A Study on Chinese Teachers’ Experiences and Perceptions of Gender Roles and How it Affects Work, Family and Students

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Abstract

This research is a case study focusing on a group of Chinese teachers working in a senior high school in northern China. It seeks to explore their experiences and perceptions of gender roles, both in the workplace and at home. It aims to discover the impact of cultural values and beliefs on them as well as on their teaching practice, and to explore how they deal with the potential contradictions.

There are three questions being addressed in this research: (1) In what way do male and female teachers experience and perceive gender (in)equality at the workplace? (2) In what way do male and female teachers experience and perceive gender (in)equality at home? (3) How do their experiences and perceptions of gender roles influence their teaching practice?

The results show that both modernization and communism have positive influences on gender equality. However, tradition and stereotype impose men and women with specific roles and qualities. They influence participants’ domestic life to different extents: decision-making, housework division, attitudes toward marriage, premarital sex and gender preference of their children. Whether caring or paternalistic, parents play a very important role in the family. It also can be seen that women are trying to take an active role in household finance management. At the workplace, the ongoing work-family conflict and stereotype about gender roles hinder women’s career development. The participation and the percentage of female representation in management positions are rather low, even though they are encouraged to take an active role. When seeking employment, women face more frustration than men. In the classroom setting, gender difference can be seen when teachers give criticism and assign legwork. Students are expected to develop different qualities: male students with “male characteristics” and female students with “female characteristics”, as a result of social pressure.

Keywords: gender difference at workplace, gender difference at home; gender in classroom; parents’ role in family


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List of Abbreviations

PE- Physical Education
UN-United Nations
GNP-Gross National Product
List of Tables and Figures

Table 1: Central Human Capabilities  P14-15
Figure 1: Participants  P20
Table 2: Highlights from the Interview Guide  P21
# Table of Content

I. Introduction .................................................................................................................. 1  
   1.1 Background and Justification .............................................................................. 1  
   1.2 Research Objective ........................................................................................... 3  
   1.3 Research Questions ............................................................................................ 4  
   1.4 Structure of the thesis ....................................................................................... 5  
   1.5 Limitation and Delimitation .............................................................................. 5  
   1.6 Ethical Consideration ......................................................................................... 6  
II. Theoretical Framework .............................................................................................. 7  
   2.1 Gender Equality in a Global Context ................................................................. 7  
   2.2 Gender Equality in Confucian Societies ............................................................. 8  
   2.3 Gender Equality in Communist Societies .......................................................... 9  
   2.4 Gender Equality Mobilization in China ............................................................. 10  
   2.5 Analytical Framework ....................................................................................... 13  
III. Research Methodology ............................................................................................ 17  
   3.1 Research Design .................................................................................................. 17  
   3.2 Methods ............................................................................................................... 18  
   3.3 Subjects ............................................................................................................... 19  
   3.4 Procedure ......................................................................................................... 20  
   3.5 Data Analysis ..................................................................................................... 22  
   3.6 Reflexivity and Bias .......................................................................................... 23  
IV. Findings .................................................................................................................... 24  
   4.1 Role in the Family .............................................................................................. 25  
   4.2 Role at Workplace .............................................................................................. 26  
   4.3 Attitudes toward Marriage ............................................................................... 30  
   4.4 Lifestyle .............................................................................................................. 32  
V. Analysis and Discussion ........................................................................................... 35  
   5.1 Domestic Life ..................................................................................................... 35  
   5.2 Gender Difference at Workplace .................................................................... 38  
   5.3 Gender in Classroom ....................................................................................... 39  
   5.4 Linking Previous Research ............................................................................. 43  
VI. Conclusion and Suggestions for Future Research ............................................... 46  
References .................................................................................................................. 49  
Appendix A (Interview Guide A) ............................................................................... 55  
Appendix B (Interview Guide B) ................................................................................ 57  
Appendix C (List of Interviewees) ............................................................................. 59
I. Introduction

Gender equality as an instrument for development can enhance economic efficiency as well as improve women’s autonomy and other developmental outcomes (World Bank, 2012). However, it has been a challenge to development and has been continuously addressed in United Nations’ (UN) working agendas, based on the fact that in some developing countries women have less secure jobs with fewer social benefits and less influence on decision-making than men do (www.un.org, 2013). Ranking the first in occupational prestige in China, teacher plays an important role in terms of the influence they have on students who are deemed to be the future of the country. In the process of boosting education modernization, traditional values and personal beliefs can be a challenge for teachers. This research is a case study focusing on a group of Chinese teachers working in a senior high school in northern China. It seeks to explore their experiences and perceptions of gender roles and gender equality, both at work and beyond. It aims to discover the impact of their cultural values and belief on themselves and their teaching, as well as explore how they deal with the potential contradictions.

