foster families in urban China, and transforming foster children to adoptive families (Abdullah and Emery, 2022) were presented in studies on the evolution of foster care during China's modernisation.

As shown in the Literature Review, a particularly highly discussed topic is the safety and well-being of those left-behind children who remain in rural areas with family members when their

migrated parents live in urban regions. However, attention to child maltreatment is still comparatively limited due to the predominant culture that views children as the property of family. This, firstly, stems from the Confucian ideal of family harmony, which considers child maltreatment as shameful and private and thus limits the public sector's ability to intervene although it had the authority to do so (Xu, Bright and Ahn, 2018). Secondly, the family takes a stronger role than the state in dealing with family and children's issues because the government assumes responsibility mainly for those children who lack parental care, such as abandoned, street children and orphans--- care for those children being provided as a means of social control (Bow, 2012; Zhao, Hämäläinen and Chen, 2017). Although the state aimed at increasing an inclusive child welfare system for all children, foster care was still mainly introduced for those children who stayed outside the regions of family (Shang, 2008; Man *et al.*, 2017). Thirdly, overall political strategy on child protection is limited because (a) the belief in social harmony considers child maltreatment inside the family and (b) does not expand much into thinking of human rights (Qiao and Xie, 2017; Xu, Bright and Ahn, 2018). Though China has paid attention to safety and permeance of orphans, youth with disabilities, abandoned or street children, there is no specific definition of child abuse and neglect developed by the government and policy (Xu, Bright and Ahn, 2018), also, attention to the maltreated children who have been within families is absent in discussions in studies of China's child protection.

Therefore, before we move on to explain how the "black children" experienced their shifting care, it is significant to explain the distinction between them and other foster-cared children in China, so we can have a better starting point to understand why the "black children" could be hidden on that many levels and why there were so few opportunities for their voices to get through. Firstly, compared with children who are considered as "inside the family" or "under the state's protection", the "black children" turned invisible in the gap. Their existence was neither noticed by the community nor the state because they were rarely included in their biological family's formal registration and daily presences, nor sustained in their foster families' acknowledgment of "us". Although some of them formed primary attachments to their caregivers, voices from their living environments disrupted their mutual connection with the primary caregiver, or mother-substitute. Secondly, in contrast to children who moved from a biological family to a foster family with clear understanding of who the biological

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parent(s) was/were, the "black children" were moved without conceptions of whose family they biologically belonged to. They were moved with training to call someone "mother" and "father" but with little understanding of who the mother or father really were. They merely conceived the idea that "I am not this family's child" whereas there were no following answers to "then I am whose child?" and "if I don't belong here, then where do I really belong to?" In short, they felt into the limbo between biological and foster families where they stepped at edges without finding the way out. As a result, these foster-cared "black children" not only became unseen subjects of family life in terms of institutional consideration and protection, but also the overlooked space in an individual family's responsibility.

### 5.1.3 From door to door like a parcel

> Always lived under someone else's roof, from my grandma to my aunt, from my aunt to her cousin, far away from going home. I was wondering when a couple gave birth to a baby, they did it for whom? For these caregivers? If you can't raise up your children by yourself, then don't have them.
> --Maomao (pseudonym), the second daughter of an urban couple who had two girls and one boy, only one child permitted.

As we have seen, the caregivers who fostered the "black children" changed in many narratives in a manner like Maomao's story here. Some "black children" continued their ties with the mother-figure who made them feel being loved and nurtured; however, many "black children" involved in this research were moved from one family to another for various reasons, such as the primary caregivers getting too old, the foster family changing their minds, the foster parents' energy and time not being able to afford the concealment, etc.

> I spent my early childhood with my maternal grandma, but she got too old to look after me, so she abruptly took me to her cousin's one day and told me to stay with them. That old couple were nice to me. However, I still missed my mother and my grandma although I knew my mother was pregnant with my younger brother and she didn't visit me too often. My grandparents came to see me frequently, they brought me food and clothes, every single time when she stood up for leaving, I

held her leg and cried badly. My grandma had to stay and put me to bed, leaving when I fell asleep.

--Jiang (pseudonym), an elder daughter of an urban couple who have one girl and one boy, only one child permitted.

The above extract illustrates how the "black children" experienced a second separation without being informed or well prepared (in a similar manner with hidden Jewish children mentioned in the Literature Review), resulting in a dilemma between the child's primary attachment and irregular visits, thereby both the children and their shifting caregivers experienced maladaptive relationships with each other. In fact, maladaptive behaviours (including fear, avoidance, withdrawal, anger, self-harm, all of which will be explored in a later section in this chapter on family return) were prominent in narratives of shifting caregivers: from the primary mother-figure to foster parents, then return to the biological family. The "black children" formed their primary attachment to their caregivers but then were often abruptly removed from the familiar mother-figure to a strange place with unfamiliar people. Most of these transitions happened between the ages of one or two and primary school age. In a different way to the first family-separation between them and their biological mothers (which was hardly remembered and sensed by infants themselves), the separation from their primary attached caregivers, with whom they had formed a more concrete bond, caused anxiety – the participants revealed their struggles to readjust themselves to the family changes and explained how it profoundly contributed to their sense of insecurity and displacement, as Tao explains here:

Childhood in my memory was [moving] from one temporary place to another, calling the woman "mother" and the man "father" as required, but no one told me where my real parents are. I once lived in a garage belonging to my aunt's family and slept on a bunk during nights. They were not bad people but too busy with their own children, and easily lost their patience with me. I became quiet with people and reluctant to be communicative, dropping my tears quietly and missing my grandma in the night, afraid of being found out, otherwise I would be blamed and punished, possibly moved on to another family.

--Maomao (pseudonym), the second daughter of an urban couple who had two girls and one boy, only one child permitted.

A sense of insecurity and displacement can be significantly observed from the above excerpt. It is common in many of the narratives to hear how the "black children" turned quiet and less communicative with their foster families, as well as with people from extended surroundings such as neighbourhoods or biological parents who visited them. The gap between calling someone "mother" and "father" but not feeling the responsive and sensitive mothering or parenting was notable in such experiences. Crying was mentioned as a very common behaviour to present participants' distress during their inconsistent caregiving.

My mother gave me away to my aunt at fifteen days old and so the aunt became my foster mother. The local birth control office thought of me as the foster family's new "black child", therefore, the foster family had to hide me at my grandma's home every time when the birth control officers came to investigate. I moved between the grandma's and foster family's home. Fortunately, my foster mother treated me very well and treated me as her own birth. However, my biological mother wanted me back suddenly when I was of nursery school age, which began my nightmare. I don't know why she abandoned me first and then wanted me back. I wish I hadn't returned. I cried a lot but my [biological] mother hated my tears. She possibly didn't' like my everything.

--Han (pseudonym), the elder sister of an urban family with two children, one child permitted.

It might be surprising for biological parents to hear that their "black children" primarily sensed insecurity and displacement when they experienced the family return in some cases. Han and other children like her still formed attachments to shifting caregivers even though they were moved between them. Several narratives noted the loving and nurturing ongoing daily interactions between the "black children" and their caregivers, and how the children fell into disorder when they were removed from their primary, more organised relationships.

Bowlby (1979) proposed the concept of "childhood mourning" to understand children's responses to the loss of their primary mother-figure on a clinical psychological level. He argued that a child of from fifteen to thirty months had a reasonably secure relationship to his/her mother and the separation between them would commonly introduce a predictable sequence in the child's behaviour: protest – the child demanded the mother back at first with tears and anger, which may last several days; despair – the child became quiet but "preoccupied with his absent mother and still yearned for her return", yet "his hopes have faded" in this phase (Xu, Bright and Ahn, 2018); and detachment—the child eventually forgets the mother and remains uninterested in her, or even does not recognise her when she comes for him. The length of the separation and the frequency of visits turned on how unresponsive and undemanding the child's behaviour would be once returned. When the child "has been away for a period of more than six months or when separation has been repeated……there is a danger that he may remain permanently detached and never recover his affection for his parents" (Bowlby, 1979, p. 49). The sequence of protest, despair, and detachment is characteristic of all forms of mourning, and such loss may lead to a pathological outcome (Bowlby, 1979). Though he discussed more on the child's grief after a parent's death regarding the topic of losses, and compared it with adult's bereavement, the "black children" of this study exhibited rather similar maladaptive behaviours when they went through second and subsequent further separations. The "black children" wanted their primary mother-figure back but mainly demonstrated this through tears; anger or screams were rarely revealed in their narratives. Their period of protest and despair would last years throughout their shifting foster care experiences and biological family return.

Bowlby believed that the requirement of a secure personal base is "by no means confined to children……because of its urgency during the early years" with good evidence and studies (Bowlby, 1979, p. 103). Young children are naturally well-equipped to relate to unknown people when not in distress; the presence of familiar others who support and help the children to learn and understand their cultures becomes a "secure base". The secure base is the primary caregiver, most often the mother, who serves the child's needs and opens the door to cultural development, representing the early relationship as secure and influential (Bowlby, 1969; Grossmann and Grossmann, 2021). Attachment figures not only provide young children with the basis of feeling secure and curious but also a capacity to understand

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themselves and others' internal mental states (Grossmann and Grossmann, 2020). Repeated separations undermined the "secure base" the "black children" experienced throughout their years of immaturity: infancy, childhood, and adolescence, and when their foster siblings' family interactions were compared, the differences stood out as their most narratable experiences in childhood before they returned to biological parents. To understand the parenting experienced by the "black children" it is necessary for us to understand their very floating identity in "whose family's children?". Being transported from one door to another, asked to call one caregiver "mother" to another simply in line with the foster families' wants instead of a consistent caregiving plan. The absence of a physical stability and emotional security constituted the relationship pattern of their infancy and childhood, which largely disadvantaged their ability for self-respect and recognition as children within the family.

### 5.1.4 Physical concealment

> I was hiding here and there ever since I could remember. My uncle's elder son often took me to hide in the corn field with tents when I was in my paternal grandma's home. I didn't understand what I was doing then and what kind of potential consequence followed if I was found out. The only thing I knew was my grandma held me in her arm and asked me to sleep quietly. I asked my grandma why we were out in the corn field, in the tent other than in the home, I still remember her look – she was staring at the sky of darkness and wordless.
> --Maomao (pseudonym), the second daughter of an urban couple who had two girls and one boy, only one child permitted.

My analysis reveals that it was common for the "black children" to experience physical confinement in small or concealed places to hide away from neighbours' visits, guests, or political investigations. As we can see from the above extract from Maomao, firstly, the children were often unaware of what they were hiding for and why such practices seemed necessary; secondly, there was a lack of responses to children's puzzlement and sense of insecurity. The "black children" mechanically engaged themselves within the family arrangement to make themselves invisible to the foster family relationships. It is worth noting that sending the "black children" back to the foster families in rural areas did not remove the

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full risks of being punished, because local investigation and surveillance also existed as one of the significant aspects of the hidden lives experienced by these children.

> My paternal grandma told me I was hidden in a dark cellar with her or sometimes, my aunt, to hide from the cadres' investigation. I remembered nothing about this, but I would not be surprised if it really happened. I hid myself under so many roofs and I hated staying in some dark moist basements to wait for people leaving. People, I didn't know who they were, but I knew they came to drag me out and then to fine my parents. I was told this thousands of times, but I still felt puzzled, why?
>
> --Kang (pseudonym), the second daughter of an urban family, one child permitted.

> I hid myself in the farmland, under the bed frame, in the hallway, I didn't understand why would I bring my family's disaster? I felt unfair and really sad.
>
> --Han (pseudonym), the elder sister of an urban family with two children, one child permitted.

In contrast to the "black children" who expressed their puzzlement about their occasional physical confinement, children like Kang and Han explained their understanding of the potential risks their biological families would take otherwise. These children were convinced that the responsibility to protect their parents and homed siblings lay with their concealment. The burden of family responsibility is a significant notion that is threaded through these stories. Narratives like above two excerpts suggest how the children were responded to by caregivers and people around, when they questioned why it was necessary to be treated like this, and their narratives suggest the discomfort in losing the freedom of their bodies, as well as noticing the distinction between their confined status and other children's free movements. When the "black children" were forced away from the daily presence *inside* their foster family and the local community, we can see little recognition of their family membership though they experienced daily interactions with local communities. Foster families, neighbours, local officials co-produced the pattern of going and hiding and a communal value was thereby constituted --- confining the "black children" was seen as necessary to protect other family members. It was in fact a body politic for the family figure to govern their desires and fears.

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My mother used to point at a hole in our cupboard and tell me "This was damaged because of you". She said I was hidden in the little niche of Buddha when the Birth Plan Officers came for population investigation. Officers didn't look through that niche at that time, possibly they respected some religion rules or just didn't believe that small size could accommodate a human being. But they didn't believe my parents had no "illegal" children, so dragged the cupboard back to their committee and damaged it. My parents got the cupboard returned after the penalty was paid. I don't know which year, they only joked about the hole left in the cupboard and saying that was for me.

--Hong (pseudonym), the second daughter of a rural family with three children, two children permitted.

Family conversations like "this is for/because of you" occurred repeatedly in several narratives when the children recounted events relating to their families, for instance, paying the penalty fines, leaving the previous job position, moving to new residential areas, reducing the social communications. Though their families' efforts to keeping their babies before and after the birth-giving were presented there, children were the main subject that carried on hiding and shaming in their daily experiences with neighbourhoods, community, and bureaucratical constraints. It was not the "black children" who made the decision to be born or broke the policy, but they were burdened with responsibilities for the policy-breaking outcome based on narratives like the above two. By contrast, the "black children" were required and arranged to live with many family changes that went beyond their understanding and adaptation. The responsibility for family loss (such as the parents' financial or career deduction) was burdened onto the "black children" who were convinced that their "invisibility" in either the biological or foster family relationships was decisive and necessary. Such interpretations of moral responsibilities towards the family cost highlighted parents' binary conceptualisation of "family membership" and "non-family membership" in line with legal statues. Criteria of children's entitlements and rights were defined as associated with their status of "black" or not.

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### 5.1.5 "There wasn't my name in my family *hukou*"

For an individual family, concealing a child required two key practices based on the narrated strategies: one, making the child physically unseen and untraceable; two, ensuring the child could not be identified as the family member. This strategy was to disguise the family relationships on a documental level *and* emotional level. To put this specifically, making the "black children" either exist without legitimised citizenship (for instance, not registering the children) or without the biological family membership (for instance, registering the children as some other families' children). Drawing on the family practices revealed in this research, these two tactics happened in the former and later phases of the concealment respectively. Most "black children" were legitimately registered via their biological families' efforts at the due time (at their school age or to cope with temporary strict polices). To some extent, the registration problem seemed overplayed in previous studies since most "black children" had access to public welfare such as school and medical care. The real dilemma that challenged the "black children" appears to have been, instead, the concealment of their identities in official documentation.

As introduced in Chapter Two, the *hukou* has been an institutional registration system for households since 1958 and digitised since approximately 1998. Citizens are individually registered with their identifying information such as name, birth date, birthplace, gender, ethnicity, religion, resident area, parents, spouse, marriage, divorce, moves and death on the first page of this booklet (later a digital version began to be created nationwide from 2016). State resources (such as education, medical care, financial benefits) are allocated to registered individuals in accordance with it (Wang, 2005b; Afridi, Li and Ren, 2015). It has been discussed as surveillant assemblage that the Chinese state monitor the individual as a "data flow" encoded with their detailed family information. Family is the starting point of the structural surveillance – family members' relationship with the head of the household (such as wife, daughter, or son) are recorded and regarded as the official confirmation of the link between individuals. Not only did the *hukou* legitimise the family kinship on bureaucratic level, the system also constructed the sense of belonging from a legal perspective (Cassiano, 2019). Therefore, not registering a daughter suggested more than denying her access to the state resources, it exhibited the family's decision on removing her family entitlement, as well as

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parents' postnatal power over the state policy. However, not registering the first or second daughter was practically employed by families who preserved the legitimised position for a boy in both urban and rural areas, though they were consciously aware of how it went against the regulations. The postnatal violence against the "black daughters" was highlighted here to demonstrate the gendered production of "black children" in accordance with family power beyond the state policy.

> My father purchased my *hukou* ahead of my birth with 4,000 yuan (around £400)
> because he knew some local officers and many people used such connections to
> fix their children's hukou.
> --Kang (pseudonym), the second daughter of an urban family, one child permitted.

> My father used some help to get a twins' registration after my elder sister was
> born, they were ready for two children at that time and made many preparations
> for getting the documentation done. Then I came and they registered us as twins.
> ---Nan (pseudonym), a younger brother of an urban couple with one girl and one
> boy, only one child permitted.

Bribing local officials or other efforts by using families' personal connections were commonly suggested in participants' talks about how the family fixed the problem of *hukou*. Notably, the dilemma in lacking a *hukou* and getting a *hukou* shifted across time and contexts. To be specific, firstly, formal registration was mentioned sparsely in their storytelling of village life or concealment in rural areas but noted more when the "black children" moved from rural to urban areas. Also, episodes of local investigation and political coercion were always suggested as the main push for getting participants' *hukou*. Secondly, *hukou* became noticeable in accounts around education, such as the primary or secondary school enrolment issues for these returned "black children". It largely happened in episodes of these children being returned to their biological families' urban residence (this will be explained in more detail in Section 5.2 on family return). In short, episodes of talking about *hukou* were often related to talks about the local coercion, penalty, and institutional barriers such as schooling. The lack of *hukou* was a periodical dilemma in fitting these "black children" between concealment and with legal access to public resources. Most participants in this research were registered with

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*hukou* documents before the policy's constraints were dismantled, although not every one of them was registered as their biological family's child.

> I was registered under the name of my paternal grandfather's uncle in his village and called his daughter. I don't know how it could be possible, but it was common to see many messed up bits of information on registration forms. A passed-away brother was registered as alive, and bachelors were registered as married. My cousin was registered under the name of an elderly bachelor in her maternal grandma's village, a man she, or her parents never lived with.
>
> --Fang (pseudonym), the second daughter of a rural family, two children permitted.

As noted in the earlier paragraph, many "black children" were registered with a legal *hukou* but not as their family's child ---- they were either registered as someone else's family's child, like Fang's cousin who was registered as a stranger bachelor's daughter; or registered as some relative of their biological family other than a child, such as Fang who was registered as her paternal grandfather's nephew's daughter. The disparity between local cadres', especially village cadres' ideas of *hukou* registration and the state institutionalised governing was observed at local levels.

> My elder sister, me, and my little brother were only registered at the same year when our village cadres had to cope with upper-level government's administrative investigation. I was registered as being older than my sister but still as the second child, and somehow a 'used name' showed up in that category which I never had, because they (cadres) had little knowledge of census and official forms, they filled in as many blank spaces as possible without understanding what it was for. Neither me nor my brother were questioned about documentation because no school there requested something like that.
>
> --Chun (pseudonym), the second daughter of a rural family with three children, two children permitted.

It is not rare to find experiences that have similarities with Fang and Chun in this research. Village cadres exhibited little understanding of the demographical investigations and regulations; they also did not care about the central state policy on a bureaucratic level. They practiced local community support to implement policy from county and township/town governments, in order to sustain their power and privilege in local areas, therefore, they played in-between roles in protecting their villagers' collective resistance against the upper-layered authority, as well as ensuring the state policy exercised on the foundations of local authority. Such middlemen were on one side, significant in facilitating the "black children" to be inducted to the larger social world, but on the other side, hindering the possibility of knowing how many children experienced as "black" like this research explores because they were very likely included in the national census data. Therefore, it became a struggle for researchers or reporters to understand whether these children shared the same identity with other "normal" children or not at the level of formal document. On one hand, they were registered as legal persons, on the other hand, many of them were not even registered with real family relationships. Though these "black children" had legal *hukou* documents to cope with public institutions, it was not clear who they really were in terms of their statuses in families, and communities. Did they really belong to their biological families or not? What qualified their identity as one of the family, and one of legitimised citizens? It might simply be employed by the family agent as an instrumental tool to locate one within a setting of relationship to cope with others' investigation, however, it was signposting the "black children" where to fit the self within a family identity.

### 5.1.6 The "black children" who claimed they were "normal" people

Though it is a small number, still some narratives described experiences that contrasted with foster-care and disguise-registered "black children": some children cohabited with their biological parents from birth and were openly claimed as the family children on documents and in neighbourhoods, community, and other family interactions. However, the pattern of "one in and one out" was presented with no exception in such narratives – there was always another child were removed from the family.

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I was living with my parents in a very small suburban flat to hide from the local

investigation, but the flat was too old and one night I fell asleep with gas leaking.

My mother and I took some gas in during our sleep and my father came home late

at night, noticing the gas leaking and sent us to the hospital. We turned out fine

after the medical care, but my father decided not to hide me in that flat anymore,

he said "we shouldn't risk our lives to hide a child." So, we came back to the

original home and brought my elder sister back as well. She was with my grandma

when my parents had to shelter me.

--Kang (pseudonym), the second daughter of an urban family with two children,

one child permitted.

From Kang's story we can observe the family pattern of "one-in and one-out" again though she was not the one who lived separately from her biological parents. The elder daughter was looked after by her grandparents whilst the parents were hiding with the younger child to run away from the punishments. It is complex to classify which child was "normal" or "no different" from other children because each of them shared some characteristics of their family concealment: the elder child was able to be present in the public views but away from her parents' daily interactions, nurture, and connections. The younger child had access to the parents' daily nurture and bond yet could not be seen by others. Though it suggests continued family ties, stabilised cohabitation, and acknowledged parent-child relationships in these families of "black children", it is conspicuous that the participants' siblings, those who were removed from the family to ensure their "black siblings" remained, were the ones who were absented from the family conversations and experiences.

The pattern of "one-in and one-out" was presented as an unavoidable outcome, and the cohabited children and foster-cared children were distinguished from each other's family treatments entitled with their family titles. Studies of attachment have shown that human infants are born physically premature (Tiger and Fox, 1966), and their brain development requires special feedback for an organised functioning within early relationships (Polan and Hofer, 1999). The evolution becomes prominent only from the second year of life on and requires lifelong feedback, to adapt to complex cultural worlds (Sternberg, 1997). Based on data from US and Europe, it is argued that it is essential to conceptualize which adult is

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trustworthy in infants' emotions and expressions so their physiological homeostasis could be maintained, otherwise the children's developmental pathways deviated from the range of normal development (Bowlby, 1988). Infants practice cultural and social learning from people around them through the meaning and interpretations these people give to their behaviours, therefore, "responsiveness is the very key foundation of communication in infancy and across the life span" (Grossmann and Grossmann, 2021, p. 233). Grossmann and Grossman formulated a sensitive response as infants' signals are understood and their intentions are acknowledged, which may lead to strong identification with trustworthy adults and acceptance of cultured kin. Meanings and strategies of their worth are conveyed through narrative discourses, social mediation and community participation (Grossmann and Grossmann, 2021). Compared with the "black children" who experienced destabilised infancy and those who narrated cohabitation, the difference between self-worth stood out in process of conceptualizing and reconceptualizing "family".

For the above two extracts, the participants were recruited as "black children" because their births broke the policy permission and their parents paid a penalty for their *hukou* registration. However, when this research takes a closer look at their family patterns, it becomes challenging to determine what was "normal" to the "black children" and their siblings. Was it determined by the level of formal document? Or by who were allowed to physically present him/herself in the family daily interactions? or by who held the freedom of calling his/her mother as "mother"? Furthermore, the lack of affective family ties was notable between the children who were foster cared and other biological family members. The recognition of each other's inner bond was harmed already through the discontinued parent-children's interactions.

### 5.1.7 Summary

This section has shown how the "journey" of becoming "black children" began from their primary separation with biological parents in terms of formal registration, physical touch, and emotional connection. It happened in these children's very early infancy or childhood because the main strategy for hiding them was to remove their presences from biological parents' identifiable relationships *outside* the family, such as workplace and neighbourhood. Tactics

included (a) physical distance by residential concealment --- sending the "black children" for foster-care in rural areas, the role of caregiving mainly being taken up by grandparents. (b) Formal relationship denial – not registering the "black children" after they were born or registering them *outside* the family. (c) Emotional disconnection by calling mother as "aunt" whilst aunt as "mother". Concealing the "black children" at multiple levels was suggested as a commonly used strategy nationwide but it led to three problems for these children to develop their conceptions of "children", "family" and "recognition". Firstly, foster maltreatment and absent family visits from biological parents resulted in these children putting their family statuses on margins other than *inside* the family – the basic unit that should enable children to establish a secure base and develop further relationships with others. Secondly, shifted moving, disguised registration, and relationships' calling jointly conceptualised these children's self-identity as someone different from, or even opposite to the "normal" population who were seen to experience more continued, stabilised, and recognised parents-children's interactions both *inside* and *outside* the family. Thirdly, the pattern of "one-in and one-out" was noted in every family involved in this research, either participants or their siblings were moved out as a way to solve a problem and different modes of parent-children's interactions were found in their narratives.