1.1 Background and Justification

Economic growth brings forth social change. Influenced by tradition, modernity, and native and foreign, people’s values change as well. Modernization theorists argued that education enhances the modernization process. Within any given society, the most educated tend to have modern worldviews. With the rise of educational levels, traditional religious worldviews inevitably yield to secular and rational thoughts. (Inkeles, 1983).

In transmitting moral values, teachers play an important role. They spend copious amount of time with their students, therefore, they have more influence in students’ psychological development and the formation of their social-cultural identity. Some research in the US found that African American male teachers set examples as role
models and play a crucial role in helping African American males succeed (Gary, 2016; Brockenbrough, 2012). Students tend to adopt their role models’ values and frequently imitate their behavior (Bucher, 1998). It is also argued that teachers have the potential to be the role models for their students within the formal and informal sector (infed.org, 2004).

However, an increasing demand on the educational system has led to substantial increases on the workload of teachers. In some societies, teachers are reported to have the highest level of occupational stress. Studies also found that the workload and work-life balance issues may have a negative impact on their well-being (Bubb and Earley, 2004).

A great deal of research has found that gender discrimination widely exists throughout the process of general employment, explicit or implicit, and direct or indirect (Cooke, 2015). Yet, the same is true in the educational sector. In many countries, especially in developing countries, division of work is unequal between female teachers and male teachers, both in the workplace and at home. In Rwanda, for instance, the psyche of the society is that women and girls are supposed to cook, clean, fetch water and take care of the children. The unequal share of domestic work and childcare can be the main underlying cause of the shortage of women in secondary teaching and education management roles (VSO, 2013). Focusing on the experiences of teachers in Ghana, Leslie (2007) discussed women’s domestic responsibilities and reproductive role in the family. There have been accusations by male teachers that female teachers do not spend as much time in the classroom, and do not prepare for classroom teaching the same way as they do.

Teaching is a prestigious occupation in China. The Chinese civic scientific literacy survey\(^1\) in 2010 and 2013 both showed that teaching ranks the first in the occupational prestige among various professions (crsp.org.cn, 2010& 2013). China also has a rigid teacher education structure. The state sets standards that in senior high

\(^1\) The Chinese civic scientific literacy survey is a regular carried out survey to understand public scientific literacy status since 1992. The one carried out in 2013 is the ninth one.
schools in economically developed areas, there should be certain ratio of teachers that have achieved master degrees in a discipline, besides those who have obtained bachelor degree. Being well-educated, the teachers are the main actors to push forward new and modern ideas.

In traditional Chinese culture, teachers are meant to “propagate the doctrine” (ChuanDao, 传道) and to “impart professional knowledge” (ShouYe, 授业). This indicates that besides the knowledge that the teachers need to pass on, they are also supposed to deliver moral values and ethics to students. The dual responsibility can be seen in the Teachers Law of Peoples’ Republic of China, which says “Teachers are charged with the duty of imparting knowledge and educating people, training builders and successors for the socialist cause and enhancing the quality of the Nation” (npc.gov.cn, 1993). The code of ethics for professional teachers in China also requires teachers to set a good example for students. Thus, it is obvious and essential that the teacher has a responsibility to spread positive values. However, their beliefs and cultural values have considerable effects on their behaviors in terms of teaching styles, objectives and teaching outcomes. The complex mix of cultural influences is a neglected, but worthy study question.

Given the above, to have a better understanding of the individual trajectories and different perceptions of gender roles and gender equality, a group of Chinese senior high school teachers were studied. Historically, culturally embedded values, socialist ideology, and propaganda, all impact teachers’ view on gender roles and their reaction to possible contradictions will be discussed.