All of this revealed the complexity intertwined between family identity and citizenship rights when siblings' experiences were different from each other at multi-layered levels; for instance, some participants were referred to "black children" by their biological parents though they lived together on a daily basis, siblings who were foster cared by others termed as "normal" in the narratives. Therefore, it is significant for this research to stretch the meaning of "black" not only at the level of formal paperwork from perspectives *outside* the family, but also from *inside*—the perspectives of parents and children themselves. We can tell that most of them conceptualised the family identity simply at the level of a legitimising document. Some participants said they were referred to as "black children" for a few years, then it became "no longer the story" because they got *hukou*. They confirmed they were sent away for hiding and trained to call their mother "aunt" whilst they got *hukou*, and they defined them as not "black" anymore. They still defined themselves as different from "normal" or "others in the society", but their attitudes suggested their statuses with *hukou* as better or higher than "black". For instance, their tones were urgent when they clarified themselves as no-more "black" --- "no,

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no, there was a time people called me 'black', but I got a *hukou* soon. I have been with an official status, it's not 'black', I have *hukou*, it's different from 'black'" (Chun). Or "don't mess my status with 'black' because I have *hukou*. You can call me illegal, against the law (even though she has a legal registered identity) or forbidden, but it's not 'black'" (Tilan).

It is very interesting to observe how complex the conceptions of "legal" and "illegal", "black" and "black no-more", "forbidden" and "normal" were in narratives of participants' reflections on their family membership and citizenship. Their thoughts suggest that access to *hukou* could terminate the meaning of "black" but did not restore their legitimised status although the primary function of *hukou* is to mark citizenship rights at the level of legitimacy. Honneth argues that legal recognition is necessary for successful self-relation:

> At the individual level, the experience of being recognised as a legal person by the members of one's community ensures that one can develop a positive attitude towards oneself. For in realizing that they are obliged to respect one's rights, they ascribe to one the quality of morally responsible agency (Honneth, 1995, p. 80).

Legal rights are expressed as an original social component of human subjectivity by Honneth's philosophy of identity. Love, law and solidarity necessarily cohere together in developing identity. However, what we can observe from the narratives of becoming "black children" is the reduced, or even lost formal rights of these children due to the family's will in addition to the state policy. Children who defined themselves as "illegal" even with *hukou* registration (the form of legitimised citizenship) were not exceptional in this research, and this significantly suggests how the self-identity was in fact constructed by their day-to-day family exclusion. The state policy and legal registration, therefore, was suggested not as absolutized force to strip the justice and respect from these "black children". Family acceptance of individuals' legal rights, love, and solidarity, in many cases, outweighed the formal document in forming the recognition of family membership and citizenship rights. Also, this is why the state policy's changes could not be seen as the absolutized power to restore these children's freedom and rights in our rethinking of the policy's legacy.

## 5.2 Family return and readjustment

My analysis reveals that the "black children" were often returned to their biological families around school age; most of them at primary school age, although several of them were brought back at their nursery school age and a couple of them were back for high school. The reasons for this timeline were twofold: first, educational inequality[2] had occurred as a result of different resources (with large cities at the top and villages at the bottom) having been allocated to urban and rural children during the country following economic reform in 1978, and the centralised education system had contributed to rural-urban disparity (Fu and Ren, 2010; Wu, 2011). The "black children" returned to their urban biological families mainly due to the lack of proper primary or secondary schools in rural areas, associated with the urbanisation process in China. Fewer schools, teachers, related facilities and other related resources were located in rural areas and more efforts on developments of education had been made in towns and cities since 1978 (Zhang, Li and Xue, 2015; Yu and Bao, 2019; Zhao, 2021). The rural areas and their population had been marginalised by the rapidly growing process of urbanisation and migration from 1985 to 2003 (Wang, 2003; Zhao, 2021).  The gap in educational levels in rural and urban areas widened between 1985 and 2005 although the 9-year compulsory education was implemented throughout the whole country (Zhang, Li and Xue, 2015). Therefore, the external push from the education disparity between rural and urban areas drove the family return of "black children" around their school ages.

Second, it was comparatively difficult for the "black children" to have access to schools from their foster families, because the temporary foster care arrangement involved little about the follow-up education for the "black children" between the biological and foster family. The discussion on education arrangements and the family return timeline was largely absent in the narratives (none of my participants recounted any episode related it). The external push from educational necessity seemingly played *the* decisive role in allowing the "black children" to return to their biological families' home and to be institutionally engaged into some social networks such as school and friendship groups. However, the "black children" experienced maladaptation in terms more than just residential adjustment – there were a number of

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[2] Income disparity, various institutional barriers, and different parenting styles among others are regarded as potential causes of education inequality (Fu and Ren, 2010, p. 198).

challenges on their emotional and identical levels too. As will be shown below, these focussed on issues of separation with the previous familiar people around, lack of properly prepared family cohabitation, the "black children" experienced confinement for a second time at both bodily and documental levels, parental or siblings' maltreatment, and differentiated parental attention and affection between "homed children" and returned "black children".

### 5.2.1 Family return and maladaptation

*Separation for a second time.*

One thing that contrasted with the biological parents' imagination of their "black children's" return was that return felt more like a "separation for a second time" by these children rather than a re*unification*. Echoing the initial family separation between the "black children" and their biological parents, especially mothers, the narratives of their return suggested more separation disorder than smooth acceptance of the cohabitation. In contrast to foster-cared children in state certificated institutions or with legally approved relatives' in US and Europe who were removed from their biological parents mostly as young children other than infants, and were aware of their biological mother-child relationship as well as the claimed reasons for such arrangement (Fitz-Gibbon, 2016; Carvalho *et al.*, 2018), the "black children" in this research were removed during infancy and found no answers when they questioned "who my mother is" and "who I am". Therefore, many "black children" experienced the family return as another separation from their attached caregivers in the foster family and sensed the conflict between their maladaptation and their biological parents' anger. Affectionate bonding entails an ability to recognize individuals, and the essential feature of it is that the two partners tend to remain in proximity to one another (Bowlby, 1979). However, the residential separation dismembered the proximity, and when the children and parents were not bonded, they exhibited strong resistance to any approach the other attempted.

> I thought my grandma was my mother. One summer vacation during my first year
> of primary school, three strangers came to my home suddenly and people in the
> village seemingly all knew them. But I didn't know them at all. They told me that

they were my parents and elder sister, while I didn't believe that because I thought my mother should be my grandma. Thus, I reckoned my grandma was going to sell me to them because I was not good.

That's my first time remembered the meeting with mother, I felt so sad to leave my grandma and a little feared of joining the strange family. I knew no one there. I cried silently the first few nights because once I got found out, I would be punished.

--San (pseudonym), the second daughter of an urban family, one child permitted.

Feelings of separation from their mother-substitute in the rural families was common in the narratives of "black children" returned to their biological families in urban China. When these children physically arrived at their biological families' doors, there had been very little prepared for them. When we talk about "return" we have to understand "belong". From the family's perspectives of moving the "black children" from their foster families to their biological parents, it meant that these children came back to some significant persons to whom they primarily belonged. Nevertheless, from these children's perspectives, they conceptualised the biological parents and "homed siblings" as a ready picture of family and found it awkward to fit themselves into that picture. To some extent, their narratives suggested such status as awkward as an extra piece of jigsaw puzzle that tried to fit into a wrong picture.

It is difficult when I really missed my "home", well, my grandma's home. but I reckoned that home was more like mine than my mother's, I don't' know why. My mother hated me when I said I missed my paternal grandma. I did miss her because she was very nice to me, she raised me up and did everything nice for me. Everyone loved my little brother, but my grandma loved me, she didn't mind me as a granddaughter other than a grandson. There's no room for me before and I don't think they (parents and siblings) really made some room for me when I returned. I cried a lot, and this enraged my mother. No room for homesickness, of course no room for tears, either. So, I became quiet and hid myself in some corner when I needed a cry.

--Maomao (pseudonym), the second daughter of a rural family with three children, two children permitted.

From the above excerpts we can clearly observe the children's protests as they struggled with their understandings of who to regard as their "mother". This was not unique to San and Maomao – other "black children" involved also recounted such memories. Echoing the absence of biological parental availability and irregular visits throughout these children's temporary foster care, the returned "black children" exhibited maladaptive responses to their biological mother-child relationship and the mothers expressed their maladaptation as well. The freedom of "black children" to express their desires and fears was suppressed by the biological family at the first phase of their family return, which attributed to their following despair and detachment that harmed their readjustment to the biological family interactions. The family tolerance of these children's separation disorders was absent in narratives of parents-children's interactions, but the stress to supress their "homesickness" and reconceptualize the biological mother as "mother" was a common theme. Grossmann argued that sensitivity and responsiveness to the infant's attachment signals of distress is significant to make the child feel worthy (Grossmann, Grossmann and Waters, 2005; Grossmann and Grossmann, 2021). Bowlby noted that a young child is intensely distressed when he stays with strangers instead of his familiar parent figures, and long or repeated separations relate to subsequent personality disorders (Bowlby, 1979). Unfortunately, neither of the sensitive responsive attachment of infancy or continuous family tied childhood was presented in narratives of the "black children" who experienced family separation.

Moreover, these children were discouraged from expressing themselves and felt great discomfort at the biological family's expectations. Bowlby suggested the ability to express thoughts and feelings to others for comfort and help as a healthy strategy because early patterns of attachment and communication organised the children's perceptions, thoughts, feelings, and behaviours, especially in times of distress (Salter Ainsworth and Bowlby, 1991). We can tell from the above extracts that the emotional needs and desires of the returned "black children" were neglected or suppressed by the biological family in the first phase, which attributed to the children's self-muting in exchange for security because children are people of dependency and vulnerability. There seemed little acknowledgement that the

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"black children" expressed their unfamiliarity with and detachment from the biological family, nor parental respect for the children's needs at the time to process their family reconceptualization as suggested in the narratives. Bowlby formulated the parental respect for a child's attachment desire as a respect for his desire to explore and gradually to extend his relationships both with peers and with other adults (Bowlby, 1979). From the parenting experienced by the returned "black children", little respect and tolerance for these children's desires and fears were evident. They were forced into movement between families, between rural and urban areas with some distinguished life habits but little prepared room for their free expression or communication. "By enabling him to explore his environment with confidence and to deal with it effectively, such experiences also promote his sense of competence" (Grossmann, Grossmann and Waters, 2005, p. 129). It is important to illustrate the stress of being unacknowledged and unheard in the presence of the biological family as recounted by the "black children" because these episodes were chosen as the most memorable part to story by the participants. When they reflected on what happened after they returned to their biological parents, they chose memories filled with suppressed fear and desire over other things. It was illustrating their deconstructed self-confidence and respect *inside* the family, as well as their emerging identity as being on the margins, or *outside*.

## 5.2.2 Family readjustment

I went back to my parents with a little package prepared by my grandma. She told me I'm going to live a good life with my parents because they live in the big city, and I can have as many beautiful clothes as I want. However, none of these existed. I didn't even get a proper bed in that family, and they told me to sleep on a table for the first few nights. You know, we ate on the table during days, and I slept on it at nights. I heard some girls who were brought back to the family and their mothers purchased them so many beautiful clothes every day, even took them to restaurants for tasty meals. Wish I had them as well.

 --Hong (pseudonym), the second daughter of a rural family, two children permitted.

Hong's story illustrates exactly how such lack of preparation for their return was experienced. Firstly, the lack of appropriate material preparation for including the returned "black children" into the family daily interactions can be seen from the above excerpt: participants were conscious of challenges like no allocated room or bed, conflicts between their homed siblings in regards of material resources' distribution, etc. In a manner similar to the family concealment during the stage of foster care before the family reunification, the inappropriately prepared family readjustment to the return of their "black children" was notable as well.

Secondly, though some parents cleared out a space for the returned "black children" and informed their "homed children" about the ongoing family changes in relationships, some (approximately six out of twenty) narratives remarkably resembled each other in how few family changes were made to accommodate another child into the family pattern. Even those who noted family readjustments on a material level, suggested that the emotional level was lacking. The "black children" and their homed siblings were cohabitated physically but not emotionally as they were barely conscious of or recognised their family bond. Their biological parents also presented their struggles to accommodate both "black" and "homed" children together. In some cases, disguise by calling adults different names was continued by the "black children" though they cohabited with their biological parents and siblings.

> I never called my parents "mother" and "father" because this was not allowed through the foster period. I was collected by my parents when I was ten, with whom I had no emotional connection. I still called her "aunt" and my sister "cousin" after I went home with her. Therefore, I expressed my detachment such as crying and wanting to have telephone calls with the foster mother. My mother watched me unpleasantly, and she really minded me doing these things.
> --Bao (pseudonym), the first daughter of an urban family with two children, one child only permitted.

We can see from Bao's story the lack of emotional preparation between mother and daughter before the family return, as well as the absent parental tolerance of the children's reconceptualization of motherhood, daughterhood, and family after they physically returned.

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It is significant to note that the "black children" who physically arrived at their biological parents' home did not equate their reconceptualization of "home" and "mother" when they arrived, because we can only understand the meaning of "home" in line with these children's experiences. When they talked about "home" and "family", they were talking about more than a place of cohabitation, they were trying to communicate their sense of identity, belonging, and recognition. Echoing the children of migrant parents' longing for belonging, affection, security and a sense of self in the present as revealed by Murphy (Murphy, 2020b), the "black children" expressed the self within their located parent-children's relationships and children's desires for family belong and recognition. Different to those left-behind children whose family identity was acknowledged, and the reciprocal recognition was in a state of "abeyance", however, only rarely is the family identity of these "black children" continued and fully acknowledged throughout.

> There's a ridiculous thing which I will never understand. My parents, they asked me to call them "aunt" and "uncle". See how hypocritical it is! I couldn't and I still can't understand it. You know it confused a child badly, and I never understand why should I call my mother "aunt"? She was my mother for my whole childhood but somehow, she turned into my aunt suddenly. I knew they were my parents when I was hidden in my paternal grandma's village. It was too strange and unfair. I only wanted call her "mother" not "aunt", just as same as my brother and sister did."
>
> --Hua (pseudonym), the second daughter of a rural family, two children permitted.

The strategy of disguised calling made some returned "black children" feel further confused and distressed because they struggled to make sense of the complex family changes around them as school aged children. It also meant that their homed siblings struggled also to understand their biological/kin relationship, as Hua relates:

> My brother thinks I robbed him of his parents' love and resources. He once had everything as the only baby in our family, but I came in suddenly and parents had to make some room for me. I think he still sees me from this angle.

> I wouldn't want his stuff; I knew I was less than him so I wouldn't compete with him. He has been over worried.
>
> --Hua (pseudonym), the second daughter of a rural family with three children, two children permitted.

It is not rare to observe the "homed siblings" being concerned about their returned "black" siblings – these were "intruders" to their bonded family relationships, in particular the parent-child connection. All excerpts above depicted how events of family reunification challenged children's conceptualizations of "family", "parent-child", "sibling" and "we-they", how the returned "black children" were responded to by their biological parents and siblings, and how they interpreted such responses. The "black children" positioned themselves on the edge of the family resources' distribution system via little freedoms of self-expression. For instance, Hua internalised herself as someone "less than" her homed sibling, which suggested they positioned themselves as lower than their homed siblings and took such inequality as regular family practices.

Thirdly, coupled with the continued disguised calling, the *hukou* documents mainly stayed in disguised conditions even after the "black children" returned to their biological families. These children were continuously registered into some other families' household booklets and distanced from their biological family relationships on a documental level. Take Maomao for instance:

> I kept being the "niece" of my family even though I started living with them [biological parents]. Everyone thought it's nothing different from my sister and brother because all I needed was just a *hukou* and they gave me a *hukou*. They didn't know it, it's different. How can "niece" be as same as "daughter"?
>
> --Maomao (pseudonym), the second daughter of an urban couple who had two girls and one boy, only one child permitted.

Fixing *hukou* instrumentally reallowed the "black children" to have access to public resources (like education which was mostly noted in this research), as equal as the "homed siblings" in some ways because parents regarded the significance of *hukou* merely on the level of legal

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personhood. Divergent from such understandings of formal identity, the "black children" regarded their family registrations more than instrumental papers, but their formal acknowledged identity – child of their parents, insider of their family, an included member of their own community, a recognized citizen of their society. For many "black children" who were registered *outside* the biological family, they experienced their primary and high schools with disguised family relationships on documents though they daily cohabitated with their biological families. Some of them were registered back to their biological family after the one-child policy was officially dismantled at the end of 2016, and some were pushed by an external drive such as the necessity for university entrance, employment migration, or getting married (moments when their *hukou* documents needed to be updated in accordance with recent changes). Such types of family registration commonly happened within comparatively loose surveillance or bureaucratic constraints based on narratives, but notably, a registered family document did not necessarily equal claimed family membership. The emotional disguise and document distance were complex and circulated around each other throughout their years before the end of the one-child policy. See from the meaning of the family relationships documented on papers, many narratives suggested the distinguished understandings between parents and children --- parents regarded *hukou* registration on the level of instrumental function and failed to see their children's emotional needs of acknowledged identity within the family relationships.

## 5.2.3 Parental and sibling maltreatment

Parental/or sibling maltreatment did not only happen in the foster care family but also in the biological family according to narratives of the returned "black children" interviewed here. In fact, it is noticeable that more parental/or sibling maltreatment was described in narratives of "after I returned home" than "when I was foster cared". Maltreatment included parental neglect, physical abuse, and emotional abuse that the "black children" believed they experienced in years of childhood, adolescent, and early adulthood.

> I didn't know why parents wanted me back if they had no time for me. They left
> me at home and barely answered my questions, they excused themselves as too
> busy to be patient with each child in the house, but why they had time for my

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sister and brother? I asked less and hardly bothered them because I knew I was different to my siblings, but why they overlooked me more often?

--Hua (pseudonym), the second daughter of a rural family with three children, two children permitted.

Less parental attention was suggested in several narratives when participants compared their family interactions with their homed siblings. The differential family treatment between children was, in fact, outlined by questions from the "black children" who experienced residential separation and foster care: "why I was the odd one out?" or "why couldn't I be with parents the same as my siblings were?" Following the residential distribution, the differentiated parental attentions upon homed and returned "black children" reminded the "black children" of their lowered family positions though their parents possibly held their defence. However, the shortage or deprivation of children's basic needs such as food, bed, clothes, or parental attention was remarkable in this research, and few mentioned any supervision or intervention involved.

My brother was little when I returned. I rocked his cradle to get him sleep sometimes. But once the cradle dropped onto the floor and my brother popped out, my parents dragged me outside our front door, kicking me together with shoes. I ran away but was caught back, then I cried because it hurt badly. But I found tears helped nothing, so I stopped crying. They kicked me as much as they wanted and then stopped, they may be afraid that I might die. My mother walked away to cook, and my father went to watch TV. I regained consciousness after a while and dragged myself up, going back home.

--Cai (pseudonym), the second daughter of a rural family, two children permitted.

Physical abuse from biological parents was presented in some narratives of extreme domestic violence against the "black children", like in the story above. Physical abuse often coupled with differential parental treatments between the "black children" and "homed siblings" appeared in the memorised experiences of being "black". Gender is a noticeable dimension of distinguishing "black" and "homed" children regarding their family treatments, age is another factor. The moral responsibility of parentification was suggested in some narratives,

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such as parents expected, or even demanded returned "black children" to look after their younger sister or brother because they were "older" and supposed to "understand things" (*dongshi*). Also, in some narratives, the "black children" were still expected to do more housework and share some parental responsibilities even though they were younger, mainly because these children were afraid of enraging parents or siblings by going against their words, as Hong relates:

> Nothing good happened after I returned home. My parents had to work and hardly stayed at home, so I had to look after two kids, took over housework and my study alone. I was 10 years old, and my sister was 12, brother was 3. The 3-year-old boy was keen on biting me and the 12-year-old girl loved scratching me with her nails. My neck, shoulders and face were bit and scratched frequently, yet I had to hold my tears and let no one notice it. I finally failed to bear with the pain and pushed my brother once, my father burst out of his anger and roared at me "why don't you just kill him? Murderer!" I had no courage to fight against my brother since then. I reckoned nobody cared about my mind or feelings since I could remember. They four were a family, no idea where I should stand at. The most jealous moment was when my sister lied in my mother's arms and asked me to get her some water, or something else for her. She always asked me to do something, and no one stopped her, I didn't want to be enslaved by her, but I was too frightened. She lost her temper easily and every time we fought; my mother blamed me for not being reasonable, being problematic, or difficult to cope with.
> --Hong (pseudonym), the second daughter of a rural family with three children, two children permitted.

From the above extract, we can see not only the patriarchal violence against the "black daughter", but also how the same gendered siblings were treated with distinguished parental affection, attention, and respect. The phrase of "they four were a family, no idea where I can stand" suggests the emergence of being marginalised and excluded by the biological family in accordance with her daily interactions with each other member within the family. Narratives of sibling maltreatment were not exceptional in the family return episodes.

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> One summer night, my mother asked me and my sister to get each of us an ice cream, my elder sister suddenly shouted at me: "don't give her ice cream! Why should she have our ice cream!" then she started shouting and crying, my mother said "ok, ok, we don't give her ice cream, is this ok?"
> --Maomao (pseudonym), the second daughter of an urban couple who had two girls and one boy, only one child permitted.

Physical abuse from parents and siblings was notable, especially when the sibling abuse, encouraged by the parental maltreatment, built up a family hierarchy system. We can see from narratives of siblings' relationship when the "black children" returned to their biological parents' residence that siblings' physical abuses towards their newly arrived family members were not exceptional, nor one-time events. Parental respect for the "black children" and "homed children" largely differed in accordance with the narratives shown above, also participants noted their consciousness of differentiated parental affection between themselves and their homed siblings. Additionally, several participants recounted how elder sisters took parenting roles to look after younger sisters, sometimes even the parent or senior members in the family. This is not saying that each "black child" identifiably experienced such violent maltreatment from their biological parents or siblings, however, it is important to note how many "black children", were deprived of their basic needs and freedom of eat, sleep, and cry simply by their dependency and vulnerability, and how they lost out on freedom and entitlements in comparison to other "homed siblings".

We cannot deny that the biological parents, to some extent, protected their "black children" by hiding them away from administrative punishments, and also kept them provided with education and further possibilities for personal growth. Nevertheless, emphasis on parental maltreatment far outweighed parental effort throughout my participants' described family practices. Family readjustment challenged everyone in their processed family reunification.

> I had no appropriate clothes nor shoes, but this didn't matter. My sisters slapped me, but my parents ignored it, that doesn't matter, either. What really mattered to me was the moment when my elder sisters jointly asked me to roll over their table, leaving their family. None of my parents said a word to stop them two, my

tears dropped into the bowl, and I had them down into my stomach with food. This kind of torture was as regular as three meals a day, two sisters swore anytime they felt unpleasant, asking me to get away, getting out of their door. I really wanted to leave but was uncapable of doing anything then. Neither my foster nor biological family wanted me at all.

--Ding (pseudonym), the second daughter of a rural family with three children, two children permitted.

Ignored physical abuse between "homed siblings" and "black children" was illustrated as routine, commonly appearing alongside frequent and intense emotional abuse (e.g., name calling, ridicule, degradation) between siblings as well. Attacks occurring between children in the same family were basically ignored in multiple surveys of randomly selected families in European and American studies and emotional sufferings remained even after the physical pain were shut off, and parental intervention was argued as necessary to stop reoccurrence of further abuse (Wiehe, 1997). However, little was shown in the narratives of parental response to siblings' emotional abuse, and no respect for the returned "black children" seemed tactically consented to or encouraged by parents. We can observe from the above extract that children like Ding regularised her siblings' physical and emotional abuse into her ongoing family interactions when such abuses were overlooked or ignored by parents. It was formulated that victims were given the message that this abusive behaviour was really not abusive when parents excused or overlooked abuse between siblings (Wiehe, 1997), which profoundly affected how the returned "black children" conceptualised their family value and position in accordance with responses they got from people surrounded. Ding conceptualised her family pattern as "me" and "they" and defined herself as "neither wanted by biological and foster families", which was not rare in other narratives of maladaptive family reunification. Researchers identified emotional abuse as most damaging effects of impacting on victimised children's self-esteem, interpersonal relationships, and psychosocial functioning in general (Brassard, Hart and Glaser, 2020) and caused "mental injury" (Wiehe, 1997). It is shocking to hear the "black children" experienced sibling abuse regularly, but parents normalised such violence and discrimination against the "black children" into a parenting routine, which differentiated parental affection and protection of their returned "black children" from that given to "homed siblings". The "black children" subsequently

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processed their self-worth and respect throughout such parenting pattern, as will be discussed in more detail in Chapter six.

### 5.2.4 Hidden for a second time

#### *5.2.4.1 Continued physical concealment after return.*

Alongside continued naming disguise ("black children" cohabiting with their biological families yet calling their parents as "aunt" and 'uncle'), they experienced physical concealment occasionally to remove their appearance from the family identifiable networks. Specifically speaking, the "black children" were asked to hide themselves from their families' visitors, guests, or surveillance in the community.

> I hated moments when my family had visitors at home during my school years. I studied at home, but any time visitors came, I had to do my toilet ahead of his/her knocking, then hid myself in the room without being perceived. My mother brought me a meal into the room, and I ate it quietly, moving quietly. Sometimes I could hear the visitors had left yet sometimes I couldn't, so I just waited quietly. Once I was suffering from the full bladder and rushed into the loo as soon as I came out of the room. Since then, I took no drink before the visitor's coming. It felt bad but gradually I got used to this shadowy life.
>
> --Jiang (pseudonym), a younger daughter of an urban family with one boy and one girl, one child permitted.

We can tell from such events that the presence of returned "black children" appeared incompatible with their families' social networks because the children needed to be invisible from the family daily practices and suppressed their basic needs such as food, movement, and toileting. Jiang's experience of continued physical confinement even after having physically returned to their biological parents' residence places, was not unique among the "black children" though it did not happen often in each narrative. It is worthy to note that Jiang was registered as her family's daughter on documents when she practiced repeated physical

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confinement, as the core of this research is to represent the complex and circulated family distance, denial, and rejection against the "black children" on physical, emotional and documental levels, and how these innocent children were differentiated from "normal" persons via basic family interactions, like eating, sleeping, toileting, crying, and speaking. Losing such freedom of their bodies was very common throughout these children's infancy, childhood, and later interactions *inside* and *outside* the family. The "black children" were treated by regulated body confinement at the family level though their formal identity had been registered with an abstract legal personhood (*hukou*) at the state level. This raised up a question about their citizenship and what really defined/denied their access to citizens' freedom and rights. It is important to look beyond a binary model of legal "citizenship" and "non-citizenship" when we examine the exclusions experienced by the "black children", because their hidings were dynamically regulated by multiple social actors and settings of power relations instead of a simple rule of the policy. The registration of *hukou* neither licensed these children's bodily freedom to live, love, move, nor acknowledged their family membership in public views.

### 5.2.5 Commodification of children, childhood, and family membership

That money also circulated around children was remarkably noticeable from the prenatal to family reunification stages. Firstly, the one-child policy's implementation consciously or unconsciously put a price upon decision-making and taking of children on both individual and bureaucratic levels. The family either paid the penalty for their "black children" or put the money into forgery of official documents to sustain their children's cohabitation and family membership.

> I lived with my aunt for a few years before I returned home. My parents needed to have a boy, so I was sent straight away after my birth, yet their second child was still a girl. They registered my younger sister as their first child and later they had my little brother, paid for the penalty. A lot of money.
> --Han (pseudonym), the elder sister of an urban family with two children, one child permitted.

From the above excerpt, we can tell how some children were differenced from being "paid" and "unpaid": the younger brother was paid for his legal personhood and family position whereas Han was sent away for foster care to hide away from the penalty. The commercialised value of children differed in accordance with gender in this light and narratives resembled that above, describing such differentiated family treatment as "everyone did so in my place". The repetition of such happenings in participants' surroundings normalised such differentiation and the people involved internalised it into norms.

> My mother believed in a local church in my village very much because she said she successively gave birth to me following a 500 yuan donation (approximately £50) there in one winter then she had me the next year. She reckoned the God made its presence because of her devotion, so she joined them and claimed herself as a Christian since then.
>
> --Gao (pseudonym), the third child of a rural family with three children, two children permitted.

In contrast to commodified practices related to bureaucratic authority suggested in earlier narratives of penalty fine and bribery in documents, the commercialised religious belief was interestingly notable from the above excerpt as the child, male offspring specifically, was regarded as the desired outcome of individuals' money in exchange for religious benediction. In this sense, religion outweighed the political power.

Secondly, for those children who experienced foster care and family return, their parents paid for childbearing and substituted parental efforts to maintain the children's growth. Commercialised childhood was suggested from the practices of foster care quality to the family return arrangement.

> I firstly stayed with my grandma and later moved to my uncle's family in a southern village. My mother wanted me back when I was 12 years' old yet my foster mother, the uncle's wife disagreed at first, later she agreed but requested 10,000 yuan (around £1000) as the "foster-care money". In the end I don't think the money

was really paid. My grandma turned very angry, and my uncle's family possibly stepped back, I don't know, but I barely knew my parents when I returned to them.

--Maomao (pseudonym), the second daughter of an urban couple who had two girls and one boy, only one child permitted.

From above excerpt, the "black child" Maomao was regarded as a marketable item between the foster and biological parents when her foster mother asked for the childbearing money (though she confirmed her mother paid for the childbearing during her foster care periods in interviews). Similarly, when I questioned how their parents responded the end of the one-child policy and new two/three child policy, some participants recounted their parents' conversations like: "What a shame! If it allowed two children two decades ago, then I needn't abort your sister/or brother (because we would not be fined)." Or "how nice it would be with two or three decades ago, then I needn't to pay for your penalty!" Different families expressed different priorities – mourning the loss of either the children or money, which suggested the core meaning of children in the family's negotiation between policy implementations.

As discussed in Chapter Four, it is an indefinite term of "negotiation" in my exploration of the family separation and reunifications that the "black children" narrated, because it is hard to see any agreement achieved either between the state policy and family, or between the family and "black children". It seems more likely that dependent and vulnerable children complied with their family arrangements to repair their parents' policy-breaking conduct. Family figures and either the state authority played roles of buyer and seller in keeping the "black children". The trade-off between these innocent children and economic resources could be observed anywhere in relationships between biological and foster families, individual family and local bureaucratical power, local and state governments. The family membership and legal citizenship became items of commodity when we rethink about such trade-off --- the physical body of "black children", their formal registration opportunity, and emotional recognition of mother-child relation, all were regulated by interactions of charging and paying. Cost of money or material resources were never divorced from narratives of how these children's families talked about their births, foster-care, and return. The commodification of "black children" not only reflects but also reinforces the structural

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inequality between respect for them and other children from the familial to the bureaucratical levels. Instead of granting citizenship as the basis of expression of liberty and marking civilising in a modern social order, the treatments of "black children" had to be accounted by the trade-off.

### 5.2.6 Institutionalised inclusion and difference

My academic performance has been always good because I know clearly that I have nowhere for turning back after so much suffering. My study was higher than the average in a village class and I wanted to go to a better school in the town for a better development. I got admitted by the top class from the town school and needed to pay for 20,000-yuan (approximately GBP 2,000) tuition fees, my brother, however, he was three years younger than me and even failed in his village junior high school application, my mother spent 60,000 yuan (approximately GBP6, 000) on a better school for him. And she even gave me a call remotely to report this to me with a joyful tone. I was 10th grade and I really, really wanted to jump off a building, I felt abandoned again. No matter how hard I tried, or what I tried, I would always be inferior to my brother because I've been always a worthless girl.

--Hua (pseudonym), the second daughter of a rural family with three children, two children permitted.

Schooling practices played a profound role in impacting some children's self-identity *inside* and *outside* the family relationships. On one side, these children, for the first time, began to sense themselves within a systematic network, structure their daily practices in accordance with an institutionalised identity, agenda, and approaches. They were officially engaged with institutionalised relationships with teachers, schoolmates, friends, and peers. They were connected to the larger world beyond their families, and their assessment of self-worth began to develop in association with the extended network. On the other side, the family differential treatments between the "black children" and their "homed siblings" reminded them of their "self-worth", of being "lower", "other" or even "outsider". As Murphy argues, schools were an important feature that interacted with geographical context, physical location, and

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gendered family culture that impacted on children's socialisation, education, aspiration and agency, and their experience of family relationships (Murphy, 2020a). The institutionalised practices of schooling presented the familial treatments in an institutional manner as well: levels of school, money, and opportunities were marked with institutionalised evaluation. The "black children" thereby matched their family treatments with their conceptualised "worth" *inside* the family.

According to studies of migrated families' education, gender played a very influential role in people's educational experiences, especially those girls who had brothers (Goodburn, 2009; Murphy, 2020a). The gendered violence against Hua in locating an educational resource is noticeable from above extract. School practices and peer networks are essential in understanding what the "black children" experienced differently from the "norm", specifically speaking, the other children's entitlements in such institutions. On the one hand, school registration and systematic practices structured these children's legal personhood, social connections and learning process into the social "norms" to some extent. The "black children" sensed their similarity with their schoolmates to some extent and reconceptualised themselves as an acknowledged individual in the system. However, on the other hand, continued naming or disguise in documents differentiated their identity from their "normal" schoolmates and regular systematic school practices reinforced their sense of being "different".

> I couldn't speak my parents' local dialect and my schoolbooks differed from my previous lessons, because I didn't grow up there. But all my classmates spoke with same language and sometimes they made me feel like a fool. I was sent to boarding school where I had no friends, and a different language, and everything made me uncomfortable. The situation was disappointing as well when I got home, my sister and brother shared with my parents what was going on in their schools whereas I had nothing to share. It was not fun there. My classmates mocked at my accent and said I must be a child of no one, otherwise why did everyone else's parents come and see them but never mine? I knew they were talking nonsense but what could I prove? Days were stressed.

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--Bao (pseudonym), the first daughter of an urban family with two children, one child only permitted.

Similar to the Jewish children's experiences of struggling with changing their Catholic beliefs to their parents' religious system or fitting themselves into their parents' lives after the war, Bao's story resonates the maladaptation of children whose background culture was different from their families' after separations. The dilemma in having their framed cultural experiences and readjusting themselves onto a new family status furthered their maladaptation. Like Bao said, she could not speak her parents' language nor follow the study tightly because of the long-term family separation, so relationships between her and parents, siblings, school peers were presented with struggles. Her situation of being one of the "black children" was suggested as a barrier to readjusting her into the connections with family and school.  We can tell from the above excerpt that these "black children" were conscious of their differences between their situations and other children's in the school context. Institutionalised regulations and practices inducted the "black children" into the public sphere and connected them with extended relations. However, their peers' awareness of and curiosity about their different family situations evoked the conception of "difference" in a larger context than the private family, which was processed into their further self-worth and social recognition. Other "black children", in contrast, represented their networks as "pleasant" and "cheerful" places to "hide away" from their family distress, as Fang told me:

Every time I went to school and stayed with my friends, I felt pleasant and happy. But when I turned back home, I felt very unhappy. I talked about everything with my close friends at school and they heard me, they understood I was unhappy and suppressed at home."

--Fang (pseudonym), the second daughter of an urban family, one child permitted.

Friendship with peers was importantly represented in narratives of the social readjustment of the "black children", which either suggested the participants' inclusive engagement with their newly extended social networks, or their struggles to fit themselves into social connections and how this reinforced their sense of difference in their return.

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My family was my secret, but they didn't have such a one, my friends. Sometimes I was so envious of their lives, I wanted it as well, telling everyone this is my mother and inviting them to party at my home. I couldn't, I lived with a secret, different from them.

--Lan (pseudonym), the second daughter of an urban family, one child permitted.

Being "different" from their "normal" schoolmates and friends was noticeably represented in narratives of school life and further social networking, including the university years of these "black children". Conflict between normalising themselves into peer networking and concealing their "family secret" was a repeated theme, which suggested the emotional dilemmas experienced as they tried to protect the family's policy-breaking, but at the same time desired to be legitimised and justifiably recognised by the larger world.

I started my rebellion period at my senior high school. I started blaming my parents for their misdoings, normally we blamed each other, then we all cried, mother always blamed me for my bad temper, she said mine was the worst of her three children. I never argued with my parents on the topic of "hidden birth" because I was afraid of people noticing that I minded the fact of my "hidden birth". I was afraid that people's sympathy for me and my relationship with my parents would crack. I subtly sensed that as long as some topic remained uncovered, our relation would never be rebounded again.

--Bao (pseudonym), the first daughter of an urban family with two children, one child only permitted.

A re-positioning within their family practices and social interactions was suggested in these narratives of school and peers. Some children sensed their different positions from peers within the individual families and mentioned confusions about the justice of their own experiences. Similar to the children in long-term foster care and reunited with their biological families, the returned "black children" were described as the ones with behaviour problems, and many of them internalised this. However, who defined "problems" and what were real "problems" were rarely part of the family communication.

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For the children who experienced a longer stay in foster care, their families faced multiple problems and risks to achieve reunification compared with those children that had briefer stays in foster care, due to the actual physical separation and children's developmental challenges, therefore parents may have struggled to re-establish or recreate parenting routines and roles in a period of readjustment, particularly when the foster care limited the parents-children contact, and the reunification was associated with an increased risk of behaviour problems including legal involvement, substance abuse, self-destructive behaviours, social isolation in Brassard's studies(Brassard, Hart and Glaser, 2020). Although children benefited in some respects from their return home, they risked exposure to family problems such as poverty and neighbourhood problems (Brassard, Hart and Glaser, 2020). In contrast to other studies on children's foster care and family reunification that discussed parent/caregiver quality (e.g. drugs and alcohol) in association with maltreatment recurrence, narratives of the returned "black children" noted few problems about their parents' mental health or physical health, emotional problems or intellectual limitations. What impacted their readjustment mostly was presented as the continued hiding and disguising within the true family relationship, especially when such continued concealment was regularized with lower family respect and less parental equality. When participants recounted their disordered family separation and cohabitation as the dominant family practices in discourse, they had lowered self-worth and social isolation in their understandings of who were the worthy and who were not. In short, following their different parental attention, affection, and protection from their "homed siblings", as well as partially alienated school and peer network in their years of immaturity, the "black children" practiced their social alienation consciously or unconsciously in their early maturity as an outcome of the long-term concealment.

### 5.2.7 Life in adulthood

#### 5.2.7.1 Social alienation

What happened to the "black children" once they reached adulthood? What kind of readjustments did they make to process their early adulthood and further life courses within a larger world than family and school? Answers varied from participants who discussed continued maladaptation and those who acknowledged parental efforts in their discourses

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about family practices. Unexpectedly, participants highlighted that their whole lives had been framed and to some extent, determined by being "black", regardless of policy changes. Reflecting on experiences of being removed from their formal relationships in the family *hukou*, continued calling mother as "aunt" in public views, physically confined and emotionally disconnected, narratives of being concealed for a second time severely questioned the recognition between these "black children" and their families, the belonging between them and their communities, even the whole society with a new three-child policy. Dismantled policy did not necessarily restore the legal rights and freedom, family love and respect, and justice for these "black children".

Bringing back Honneth's philosophy of recognition and Agamben's argument of "bare life", it is significant to explain the legacy of being "black children" because their experiences formed triple "black identity" -- formal denial, family marginalization, and social alienation. When a group of individuals follows a norm to which each among them "in principle appeal to evaluate the actions of one of the other participants", the practice can be labelled as "ethical" based on Hegel's account (Honneth and Koch, 2014, p. 819). Honneth argues for this kind of norm as an authority that grants each other the right to judge and determine shared obligations and freedom, respecting each other as "legal personalities". It must reflect some ethical value that "expresses the inclinations and intentions of each of the agents" and only thus is it possible as "determinations towards freedom" (Honneth and Koch, 2014, p. 820). From the narratives of being "black children", we can see that the norms of "family" endorsed the pattern of "one-in and one-out", hiding the "black children" and even stripping away their resources and citizenship rights. Ethical norms of differencing the "black children" from other "normal" population were backed up by the logics of familism intersected with the modernity request in China. It was neither the state will nor the family intention to reduce these children to "bare life", also the "black children" were different from examples of "bare life" in camps and shelters, but it is significant to rethink what similar impacts left on their identity from experiences of family separation, displacement and forced movement, disguised relationships and difficulty in belonging to communities.

Drawing on a series of  longitudinal studies with first-hand accounts of attachment, Grossmann (2005) suggested psychological security in early adulthood "depends on a history

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of secure emotional organization and freedom to explore and evaluate past and present attachment relationships with parents and/or partners" (Grossmann, Grossmann and Waters, 2005, p. 129). Drawing on narratives of how the "black children" sensed their insecurity in foster families and displaced childhood, disconnected families, and marginalised biological practices, then fear of being degraded by a peer network, we can observe their disorganised sense-making of the past and present, and how it impacted upon young adults' interpretation of family, children, human and self-worth.

> My father blamed me that I give few calls to the family during a year, my mother complained that I did not look after my elder sister and younger brother as much as other families did. However, I am sorry that my childhood only taught me to stay alive and alone. Now it's two-child policy, go to hell. you can't just wipe off one's sufferings that easily.
>
>  --Bao (pseudonym), the first daughter of an urban family with two children, one child only permitted.

We can tell that the "black children" like Bao expressed their intentions to distance themselves from their families, in order to satisfy their demands for comfort following years of dependency. Similar attitudes were noticed in narratives of some children's withdrawal from or avoidance of family interactions in their early adulthoods, together with their reflections on having little freedom to communicate openly with their parents or siblings and to build up confidence in getting heard and helped in times of distress.

> Sometimes I felt like I was not connected to any part of the whole world, nobody really cared about me and if I disappeared, they might not even have noticed it because I was invisible in many respects.
> --Maomao (pseudonym), the second daughter of an urban couple who had two girls and one boy, only one child permitted.

Few families appeared to have openly acknowledged that the "black children" should be entitled to same rights as their "homed siblings" on bodily, emotional and documental levels. These vulnerabilities became evident as they moved to more independence in adulthood and

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tried to position themselves somewhere within the extended social relationships that desired stability and interaction. The core of their dilemma in coping with these consequences was that their internalised distress and unresolved grief undermined their capability and access to an intact family. They continued to pay a price for being born and labelled as the "black children" though they were removed from the central situation by family concealment on bodily or documental level. The feeling of struggle to co-establish a mutual recognition of these participants' family identity was notable in narratives like the above. Absent expressions of primary family love between the "black children" and their biological families, lack of acknowledgment of their legal relations not only in filing but also in performing their rights, all these disadvantaged the biological family and children themselves to establish reciprocal recognition --- whose outcome was argued by Honneth as solidarity that recognises each other's particular worth (Honneth, 1995). The problems presented in reflecting the family reunification was that these returned "black children" barely experienced equal parental respect, and their needs of love and freedom were presented more as being suppressed than expressed. Little reciprocal esteem or shared values were suggested between the families' interpretations of moral responsibility towards their "black children", and these children's own understanding of human worth.

### 5.2.7.2 Adaptation

> I forgave my parents after a long trip during my university time. I travelled to many places and read lots of books, I decided to let my resentment go because my parents were born and grew up with political movements, the only thing they knew about was campaigns, what did they know about parenting. What could I expect from them? My mother gave her children equal money and now we are leading our new lives, she did her best anyway. My sister has two children now and I was married last year, I began to feel it's nice to have a big family around.
> ---Kang (pseudonym), a second daughter of a rural family with two girls and one boy, two children permitted.

Whilst some participants remained distanced from their families into adulthood, others talked of their changed attitudes towards their family practices and further interactions with

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the larger world. One of the tactics in comforting themselves was excusing parents by reference to the historical background such as the cultural revolution's influence on individuals, as Kang described, reflecting on the dilemma between the powerful political influence on intergenerational transmissions and powerless individuals' response. Another tactic employed by participants was to extend their regular networks across borders of regions and minds to facilitate their acceptance of all happenings.

> I don't know when I started to tolerate my parents, truly understand them. Possibly I travelled a lot and met some people on my trips, witnessing the hardness of different lives; or maybe due to some books I read that gradually changed my mind. I am unable to understand my parents' conduction, neither do I want to change them or myself. I only want to accept them as what they are, as well as myself as who I am. Nothing could be changed if I didn't let it go, I'm only hurting myself for a second time.
>
> --Han (pseudonym), the elder sister of an urban family with two children, one child permitted.

It is worth noting that both the above extracts were drawn from narratives that presented comparatively stabilised foster family practices (such as a continued caregiver before the family return and an attachment formed), little parental maltreatment or sibling abuse (some different parental affection in accordance with gender was mentioned but participants reflected it as their culture or "normal" practices), and more cheerful school practices described. Both tactics suggested were in fact repositioning the self within a much more extended set of human relations than individual family to dilute their focus on their own interactions with someone near and dear. Neither of the above extracts indicated the participants' agreement with their family strategies or justified such happenings but focused more on acknowledging structured harm (either by state sanction or family) in contexts of history and culture and then leaving it in the past. This brings us to the point that the scars of the "black children" hardly disappear though many of their sufferings and grief were normalised and internalised into their conceptions of "norm" under the name of state policy or culture. The children who could genuinely accept their family strategy and their experiences might be those who barely experienced the residential separation from the very

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beginning, which distinguished them from the researched "black children" in the discourse, as the shadowed siblings next to them were the real "black children" who even disappeared when given the chance to present themselves.

### 5.2.8    Summary

Returning to the biological families' residence was never suggested as the terminal point of being "black children" because they were hidden for a second time. Contradictory to parents' understanding that their "black children" experienced equal parental love, protection, and affection with the "homed siblings", this research has found that participants' narratives of family trauma and problematic relationships focused on their maladaptive family return. (a) Being separated for a second time was a common problem noted by participants who barely established primary knowing of their biological parents and siblings. A selective attachment was developed between the "black children" and their foster caregivers, however insecure it may have been. Little tolerance and parental respect for these children's "homesickness" was common in their narratives of the early interactions. (b) Lack of proper preparation for the family readjustment at levels of material resource, emotional connection, and formal acknowledgement was notable. Not only discounted material treatment compared with their "homed siblings" (e.g., bed, clothes, food), but also continued disguised formal relation in *hukou* and relation claiming (calling mother as "aunt") largely disadvantaged the returned children's self-confidence in their family identity. Maltreatment from biological parents or siblings was not exceptional in their readjusted interactions on daily basis. (c) Being physically hidden for a second time coupled with a disguised *hukou* or relation claiming. Losing their freedom of body and emotional expression reflected and reinforced the long-term discrimination against the "black children". (d) Commodification of their childhood, family membership and citizenship rights were presented throughout the trade-off between children and economic benefits.  (e) Institutionalised identity from school lives on one side allowed the emergence of their formal status within social groups based on shared recognition, but on the other side reinforced their cognition of being "different" and thereby ashamed. (f) Discontinued family interactions and continued structural inequal treatments between the "black" and other children significantly impacted on their realization of self-

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worth. Lacking reciprocal recognition with the family and community was notable and common in participants' reflections on the meaning of their existences.