1.2 Research Objective

The objective of this empirical research is twofold. The primary goal is to find out what are the Chinese teachers’ experiences and perceptions of gender roles, by way of taking social, cultural, political, economic factors, and domestic life into consideration,
and to seek the possible contradictions between articulation, formation of gender roles and reality. The secondary goal of this research is to look into how their perceptions of gender roles influence their teaching practice and to discuss the possible influence on students. To address the problem in the discussion, I will offer insight into how culturally embedded values concerning gender norms and stereotypes can be mobilized in the Chinese context.

1.3 Research Questions

The research will look at Chinese teachers’ experiences and perceptions of gender roles both at workplace and beyond, and how this influence their teaching practice. In order to achieve the research objective, three questions will be addressed:

(1) In what way do male and female teachers experience and perceive gender (in)equality at the workplace?

(2) In what way do male and female teachers experience and perceive gender (in)equality at home?

(3) How do their experiences and perceptions of gender roles influence their teaching practice?

The author will use capability approach as analytical framework to answer the research questions. Referring to Nussbaum’s (2011) human central capabilities, some key aspects at workplace will be highlighted, such as decision-making, degree of participation, difference in tasks, workloads and experiences of injustice. With respect to domestic life, it is necessary to look at family responsibility, housework division, decision-making, and household finance among the others. In the end, focus questions will be constructed concerning how teachers deal with gender difference in their teaching practice.
1.4 Structure of the Thesis

This thesis consists of six parts, focusing on Chinese teachers’ experiences and perceptions of gender equality in the workplace and at home. The first part introduces the background and objective of the present study. It also addresses the specific problem and research questions, limitation, delimitation, as well as ethical considerations. Part two provides a review of literature on gender equality and relevant research in the Chinese context, followed by the analytical frameworks that the present study is based on. Part three presents a description of the methodology, which constitutes research design, methods, subject selection, detailed research procedures, data analysis and positionality bias. Part four gives answers to the research questions by presenting the findings of the analyzed data and implications. Part five discusses the results and sheds light on the connections with the previous research. Part six offers a summary of what has been discussed in the preceding parts as well as suggestions for future research in the issues of gender equality in China.

1.5 Limitation and Delimitation

The limitation of this research is that the scope of findings in this research is restricted. The participants are not representatives of the whole population thus the research result can hardly be generalized. However, it is a glimpse of a broader set of recognizable features when studying teachers’ perceptions and experiences of gender (in)equality and gender roles.

The main focus of this research is how these Chinese teachers’ experience and perceive gender (in)equality in the workplace and at home, and how these experiences and perceptions influence their teaching practice. There are twenty-nine participants from a senior high school in northern China. The analytical framework is based on the capability approach and Nussbaum’s “central human capabilities”. Semi-structured interviews consisting of focus questions are used to define the area to be explored and to get more detailed information. When analyzing the data, thematic analysis is used
to seek reoccurring topics, similarities and differences.

Concerning the questions addressed in this research, it is also possible to use other methodological approaches, such as a longitudinal study that tracks gender norm development over time. It is also necessary to study the topic from broader participant populations. To look into gender roles in the classroom, classroom observation and/or students’ perspective can be included to help understand how they deal with the challenge of dominant gender norms. To have a better understanding of the policy impact, it is also important to conduct desk studies assessing and evaluating existing laws and regulations that sought to change disadvantage of either gender.

1.6 Ethical Consideration

When conducting qualitative research about personal experience in domestic sphere and in marriage life it is crucial to respect the participants’ privacy. Due to the fact that this study will also look at classroom setting, it may involve certain ways of punishment used by some teachers to maintain classroom disciplines that may not be acceptable in other contexts. For instance, using timeouts as punishment is not uncommon in a large size class at a local level, but may be seen as a violation of professional ethics or face criticism. To deal with this, anonymity is used in note taking and coding to protect the interviewees’ privacy. In accordance with the sequence of interviews, each interviewee is assigned a number. The identities and records of individuals are confidentially maintained. Thus when quotes are used to present the data, individuals are not identifiable.
II. Theoretical Framework

This chapter presents a review of previous studies on gender inequality both in global and Chinese contexts. It introduces contextual factors such as Confucianism, Marxism, communism and modernization intertwined with the issue. In addition to the gender issue indicated previously, the author will also highlights the lack of attention to the teacher group and the possible influence they can have on students in relation to gender equality.