## 5.3 Where do the "black children" belong?

Compared with earlier experiences with their foster families, maladaptation of their family returns and reflections on their family relationships were talked about more by participants in this research. Similar with the external push to register *hukou* for the "black children", their school enrolment was also pushed by factors such as the imbalanced educational resources between urban and rural China, and the absence of an arrangement for education during the foster-care. Fixing *hukou* was not suggested as a necessary method to enable school access for the "black children" in this research because most of participants either faced up to no *hukou* requirement at school entrance or got *hukou* before their families' concerns about their returns. Two points are noticeable in understanding the meanings of "return" and "family" for the "black children". Firstly, concealment continuing through the family return was not exceptional in their narratives, including continued disguised formal relationships on the *hukou*, continued calling mother as "aunt", and continued physical hiding to cope with family visitors or guests. Though these children were geographically localised together with their biological families, their experiences were far from being recognised as the family child at the levels of formal return, physical presence, and emotional reconnection. It is important to note the movement between rural and urban areas when we understand how these children became "black" and maintained this status regardless of their localised *hukou*. Rural and urban China was presented not as binary but as influencing each other through these children, families, and local impacts on people's experiences. Secondly, children's maladaptation in refitting themselves into a settled family picture completed by their biological parents and "homed siblings". Not only at the levels of material and emotional preparations, but also of cultural influences such as language. Distinction between the parents' and children's family ideology was suggested in the dilemma between continuously hiding the returned "black children" and claiming their family status as the same as "homed siblings".

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Experiences and awareness of being "other" not only in the family, but also in wider contexts, such as school, local community and the state, were developed through very different family treatments between the "black children" and their "homed siblings". When it became normal to hide them physically, to deny their family status of children in formal and emotional relationships, and to repeat communal practices to frame their family patterns and identities, these harms against the "black children" were perceived as "ethical" in line with the reciprocal recognition between the family and community, parents and siblings. This sort of recognition served as the foundation of forming the family love, legal rights and emotional respect for the "black children". When conceptions of "family" and "home" were presented in the family interpretations of each member's status, value, experiences, both terms meant more than an instrumental *hukou* document paper and a residence place where people cohabited together. Which child met the criteria of family identity and being acknowledged as a legal citizen was defined by the family claim other than by the political regulation. Dividing the children between *out* and *in* was presented as central to regulating the concealment both subjectively and strategically. Recognition of the basic needs and freedoms of the "black children" was little seen in their reflected family relationships. Furthermore, shifting between foster and biological families largely disadvantaged their seeking of belonging to a stable and continued community, where citizenship rights and responsibilities could be centrally positioned. To rethink what defined or denied the citizenship claim for the "black children", it is significant to explore beyond the understandings of "*hukou* equals "'black'-no-more" and "return equals no more hiding". The politics of (dis)recognizing the family membership and citizenship of "black children" were more complex than abstract legal rights.

# Chapter Six: The emotional world of being a "black child"

## 6.1 Introduction

> I felt painful and struggling from day to day, but I would sense nothing about pain and loss, happiness, and fairness if I had no education, no chance of living like other "normal" children. So, it's very paradoxical, I hate my parents, as well as everything that happened to me, but I would not be here without everything I experienced though.
>
> -Jiang (pseudonym), a second daughter of an urban family, one child permitted.

We can observe the dilemma presented in Jiang's anger of being reduced to some form of existence that may be compared to Agamben's conception of "bare life", and her guilt and pain growing up with the experiences she associated with being a "normal" child. Expressions of feelings and attitudes formed a large part of my participants' reflections on how their present and future could be shaped by their experiences of being hidden away, both literally and metaphorically. It is important to explore these participants' feelings, attitudes, and values as they reveal how they understood and coped with (or not) all those differential treatments *inside* and *outside* their families. Their emotions as revealed in their stories help us to understand how the "black children" thought about their worth and value in accordance with their normalised exclusion and social marginalisation. This chapter moves on to explain what the "black children" thought they deserved and did not deserve under the legitimised policies and family strategies. Who benefited from such ideas and who did not? Whose voices got heard and whose did not? What impact did all of this have on their emotional health and well-being?

Explaining the worth of lives cannot be divorced from discussions on "bare life". As discussed earlier in the Literature Review, Agamben explains that the state of "exception" was built up by a final authority that suspended the validity of the positive law (Villamizar and Eduardo, 2014). As noted in previous chapters, family injustice against the "black children" came up in narratives more frequently than the state will to reduce them to forms of lives that shared

similar characteristics to "bare life". Loss of continued, stabilised, and reciprocally recognised family lives and partially denied citizenship rights of the "black children" resonated with many experiences of children of the Holocaust, and Rohingya. Although the "black children" involved in this research were individually socialised through their families' ongoing negotiations with the policy controls, it is still necessary to illustrate how they were reduced to someone "less" *inside* and *outside* the family in the name of the state policy power ---- similarly with the state of "exception" in the name of crisis or emergency.

Their emotions matter, and matter a lot, because their anger, fear, shame, guilt, indifference, happiness and all other emotions helped to frame and position their self-identity, and their ideas about family and societal recognition. Though narrative analysis usually does not focus on emotions, narratives are inextricably emotionally structured (Kleres, 2011). When the "black children" chose what events, actors, time, feelings to talk about, they made evaluations of their lived experiences. Nevertheless, it is difficult to generalise any communal emotions that *all* participants and the "black children" had as they described how it felt to be a "black child". Firstly, the ways in which the "black children" were treated by the family differed from individual to individual, in association with the gender priority, foster treatment, family love or suppression, local culture, etc. Some "black daughters" were wanted and valued by the foster family or biological family to whom they returned, whereas others recounted no such sense of being wanted or valued. Some returned "black children" gradually developed attachment to their biological parents and siblings, yet some described no such attachment. Secondly, their emotions were continually changing through their ongoing interactions with their families, and thus participants described their different emotions related to being the "black children" based on the different connections with their parents and siblings at different times. For instance, some "black daughters" asserted their hatred towards their mother/father/sibling in their narratives of early interactions with the family, whereas they described forgiveness and love towards the family decision and pattern after efforts by their family. Also, some said that they felt nothing hurtful in early childhood, yet frustration and sadness came through in their later stories of family reflections in the life. Paradoxically, although the "black children" were excluded or marginalised to some extent, they were also incompletely engaged in the larger world (such as through school, peer relations, employment, and adult intimacy). Consequently, their narrated emotions were

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lively and shifted through their stories, and as the opening epigraph from Jiang suggested, the feelings of being harmed by the family sometimes were intertwined feelings of being protected by the family. These complex and contradictory circumstances laid the cornerstone for my following discussions on how the "black children" felt about being "black".

Most studies of emotion document four primary emotions in human experience: anger, fear, sadness, and happiness (Turner, 2009), and more complex emotions can be activated, like shame, guilt, jealousy, wonder, envy, respect, vengeance, snobbery, nostalgia, yearning, and many others in relation to biological mechanisms (Kemper, 1990; Turner, 2009). Narratives can only be understood in relation to narratives of self, and emotions are embedded in narratives, socially learned through stories (Kleres, 2011). Kelly identified four patterns of attachment from her study of maltreated children in foster care: secure, ambivalent, avoidant, and an disorganised attachment (Kelly, 2017). My researched "black children" developed similar patterns of attachment issues as their adaptation strategies to cope with their shifting family positions. Narratives of "black children" on one side illustrated similar traumatised emotions of secure, ambivalent, avoidant, and disorganised attachment, but on the other side, they experienced more complex emotions within their ongoing relationship with their biological families, such as emotional abandonment, blame and shame, love and hate. When these children's physical bodies were produced, regulated, and restrained *inside* the family, their sense of identity, belonging, and recognition emerged throughout the regularised concealment.

## 6.2 Emotional abandonment

When my participants talked about the experiences they could remember, they always talked about distance. This might be the geographical distance between their biological families' houses and foster parents' places, the physical distance between themselves and foster parents' hug and cuddle, the emotional distance between their imagined "mother" and the reality of "no one". I often heard phrases such as "I felt like I was being abandoned by my own mum" when the "black children" reflected on their infancy and early childhood, not only because they sensed the lack of connection between themselves and a continued agency of

mothering, but also others' reactions to their mother-seeking profoundly impacted on their primary concepts of "mother" and "me".

> Sometimes I feel like my mother abandoned me, and I was born to be abandoned. My mother had me and this caused her trouble in having a younger brother. Maybe people's words were not wrong, giving birth to me kind of wasted their [parents] birth quota. So, I had to stay with my grandma, and this released my family.
> --An (pseudonym), an only daughter of an urban family, one child permitted.

Similar to An's feelings of being abandoned, some "black children" conceptualised their residential move as a sign of "abandonment" by their biological parents. Also, other adults' words were mentioned in such narratives, as in the above extract, other people's words denied the value of giving birth to the children and deeply affected their understandings of how the family valued children differently.

> When I saw the neighbouring girl, whose mother abandoned her, I saw myself in her. I was thinking of myself as an abandoned daughter as well although my paternal grandpa looked after me very well. I regarded him as my mum when I was little, but I still felt as though I had been abandoned, because I wanted a real mum, like other children's. People nearby always asked me "whose child you are" and I said, "I am my grandpa's child", but they laughed at me and said "no, you are not his child, silly girl". I cried back to my grandpa but neither him nor my grandma comforted me on this, they just told me don't cry, don't care about people's words.
> --Kang (pseudonym), the second daughter of an urban family, one child permitted.

From the above extract we can understand how Kang related her own situation to the neighbouring girl whose mother abandoned her. The temporary absent motherhood was seen as no difference to the permanent abandonment in children's eyes like Kang. Although she described her grandparents as the mother-substitute and established attachment to them, she still expressed her clear intention on wanting a "real mother" the same as others. In a manner similar to the ways in which parental migration caused children's emotional

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dilemmas and feelings of loss (even when children see such migration positively), because a significant person was removed from the children's home life, and it harmed the nurture of familiarity and intimacy (Murphy, 2020b), words like "you are not his/her child" and questions of "whose family did you come from" stirred the settled positions of the children in this study and furthered their feelings of being abandoned.

> I felt unfair and really sad. In my memory, I stayed in my paternal grandma's home until eight years' old. My classmates asked me why I didn't stay with my parents, I covered it with some excuses like no qualified schools in that neighbourhood. Who knows, I asked them about this question thousands of times, why it was me? Felt like I was the only one excluded. [......] no surprise, no answer came back to me. They barely responded my questions, possibly they thought me as too annoying.
>
> --Han (pseudonym), the first daughter of an urban family, one child permitted.

In addition to local adults, children like schoolmates and peers in schools also generated impacts on feelings of being abandoned or excluded when the "black children" interacted with them. Stories of how their differences were noticed by peers, as in the above extract for instance, suggested these children's feeling of being positioned *outside* the family. Questions of "why me?" suggested that the "black children" failed to make sense of such family arrangement, and they were trying to communicate with the family the injustice they felt.

We cannot ignore the strong intention of seeking their original mothers' love and acceptance, even though these "black children" had some alternative mother-substitute such as grandparents or foster parents. It was not hard for them to realize themselves that they were not born of their foster parents, because the "black children" experienced shifted caregiving and each foster care was only for short-term temporary purpose. Different to those "black daughters" who were born, abandoned permanently and had no access to their family returns (whom I had no access to interview), my participants all were part of a planned short-term foster care and had known about their biological family members since childhood. Both Kang and Han suggested that neither grandparents nor foster parents presented what they felt were appropriate responses when they raised their discomfort about being "abandoned".

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Consequently, these "black children" began to build up their own understanding of family value and self-worth in accordance with such discomfort. Infant babies remembered nothing, but their experiences produced their emotions, which circulated their bodies, for instance, the fear as a response to maltreatment that will be discussed in Section 6.3. Additionally, either conversations between the "black children" and adults in neighbourhoods or with peers in school reminded these children of their differences ---- not living with their biological parents whilst other children were. This reinforced their feelings of being less desired, unwanted, or abandoned. Seven out of the 20 participants mentioned being teased by their village neighbours or foster parents with phrases such as "your mother abandoned you", "your mother would not take you back", etc. Denzin discussed experience as "mediated and shaped by prior textual and cultural understandings which are then re-inscribed in the social text" (Denzin, 2014, p. 13) and the "black children" had to make sense of their "deviance" within repeated texts of being rejected, abandoned, or excluded.

> My birth was totally pointless, I told myself so last night, and you could only be dependent on yourself as always. "Family is an extravagant hope for your whole life".
> --Hua (pseudonym), the second daughter of a rural family with three children, two children permitted.

Reflections on their birth always contained very strong emotions. Female participants commonly presented more negative reflections on their births' values to the family than male participants, using words like "pointless", "unnecessary", "extra", or "sin" (*zui*). In fact, it was rare to hear male participants to talk about how any reflections on the meaning of their births. When female participants talked about their feelings of being abandoned, they described more about their discomfort and tried to make sense of such happenings, nevertheless, when male participants talked about their reflections on the primary family separation (very limited cases but this still happened), they expressed more anger than sadness --- they were mainly blaming parents for not being responsible.

> I thought of myself as someone who was born as extra, and as "sin" (*zuinie*). My birth cost my parents a 300,00 *yuan* [around £3000) penalty, no house allocation

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and no promotion for 3 years for my father. My mother got used to saying that I shall look after for her whole life when I turned independent because my birth cost her much suffering. Kids knew nothing, and so I was always thinking, was I born to bring my closest person suffering? Would it be better to live without me? --Ding (pseudonym), the second daughter of a rural family with three children, two children permitted.

It was common to find female participants relating the meanings of births to negative words, such as "sin" (*zui* and *zuinie*) and "crime" or reflected on their family financial/political loss as their moral burden, just like in the above extract. Echoing participants who described their births as "by-products of the family's boy-production line" (see Chapter Four), we can see the tendency of denying their birth-worth from such narratives. Though the participants were not explicitly framing their stories in religious terms, many of them told me that they chose terms like "sin" to articulate how they felt their birth was a crime or wrongdoing. While intergenerational transmission of religious values might be a feature of western families (studies on American parenting, for example, reveal how children are taught religion as instrumentally and functionally meaningful to their life purpose, wellbeing, etc, coherence and solidarity in their family relationship and further socialisation (Smith and Adamczyk, 2021)), few of the families (in fact, only Gao's mother was mentioned with religious belief) in this study were described as Buddhist, Christian or something else. Instead, what is noticeable is the way in which the patriarchal culture shaped not only the parents' ideas of life, morality, and worth, but more importantly these victimised children's self-cognition and identity within that framework.

Different from most female participants, burdening the responsibility of breaking the policy to parents was more obvious in male participants' narratives. For instance:

They [parents] are selfish. They only wanted to have a boy, continue with a male heir and never really understand what does parenting mean. They broke the policy and then had me, so what? They paid for the penalty and keep saying my birth cost them a lot. Who asked them to give birth to me? Have they ever cared about

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how much it affected my life? why choose to be parents while they couldn't be responsible for their own kids?

--Zhao (pseudonym), the younger brother of an urban family, one child permitted.

From above two extracts, we can observe the different attitudes towards the family arrangement and self-worth in accordance with gender. Female participants sometimes described their births as "sin" even though they mentioned little religious background. For instance, "I could not make sense of why everything happened to me, so I had to persuade myself it is karma, it is sin to be born and my suffering is helping me to pay it off" (from Ding), and "I must do something wrong to be born to this life, my birth is the sin of my family, I don't know how to wash it up" (from Hong).

The feeling of being rejected by their original mothers scarred the "black children" no matter whether they had an alternative mother figure or not. The difference lay in *how much* they were scared: the children who described their foster care with love and care either from their grandparents or foster families, described themselves as "abandoned" but did not question their legitimacy of being born. While those who described foster maltreatment expressed strong grievance or objection against their births, such as describing their births as "sin", "unnecessary", "extra". In short, the "black children" without a mother figure illustrated a strong intention of self-blaming and stigma with regards to their birth compared to the others. As Goffman (1968) noted, words have been used to stereotype and stigmatise as long as we have had a history (Goffman, 1968). The children who considered themselves born as "sins" suggested their self-recognition as "deviant", which separated them from the "normal children" who had been accepted by the family and society since birth. This recalled the question I put earlier about the line between humanity and dehumanisation in association with vulnerable and disadvantaged children. Not every "black child" was disadvantaged by their births because some "black daughters" were born legally yet were determined as "black" by patriarchal values. However, in the words of the participants who articulated confusion around visits and departures, even frequent visits could not match the stable and continued mother-child interactions on a daily basis "as most families did":

Based on my memory, my mother only visited me once when I was fostered, and she stayed with me less than two days. I could barely remember their faces after four years' separation, not to mention our emotional bond.

---Jiang (pseudonym), the second child of an urban family, one child permitted.

Residential concealment and regular visits were combined to protect the family benefits and parent-children bond based on the parents' expectation. The children, however, saw things differently – they still sensed the feeling of being rejected and excluded through their family separations. Disappointed mothers *and* "black children" were commonly presented in such stories because the affective inequality was created and sustained through the family separations. Furthermore, the mother-child attachment was sensed differently between parents and "homed siblings" either by the "black children" or biological mothers. One other child mentioned by my participant Hua (the child was from Hua's grandparents' neighbourhood) was sent back to her foster family when they found her "not sensible" (*bu dongshi*) because she still missed her foster mother after a year of return, failing to develop a mother-daughter attachment with her biological mother. Hua regarded their family decision as acceptable because the child recognised herself as the foster family's daughter, Hua said it was better for the child to stay somewhere she conceptualised as "home" other than with her parents. Notably, success in family emotional return was not suggested in each narrative because many narratives reveal the absence of family tolerance, love, respect, affective equality, and freedom of self-expression.

> My younger sister was registered as my mother's first child. I was "black". I did not sense anything mattered until I saw my sister with our parents while I had to stay with my foster family. Why did my mother abandon me? Was I not good? Not beautiful?
>
> --Han (pseudonym), the elder sister of an urban family with two children, one child permitted.

Questioning the self was not exceptional in participants' reflections on why they were the one chosen to be "black" over other siblings. Like Han's experience, sensing some difference between themselves and "homed siblings" pushed the "black children" to make sense of the family injustice against them though they often could not locate convincing reasons. As a result, they blamed themselves for not being good, beautiful, or worthy in terms of gender or other criteria for the family's evaluations of children. We can observe the emergence of connecting being "abandoned" with "self-blame". The biological mother was the main actor

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implicated in narratives of "abandonment", whatever types of foster family care the "black children" got (mother-substitutes' nurturing or foster maltreatment). Their narratives indicated their desire for a continued primary mother-child relation similar to that of their siblings. In fact, when the "black children" talked about their sense of being "abandoned" by the biological mother (although they returned home), their narratives raised up the question about the justice of the "one-in and one-out" strategy, and to what extent the foster family experiences failed in developing these children's belonging to a particular mother-child relation. Furthermore, the self-confidence of being a child of the family was questioned and even destroyed by the gap enlarged by continued inequal family treatments, which tremendously impacted on the family relationship after the child returned.

## 6.3 "Everyday has been full of sense of insecurity"

Whether the concealed "black children" had attachment to their foster family or not, their narratives were filled with discomfort in refitting themselves into the biological family relationship. More than half of the participants recalled "homesickness" after their family residential return, and how hard they tried to not let the biological family notice it. Their "homesickness" often appeared to enrage the biological family, particular the mother. Wanting to go back to the foster family was a common reaction for many in the early days of return. Similar to the way in which some foster parents questioned the loyalty of the "black children" (see Chapter Five), some biological parents tried to test their returned children's loyalty to the relationship as well. For instance, mothers asked returned children "where do you regard as 'home'? mine or your Nan's?" or "do you miss her [foster mother]?", "do you want to go back to their [foster family] home?" Participants Yao and Kang noted they were aware that the mother was "testing" them purposely and there was only one acceptable answer – confirming they only belonged to the biological mother and not the foster family. However, even though some "black children" went through foster maltreatment, they still established their earliest connections with their primary caregivers rather than their biological parents, which created a challenge as they established relationships with the newly cohabited biological family.

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I spent my childhood with my maternal grandma, but she turned too old to look after me, so she took me to her cousin's and that old pair were nice to me. However, my mother wanted me back around my primary school age, so I came home with her. I felt homesick after I left grandma. She came to see me once on my holiday and brought me food and clothes. Every single time when she stood up for leaving, I held her leg and cried badly. My grandma had to stay and put me on bed, leaving when I fell asleep. I missed her very much, but my mother seemed very unhappy, she said something sarcastically, "why don't you just follow her [grandma] back to your sweet home?", or "looks like I help other people get a loyalty child. You must love her more than me, right?" I didn't know what to say, I only sensed fear and puzzlement. So, I learnt how to be "good", to miss her [grandma] secretly and cried silently in dark nights.

--Hong (pseudonym), the second daughter of a rural family with three children, two children permitted.

Lack of parental tolerance of the returned children's maladaptation was often noted in participants' reflections on how they emotionally responded at the beginning of the family return. Here, the biological mother was still mentioned more than other members in noticing these children's emotions, even though many narratives were about mothers' negative feedbacks on children's expressed feelings.

My paternal grandpa was nice to me, and he saved any treat for me although I was just his granddaughter rather than a grandson. But my mother was unhappy when I talked too long on the phone with him after I returned to parents, she said nothing, but I saw her face. I sometimes missed my grandpa very much, but I had to endure it. I didn't want my mother unhappy, yet I felt sorry about my grandpa. I felt shamed, I was not a good granddaughter, to some extent, I betrayed all his affections because I couldn't call him on the phone or go back to see him regularly, my mother wouldn't be happy with that. But I was not a qualified daughter either, imagine a mother whose own daughter wanted another person more than her to live with, that's heart-breaking.

Life was so difficult, it's so complex, filled with fear, shame, sad, and helpless.

My analysis reveals conflicts occurring as the children disconnected from the primary caregiver and re-connected with the biological mother, especially for female participants who often noted their sense of moral responsibility. Take above extract for instance, San expressed her dilemma in dismantling the foster family attachment and establishing a biological family bond. Tactics of suppressing their true feelings and hiding its performance were thereby used by these returned children to cope with their biological families' requests. The mother's self-confidence in assuming a mother-daughter natural bond was harmed after the primary separation, and the "black children" bore the burden of such harm in their own moral responsibilities for their mothers. Based on the above extracts, we can see that discontinued motherhood and daughterhood severely harmed the family reunification at the emotional level. For instance, the challenges in calling the biological mother "mother" were strongly noted in just over half of the participants' narratives.

The only thing I know that I shared with someone like me: we basically never called them mother and father. It was awkward to pronounce these two words when you know you were someone different from their "normal" children. You were different from these children who could call them "mother" and "father" naturally. Everything is so easy for them; everything is naturally acceptable for them.

---Jiang (pseudonym), the elder sister of an urban family with one girl and one boy, only one child permitted.

We can see that calling the mother "mother" was conceptualised as a key aspect of identifying the self as "normal" in these children's conceptions of "family", but it cost the "black children" extra effort to do it. One noticeable thing was the continued relationship disguise that went alongside with the calling-correction: the returned "black children" were required to call mother "mother" *inside* the family but continued calling her "aunt" in public. This on the one side facilitated these children to reconceptualise their biological family relationships as the dominant relationship, but on the other side, enlarged the gap between ideas of "I am acknowledged as her child" and "I could not be claimed as her child". Such a gap kept reminding them of how their status was

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distinguished from other "normal" children, and how they were struggling to belong to the biological family as fully returned children. It is even hard to argue these children physically returned as full children *inside* the family, because their body confinement also continued through the cohabitation. Take an instance of when the family's social network conflicted with the presence of a returned "black child":

> I hated moments when my family had visitors when I was at home. you know, any abrupt knocks could mean someone's coming and my hiding. I had to go and hide myself in the wardrobe, under the bed, or even go outside and stay somewhere away from my neighbourhood. My mother sometimes went out to get me back after visitors left, sometimes she and other people forgot about me. I always needed to hold my breath when I was hiding at home and was worrying about my homework. They [visitors] stayed too long sometimes and I had to do my homework after midnight when they left. It felt bad but gradually I got used to this kind of life. It is absurd when my parents claimed they loved me and my siblings equally, but did they need to hold their breaths in the room as well? how it could be equal?
>
> --Hua (pseudonym), the second daughter of a rural family, two children permitted.

Being hidden for a second time was not exceptional in this research, either, as explained in Chapter Five, but little was mentioned about how the family responded to these hidden "black children". In narratives of such family hiding, the "black children" were presented as the only persons who needed to make movements and were responsible for the conflicted relationships --- the family's network with the social world and family-children's relationships. Hiding their bodies and eliminating signs of their existences at the physical level was used as a regular and effective tactic in these narratives, and little was mentioned about how the parents or siblings thought about it, or how the family communicated about it with these confined "black children". Noticeably, physical confinement still happened regularly during some participants' high school years, and the lost freedom of moving was presented as an acceptable phenomenon by these children, as the above extract said, "it felt bad, but I got used to the life". Furthermore, the "black children" not only conceptualised such loss of

freedom as family regularised routine at the physical level, but also internalised the family differential treatments as ethically normative patterns.