Scholars such as Connell (1987) have argued that gender has been constructed as part of each society throughout history. Stereotypes on gender have much influence. They influence conceptualizations of women and men and establish social categories for gender. These categories reflect what people think and believe, both for the self and for others (Foley et al., 2015). Therefore, to have a better understanding of the current gender issue, it is necessary to look at gender equality at a global context, and the history and culture, social regime and modern ideas to see how they influence people’s lives.

2.1 Gender Equality in a Global Context

Gender inequality is a widely examined topic in the field of social science. There is quite a bit of research that is specifically addressed to women empowerment and revealed gender inequality. There are measurements such as gender inequality index used by United Nations that involves three indicators in regard to human development, which are reproductive health, empowerment, and economic status. More specifically, it covers different dimensions including maternal mortality ratio, adolescent birth rates, proportion of parliamentary seats occupied by females and labor market participation, etc. (hdr.undp.org, 2014). It is shown that inequality in terms of individual’s autonomy, and mortality rates of different age groups has direct or indirect consequences to the inclusive economic growth. Other studies that compare multidimensional inequality in different countries showed that women make up a
substantial majority of the world’s poor resulting from the primary responsibility for households and child rearing, lower earning capacity and limited control over their spouse’s income (Todaro & Smith, 2012). Uunk (2015) conducted research on gender roles in 33 countries and indicated that the cultural (attitude) context matters for female labor supply.

2.2 Gender Equality in Confucian Societies

China has gone through a lot of changes over history, culturally and socially. However, it is impossible to even start talking about women, men, and gender without mentioning ideas that are broadly termed as “Confucianism” (Grant, 2008). Confucianism is an important ethical and philosophical system that emphasized ethical characteristics such as loyalty and obedience (Du, 2014). With regard to feminine ethics, it stresses Three Obediences and Four Virtues (sangcongside, 三从四德): the Three Obediences refers to obedience to one's father before marriage, to one's husband after marriage, and to one's son after one's husband's death; the Four Virtues means morality, proper speech, modest manner, and diligent work (Tsang, Chan & Zhang, 2011). The ethics imposed tighter morality on women and had dominated almost any of its feudal dynasty (Gao, 2003). It is highlighted as “patriarchy” “feudalism” in essence and a great number of research has been done to theorize and discuss Chinese patriarchy. Researchers found that societies with long histories of agriculture are less equal in gender roles. The diminished role of women in society is a consequence of patriarchal values and beliefs (Hansen, Jensen & Skovsgaard, 2015).

With the expansion and growth of urban areas, the large-scale rural labor force shifted. Despite the rapid economic development of modern cities, the research by Thakur (2006) indicated that the huge regional disparities, plus the pressure from the social services such as education and health all lead to the re-emergence of a more traditional, Confucian, Chinese discourse on gender relations. Researchers argued that Confucianism has negative influence in the workplace. According to a study by Du
Confucianism affects the board gender diversity in Chinese stock market. He stated that in firms surrounded by strong Confucianism atmosphere the proportion of women directors in the board is significantly lower than those in firms located in regions with weak Confucianism atmosphere.

Despite the negative influences of Confucianism on gender equality, there are also researchers who defend the Confucian ethics. Clark & Wang (2004) argued that it is virtue based rather than gender based, if not misused by emperors and bureaucrats in ancient China. However, the effect of the misuse in ancient dynasties can be easily seen in a number of research and not many similar defending opinions can be found.

2.3 Gender Equality in Communist Societies

China, as a socialist country and aiming for becoming communist, has been significantly influenced by Marxist gender theories. Marxism, as a series of criticisms and theories put forward by Karl Marx in the middle of the nineteenth century, has clear implications for gender equality theories (Little, 2011). It criticizes the social relations that give rise to the issues such as exploitation and inequality. However, Manning (2006) argued the Marxist conception of equality stresses the physiological difference. With this point of departure, the legacy of Marxism was a commitment to gender sameness in public space, not the development of spaces where women could explore their own situation and determine how to understand and change it (Gaskell, Eichler et al., 2004). In relation to well-being, a World Values Survey was carried out by Meisenberg and Woodley (2014). It investigated gender differences in subjective well-being among more than 90 countries. Results showed that in the communist and ex-communist countries, low female well-being coincides with an ideology of gender equality that expected, demanded, and largely achieved, full participation of women in the labor force. The survey explained part of the effects of communist history that tends to reduce happiness and life satisfaction, and the effect is stronger for women than men.