Ingratiating themselves with their biological parents and sometimes siblings as well, was a tactic recounted by more than half of the participants to facilitate them to process the family relationship with biological parents and siblings. For instance:

> I loved ingratiating people. I tried to please my parents by doing whatever they asked me to do, though I didn't want to. I tried to make my siblings accept me by tolerating them laughing at me or making some nasty jokes about me. well, I would not get a fair word even I mentioned it to our parents. They [parents] always asked me not to be mean about my siblings. You know, you had to be careful without being blamed or marginalised. They were already a family way before I came here. So, I always do everything alone because I don't think I need anyone. I survived alone and no one would come for me even if I cried for help.
>
> I still remember the time when my husband drove me to the hospital and waited for me there, my tears dropped. He was shocked but I knew what it meant to me. Finally, I felt like being cared about and favoured over other things for one moment.
>
> --Han (pseudonym), the elder sister of an urban family with two children, one child permitted.

Ingratiation was often recounted as a tactic in interactions with their biological parents and other children, and this stretched into relationships with peers, friends, and further relationships with colleagues, partners, even strangers. Their narratives suggest that these children positioned their worth lower in relation to parents' and siblings' love and respect, and such self-position was normalised into their interpretations of the most significant relationships to sustain its peace and continuity. They disregarded their own struggles and needs to keep the family functioning. Subsequently, the "black children" developed their adaptation to the family discourse by suppressing their self-expression and distorting their self-presentation. They chose to perform the self in accordance with the family's interest in exchange for staying in the family with less loss. We could tell that the feeling of being

abandoned harmed the children's sense of security with their biological parents, and their unfamiliarity with the returned biological family jointly contributed to their fear throughout their family readjustment. The "black children" articulated their fears of maltreatment and being abandoned for a second time.

> My mother seemed happy with my return at first, then she lost her patience with me ultimately, possibly because I was not a good child. She complained about my "defections" a lot and said she shouldn't have given birth to me. My father only cared about my younger brother, of course, neither my sister nor me would be his concern. But I envied my sister, she felt free to say what she wanted with our mother, whereas I did not dare to do so. I was afraid of my mother, father, sister, anyone in the family, while my sister was not. Anyway, my mother made her decision with one of us two when she could only keep one, and my sister was the one kept.
> 
> --San (pseudonym), the second daughter of an urban family, one child permitted.

We can observe the harm against participant's secure base *inside* her biological family when her mother complained directly that she should not have been born, and her personality was "defective". Her fear of relationships with parents and siblings was noticeable in her reflections on how her family evaluated children differently. Again, the distinctions between the "black children" and their "homed siblings" were highlighted in suggesting a threatened parent-child trust from the returned children's perspectives. Nussbaum argues that envy and its close relative jealousy resembled anger that focused on the advantages of others. The rivalry involves a fear of specific loss (Nussbaum, 2016). When the "black children" talked about their envy for their siblings' parent-children's good relationships, their desire for family love and trust also underlined their fear of failing to establish one. It is not surprising to find such failure in narratives where parents, especially mothers, expressed their anger towards the returned "black children" and blame always followed. Nussbaum discusses blame more as a type of action rather than just speaking because it is to punish or sanction in some other way (Nussbaum, 2016). Blaming the value of the birth and the children's personalities was expressing the family's judgement about what the returned "black children" deserved, no matter whether it was presented as the family's cognitive or non-cognitive account of anger

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or resentment. Defining the "black children" with negative words such as "defective" was suggesting they were conceptualised as "blameworthy" regarding the family experiences of separation and maladaptation. What gave it significance was these children's need to be recognised as one of the family to establish their sense of belonging. All forms of fear and insecurity signified the vulnerability of these returned "black children" in maintaining their physical, emotional, and social survival.

## 6.4 Blame, guilt, shame

Following the above discussions, suppressed self-expression, self-blaming and guilt appear as common themes when the "black children" reflected on their relationship with parents and siblings through family shifting and readjustment. They emotionally tailored themselves to fit themselves into the family's expectation of "reunification" regardless of their own struggles and its long-term harms. Similar to the moral hierarchy built up by their parents in deciding a "black child" (see Chapter Four), narratives of taking on the burden of a sense of guilt and blame suggest a moral hierarchy established between their self-respect and the family's expectation of harmony. Labelling them as "black" was presented as giving authority to justify all forms of blame and shame, not only in understandings of the family and society, but also internalised in many children's interpretations of "norm" via repeated differential treatments.

Goffman (1968) defined "stigma" as an expectation of a discrediting judgement of oneself by others in a particular context. It causes an individual to be mentally classified by others in an undesirable, rejected stereotype rather than in an accepted, normal one. A man with stigma is reduced from a whole and usual person to a tainted discounted one in our minds (Goffman, 1968), experiencing status loss and discrimination in realms of family and society that leads to inequality (Link and Phelan, 2001). Self-stigma is a distinct quality indicated by the "black children" when they recounted their family interactions. Both family blame and self-blaming presented the disrespect for the "black children" because the subjects considered they had no right to demand, for instance, their continued daughterhood, equal family love, tolerance of the separation disorder, freedom to feel and express, affections of intimacy, etc. Self-

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shaming and stigma were implicated through various stages of their socialisations when the "black children" narrated their interactions with the family, peer, and intimacy relationships. Describing their personality as unsociable, isolated, sensitive, mousy, no sense of security, low self-esteem, low self-confident, eccentric, irritable, etc was overlapped between the children's narratives and their narrated parents' comments on them.

Being labelled as "black" not only facilitated the family discrimination against these children, but also internalised their loss of legal rights, of continued family love and lives, and of equal respect between them and other members as morally acceptable. For instance, some female participants expressed their gratitude for being alive even though they had to live as "black children" and sensed forms of differential treatments between them and other children. It is very interesting to see how the ways that participants' language was used to reflect on their family patterns conflicted what was revealed. Though not every participant involved in this research expressed gratitude for simply being alive, their narratives still suggest a big part was played by self-stigma in making sense of what they deserved as the population labelled "black". Being grateful for being given a chance of staying in a form of "bare life" is noted in such narratives, all inequal treatments between participants and siblings being internalised as something beyond her entitlement as "black". Attitudes like this suggest these children regarded their life itself as some privilege beyond what they originally deserved, and they possibly conceptualised their worth as similar to what a "bare life" individual valued in a state of "exception".

> I thought, it's wrong for me to be born, so it's reasonable to punish me severely if I did something wrong, like undesirable school performance. My parents were harsh to me every day, so punishment was my routine. Consequently, I felt no sadness when I got punished because I was believing that I could never do a right thing. Right, I didn't love myself at all, I thought it's wrong to be born, of course it's wrong to do anything on this planet, like breath, I might consume someone else's air."
> —Hua (pseudonym) a second daughter of a rural family with two girls and one boy.

From the above extract, we can tell how the "black children" reduced their self-worth similarly to the form of "bare life" based on others' interpretations of their births. The stigma of being "black" and the shame of their existence came as twins in facilitating their perceived self-identity. Scholars agree that the "self" is socially constructed, and Mead (1934) proposed that social conceptions of the self-worth arise out of role taking or seeing things from other's viewpoints. Such idea is central to the social psychology of stigma and shame. For instance, Cooley's concept of "the looking-glass self" argues pride and shame as imputed sentiment --- we always imagine the judgements of the other mind. Goffman perceived seeing one's self negatively in others' eyes as the origin of shame, and living in others' minds constituted the major emotions of everyday life (Scheff, 2003). Lewis emphasised shame as an instinct that signals threats to the social bond, it is a continuing presence in most social interaction and experiences in either unconscious or misnamed situations (Lewis, 2003). Shame served to judge the punishment carried out on these "black children" like Hua as not morally wrong, and even culturally acceptable in their given relationships with family, community, and even the whole society. Nussbaum (2006) explains that shame punishment is used to reduce an offender's dignity and it means we do not recognise persons as of equal worth. She argues that a decent society should try to protect its members' dignity against shame and stigma through law (Brooks, 2008). What the "black children" presented in reflecting on their existences within the given society was, however, the stripped dignity of humans who felt wrong and guilty to be born, breath, and grow up. Whatever their rights of physical body and formal identity as embodied in the state policy (e.g., the first daughter in urban family and second daughter in rural ones), the label of "black" disadvantaged their access to equal respect alongside other members of the society.

### 6.4.1 Shame and blame in the family discourse.

To coordinate their actions in a "normal" others-dominated family, the "black children" had to see themselves as they were seen. They were attempting to fit themselves into others' ideals of "family" and "children". Family blame and shame was presented as the first key aspect in constructing the self-worth of "black children". Scheff argues that shame is the master emotion because it is key to conscience --- (a) it signals moral transgression even without thoughts or words, (b) it signals trouble in a relationship, and (c) it plays a central role

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in regulating the expression and awareness of all our other emotions. "Shame is our moral gyroscope" (Scheff, 2003, p. 254). Take his example of an infant's life --- when it is completely dependent on the bond with caregivers, shame is as primitive and intense as fear when one has failed to live up to the significant other's standards. It signals a threat to one's social relationships and can cause one to repress their emotions completely (Scheff, 2003).

> My family complained about losing the farmlands for thousands of times, saying it was because of me, the poverty was because of me. I hate them saying so, it's not my decision to break the policy, I was so unconscious as a baby and why didn't they abort me then? Why not strangle me right after my birth? If I knew what came after the birth, I would have rather strangled myself.
> ---Pan (pseudonym), a younger brother of an urban couple with one girl and one boy, only one child permitted.

Shame also combines with other emotions to form affects, such as anger and guilt. We can observe expressions of anger in the above extract, and this is more commonly found in male participants' stories than females' narratives. It suggests who was burdened with the responsibility for the family loss tied up with "black" labelling. Scheff argues that guilt serves as a vital social function to mask one's shame (Scheff, 2003). Elias notes shame goes underground as a positive variant of social control, leading to behaviour that is outside of awareness. "It is the social prohibitions and resistances within themselves, their own superego, that makes them keep silent." (Elias, 1978, p. 181). Being blamed for the family loss, financial and emotional, can also be seen in the narratives:

> They (parents) blamed me for being annoying when I asked for some help, because I was in need. Everything, everyone was so strange for me, and I knew nothing about this family while they expected me to sit and eat regularly like my siblings. My mother lost her temper very easily and blamed me for not being close to her, different from my siblings. I feel guilty, but also sad, sad for myself.
> --Fang (pseudonym), the second daughter of a rural family with three children, two children permitted.

From above two extracts, we can tell how biological parents blamed the "black children" for not being attached to them and for losing their material resources, putting the burden of responsibility onto the "black children" and regularising it into the parental routine. Coupled with earlier participants' comment on their parents' "irresponsible" decision and conduct to turn them into "black", the "responsibility" burdened upon the returned "black children" illustrated how the family conceptualised the value and functionality of children in their practices at financial *and* emotional levels. We can tell the comparisons between emotional bonds with parents between the "homed siblings" and "black children" in their parents' interpretations, and how participants explained the origins of such differences. Siblings blaming the "black children" were common in stories about the interactions after family reunifications. The "homed siblings" viewed the returned "black children" as intruders on their family relations and resources on both emotional and material levels, which suggests the family had made no preparation for readjusting the children and their relationships. Sibling blame shamed the "black children" when they were reconceptualizing the parent, sibling, self, and family, as well as their respect and worth.

> Once I argued with my sister and she could not compete with my quick response, she cried, I proudly felt like a winner at that moment. But then she said one term slowly, "black children", I suddenly burst out crying.
> --Hua (pseudonym), the second daughter of a rural family with three children, two children permitted.

We can tell from the above excerpt that how emotionally harmful it was to be labelled as "black" in family practices. Labelling "black children" was interpreted differently by participants who were conscious of their family separation and concealment, and those who were nots. As noted earlier, for participants who claimed themselves as "normal" as other children from neighbourhoods or schools, they understood the label "black children" to mean someone without *hukou*, which was something they had. But for some (approximately five or six participants) whose experiences resembled that in the excerpt above, they understood the label "black children" as a deep stigma that not only degraded their family worth and societal acceptance, but also justified such degradation. Groups of "normal" children (such as

homed siblings and only-children) and "black children" were created and socially judged, which identified these children differently as a social process, separating their labels as "us" and "them". We can tell from the above excerpt how the "homed sibling" used the label with consciousness of its harm and discrimination against the "black child", and how the participant was conscious about her status as undesirable and disadvantaged through carrying this label even in close family relationships. When participants were eager to distinguish themselves from those labelled "black", and when those like Hua were knocked down instantly by being called "black" in language, we can observe the very stigmatised identity attached to the "black" label in locating the degraded respect and resources.

As Dauncey (2014) showed in her study of disabled people' citizenship in China, labels really matter when it comes to identity and empowerment. Disabled people themselves are found not always eager to embrace the label of "disabled" due to the continued stigma it holds in their identity. From their own interpretations, they were seen in a way that was so "superior and dismissive" and felt they "deserve no respect" (Dauncey, 2020, p. 178), and many of them avoided using the term when referring to themselves in communications with the world. Negative experiences of discrimination resulting from exposure to such compelling discourse became attached to the "disability" label when the hitherto stigmatised identity was culturally accepted and legally protected (Couser, 2009; Dauncey, 2020). When Nazi Germany identified Jews by a yellow star badge and classified people into concentration camps, labelling practices of religion and culture and legitimising the use of force to harm them (Dwork, 1991; Kelman, 2020), to reduce "lives" to "bare lives" at a time of state "crisis". Also, similar to Rohingya children "blacklisted" in Myanmar, culturally accepted structural discrimination and violence against them was made legitimate through labelling and regularised into the social norms of local lives. Coming back to the "black children" who identified their births as "sin" and their personalities as "defective", their reflections on their little self-worth reflected how the family ideology and cultural acceptance reduced their freedom of self-expression, rights of being respected, and self-identity to some "lower" population simply by labelling.

6.4.2 Shame and blame in the public discourse.

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Feeling ashamed and stigmatised with the "black" label also appears to have shaped their engagements with school and peers *outside* the family. Extra efforts on fixing hukou for these children, the physical and emotional concealment of their real family relationships were noted as three key aspects of increasing their shame of being "black children".

> I felt nothing different from my siblings when I was little, until once I needed a hukou for primary school, but I was "black people" (*heiren*) then, so my father had to use his personal connections to get me a *hukou*, sent money to someone, kept calling people on the phone to help him. Then one day, he suddenly said "why you didn't go to die? You cost me so much money and effort on just a damn *hukou*". I was shocked and it was my first time to know how unwelcome I was for the family. Later I realised every time, when I needed something like paperwork or school payment, my father easily lost his temper. My existence must be such a "trouble" in his eyes.
>
> --Chun (pseudonym), the second daughter of a rural family with three children, two children permitted.

The above extract suggests that when the "black children" were prepared for stepping outside the family and engaging with the larger world, such as schools and formal registration as citizens, their access to these recourses were regarded as a privilege rather than a right by their parent(s).

> I was always worrying about submitting some certificates or documents to school since I was little. Each stamp sealed paperwork equals a bill that my father had to pay.
>
> ---Kang (pseudonym), a second daughter of a rural family with two girls and one boy, two children permitted.

What we can see from the above excerpt is how the "black children" interpreted their access to normal socialization within a given society as something beyond their parents' responsibility or obligation. Their freedom and rights to be respected as civilised social members were reconfigured as "privileges" that went beyond the family's moral

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responsibility. The sense of shame evoked from their school engagement was also noted in comparisons between the "black children" and their schoolmates. Acknowledgment of formal documented family relationships was a key aspect in differencing the "black children" from their classmates:

It's shame when my schoolmates read each other's family relations on *hukou* booklets and found out only mine said "niece". Theirs all said "daughter/son", and they laughed at me, giving me nicknames, even riding over my body like on a bike when teachers were away. I was so weak at that moment, had no courage to let anyone know this, forced myself to swallow everything and comforted myself: it will be ended when I left there for secondary school. However, it never ended. Every time we students submitted our documents, people still talked about this, good news was no one bullied me anymore, I only needed to hand in my document quietly. It's been two decades ago already, but still, the scene comes back to my eyes occasionally. I think it's brought me huge low self-esteem, continued sense of insecurity, and mental illness throughout decades.
---Han (pseudonym), the elder sister of an urban family with one girl and one boy, only one child permitted.

Feelings of shame were often described by the participants when they had to disguise their family identity to cope with their school engagements, such as when teachers were managing student files and schoolmates' curiosity about their backgrounds. They sensed their difference from peers on documental and physical levels. First, they were documented *outside* the parent-children's relationships whereas other schoolmates were officially claimed *inside* the formal parent-children bond. Second, their parents were physically absent in their school experiences such as school meetings or children's pick-up, different from their peers' parents' presence in family-school interactions. Curiosity and suspicion from peers disconnected the "black children" and reinforced their feelings of isolation and shame. Echoing feelings of helplessness in the narratives of foster maltreatment the "black children" were also aware of how little their biological parents could or would help in such situations.

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It is common to find that the "black children" internalised their births as "wrong", "illegitimate" or "not supposed to be" in line with their families' interactions as they intersected with their school lives. They made sense of their family treatments and further access to opportunities based on the label of "black children". However, feelings of being differenced, or even excluded from the "normal" identity flooded through their suppressed expressions, such as their regular use of "lonely", "sad", "helpless", "insecure", etc. The significance of understanding shame in the public discourse around the "black children" is to illustrate what forms of treatment were supposed to be given the label "black" in other citizens' eyes. What types of respect or discrimination were seen as "normal" and "acceptable"? When the label of "black" was used to defend all forms of discrimination against the population labelled with it, it explains how the stigma treated the population as less than fully human and judged their existence and rights as unworthy somehow:

> I don't like the saying that "black children" had privilege, but people around me kept saying that. People said families like mine took the privilege of their families. but how? I once complained about it with my mother whilst she said, "it's true, strictly speaking, you were not supposed to be born'.
> --Zhao (pseudonym), the younger brother of an urban family, one child permitted.

It is not unique to hear judgemental voices about the "black children" and their access to public resources was seen as "privilege" over their original rights. We can tell how voices from neighbourhoods or local communities judged the existence of "black children" as something in conflict with their benefits, though no direct evidence was presented in these families' interactions. It is remarkably important to note the parents' apparent agreement with such public judgement in the family discourse: they interpreted rights and resources of their "black children" as something beyond their entitlement as "black children", something that was "not supposed to happen". Their responses justified the stigma of being "black" and internalised it into the ideology of family and citizenship rights. Placing most of the blame for harming the family's solidarity on the "black children" was very common in narratives of problematic communications between these children and their biological families. Negative words like "extra" and "useless" to judge the value of themselves *inside* the family highlighted the stripped self-respect of being "black children".

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People said I should be grateful for my parents' decision and efforts on keeping me, though they concealed me for years, I was not abandoned nor drowned like many other people did to their daughters. I don't like such talks, people always say children owned their parents' lives when they were born, I think it nonsense, it's not the baby's choice to be born as someone unwelcomed. I know my parents have been waiting for me to say thank you for ages, whilst I have been waiting for them to say sorry for my whole life.

It was a shame to be born in this way.

 --Bao (pseudonym), the first daughter of an urban family with two children, one child only permitted.

We can see that the rights of being born, leading a life, and being partially titled with citizenship rights such as formal registration and schooling were conceptualised as some "privilege" that went beyond the normal resources and rights of the "black children", not only in voices *outside* the family, but more importantly, *inside* the family. Parents and relatives regarded their efforts raising the "black children" as extra contributions that went beyond their parental responsibilities. However, the "black children" sensed their discomfort in such master narratives of their positions in the family and public. Both family and society accounted for people's sense of normalcy by differencing the "black" population from others. Members of the society held common beliefs about both the cultural meaning of the label "black" and the stigma attached to it. This greatly affected the way in which the "black children" were kept marginal to the idea of "normal citizens".

### 6.4.3 Shame continued in later adulthood.

My analysis also revealed that the fear of being seen differently from "normal" people with "normal" relationships was notable throughout participants' reflections on how their now-reached adulthoods have been impacted by the past. My female participants talked about their fear of unpredictable and insecure adult relations, for instance, the intimate relationships with their boyfriends and husbands. It is noteworthy that these participants did not reject emotional attachment and intimacy, in fact, their experiences indicated a large

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number of "black daughters" who were longing for being confident in a secured relationship with their future partners, compensating for their early damaged needs of being nurtured, loved and valued by some parent-substitute. However, they feared to trust and connect people because of their early family separation disorder, discontinued daughterhood, and exclusive family bond.

> I don't know why some "only-children" or their parents turned angry at someone like me, blaming us for showing off how smart our parents were to break the policy in front of families with one-child, I've never seen any person do this (show-off) in my life. As a "black child", I've been rather embarrassed about my identity and my family's son-priority, it's shameful when schoolmates or colleagues asked me why my family have more children than policy permitted.
> --Jiang (pseudonym), the second daughter of an urban family, one child permitted.

Feeling ashamed of being found out or defined as "black children" by significant others was largely mentioned in narratives of problematic adult intimacy. Two major concerns were described in such shame: first, feeling ashamed of their family that presented the son-priority by having the "black children"; second, feeling ashamed of being defined as "black children" when they were trying to build up further significant relationships, such as intimacy and friendships in the larger world.

> It is impossible for me to get a boyfriend or marriage, because I have no courage for getting him to understand my past, my experience as a "black child", all my awful stories, my family with no decent behaviours. I was wanting an honest man but how could I be honest with him?
> ---An (pseudonym), the only child of an urban family.

Expectations about establishing continued, honest, and stabilised relations conflicted with their experiences which were filled with hiding, disguising, and discontinuity. The most significant challenge for this generation's adulthood presented in this research is that significant interpersonal relationships would risk their hidden identity's exposure, yet neither their experiences with family or the societal interactions had prepared them for such

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exposure and readjustment. Furthermore, the society was not ready to shift them from forms of "bare life" to "proper life" at the level of cultural beliefs when they were still labelled as "black". Therefore, we can understand why some participants were eager to distance themselves from the label of "black", or even burst out crying for being called "black child" by the family or others. Labelling "black" disconnected these children from conceptions like "normal", "us", or "insider". And as Elias argued, outsiders are stigmatised (Elias, 1965). Shame of being "black" is not only a familial process but also an overwhelmingly social and cultural phenomenon when it signals how to treat these children with the given identity correctly. Both the family and public shame not only regulated the reduced respect, freedom, and entitlements for the "black children", but also suppressed representations of perceived self-worth, love, and respect.

## 6.5 Ambivalence: Love and resentment

Whether they were loved or not by the biological parents, especially the mother, was noticeable in participants' judgements on their anger, guilt, shame, and resentment. Conflicted feelings towards their biological parents often appeared in their reflections on why they had to experience being labelled "black". Repressed self-expression dominated the family interactions between the returned "black children" and their parents. According to more than half of the participants who attempted to talk about their feelings with parents, the conversation ultimately turned a fight or monologue and the "black children" gradually learnt not to speak or communicate with parents about themselves. Several participants suggested that they reconciled with their parents because they witnessed or understood the parents' sufferings, although little was mentioned about parents' acknowledgment of harms against these children.

Emotional denial of their rights to live was commonly implied in narratives filled with family troubles and conflicts after the "black children" returned. Remarkably, emotional rejection of parents and denial of their right to live were largely suggested in families' interactions after the return rather than before, especially when a sibling's maltreatment was mentioned. These stories suggest that they were emotionally harmed *more* by their biological family than

by their foster-care experience. *Avoiding* attachment tactically played an essential role in helping the "black children" readjust themselves to their biological mothers' expectation, punishment, love, and fear. It is rather ironic to observe how the "black children" expressed their conflicted feelings of blaming the family but worrying about being blamed.

> Now I want to go far away, not somewhere close to my hometown, nor to my brother. I don't want to be close to them. My parents implanted me with a feeling of "you are unworthy of being loved". One day I asked my mother how much she paid for my college, and she gave me a number, I plan to pay it off in the near future and then I owe her nothing, I can leave her without any guilt.
> --Maomao (pseudonym), the second daughter of an urban family, one child permitted.

Avoidance or withdrawal of emotion was presented in a way which these children expressed but also they supressed their anger towards their parents. We can observe the lack of sense of belonging to the family throughout, as well as the moral burden on the "black children". A tendency to distance themselves from the family, both physically and emotionally, often occurred around participants' university entrance or financial independence. In such narratives, we can see a lowered expectation of their parents as the participants mentioned more about how they were trying to make sense of it.

"Love" and "resentment" were noted as key aspects in explaining the meaning of the family's acknowledgment of the voices of the "black children". Honneth refers to "love" as the fundamental form of reconstructing normativity from an anthropological-psychological perspective. He claims that love confirms each other with regard to their needs and thereby both subjects know themselves to be united in their neediness and dependence on each other. It is constituted as a precarious balance between deep attachment, and Honneth concentrates on the love relation between mother and child to explain the tension between dependence and interdependence (Honneth, 1995). Only the loving care and constant confirmations of the mother can enable the child to achieve independence, and recognition through love is seen as a relationship that constitutes the independent self. Experience of continued assured love must be mutual in relationships and recognition is here characterised

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by a double process (Honneth, 1995). When it comes to the institutionalisation of personal relationships in modern relationships, such as friendship, intimate relations, and family, Honneth discusses how the freedom is actualised in a social sphere constituted by intimate relations. Realizing oneself as an autonomous and free agent is essential to mutually satisfy each lover's needs, thus one develops and reinforces self-knowledge and self-confidence to realize one's own desires and projects in the love relationship (Honneth, 2014). What we can observe from the narrative of being labelled as "black children" is, however, the absent foundation of love, the overlooked needs of being acknowledged as mother and children. Some narratives noted that the mother questioned her returned "black child": "do you love her [foster mother] more than me?" (from Ding), and some participants said directly "she has [biological mother] never loved me, let's put it in this way." (from Lan).

Strawson (1963) argues that "resentment" is a pooling of reactive attitudes and feelings as it plays a major role in our dealings with one another and is integrally bound up with the very idea of human freedom and responsibility. Anger is also noted as closely connected to the assertion of self-respect and a protest against injustice. The "black children" narrated their anger or resentment at being reduced to someone "less" after they grew out of their dependency, residentially and emotionally distancing themselves for a third time following their primary biological family separation, and second-time separation from their attached foster family. Their expression of avoidance or anger suggested their seeking of time and space to accommodate their discomfort with the "norms" of family and society, repositioning the self within their reconceptualised ideas about children, parent, family, and humanity.

> I did not hate my parents for not sacrificing their careers and sending me for foster, what I hated was their continuous blame on my birth for degrading their life quality. If I could make a choice, I choose to be unborn. But I was born without a choice. I kept telling them it was not my fault to be born and cost their money, jobs, careers, but they always ignored my voice. Every time they encountered something unpleasant, they blamed it on my birth. A living hell.
> --Han (pseudonym), an elder daughter of an urban couple who have one girl and one boy, only one child permitted.

A feeling of resentment was noted in Han's reflections too. It was rather common to hear narratives like "my voice has been ignored" or "muted" in efforts on family communications. In an earlier extract from Maomao, who suggested her willingness to divorce her identity from the mother-daughter relationship by paying it off with money, we can see the decreased tendency to reconstitute reciprocal neediness and the increased desires to disconnect. Nussbaum (2016) argues that the idea of payback or retribution is a conceptual part of anger however subtle it is. Either anger focuses on some significant injury or the significant wrongful act for the victim's relative status (Nussbaum, 2016). The avoidance and anger from the "black children" suggested their discomfort in the primary family positions and their efforts to readdress the imbalanced power dynamic between parents and children, transferring their anger to constructive thinking about future good. Anger, when discussed, focused more on the parents' responsibility and obligation and how they were the ones who had failed, rather than on their own victimhood. Although the "black children" were concealed and shadowed throughout in their interactions with the larger world, they still found ways to engage themselves into various social networks such as schools, peers, love and sexual relationships, college and marriage. Multiple settings of relations rearranged their ideology of self-value, and hence their emotions varied from time to time in response to the transmitted self-confidence in being a child, a friend, a partner, a mother, etc. Conflicted feelings of anger and forgiveness, hate and love, gratitude and resentment were largely described by the "black children" circulating around their own confusions: is it fair to hate/blame/forgive?

Feeling "forgiveness" was discussed differently by the "black children" who either suggested their response as self-empowering or as "have no choice". Nussbaum explains the forgiveness process as "a harsh inquisitorial process. It demands confession, weeping and wailing, and a sense of one's lowness and essential worthlessness" (Nussbaum, 2016, p. 73). When the "black children" talked about their forgiveness, they were suggesting that their anger was a moral right, and to some participants, it was observed as pivotal to transfer their self-esteem from "undeserved" to "deserved". In their stories, the enactor of the family "forgiveness" was the "black children" alone: they bore the moral responsibility of the familyhood within their contextual understanding of history, politics, and moral values.

I can understand why they couldn't understand me, but I don't want to accept their reasons. I was born in 1990s, my parents were born in 1960s and they grew up in 1970s. All their youth was about endless political movements and campaigns. They didn't know people have marriage because of love and that parenthood required responsibilities. I don't blame them for all their ignorance because they were harmed as well. but I wish they could stop harming me, or they should never have given birth to me.

--Cai (pseudonym), the second daughter of a rural family, two children permitted.

Both "forgiveness" of the one-child policy *and* family injustice were therefore presented in narratives of their understandings of the contextual culture and gratitude for being alive and engaged with society. From their narratives of emotions shifting from being abandoned, fear and insecurity, shame, guilt, and anger, helplessness and forgiveness, we see reasons for the low self-esteem, absent family belonging, emotional avoidance or denial of the further intimacy, and deconstructed self-identity. The "black children" were trying to make sense of the moral wrong and right via a sympathetic understanding of their parents' significant loss and grief in this process. What we can observe from their sense-making is a struggle within the self that the "black children" expressed in valuing the moral responsibility for their experiences. Narratives of family interactions in their adulthoods suggested their continued efforts to communicate their discomfort in the parental routine and social norms with different significant actors in their daily lives, from the parent to sibling, to friends and peers, then boyfriends or life partners, to the larger audience such as me and this research.

Both traditional filial piety culture and their parents' victimhood suppressed their anger when the "black children" realised that they were in fact victims throughout their lives. Stocker argues that angry people have been dealt the moral or moral-like harm of being denied proper respect (Stocker, 1998). The evidence from this research suggests that the "black children" were harmed in ways that go beyond moral denial or disrespect, as their anger stems from being excluded by the family when such feelings conflicted with the justification for turning some children "black". "Black children" presented their anger because they sensed they cared about the family's acceptance and recognition of them when they were emotionally distant and socially disadvantaged, and they were entitled to expect the family, especially parents

not to have done it, and parents must be responsible for the fact that they did it. But such self-expression conflicted with the filial piety according to which children subjected their selves to the parents' desires. The anger was suppressed but not forgotten because the "black children" found their traumas unrecovered nor acknowledged still, and some responded to such suppression by self-blaming, self-harming, or self-hatred to transfer the anger to the self.

## 6.6 Summary

Emotional abandonment, fear and loneliness, blame and shame, ambivalence between love and resentment were highlighted in this chapter which examined how the "black children" reflected on their relationships with their families, and how their now-reached adulthood's relations were grounded in their past experiences. This chapter has explored what the label of "black" meant to these children in relation to identity, how they were referred to as "black" not only in practices of physical hiding, but more importantly, in experiences of being stigmatised as the population who "were not supposed to be born" and any resources given to them were seen as "privilege". The discourse of blame and shame from family and public perspectives suggest the moral responsibility was burdened onto these children. They were blamed for being born alive and having access to partial citizenship rights (e.g., *hukou* and education) and they sensed the discomfort in being lower than other "normal" children. Shame was highlighted as a key mechanism to engineer the injustice of lowering the "black children" and to silence them.

When the "black children" talked about their fear, loneliness, helplessness, and jealousy of their "homed siblings", their narratives suggested the challenge of fitting themselves within emotional bonded relationships, and how their everyday lived experiences were framed thereby. Firstly, half of the narratives described their frustration and sadness when they sensed the reciprocal detachment from their foster families because of their "outsider" identities. The differential family treatments between their foster siblings and them drew a line between the family scope and the "black children". Additionally, the texts they constantly lived with outlined the sense of being excluded. Secondly, due to this emotion of fear and

mistrust of their biological family the returned "black children" went through destroyed self-confidence in their family membership, entitlement and judgement. Shame was deeply hidden and expressed through anger or guilt in many narratives of reflecting on the value of their births, especially when participants presented how the moral responsibility for parents was interpreted. Presentations of shame attached to the label "black children" noted the disconnection between this population and their significant relationships, such as mother-child bond, friendships, love intimacy. The marginal status of these "black children" continued throughout their family and societal interactions. Conflicts between love and resentment prevented the mutual recognition between the "black children" and their biological families after they moved back in together. The cultural acceptance and even protection of the structural discrimination against the "black children" was highlighted in narratives of "love" and "forgiveness", especially when it came to the moral hierarchy between generations. The power and violence against children with labelling was justified by the label itself when the differencing was regularised into parental routine and continued throughout their constitutions of self-worth.

# Chapter seven: Conclusion

## 7.1 Introduction

This research has explored the phenomenon of the "black children", a very little-known generation who lived with concealment under the one-child policy. As one of these children, there was no mention of my name in the family registration for almost three decades, no photograph of my face in the family photo album shown to my parents' friends, and I could not address my own mother as "mum" in any public situation. What was the meaning of "family" to someone like me? What was the meaning of "children" in families like my own? When the population of China was quoted as 1.4 billion, what was the status of these "Chinese citizens"? How far was it from a "black child" to a "child" in the family? What would promote "humans" to "citizens" in this society? The purpose of the research reported in this thesis was to explore the voices of my generation, to listen to their stories and to try to understand their victimhood. Although the one-child policy and the sufferings of parents have been well-researched, only limited studies have focused on the daily experiences and emotions of being "black children" throughout their life courses. This meant more than the lack of legal personhood registration in official documents. The injustices experienced by the "black children" were coproduced by family power and state policy. To answer questions about who these children were, what they experienced, and how they were affected, this research involved the semi-structured interviewing of 20 participants to explore their lived experiences of being "black". The "black identity" was experienced on four levels: formal registration of citizenship, physical concealment, and emotional distance *inside* the family, and social alienation *outside* the family.

As a generation who lived through the silent grief of being *outsider shameful* or *lesser* and to some extent still remain in this silence because of no family acknowledgement nor formal apologies, the "black children" in this research described in great and intimate detail how they experienced their everyday life – the material resources and documents they were denied, their physical presence/absence in the family and society, and the emotional bonds

that were forged and broken. The primary objective of my research was to hear these children's stories from their now-adult perspectives and respect their freedom of self-expression, something that had largely been absent in pre-existing narratives of family and public discourse. Instead of seeing children as passive vessels of/for capital in researching what happened to individual families in relation to a state policy in most existing studies, I focus on the children themselves – it is only in this way that their accumulated experiences of being "black" can be revealed. In short, what really happened to these babies after they were born and determined as "black"? Why had we heard so little of their voices? How did local politics, cultural norms and values, and Chinese familism, conspire to create "black children"? Starting with their births and the reasons for their family rearrangements, this study found that the power dynamic between the state policy and individual families was key to understanding how parents negotiated with the everyday political constraints on local levels. The study heard the "black children" describe why they were sent away from the biological families to be foster cared by some relatives, how they experienced early infancy and childhood with foster parents, siblings, and significant people in their neighbourhoods, what had left traumatised memories and profoundly impacted their senses of family, children, and love. Narratives of family "return" that were physical but not emotionally fulfilling revealed differences between their parents' ideas of family and these children's understandings of "home". Differential family treatment of the returned "black children" and "homed siblings" were also significant in affecting how the participants reconceptualised *family, love, worth*, and *human entitlement*.

## 7.2 Why were the "black children" born?

### 7.2.1 Moral hierarchy between individuals' freedom and family fertility desire

It is significant to explain the birth of this generation to understand how children were distributed. The first key point is who played the role of decision-maker in such family arrangements? We can see that the mother's bodily autonomy was not always exercised by herself in practicing the pregnancy, abortion, and birth-giving. Some narratives described how paternal grandparents demanded more babies than the policy permitted, and participants

frequently excused their parents' actions with phrases such as "they had no choice" but to respond to the filial piety responsibility demanded by patriarchal familism. Maternal grandparents also played an indirect role in many narratives, reinforcing their daughter's subordination to patrilineal hierarchy in exchange for a more secure conjugality with phrases such as "you would be divorced without producing a boy". Fathers more frequently joined in with paternal grandparents. Notably, the most active agents were women – the mother in-law or mother – who were involved in most forms of baby-conceiving and delivery, in direct violence or verbal abuse against mothers who gave birth to girls, and in family-sanctioned harm to baby girls such as female infanticide, abandonment, or despatch to foster care. I propose the term "patriarchal devotion"*, acknowledging* Kandi's conception of *patriarchal bargain* (Kandiyoti, 1988), to explain why these female members played their roles as perpetrators to harm other younger women in a manner more active than passive, because they internalised the patriarchy into their cultural beliefs and conceptualised themselves as the ruler rather than the ruled. The more actively these females enforced patriarchal power over other younger women, the more cultural capital they accumulated in the patriarchal system.

In a semi-religious form of *worship,* conceived as an act by which people gain something for the good of their soul (Underhill, 1937), mothers actively reduced their own born daughters to something less than living humans, and the absence of emotions involved in such family discourse was remarkable. Women carried out female infanticide as part of their devotion to the "para-religion" of son-giving, or patrilineal succession, though it seemingly contradicted their mothering instincts. Every time they were questioned "why" by the participants in this study, they used phrases similar to "everyone did so in my place/era". It seemed that female infanticide was morally justified in their ideals of family value and community cohesion and continued to serve a beneficial patriarchal purpose regardless of the mandated policy. Durkheim (1915) suggested that personal sacrifice, often in contradiction to people's desires or instincts, was required by society to ensure people's respect and obedience, and respect was the emotion through which people felt this internal and wholly spiritual pressure. People generate the feeling that such pressure comes from the power of society, and the moral authority derived from socially cohesive ideals, telling people how life should and should not be lived (Durkheim, 1915). Therefore, I argue that these women in this study conspired in

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violence against other younger women as evidence of their willing patriarchal devotion and this violence could take the form of female infanticide, gender-selective abortion, abandonment, or concealment in pursuit of reserving the legal personhood for a boy. More importantly, all such forms of gender violence against daughters were practiced or continued even after state policy changes, such as when the modified policy (since 1984) allowed a second birth if the first was a girl, but the couple had to stop whatever the second gender was, and register both children as legal citizens (Greenhaigh, 2008). Cultural acceptance of the structural violence against the "black daughters" was notable in people's internalised ideal of moral value.

Similar to women who had only control over their labour power and access to old-age security in patrilocal contexts through their son's marriages (Kandiyoti, 1988), in this research, the grandmother's generation practiced their control over their children's marriages, and made the conjugal relation secondary to patrilineal dominance to ensure their life resources and emotional preoccupation, but female infanticide or daughter-concealment was carried on as a much more radical form of patriarchy than suppressing the romantic love between youngsters. The core of the former was on fertility whilst the latter was on conjugality. In contrast to Kandi's research on women's resistance to classic patriarchy lay in the extension of the patrilocal household, in this research, mothers, or parents whose employments and residence were in urban China, experienced little patrilocal marriage since the late 1980s in these family narratives. Studies on family division (*fenjia*) in rural areas have revealed changes such as growing demands for conjugal independence (Cohen, 1992), and the extension of familism beyond the village community (Yan, 2016). However, the patriarchal force (not only from the patrilineal side but also from the maternal side) was suggested as the dominant reason either by the mother/couple or the narrator herself in most narratives. It leads, therefore, to questions as to what extent the mother had or did not have her own bodily autonomy? For whom was the child born? Who benefitted?

It was not the intention of this research (nor would it have been possible) to detect whether it was true or not that the mother/parents indeed had no choice when they gave birth to the baby girl and concealed her as "black", shutting her away from the primary family affection and protection. The presence of such suggestions in my participants' narratives suggests that

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mothers took it as a sensible response to comfort themselves, citing their responsibility to adhere to the primary family value and respect for the grandparents. Mothers/parents explained it as a response to their "black children" and, in fact, suggested a tone of conscious or unconscious fear of facing their children's discomfort, as well as acknowledging what their decision-making entailed. The basic characteristic of Chinese social structure was expressed in the form of arrangements, classification, and order, termed *renlun* (human relationships) under Confucianism. The core of *lun* stressed differentiation between the noble and base, intimate and unconnected, senior and junior, father and son, etc. Order was based on classification and such hierarchical differentiations lead to key understanding of the patterns of Chinese social organization (Fei, 1992). When parents explained their dilemmas between keeping the children and obeying the grandparents, a moral hierarchy was presented in the family discourse, used to excuse the harms they did to the "black children" by reference to the responsibility of family moral order (which was normalised into their family ideology). Both children's and parents' uses of the phrase "had no choice" reciprocally implicated the moral responsibility of the primary family respect and value of a child, and its loss.

The dilemma between the mothering instinct of protecting their babies and submitting these babies to patriarchal violence lay behind what women believed, and their practices exposed their beliefs. Though the ancestor worship and kinship loyalty was undermined by social transition in China post 1949, family worship was preserved in informal control over individuals' fellow kin (Hu and Tian, 2018), even attenuated the influence of state's birth-planning policy(Peng, 2010). Such control promoted norms of civic solidarity that establish and enforce moral obligations to the community (Tsai, 2007). Patriarchal norms and values appear to have shaped these families' own belief frameworks and those who acted accordingly perceived their lives as normal, valuable, meaningful, and worthy in line with those principles. This is very similar to the common sense understanding of religion which implies that the human body has to be subordinated to some higher purpose as embodiment (Turner, 2011). Bloodline perpetuation is deeply ingrained in the core of Chinese culture that the very meaning of human existence is defined by its going (Peng, 2010). The power of the body was expressed through performance of family fertility: mothers' and babies' bodies were taken as the most readily available "instrument" by which to convey a belief in the "sacred" nature of patrilineal succession – meaning that it was deserving of respect and

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required the performance of unquestioning service or devotion – and such belief was expressed and performed in the local society as a whole.

Challenging Yan's discussion on decreased familism and increasing individualism in the process of China's modernisation – the children were positioned as the central value of the family relationships and grandparents' power and influence dropped in the family decision-making and taking (Yan, 2016), this research argues the moral hierarchy was presented by highlighting the children's moral responsibility for the senior generations, especially in relation to the fertility freedom. In this light, the individual's physical body and political rights were conceptualised as essential parts that could be confiscated to produce benefits at the family will.

### 7.2.2 Patriarchal devotion and trial birth

The second key point is who were the subjects of the decision to use such gendered violence sanctioned by the individual family? Mothers and children (especially female children) carried out the consequences of family arrangements related to forced pregnancy, hiding the pregnancy and birth, and concealing the baby once born. The presence of male "black children" in the family conversation was very small, because even though some boys were born illegally, their parents willingly paid for their penalty and prepared well for claiming the child officially and publicly, as evidenced by the male participants who described how their elder sisters were sent away for adoption to make room in the family for them. For those daughters who were fully abandoned after their births, I would argue that this could be described as "emotional abortion" – these children were medically born with physical features, but their development nurture, love, and bond with the biological family was terminated. Although these children played no part in this research – all we have are the stories told to me about them – I would like to keep this small space to remember and respect their loss and suffering. For those daughters who experienced concealment and later family return (who contributed most of the stories in this research), their establishment and development of family nurture, love, and bond was suspended and destabilised by their parents' family hierarchy between them and their "homed siblings". However reluctant the parents would be to acknowledge

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such injustice against the concealed "black children", their family arrangement of "one-in-and-one-out" drew a clear line between who was valued *more* and *less*.

It is important to reiterate the prenatal gender violence against these female children who were born alive due to the family assuming their gender would be male, also the postnatal gender violence against them even without any physical presence of a brother in the family, so we can understand what children were viewed as *worthy* of being born, of continued family affection and protection, of stabilized socialization, whilst not in the family's interpretation of children and humans. Many first or second daughters involved in this research were born as a gender-test to decide which child stayed in and which child moved out. I argue, therefore, that children such as these were born as a "trial birth" and then experienced their biological family interactions as an outsider: the meaning of trial here is twofold, firstly their births were performed as tests that aimed at evaluating whether the babies were desirable or not; and, secondly, their family positions were decided as "out" from the evidence of their gender.

Apart from those who were born as a family "trial", some "black children" in this research understood their birth as the result of parents' wanting multiple children, a desire for both genders, or fear of consequences if they lost their only child. It is important to note that many such parents were subject to the urban birth policy that permitted only one child, but they still expressed strong and determined willingness to break the policy with some foreseen consequences, including a penalty, non-registration problems and the concealment of children. It was not common, but a couple of participants concluded that their parents' motivations for their births was the worry about a lonely later life if they lost their only child. They explained such family worries as affected by the media and by other adults' opinions. Losing the only child is a real and pressing problem in China (Jiang, Li and Sánchez-Barricarte, 2014; Pan, Liu, L. W. Li, *et al.*, 2016). In short, whatever the reason for the birth in the family discourse, it seemed that these parents broke the policy constraints very conscious of the dilemma involved in fitting the "black children" between family and political permission.

### 7.2.3 Summary

It is interesting to look at the conflicting ideas between the more recent one-child policy (or the modernity of industrialization) and the longer historical culture of fertility ideals. The point of examining the birth reasons of these "black children" is to understand the gap between parental ideas of children's entitlements, moral responsibility in childbearing, respect for human freedom, and their concealed children's family ideals: the "black children" were born to fulfil the family's desired gender or number, although the parents were conscious of these children's suspended, or fully lost, access to their legal personhoods. Such births involved a system of belief and practice in which the family fertility decision-maker determined priority and the implementation of a sensible family arrangement in the light of the dominant discourse.

The commonly occurring "birth-trial" of some of these "black children" suggested that women's piety of patriarchy was completed within two stages: firstly, the baby was delivered to test the gender as a "patriarchy bargain" in exchange for the mother's sustained conjugal relationship. Secondly, the baby girl was forced away (or sacrificed in radical stories of female infanticide) as a "patriarchy devotion" to evidence the mother's virtue of worshipping the male. Smith (2009) argues that we learn how to order our loves through various worship-style practices that shape our identity and guide the direction of our "loves" (Smith, 2009). Valuing a not-yet-come boy over an already-born girl can be likened to such a ritualistic practice in this cultural context. It was presented as an organized faith that has written codes of mothers' regulatory behaviour and personal belief, or purpose. When I argue that "patriarchal devotion" is a religious-meaning practice of patrilineal virtue, I would like to emphasize the radical postnatal gender violence against daughters that closely followed the prenatal discrimination against them, whatever the health damage or emotional loss the woman herself would go through (Yuehanxun, 2004; Johnson, 2016b), and however much this conflicted with the implementations of the state policy. Foucault argued piety as an excellence self-design technology to produce religious excellence or virtues by the discipline of the body, while Weber interpreted acts of piety as the articulation of a modernised everyday world (or habitus), namely "how certain cultural developments produced a particular type of personality and a particular rational conduct of life" (Turner, 2011, p. 55). It is striking to witness the reports in this study of how much women actively partook in conspired violence against their daughters and granddaughters to discipline their piety of patriarchy, and how

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little presence men's practices or voices occupied in the family narratives about such harms, even though they apparently received the dominant benefits.