Communism and Confucianism are two main influencing factors in Chinese society,
yet, tensions are also found between them. A study looking at the influence of the two ideologies on the life of older people in the 1970s and 1990s showed that a communist society places young people in the frontier, while in a Confucian society older people have more power (Davis- Friedman, 1991). This indicates a potential crash between the old and new thinking, which is in sense a crash between patriarchal and modern ideas.

2.4 Gender Equality Mobilization in China

In Inglehart and Norris’s (2003) book *Rising Tide: Gender Equality and Cultural Change Around the World*, they argued modernization underpins cultural change. It is further explained that the changes of attitudes, from traditional to gender-equal values, have major impact on gender-equality processes (Teigen & Wängnerud, 2009). China’s history of promoting the equality between men and women during the national policy process can be traced back to 1949, when the Constitution of the Peoples’ Republic of China was launched. In the constitution, it is stressed that women shall enjoy equal rights with men in political, economic, cultural, social and domestic life (English.gov.cn, 2004). Even though it has been revised a few times, equal rights in all spheres of life has always been clearly stated (Burnett, 2010).

From 1950s to 1970s, phrases such as “women hold up half the sky” and “iron girls” became popular around the country. Through the exaggeration or metaphor, the phrases depicted women who were particularly outstanding in different fields at the time. However, researchers argued “iron girls” were at the price of physical and mental damage. In nature, they were served as a tool and propaganda embodying the state’s endeavor to enhance gender equality (Zhang& Liu 2015).

Later on, other laws and regulations to protect women’s rights and interests were enacted, such as Law on the Protection of Rights and Interests of Women, White paper on Gender Equality and Women’s Development in China (English.gov.cn, 2015).
In spite that efforts were made to neutralize the unequal gender roles indicated by ideologies, there is a resurgence of Confucian and patriarchal influence, which can be clearly seen in the statistics. The gender inequality index of China still ranked 40th worldwide, and women only hold 23.6% of seats in parliament (hdr.undp.org, 2015). The World Bank (2012) reported that in 2008 alone, 1,254,000 girls in China were estimated missing at birth resulting from family’s favoring sons over daughters. The figure is more than one third of the whole world’s missing women. It reveals a lot about the gender patterns in China that families have been favoring male offspring. However, recently there is also media reporting that in some rural places in China, missing boys is becoming a trend, resulting from the sum of betrothal gifts [from the bridegroom to the bride's family] is getting much higher (I.ifeng.com, 2016).

In 2010, All-China Women’s Federation and National Bureau of Statistics conducted the Third Survey on Chinese Women’s Social Status (WSCI, 2010). The data was obtained from more than ten thousand questionnaires, which measures women’s social status concerning rights, resources and responsibilities compared with men. The questions cover different aspects including health, education, economy, social welfare, politics, marriage and family, lifestyle, legal rights, gender awareness and other attitudes. Some highlights are listed here: in terms of working hours, women reported working longer (including domestic work) than men. As to income, the average annual income of women at work in urban and rural places are respectively 67.3% and 56.0% of men’s. Participation in decision-making in high-level talents’ working units, 80.5% in the leading groups are males. 20.4% of the leading groups in the units have no female members. Even among the female high-level talents, 19.8% of them deemed that being female hinders their career development. A more striking result of the survey is the widespread gender discrimination. 61.6% of males and 54.8% of the females agreed with the statement “A man's place is at work, while a woman's place is in the home”. The percentage is 7.7% and 4.4% higher than the Second Survey launched in 2000. The proportions of both genders that agree with the saying “To find a good husband is better than to find a good job” are also higher than the previous
survey. Thus it is not hard to see that the social and cultural environment for women’s development is in urgent need of improvement.