## 7.1 Primary conceptualised childhood, family membership, and legal status.

### 7.3.1 Discontinued motherhood and displaced childhood

The main aim for the concealment of a "black child" was to remove her/him from the biological parents' identifiable relationships via the *hukou* registration document, physical interactions, and emotional attachment. The primary tactic widely applied to the "black children", regardless of the fact that many of them were legally born as the first or second daughter in the family, was to deregister them, leaving them living in a *hukou-less* status during their early infancy and childhood, and sometimes even longer into adulthood. This not only removed the "black children" from the formal registered relationships but also shut off their access to any entitlement to legitimate protections. The second tactic was sending the "black children" to grandparents or close relatives in rural areas to remove their physical presence from the biological families' everyday lives. Corresponding to the grandparents' radical intervention upon the birth and distribution of children, the extended family's networks remarkably continued through these concealment practices; the "black children" were forced away from their biological nuclear connections but were engaged in relationships with foster families. And their relationships with their primary caregivers were shifted in many narratives: moving from one family to another, causing them to practice calling different people "mother", "father", "sibling". This introduced the third tactic to distance their emotional bond with the biological parents, with the purpose of lowering the risks in being given away. The fostered "black children" were sent to their foster families at a very early age, perhaps from a couple of days to a couple of months old, thus training them to think of the foster parents as their real parents, which necessarily brought together their physical hiding with their narratives. Consequently, it was not exceptional for the "black children" to conceptualize their primary family identity as the child of the foster family.

But when we turned to views from the foster family's side, evidenced by the accounts of participants who described how the foster parents treated them well or not, the situation

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became more complex. From the perspective of the foster parents, most of them were aware of the temporary nature of their foster-care, often noted by the biological parents at the beginning of the arrangement, and little mention was made of a permanent agreement on adoption in the narratives. In contrast to the perceptions of these infants or very small children who naturally conceptualised the caregivers as the mother-substitute whatever treatment they experienced, some foster parents viewed the fostered children as a costly burden. Foster's siblings, while mentioned less than their parents, also played a part in disconnecting the "black children", or even practiced maltreatment against their fostered "siblings". Narratives of foster family disconnection, ignorance, or even maltreatment suggest two points: firstly, some foster families treated the fostered children differently in terms of material resources and emotional care, because they saw the relationship as a short-term interaction. Secondly, some narratives indicated the nature of "black children" disadvantaged their foster treatments. Modelling the foster parental treatment, some foster siblings presented similar attitudes toward the "black children" as well.

The "black children" began to conceptualise the boundary between them, and the notion of family based on their daily interactions, as well as reciprocal recognition between parents and children, and between siblings. The core of understanding the impacts from foster-care maltreatment is the very idea of "outsider" that was expressed often very directly – "*I belong to neither side.*" The dilemma between "wanting to be in" and "being outside either side" was well presented in the above reflections for us to understand how the foster-care concealment profoundly influenced the "black children" regarding the primary conceptualization of motherhood, childhood, and self-worth in the realm of the family. The absence of proximity was highlighted here, as well as the long-lasting effects on lacking their emotional secure base in the foster families' relationships. As Bowlby's research on attachment making and breaking suggest, it is significant for children to have a secure attachment relationship with their primary caregivers to form positive self-reflections later in life (Bowlby, 1979). However, what we see from this research is about disruptive connections and inconsistent caregiving for the "black children". Acknowledging their desires for continued mother-children's bond and family nurture was very absent in either the foster families' performed parenting or the biological parents' reflections on the shifting caregiving.

## 7.3.2 Destabilised family interactions and marginalised family membership

Unlike the narratives of foster maltreatment, some other participants described their primary attachment to the mother/father-substitute (who practiced parental love, nurture, and protection of the "black children", which ensured a more stabilised and continued sense of motherhood and childhood for these children. However, return to the biological family disrupted such continuous attachment and caused these children other issues of maladaptation (further explained in the following section on *return*). More frequent visits or continued childbearing support money from the biological parents did not necessarily lead to more foster parental affection towards or protection of their "black children". Furthermore, some participants recounted that they never tried to tell their biological parent(s) about foster maltreatment although their biological parent(s) visited them several times, because they perceived the visitor parent(s) as "stranger" and conceptualised the relationship with the foster family as closer. It is remarkable to notice the absence of individual or institutional intervention in these children's foster-care in such narratives, not only because the "black children" could not be made present to any public views, but also because of their marginalised positions in the biological family's everyday life.

Contradiction between the increasing individualisation of Chinese society post Maoist era and the decreasing familism during a social transformation has been sharply presented here. Though the parent generation was born and raised in a highly developed collectivist society, the Chinese individual was also disembodied from the traditional networks of family, kinship, and community with the aim of encouraging them to take part actively in the nation-state negotiation with modernity since the late 1970s (Yan, 2010), the very beginning of the one-child policy. Political and economic reform programs had untied individual labourers from the collective constraints but still maintained the social order, then the discussion of family division (*fenjia*) ensured that new families were created with changes such as growing demands for conjugal independence, distributed property, more individualised family arrangements, etc (Cohen, 1992; Greenhalgh, 2003). We can see how much the influence from the familial fertility desire, demands, and decisions had engaged with the beginning of the "black children", and how close connections had become between concealment and extended family supports, however, the attitudes of the individuals involved in the foster

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maltreatment ironically conflicted with the very ideal of family collectivism. Some biological parents viewed the responsibility of nurturing while concealing a "black child" as shared familial moral values within their extended families, or reciprocal benefits with arrangement (such as childbearing money in exchange of the foster-care). However, some foster parents conceptualised such foster-care as an additional burden imposed by the "other". As a result, the individualised family pattern and the values underpinning traditional familism conflicted in the middle of producing the "black children", which led to these children struggling to fit themselves into an individualised family setting, or the extended family context. Feelings of not belonging to either side were evident in their self-positioning within their significant primary relationships with families.

Similar to the parent-children's separation experienced by the left-behind children in migrated China, stabilised family interactions and bonded mother-children attachment were very absent in the family narrative and children's developments were thereby profoundly influenced. However, what traumatised the "black children" more than those left-behind children whose family memberships were claimed and recognized, was the unacknowledged family identity attached to the label of "black" in the family and a given community. Different from the "abeyance" status experienced by the left-behind children when their family recognition was suspended but promised by their migrated parents (Murphy, 2020b), the promised family reunification or recognized mother-children's bond was hardly presented in narratives of the "black children". Struggles to the family separation at young ages and lost their freedom of claiming the self as one of the family, also one of citizens in a given society (in a similar way that the Jewish children experienced to run away from the institutional cleansing), the "black children" experienced little responses from either the caregivers or biological parents to help them make sense of why they lived differently from other children. Also, similar with Rohingya children's difficulties in belonging to a community when they could not belong to a family, the "black children" experienced forced leave and limited access to stabilised childhood. When we rethink about the legacy on lost human freedom through remembrance of Holocaust children and refuges victims like Rohingya children, it is common to observe these innocent children have problems of fitting the self-identity within a given relationship, such as family, community, or society.

Furthermore, treatment from their neighbourhoods and community increased/enhanced their differentiation with the other children and families in two ways: one involved the hiding away from any local investigation, while another concerned the jokes from significant adults around them. Their narratives described the discomfort in hiding, confinement, no understandable responding, and also the discourse that "your exposure would cause the whole family loss". Discomfort in being different from other children in the same living places at the same time was also reinforced by significant adults' jokes like "your mother didn't want you" that denied the relation between a child and parent(s), reminding them of their position as "other" within the very family upon which they had to depend. Compared with actors who practiced their relationships, interactions, and identities within continued, stable and inclusive families and communities, the "black children" experienced discontinued, destabilised, and marginalised positions within their individual families and local communities.

### 7.3.3 Summary

Following the births of the "black children", the main strategy to conceal their ongoing existences was to send them away from the biological family residence to some village foster families for their early infancy and childhood, disallowing their formal family relationship registration, and distancing their emotional attachment to their biological parents. We can see that such arrangements forced the "black children" away from their biological family connections at formal, physical, and emotional levels. Then they went through short-term foster care with attached or maltreated family treatments, conceptualizing the primary ideas of motherhood, siblinghood, and childhood within contemporary family relationships, and creating their family belonging or non-belonging in line with the foster parental treatments. Therefore, the "black children" established their very primary understandings of "family" and "mother" based on their experiences of disguised family relationships in naming and residence, and physical confinement when the foster family needed to submit to community surveillance. Their loss of freedom to experience a natural family engagement with parents and siblings, and the daily presence of documents furthered their sense of "not my family" or "not my mother", which resulted in their positioning their self-identity on the edge of either their biological or foster family, or even outside both.

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Furthermore, neighbourhoods' jokes or gossip about these children's "outside" position, their foster family's response to local investigation and surveillance through disappearing these children in their regularised family relationships, together reinforced the line between the "community" that defined "family" and "children" in the local context, and the "other" who were reminded of their identity as "black children". A consequence of the existence of community is to produce norms, which serve as the basis for an entire normative order that fosters unity, for example defining standards of membership in a group (Möllers, 2020). Narratives of struggling to position themselves either as the child of biological parents or of the foster family are not exceptional in this research - these "black children" were reminded of their awkwardness as something different from "we" in many ways. Emerging from this research was how common it was to find the children's discomfort in sensing how different they saw themselves from siblings and neighbourhood children, from physical presence to emotional treatment, from the realm of family to public affairs like *hukou* registration, local investigation, community surveillance. In short, their ownership of the primary family membership and community recognition was lost in the process of foster concealment, which was nevertheless widespread as a normalised family strategy to fulfil a set of fertility arrangements.

## 7.4 Distinction between the "black children" and "children"

### 7.4.1 Formal identity --- *hukou* registration

As most biological parents thought the family return would terminate the traumas (assuming that parents heard and acknowledged these happenings) of their "black children", there was a big misunderstanding that the access of *hukou* registration and family cohabitation reallowed these children's family love, nurture, rights and entitlements, freedom, and respect. The meaning of *hukou* documents were largely different between parents and the "black children" in aspects of entitlements, access to resources, and family recognition. For parents, firstly, their "black children" were given *hukou* documents as some "privileged" resources, which suggested the family viewed such efforts as something beyond the entitlements of their "black children", something which put their "black children" in a favourable or superior position. Secondly, fixing *hukou* instrumentally reallowed their "black children" to have access

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to public resources (like education which was mostly noted in this research), making them equal to the "homed siblings" because parents regarded the significance of *hukou* merely on the level of legal personhood. Contrast to such understandings of family registration, the "black children" interpretated their *hukou* documents not only as instrumental tools to allow them to be legal persons, but also to demonstrate their memberships of the family, furthermore, their citizenships in a given society. These "black children" regarded their family registrations more than instrumental papers, but as their formal acknowledgment of identity – child of their parents, insider of their family, an included member of their own society, a citizen of their mother state.

## 7.4.2 Physical return and family cohabitation

In the same way what the *hukou* registration by no means ensured the fully access to family membership for the "black children", returning to their biological parents' residence and living together on a daily basis did not necessarily build up reciprocal family love and solidarity between parents and children. Firstly, the absence of well-prepared material resources and emotional recognition discouraged the returned "black children" from reconceptualising the biological "motherhood", "childhood", and "familyhood". These children were shifted from their primary bonds with the foster family to the unfamiliar-biological bond, with no appropriately prepared room for their physical and emotional readjustments. Lack of comfortable material resources such as beds/bedrooms, clothes and foods allocated in equal ways to their "homed siblings" were common causes of maladaptation. Also, their dilemma between missing the foster-mother and fear of hurting their biological mothers' feelings were frequently suggested by mother-children's conflicts. The consequences of discontinued and suspended motherhood negatively affected the reconnection between biological mother and their children in this stage. A different understanding of "family" and "return" between biological parents and their" black children" was highlighted here: parents might have seen "family return" as children's daily regularised physical presence in the family's continuous residence ---"family" meant all members' physical presence and "return" equalled "cohabitation". Whereas the children were looking for more emotional refurbishment and reconnection than parents realised –"family" suggested reciprocal acceptances between parents and children as a unit in a continuous manner, and "return" opened the door for

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these children to be included in stabilised parental attention, affection, and protection which they were supposed to have a right to after their births.

Another problem for the "black children" to experience continued family interactions as similar as their "homed siblings" was the continued physical confinement when the family received visitors. Narratives of continued hiding away from the family visitors when these children returned to their biological parents' residences were not exceptional. Moreover, the "black children" were temporarily but frequently removed from the family networks in response to such conflicts ---- these children were physically hidden for a second time to protect and sustain the family's network built-up and sustainment. It would not be fair to say these "black children" were included in such networks or in family continued daily practices because the opposite was sharply presented in this research ---- the "black children" were still stepping on the edge of the continued and stabilised family interactions from day-to-day. Therefore, although parents' belief in "family return" was observed in this research, the "black children" showed little recognition of "home" or "reunification". They suggested a "home" was more than somewhere people physically presented together through their daily interactions, but, rather, was a space that would accommodate their needs of love, nurture, and respect.

### 7.4.3 Reconceptualization of family membership and citizenship

The returned "black children" were not only absent or shadowed in the family's physical presence when they responded to the larger world, but also in the emotional recognized "unit". Feelings of being forced away and treated as an "outsider" were repeated in such narratives, as well as issues of sibling maltreatment when the "homed siblings" had problems of conceptualising the returned "black children" as the family member and affording them respects and love. In fact, sibling maltreatment formed a big part of narratives describing the problematic reciprocal reconceptualisation between the family and "black children". Firstly, there was some gendered maltreatment against the returned "black daughters" when the parents ignored or even encouraged some violence from the male "homed siblings". Secondly, there was maltreatment between sisters when the returned "black children" experienced physical or verbal abuse even though their parents were aware of this. Parental differentiated

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treatments between their "homed siblings" and "black children" were notably interwoven with sibling maltreatment in this research. Children reconceptualized their family entitlements and rights based on their conceptualization of the worth of self and others. For example, the "homed sibling" shamed the returned "black child" with phrases like "you were not supposed to be born" to draw the line between *worth* and *worthless*.

Family shame was notable in narratives of how parents and siblings referred to the "black children" in the family discourse to position these children differently from their "homed siblings". Not only the human body but also one the mind and spirit were left marked by a violent structure (Galtung, 1990). Shame was practiced when the "black children" were devalued and rejected in accordance with people's judgements of their label as "black", their status as a costly burden, their identity as "extra", "not supposed to be born", "worthless". Such family violence against the returned "black children" was normalised, which made the structural discrimination against them, especially the daughters, look reasonable and even right in the name of authorised power (e.g., the state, law, policy). The effects of sibling maltreatment become clear when we hear participants described themselves as something "less than my brother" or "worthless", in analysis of how a family hierarchy was built up based on differential parental treatments.

It is important to note how parents' ideas of family and protection conflicted with how their "black children" understood them, to explain why such family tactics were not an individual choice, but nationally widely employed upon these innocent children and how they were differently viewed between generations. Firstly, parents represented their very idea of family as a realm of collective good that ensured their fertility desires, the virtue of filial piety, parental protection of their children, and cohabitation with children in the contexts of the policy constraints. They physically gave birth to the "black children" then formally and emotionally removed them from the family officially recognised relationships to protect the others' sustained legitimatised engagements with the state and society. However, the "black children" viewed their lack of family love, nurture, and legal personhood as the loss of basic needs to help new-borns to become members who had connections with individual families and the larger society. Secondly, parents regarded their "black children" as very immature members whose benefits could be restored by the later family cohabitation, whereas

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continued concealment was necessary to protect the others due to the continued policy constraints. Nevertheless, a family hierarchy was established when the "black children" looked into their parents' decision-making: parents and the "homed siblings" were positioned higher whilst they themselves went lower, or even to outsider to complete the others' family solidarity in contexts of the policy constraints. Furthermore, the "black children" experienced the gap between the foster and biological families when both were trying to protect their relationships with the legitimised community, which marginalised their positions within either the foster or biological family. Thirdly, parents appeared to have little awareness of family readjustments that may have been required for all members in the family to relocate themselves with the returned "black children". Readjustments presented here were largely practiced by the newly arrived "black children" who were struggling to fitting themselves within already bonded relationships between their biological parents and "homed siblings". When the biological parents used the family behaviours of their "homed children" as a parameter to measure the maladaptation of their returned "black children", they performed a tendency to judge these children's personality traits as "defective" or "problematic".

### 7.4.4 Summary

The absence of family belonging and recognition between the returned "black children" and their biological families was remarkable when participants reflected on their ongoing relationships with the biological families. Honneth sees recognition as factors of love, legal respect and social esteem that are displayed in basic values of humans beings who have needs, and are equally entitled to autonomy and capability of achievement (Honneth, 2012). With a shared "ethics" of trust (an attitude of "take others as persons who take you as a person") and solidarity (each member's need stands at the centre of attention), members of society relate to each other and respect each other's autonomy, and only the equality of rights and duties can defend 'citizenship (Honneth, 2012). However, differential treatments between the "homed siblings" and "black children" either before or after the cohabitation were presented as the normal domestic picture: beginning with the absent legal personhood, followed by the lack of continued family love, nurture, and protection, then discounted respect and freedom which was normalised by the family hierarchy as well as in the name of state policy. It was rarely found that the parents or siblings treated the needs and wants of

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the returned "black children" with the same respect as their longer-tern family members. The family discourse tended to normalise their treatment of these "black children" with the name of "policy force" and internalised it into the idea of "necessity" of keeping "collective benefits". And thus, such family-sanctioned harms against the "black children" were somehow excused by the state force towards individual families and justified by the virtue of "family good". Both parents and siblings were not only conscious of the family hierarchy but also jointly reinforced it by reducing the freedom of these "black children" to express their discomfort in such family "norms".

The "black children" could only establish their ideas of self-worth and family membership based on relationships they built up with their surroundings: parents, siblings, significant voices from the larger world such as neighbourhoods, schools, and media. People could only acquire their autonomy of their own in relation to other people who respect each as equal person, as Honneth said, "autonomy is relational" (Honneth, 1995, p. 42). No relation of recognition can do without a mutually agreed upon norm (Honneth, 1995). Moral principles determined all conceptions of a legitimate social order that considered what achievements to be higher or "worth", then what "becomes decisive norm for justifying modern social orders" (Honneth, 1995, p. 103). All their storytelling was circulating around settings of relationships in which they were forced away from the family solidarity ---- relation with foster family, biological parents and "homed siblings", and further networks with the society. They positioned themselves as *lower* or *outsider* than their "homed siblings" because of the regularised family differential treatments. Parents' agreements to such difference shamed the identity of the "black children". When the returned "black children" presented their discomfort in fitting themselves into the order and internalizing it into the family identity, hey were blamed for causing others discomfort by talking about their own.

## 7.5 Structural distinction between the "black children" and "normal" population

### 7.5.1 From family to school

Family return opened their access to more institutionalised interactions than family units, for instance, school, though problematic relationships were interplayed within. It is important to

note their school experiences both institutionalised their identities of "insider" and "outsider" within the realms of the larger world, like peers, local community, the state, and society, to further our understanding of how the "black children" were inducted from the family to the society with their continued shame of being "black". Firstly, the school system institutionalized the "black children" into public engagements on formal level even during family concealment. Nevertheless, the school system also distinguished the "black children" from their peers on formal and emotional levels: when the "black children" experienced disguised family relationships on documents and absent parents' presence at their school lives.

### 7.5.2 From school to society

Following narratives about school, university, and adulthood, especially their problems with intimacy that was influenced by their experiences of being "black children", ideals of motherhood and childhood were frequently mentioned by participants. These narratives suggest the imagined ideal of motherhood and childhood was not only for the next generation but also for the participants themselves --- their imagined further children were another embodiment of their own vulnerability and dependency, who would need their parental love, nurture, protection, and respect then. Other narratives noted some participants' intentions of disconnecting themselves from roles of parent and family, such as through having no marriage nor children of their own when they described how they had failed in trusting humanity and relationships. Reflections on such imagined relation between mother and children were noted as early as 11 or 12 years old in this research when participants talked about their problematic relationships with their biological parents. In contrast to the one group who were expressing their desires for new chances to produce family love and respect for the next generation, the second group of participants presented their loss of trust by not wanting to traumatise further young children within the family. Both groups were in fact voicing no trust in their original family relationships between parents and children, neither in further hopes of restoring the family love.

### 7.5.3 From the "black children" to a traumatized generation

A traumatised generation had therefore emerged from their days of being born to the time for considering their own marriage and fertility. The "black children" themselves, parents and siblings, and public voices were responding to the policy changes differently depending upon the influences on their individual lives. Firstly, some "black children" believed that the policy had profoundly determined and shaped their lives through two or three decades already, and that a change of a policy would in no way bring their loss back. Some participants claimed themselves to be as "normal" as other children in the community, saying that there was no influence on their families from the policy changes though they had earlier told stories that one of their elder sisters were sent away to make rooms for their births. Secondly, when participants mentioned their parents' responses to the policy changes, it was very common to hear claims about the family loss of money—penalty they paid to local governments. Although many stories noted some daughters who were sent away for adoption or abandonment, little was noted in parents' concerns about their loss before the political contextual changes. Thirdly, discussion on encouraging the second and third births have mainly taken up voices in the neighbourhoods, community and mass media, the legacy on the" black children" seemingly not worthy of people's attention in narratives of how people around told the "black children" that "everything's finished now, you are as same as your sibling". In short, the "black children" viewed the change of policy and of political contexts as of little helps in acknowledging their sufferings and loss, hearing their silenced voices, restoring their human respects and freedoms to be the same as other citizens in the society. The family conceptualised the children's losses more as some structure of their culture rather as than individual human cost and saw their practise of gender violence against daughters as something where "they had no choice" or "everyone did so in my place".

### 7.5.4 A generation of double silencing.

How the generation of "black children" was silenced and sustained in their shadowy world even beyond the policy changes? Answers start from questions of why and how the family violence against these children became embedded into the family "norm" and even justified in the name of state policy. Firstly, the family maltreatment of the "black children" was

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frequently narrated as daily experiences and too many significant people around played their parts in co-producing the harm. For instance, the biological family who decided which baby *in* and which baby *out*, the foster parents and siblings who physically or emotionally maltreated the very young "black children" without notice or intervention from the biological parents, or local community. Even biological parents and siblings carried on the maltreatment, according to a large number of narratives, and accommodated the physical bodies of the "black children" yet did not include their formal and emotional identities into the family bond. Political contexts and changes furthered the family's and local community's idea of treating the "black children" differently from their "normal" children, and thus the numerous one-time violent events against the "black children" accumulated throughout their interactions with the family and local community. Secondly, their daily experiences were in fact built up by these accumulated moments of discomfort and continued as a structural response from the world to them from day-to-day. Not only their foster or biological families, but dominant voices from the neighbourhoods, local communities, mass media and state policy reinforced the "justice" of lowering with impunity their entitlements and treatments compared to those of legitimate children. The "black children" practiced their daily lives by processing a structural discrimination against their positions within individual families and larger contexts, such as schools, neighbourhoods, media, and policy.

Thirdly, all such structural violence against these "black children" was excused by discourses of how was justified to exclude the "black children" from the continued and stabilised family life and force them away from the respect of humans and citizens in society. Employing Galtung's understanding of violence to explain how, though master narratives of the "black children" were focusing on how innocent children could be harmed by family agency, their victimhood was going beyond the realm of family when individuals were just complying with the culture they lived within. Galtung views direct violence as an *event*, structural violence as a *process* and cultural violence as *invariant,* a permanence, which leads to his *violence strata image* that generates a paradigm. Cultural violence stands at the bottom and the other two can derive their nutrients from this. Structural violence is located in the next stratum and direct violence at the top, "violence breeds violence" (Galtung, 1990, p. 295). Phrases like "we had no choice", "everyone in my place did so", " "you were not supposed to be born/here if we complied with the custom/policy" were never exceptional in the family discourse to

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present how people understood the relation between themselves, their contexts and the "black children", and how they refused to hear and acknowledge the voices from their "black children" and shut them up in the name of entities bigger topics than family ---- custom, culture, policy, state, or society.

When we examine the prenatal violence against baby girls who were born as "trial", the foster maltreatment, the biological family's disconnection, the maladaptation and sibling abuse after the family return, the damaged self-worthy and identity of the "outsider", bear in mind none of these was a one-time event, nor did it merely happen to unique individuals. Direct violence against the "black children" was so frequently described regardless of realms' changing contexts: from foster to biological family, from adults to children, from family to outside, from individuals to public voices. The structural violence against the basic needs of these "black children" was very solid and justified when families constructed their very idea of the *worth* of their "black children" based on the political policy or cultural virtues. For instance, the value of filial piety was largely used in family responses to why the "black children" were born, and why these children were blamed for failure in constructing family belonging and recognition. Norms of respect for elders and a submissive wife were established to affirm "the authority of the husband and gave a distinctive preference for male offspring" (Turner, 2011, p. 68). Parents who continued the patrilineal succession evidenced that they were useful instruments for controlling their group people, though the price was paid through the discontinued and disconnected family lives of the "black children". Filial piety was institutionalised as the core duty of religious activity when ancestor worship was required by all social classes (Turner, 2011). The family hierarchy was built up to regulate daily interactions between generations and thus the "black children" were required to understand parents' decisions and dilemmas in the family discourse.