In modernization theory, it is argued that gender inequalities decline as economy grows (Hannum, 2005). However, a great number of research conducted in the Chinese context does not support this conclusion. A common issue addressed in the research is a lack of important institutional safeguards of gender inequality. In other words, there is a lack of an independent enforcement mechanism and the absence of mandatory legal responsibilities for employers (Lay Lee & Regan, 2009). There is other empirical research that discusses the division of household labor in relation to marital satisfaction (Zuo & Bian, 2001; Oshio, Nozaki & Kobayashi, 2012) or work-family conflict (Ren & Foster, 2011; Woodhams, Xian & Lupton, 2014). They found that women feel stress as a result from the difficulty progressing in their career, unequal division of housework and social stereotype. A study on gender inequality in the legal profession suggested that gender inequality in China’s private and highly market-driven legal profession is a microcosm of larger patterns of female disadvantage in China’s evolving urban labor market (Michelson, 2009). Burnett (2010) even argued that gender-based employment discrimination is a global issue that transcends borders, political systems, and cultures.

In the educational sector, the existing research focuses mostly on gender inequality in terms of students’ educational attainment. In one of them, for instance, found no significant gender inequality in the case of girls’ attainment in urban areas within the 9 years’ compulsory education. However, inequality still exists in rural areas in terms of educational attainment, both on compulsory and higher levels (Zeng et al., 2013).

With respect to women’s status in the education sector, Gaskell, Eichler et al. (2004) studied the dimensions of participation of female faculty members in Chinese universities. The result showed an overwhelming acceptance of the belief that women are more suited for domestic tasks and teaching than for administration and research, based on biological difference from men.
In short, the coexistence of cultural preconceptions of patriarchy and socialism of equality are important topics in understanding the impact of gender on peoples’ lives in China. Especially among the teachers who have much occupational prestige and are potential role models of students, how they perceive, experience, practice and pursue gender equality has much to do with the actualization of gender equality in China.

2.5 Analytical Framework

Capability approach will be used as a guide in this research to have a better understanding of the subjects’ freedom to choose between different ways of living based on Chinese teachers experiences and perceptions.

This approach can be rooted back to Adam Smith and Karl Marx. It focuses on human achievement and freedom, and on the need for reflective rather than mechanical evaluation. According to Sen (2003), “Human beings are the agents, beneficiaries and adjudicators of progress, but they also happen to be the primary means of all production (pg.41).” It emphasizes human life as a set of “doings” and “beings”, in another word, “functionings” (ibid). As Sen’s version closely links with economic theory, it is applied in a great deal of quantitative research to examine gender inequality (Robeyns, 2003). The United Nations’ research, for instance, use the concept of human development to look at a person’s freedom to achieve various functioning combinations. A number of indices are constructed, such as the ability to be well-nourished and well-sheltered, the capability of escaping avoidable morbidity and premature mortality just to name a few. From this research, it is also proved that GDP per capita is imperfect indicator for subjective well-being, as countries with high GNP per capita can have astonishingly low achievements in the quality of life (Sen, 2003).

Sen’s version later was criticized for being unspecific. As to the research assessing more general problems of economic and social development, the indices may have to be much longer and much more diverse. Nussbaum (2003) stated that capability approach helps us construct a normative conception of social justice. It has critical
potential for gender issues on the condition that we specify a definite set of capabilities to protect the most important ones. She defines capabilities as substantial freedoms that enable a person to do and to be, or to choose and to act. Furthermore, she elaborated ten central capabilities that political orders have to secure all citizens with: (1) life, (2) bodily health, (3) bodily integrity, (4) senses, imagination and thoughts, (5) emotions (6) practical reason, (7) affiliation, (8) other species, (9) play, (10) control over one’s own environment (Nussbaum, 2011). Explanation of the basic elements can be seen in the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Central Human Capabilities</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. Life.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>2. Bodily Health.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>3. Bodily Integrity.</strong></td>
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<td><strong>4. Senses, Imagination, and Thought.</strong></td>
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<td><strong>5. Emotions.</strong></td>
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<td>Capability</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Practical Reason.</td>
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<td>7. Affiliation.</td>
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<td>8. Other Species.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Play.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Control over One’s Environment.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Central Human Capabilities (Nussbaum, 2011)