### 7.5.5 Summary

When the state policy conflicted the family virtue of fertility and the "black children" were produced to minimize the cost of other family members, the hierarchy positioned these children's basic needs as humans, family members, and citizens lower than the others in the family and society. However, it was very rare to find narratives in this research to

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acknowledge such cultural violence against the "black children" when the family discourse conceptualised the births, *hukou* registration, and family return of their "black children" as some privilege other than basic needs. Galtung explained one way cultural violence works as "changing the moral colour of an act from red/wrong to green/right or at least to yellow/acceptable" (Galtung, 1990, p. 292). The uniqueness of the generation of "black children" is that different individuals from different families across the nationwide with various experiences contributed to identifiable systematic violence against them, and such violence was normalised into their regularised interactions with families, communities, and the society. It is very interesting to observe that when the state policy conflicted with the family's fertility virtue, the much older culture took the power over the much younger policy with regards to the decision on baby-birth or not. Nevertheless, when these babies grew up as children and adults, trying to communicate with the family and larger world about their discomforts in being forced away from the core of family and social solidarity, they were silenced by families and media voices in the name of the much younger policy. The "black children" were used to negotiate between the family and the policy, and then the policy was used to negotiate between the family and the" black children".

## 7.6 From "black children" to "children"

> Sometimes I felt being abandoned by the whole world, it forgot about me. I was not registered on my family's hukou booklet, not permitted by the policy, not bonded with peers and friends, not going to establish a marriage, or having my own children, I felt like this whole world was disconnecting me. If I disappeared one day, will anyone's life be affected? If I died now, will people notice my missing from my family? No, I was missing anyway, I was never existed in the government's records of my family.
> —-Jiang (pseudonym), a second daughter of an urban family with one child permitted.

Echoing my primary motivation to research this generation and explain what they experienced, how they made sense of everything from the perspective of children, why they

became silenced and where this generation has gone and is going, this extract explains why we need to understand what was forgotten by families, policymakers, individuals who lived within the contexts, and future generations who may only get access to recorded history. When the "black children" like Jiang expressed their idea of being *missing* within the family, state, and society, they were presenting how easy it could be to reduce a human life to no-existence in everyone else's "normal" lives. The cultural violence against these "black children" normalised individuals' family harms against them within the policy applied society, making the family exclusion look rational and no wrong, normalizing the social alienation when the public shame reinforced the line between "black" and "normal". Honneth (1995) regards rational ideologies as horizon of value that "encompasses the normative culture of recognition in modern societies" and we must pose the question of "how we draw a distinction between justified and unjustified forms of social recognition?" to evaluate our awareness (Honneth, 1995, p. 88). When we hear the family discourse that the "black children" were not supposed to be born, or their basics needs of legal personhood and family return were concerned were viewed as costly privilege, we can understand how the lack of legal respect, family love and nurture, freedom and citizenship were conceptualised as no wrong, and even justified in the name of policy. All family arrangements and practices that victimised the "black children" suggest that individuals' lives were restricted by their demands of security.

Families' failure in compliance with the social "norm" of local cultures and the state policy would really or imaginably lose their identity as "insider" and "us", forcing them out of the border of "normality", therefore, they forced out the "black children" in exchange for their own security within the given society. The regulation of these children's naming disguise, physical confinement, emotional distance is the example. When the "black children" noted the blame on their lack of family recognition and identity as "normal", the moral responsibility of including these children into "humans" and "family" was absent. Recognition was concerned as a "suitably rational, moral response to the evaluative qualities of human beings" (Honneth, 1995, p. 92). When the "black children" were responded with continued "outsider" registration, requests to hide themselves from visitors or local officials, blames for being costly burden and not attached to the parents in the same way as their "homed siblings" were, the shame of being outcomes of the policy-breaking or valued patriarchy, their body, formal

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document, and emotion were viewed as instrumental tools to minimize the loss of other family members, and maximize the stabilization of local communities that benefited everyone except themselves. The reciprocal recognition between homed children and parents, family and community, community and society were observed in the picture of how the "black children" were jointly forced away from those bonded relations.

In fact, parents applied the "normal" parent-children bond and siblings' relationships as frame of reference to judge practices and the feelings of the "black children", instead of hearing and understanding these children's real wants and needs resulting from their particular experiences. Families disciplined the "black children" with rituals that were collectively created and processed by parents and their "homed siblings", which barely reserved any room for the characteristics of "black children", nor presented many efforts on relocating the family principles to suit parent children equally. For Durkheim and his school, authority of principles and their effectiveness come from the fact that they are collective and remain as a result of social rituals. These principles draw upon collective emotions so they remain forceful and finally they represent social structures as a fact (Durkheim, 1963). Family practices of "othering" the "black children" were normalised into the collective moral responsibility ritual and authorised in family principles in the name of "policy" or "state". The tendency to silence the "black children" worked in the realms of family and society because it was a collective representation. Refusal to acknowledge the discomfort in being the "black children" suggests that the dominate family discourse tried to enforce its collective value system through shared emotions. However, these emotions were denying the freedom of the "black children" to express themselves within the family discourse, they were silent in the name of "common good" or "family good". More than their physical and formal presences were confined, but also their freedom to voice the discomfort in the discourse. "Recognition ethics can only work if we give full recognition to the cultural claims of others, especially minority groups." (Turner, 2011, p. 163). However, the black children were not even allowed to claim who they really were, and what they truly felt in the existing discourse, and therefore a discourse of their silence is necessary to acknowledge them as equal to other humans.

The "black children" were co-produced by the families' and policy's conspired violence that reduced them to "bare life" when their entitlements and basic needs were viewed as

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"privileges" other than human citizenship. "Bare life" as noted in earlier chapters, is the formation that Agamben (1998) identified as the status of stripped human life or a threshold status, examples are the immigrant, the refugee, the internee, the enemy combatant (Agamben, 1998), who has existed in a state of suspension or exception to its own illegality (Deutscher, 2008). Agamben agrees with Foucault that modern politics is biopolitics, meaning when power exercises control simply over the bodies of living beings, but regulates, monitors, and manufactures the life and life processes of those living beings (Schotten, 2015). This research employs this concept to compare the stripped status of the "black children" in accordance with their families' understandings of their basic needs and wants. No continued and stable mother figure to provide love, nurture, and protection, no political personhood with registered *hukou*, no freedom of their own bodies and no rights to call their own mother as "mother", also no respect from the family, community, and the wider society to regard their entitlements to be the same as other citizens. Although their processed relationships with foster families, school peers and institutionalised networks partially prepared them for the modern civilised life in the state, their citizenships were not completed. Having citizenship involves having a family name, which is inscribed upon one's passport as a legitimate status within a kinship system and the state. It is for this reason that citizenship is normally a patriarchal legacy of households, where names are handed down from father to children. This right to citizenship through community membership defines one's identity as a public person. It is derived ultimately from membership by birth within an ethnic community, where the entitlement to citizenship is typically inherited from parents (Stevenson, 2001). If we look backward on the "black children", the family decision on "one-in-one-out" disconnected them with parents, losing their membership of the family and community, disabling them to identify the self as an insider of the family and public person within the society.

The "black children" were claimed as being treated equally with other family members and citizens whereas, when political investigations came, they belonged to no family nor community. These children were in fact stepping at edges of their family and community to shift their positions in and out, to continue but also conceal their family practices. Similar to the power dynamic between the sovereign and exceptional circumstances--- the executive power that prevails over the others and enable the state to violate basic laws and norms while facing crisis, deciding on the exception (Cristi, 1997)---the family resembled the state

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sovereignty in this manner that excluded the "black children" to comply with the social "norm". "There is always a necessary relationship between the sovereign power of the state, power over the body and the control of life." (Turner, 2011, p. 19). Agamben argues every political space has now become a "camp" --- the place wherein law is nothing but empty signifier and all life is reduced to bare existence (Schotten, 2015). Similar to but also different from the state of "exception" to cope with external threat, the family exchanged the freedom of their "black children" to enable themselves in line with the normative moral and political orders --- orders that stabilised everyone's lives apart from "black children". The elimination of what is concerned as "outsider", or perceived threat to a secure family is exactly what the production of "black children" was about, which legitimatising itself in the name of public good and state policy.

## 7.7 Summary

This research explains that the silence of the "black children" is to some extent another form of voice, and the meaning is twofold. Firstly, the generation of silenced "black children" who were absent in the discourse of individual families and state policy, were continuously trying to communicate with parents, siblings, friends and peers, intimacy relationships and wider audiences such as this research, narrating their discomforts in such absence and efforts in seeking the meaning of self. However, they were silenced by the family discourse and public shame, and changes of policy furthered their muteness. Secondly, the way of the family and state to respond voices from the "black children" was through silence --- no talk about, no acknowledgment, no review. Especially when the policy changed, both families and audiences from the larger world responded to the topic of "black children" by "Is it an out-dated topic?" For those children whose presence was viewed as perceived threat to their families' security in line with the social normative orders, their discomfort in losing their continued memberships of the family and community undermined the family recognition. Honneth elaborated the paths through which we achieved autonomy as others' recognition of us as beings whose needs, beliefs and abilities are worth being realised, and this will only be possible if we recognize those who recognize us at the same time because we mirror our own

value in their behaviours towards us (Honneth, 1995). When the "black children" constituted their self-worth in line with response from the family and community, they lowered themselves to something less than humans and citizens, which legitimatised itself in reference to the "norm" of culture and society. Therefore, the generation of "black children" experienced double silencing during and beyond the policy and its changes.

In considering citizenship rights and freedom of being the "black children", this research has argued they experienced triple identity attached to the label of "black": the formal loss of the abstract citizenship (*hukou*), the absence of family recognition and belonging, and the social alienation. Two things are noticeable in expanding our theoretical understandings of the family membership and citizenship rights in relation to the China's modernisation. Firstly, neither a formal document nor physical cohabitation were able to restore the family identity and recognition when the children experienced reduced family respect. This suggests that we need to think further about how to acknowledge the victimhood, rethink the human sufferings, and readdress the family injustice against the "black children" after the political constraints were dismantled. Secondly, it is important to understand the stripped human respect and freedom of these "black children" beyond a binary between legal and illegal birth, *hukou* and *no-hukou* identity, foster and return status, because what defined or denied one's entitlements could be very complex with the mixed logic of modern politics and traditional culture. Rural and urban China were presented as rather connected and interacting than as a binary in individual families' negotiation between their fertility desires and the state coercion. No parts of the society could be divorced from producing the phenomenon of "black children" when the one-child policy was implemented to facilitate the modernisation and urbanisation agenda. Individual families, local governments and community, state policy and the public society all played their roles in distinguishing the "black children" from the "normal" population. The real innocents were those children whose lives have been framed throughout.

The knowledge of the "black children" phenomenon should be produced, organised, and communicated within a solid contextual understanding of what they experienced from day to day, from door to door, from the policy's implementation to its legacy on this generation's self-reflection, family building up, and childbearing. The discomfort attached to the label of "black" encompasses how the systematic thought and practices of a stigmatised population

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might be treated with impunity. The challenge in voicing such discomfort reveals how human respect and freedom for certain population could be reduced or stripped by the collective will when the violence against them was practiced in the name of "risk" or "emergency". Knowledge of the state policy, family patterns, human struggles were socially constructed and mostly represented by the master narratives, such as Western-led critiques on the one-child policy's harm against women's health and children's *hukou* in existing scholarly research on their citizenship rights, or dominant parents' perspectives of the human cost in reflections on individuals' experiences. The voice of these "black children" which were silenced either by the family dominant discourse or the public narratives of the past four decades, now need to be heard in remembering what mistakes human history has made. The family and society of the "black children" might not be ready to hear this generation's sufferings and reflections due to various struggles, such as rapid changes of policy rules and intergenerational relations, or political concerns on stability or solidarity, etc. In contrast to the previous generation's collective memory of war or political campaigns, this silenced generation experienced their lives hiddenly and explored their identity individually though the social norm was shared as the cultural force. This generation's burgeoning voice is shouting out the significance of rethinking about how human freedom and respect can intersect with macro-narratives of political and historical contexts.

## 8. Limitations

I have been questioning myself whom I am writing for, and whom I am writing to throughout this research. To raise the attention of the policy makers and family stakeholders to the next generation of innocent children, when dependency is the norm for them. To raise up more concerns about the love and respect of children who are going to be born under the two-child and now new three-child polices. To think more about the next generation, we therefore need to understand more about our generation's inmost voices. Nussbaum conceptualised "Me" as an emotional memory bank (Nussbaum, 2013). Have I explored the full story of the "black children"? I am afraid it is difficult for any research to include a full picture of these people's lives because we can never get final knowledge in situated contexts. My research into the "black children" focuses on their perspectives of their lived experiences and there are many limitations for reasons such as the nature of research, sensitivity of questions, well-known medical situations, length of my doctoral study time and energy, access to participants, etc.

The first limitation of my research is that my narrative analysis is based on my participants memorised retelling. Their narratives of memorised experiences can be very revealing of the inmost thoughts but are also subjective. When we hear stories from the perspective of children, (a) there is a good chance that they tell the same story with very different perspective from their parents even though they co-experienced the events narrated. (b) Memorised events may be different from other actors' remembered happenings, such as parents' or siblings' recounting of one thing can be different from the storytelling of the "black children". (c) to what extent their narrative of memory equals the "truth"? and "truth" for whom? Like Tseris (2015) notes that "truth" can be "replaced by a playful array of multiple, shifting, and sometimes absurd narratives and interpolations. ……Also unsettled by the possibility of the disintegration of meaning and the collapse of certainty" (Tseris, 2015, p. 34). However, it is also significant to discuss that the nature of narratives' survival lies in the contextual, relationally-embedded (Ludden, 2019).

Secondly, this research explains family interactions and power dynamic from the perspective of "black children", who mostly talked about more traumatised episodes than non-

traumatised lives, also most of them were female. There are many questions which can be studied further if voices from parents, grandparents, siblings, and other significant people around, like love partners or my participants' children can be included. For instance, what about parents' ideas about the "black children"? What do they think about the one-child policy's impacts on these children? and the policy changes? How do they think about their parent-children's relationships in shifting time scales? For those children who were sent away and never came back, how do their parents think about it? What about mother-daughter's relationships going through the era of one-child policy and now three-child policy? From the perspective of siblings, what about the biological siblings' emotion regarding their awareness of the "black children"? what about their maladaptation or readjustment to family shifted pattern? From the perspective of the extended relationships of now-adult "black children", How do their husbands/wives think about their experiences? What impacts on their marriage and childbearing? What about their family backgrounds? Are they with the same contexts or the only-child instead? What do they think about the policy's change and encouragement of three-children? All above questions can be furthered to understand how people make sense of the meaning of their lived experiences within historical and intergenerational contexts.

Thirdly, all participants in this research have reached their adulthoods now, are leading their lives and trying to achieve some constructive good thinking about their future. However, there are many "black children" mentioned in their storytelling, who never came back to their biological families, or lost their lives due to extreme maltreatment. Those who had no access to re-join their family interactions could not take their parts in this research, to shed light on how children like them once lived, struggled, and lost. Also, some "homed siblings", friends, colleagues, or people in some stories they heard, are mentioned in my participants' narratives as the one who experienced family separation or concealment, but limited access to their first-hand talks because of various reasons, such as the relationship between me and my participants, the family concerns on allowing me to approach the sibling, the time and geographical constraints, or little connection between the prospective participant and storyteller, etc. Narratives of their lived experiences and reflections on their generations will help to complete a bigger picture of how individuals have lived within the society, yet the absence of access to them in this research is one of the limitations.

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Fourthly, narratives of being "black" focus on the time of their infancy, childhood, adolescent and early adulthoods in this research, however, as I have argued, the legacy of their victimhood goes beyond the policy changes, and thus narratives of continuing to be "black" of being "black-no-more" will be another piece of the jigsaw to help us understand how this generation negotiated their lives over time. Many changes happened to my participants alongside with their shifting relationships with the family and larger world. For instance, some female participants have become mothers after our interview talks, and their ideas of motherhood, childhood, or family have experienced changes as well. Some participants have experienced unexpected changes in life, or even great loss due to the pandemic problems since the lockdown, and their thoughts about parent-children's relationship, or the meaning of life and family have sharply shifted. Some participants have developed stronger emotions like love or hate, some participants said they would like to let the anchored resentment go after they lost some members of their families. Life changes and the narrative of persons' lived experiences is constructed by temporality, because "narrativity is defined by a change in time (Kleres, 2011, p. 186). Therefore, temporary narratives can be one of the strengths of this research for us to have a good understanding of what happened in the past, how the present represents the past, and where it can lead the future to. But also, it reminds us of the temporality of their stories and to get a better understanding of this generation, it is significant to update their narratives of life changes.

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05/12/2019

**Reference: 1920-014-PGR**

Dear Jingxian

**Your application for ethical approval from the School of Sociology and Social Policy**

On behalf of the Research Ethics Sub-Committee, I am pleased to confirm that your project "Secret Generation: "black children" with the one-child policy in China" has been reviewed and approved and you are now welcome to begin your data collection.

If you propose to make any amendments to the approved project or supporting documentation, you must first send details of the amendment along with any supporting documents to the Research Ethics generic email address, LQ-ResearchethicSSP@exmail.nottingham.ac.uk for approval. Please do not use any unapproved or amended documents or procedures before these have been reviewed and approved by the Ethics Sub-Committee.

If you have any queries during your project, please contact the Research Ethics administration team or your academic supervisor.

Good luck with your project!

Kind regards

Dr Alison Mohr
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## School of Sociology and Social Policy
## Participant Consent Form

Name of Study: Secret Generation ---- "black children" of China's one-child policy

**Name of Researcher(s)**:     JIngxian Wang

**Name of Participant:**

| **By signing this form I confirm that** (please initial the appropriate boxes)**:** | **Initials** |
|---|---|
| I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet, or it has been read to me. I have been able to ask questions about the study and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. | |
| I consent voluntarily to be a participant in this study and understand that I can refuse to answer questions and I can withdraw from the study at any time, without having to give a reason. | |
| Taking part in this study involves an interview completed by the participant that will be recorded using audio notes. The audio-recording will be transcribed as text for data analysis and the recording will be destroyed after the end of this research. | |
| Personal information collected about me that can identify me, such as my name or where I live, will not be shared beyond the study team. | |
| My words can be quoted in publications, reports, web pages and other research outputs. | |
| I give permission for the de-identified (anonymised) data that I provide to be used for future research and learning. | |

## I agree to take part in the study

_____      _____

_____

Name of Participant               Signature                      Date

For participants unable to sign their name, mark the box instead of signing

I have witnessed the accurate reading of the consent form with the potential participant and the individual has had the opportunity to ask questions. I confirm that the individual has given consent freely.

_____     _____
_____

Name of Witness              Signature                      Date

_____     _____
_____

Researcher's name            Signature
     Date

*2 copies: 1 for the participant, 1 for the project file*

**Participant Information Sheet**
Date:


Title of Study: Secret Generation-----"Black children" of China's one-child policy

Name of Researcher(s): Jingxian Wang

I would like to invite you to take part in our research study. Before you decide I would like you to understand why the research is being done and what it would involve for you. I will go through the information sheet with you and answer any questions you have. Talk to others about the study if you wish. Ask ME if there is anything that is not clear.

What is the purpose of the study?
This research intends to narrative a life history of "black children" who were born with the one-child policy from 1980s to early 2000s in China. It aims at exploring the structural discrimination against "black children" and how they were defined within that context.

Why have I been invited?
You are being invited to take part because you are one of the "black children" who were born and raised up without permission for a short or long term with the one-child policy. I am inviting around 20 participants like you to take part.

Do I have to take part?
It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part.  If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form (completion and return of a Questionnaire can be taken as implied consent).  If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. This would not affect your legal rights.

What will happen to me if I take part?

You will be involved in the research for around 1 or potentially more face-to-face or telephone interviews, from 30 minutes to 60 minutes per interview. This research will take place until September 2022 and you will mainly be required to participate in one sitting. However, I may contact you at later date to answer a few extra questions if you agree at the time. The interviews will be scheduled for a time that will be convenient for you and you may choose environments that will allow you to speak freely about your personal experiences, such as some coffee house your like, or any other public places that relax you. These visits will last no longer than my PhD study. Once you take part in this research, your personal information and identities will not be exposed through the transcripts of interviews, by changing names and

any details which could make you recognisable. You will be routinely consulted with to ensure that you are willing to talk with me about your experiences of being a "black child".

Our conversations will be digitally recorded for transcripts. No photos or videos will be taken without your consent. You have the access to the data and the right to require amends of the data.

Expenses and payments

Participants will not be paid an allowance to participate in the study. Travel expenses will be offered for any visits incurred as a result of participation.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?
Your hidden memories possibly bring anxiety and unsettling during the conversations, and you are welcome to take a pause or ask me to stop or change the topic. You are not obliged to tell your story but feel free to contact me afterwards if you still want to continue your storytelling.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

We cannot promise the study will help you but the information we get from this study may help explain how the "black children" suffered and survived with the state violence that was co-produced by individuals, local authorities and societies.

If you have a concern about any aspect of this study, you should ask to speak to the researchers who will do their best to answer your questions. If you remain unhappy and wish to complain formally, you can do this by contacting the School Research Ethics Officer. All contact details are given at the end of this information sheet.

Will my taking part in the study be kept confidential?
I will follow ethical and legal practice and all information about you will be handled in confidence.

If you join the study, the data collected for the study will be looked at by authorised persons from the University of Nottingham who are organising the research. They may also be looked at by authorised people to check that the study is being carried out correctly. All will have a duty of confidentiality to you as a research participant and we will do our best to meet this duty.

All information which is collected about you during the course of the research will be kept **strictly confidential**, stored in a secure and locked office, and on a password protected database. Any information about you which leaves the University will have your name and address removed (anonymised) and a unique code will be used so that you cannot be recognised from it. Anonymised data may also be stored in data archives for future researchers interested in this area.

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Your personal data (address, telephone number) will be kept for 3 years after the end of the study so that I am able to contact you about the findings of the study *and possible follow-up studies* (unless you advise us that you do not wish to be contacted). All research data will be kept securely for 7 years. After this time your data will be disposed of securely. During this time all precautions will be taken by all those involved to maintain your confidentiality, only members of the research team will have access to your personal data.

Although what you say in the interview is confidential, should you disclose anything to us which we feel puts you or anyone else at any risk, we may feel it necessary to report this to the appropriate persons.

What will happen if I don't want to carry on with the study?
Your participation is voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason, and without your legal rights being affected. If you withdraw then the information collected so far may not be possible to extract and erase after 3 years and this information may still be used in the project analysis.

What will happen to the results of the research study?
this research is part of my PhD thesis at the University of Nottingham. In the event that I publish any results of this research, your anonymity will be guaranteed in these publications as any personal identifying information provided such as your name will never be disclosed.

Who is organising and funding the research?
This research is being organised by the University of Nottingham.

Who has reviewed the study?
All research in the University of Nottingham is looked at by a group of people, called a Research Ethics Committee, to protect your interests. This study has been reviewed and approved by the School of Sociology and Social Policy Research Ethics Committee.

Further information and contact details
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**Secret Generation: "black children" of China's one-child policy**

Questions (some examples of which are given below) were prepared for guiding the semi-structured interviews as below:

- Could you tell me about your life?
- Have your family have ever talked about your birth?
- Do you have any siblings? Could you talk about your relationships with each other?
- Could you talk about your parents?
- Could you talk about your school lives?
- Could you talk about your life with friends?
- Have you ever been separated from your family? what about anyone else?
- Have you been registered? When and how?
- Have you built your own family? Can you talk about it?
- Does the gender issue ever bother you?
- How do you find about the announcement of the two-child policy?
- Do you think anything changes in your life after the announcement of the two-child policy?
- How the announcement of the two-child policy impacts on you or anyone in your family?
- Do you want your own child(ren)? How many do you want? And what decides the number?