A developed internal capability depends on different factors, varying from social, political, familial, to economic conditions (ibid). The list is open ended and Nussbaum urges modifying and rethinking. Using this approach, key interview questions are constructed to examine whether there is gender difference in achieving various functionings. The diversity and concreteness of the list help the author to look at those that may prevent people from choosing to function and to achieve quality and dignity of life. All the key factors will be taken into consideration except criteria (1) “life” and (8) other species. Due to the age characteristics of the participants who are
between twenty-five to thirty-eight years old, the (1) “life” criterion does not apply to them. (8) Other species will be left out since it is less relevant to this research objective and research questions. Details on how the author applies this approach, in drawing relating themes, will be presented in the following section 3.4.
III. Research Methodology

Part two is made up of empirical studies on gender inequality in both global and Chinese contexts, which helps to conceive the present research. This part provides a description of aspects of the current study. It starts with a description of the designing process, methods, followed by a part explaining the design of interview questions and subject selection. In the end I will present specific data collection procedures, reflexivity bias, and how the data will be analyzed.

3.1 Research Design

It is a case study that aims to have a detailed and intensive analysis on the experiences and perceptions of a group of Chinese teachers in dealing with gender issues. Specifically, this research tries to probe into the following questions: (1) In what way do male and female teachers experience and perceive gender (in)equality at the workplace? (2) In what way do male and female teachers experience and perceive gender (in)equality at home? (3) How do the experiences and perceptions of gender roles influence their teaching practice?

It is a qualitative research that aims to have a deeper understanding of the participants. As a commonly used method in social research, the qualitative research delivers a concept or elaborates a theory by way of data collection. According to Bryman (2016), a qualitative researcher seeks close involvement with the people being studied, and looks into an issue from the point of view of the participants. It is to understand participants’ behavior, values, beliefs etc. through actions of participants of social settings.

The research uses an inductive reasoning approach, which usually starts from specific observations to patterns revelations that the researcher can further explore. It commonly ends up with an establishment of the links between the research objectives and the findings, or a generalization of a theory.
The research questions will be addressed mainly by a series of questions. The participants are a group of teachers from a senior high school in Heze city, Shandong province. The school typifies senior high schools in the local area, it is neither extreme nor unusual. However, the Shandong province is the second most populated province, having the highest total agriculture output value all over China. Heze city where the school is located, was demographically reported as having the most serious gender imbalance among all the cities in the province according to the census in 2000, with the sex ratio 1.3556 (Song & Wen, 2014). It still remains as one of the top cities with severe gender imbalance as recorded in the 2010 census, with the ratio 1.2519 (ibid). The province is known as the birthplace of Confucius, where cultural legacy can be seen. According to another unofficial survey, the men from Shandong province are more traditional than those of other provinces when asked their opinion about “women wooing men”. The receptivity ranked the third lowest among all other provinces (News.sina.com.cn, 2015).

3.2 Methods

A semi-structured interview consisting of a series of questions is used in this research to know how and why gender roles differentiate in the workplace and at home. The advantage of using it is that it is able to vary the sequence of questions (Bryman, 2016). It also enables the interviewers to discover information that may have not been previously thought as significant. Employed as first hand data from the semi-structured interviews, it will help understand the causes and effects of the teachers’ perceptions of gender (in)equality. Seen as role models with much occupational prestige, I will explore how they experience and perceive gender (in)equality both at and beyond work, and discuss why it has happened. Another concern is to find out how the teachers’ experiences and perceptions possibly influence their teaching as well as their students. Influencing factors such as social, political, familial, economic conditions will be included in the questions. From the questions, I will look into the possible contradictions between the gender equality policies and reality and explore how culturally embedded values concerning gender
norms and stereotypes can be mobilized according to the teachers when they discuss gender equality.

The research is epistemological in a sense that it aims to understand the gender inequality issue through an examination of the interpretation of the issue by teachers. A reflection on human agency and freedom will be addressed to understand a person’s freedom to choose between different ways of living.

All the interviews were done through telephone calls. The advantage of telephone interviewing, according to Bryman (2016), is economic and effective. When asking sensitive questions it causes less anxiety and avoids awkwardness when either party is on the line. However, sometimes the line quality is poor. Unlike face-to-face communications, it is not possible to observe the body language of the interviewees. So it is difficult for the interviewer to know whether the interviewees feel comfortable or confused about the questions, or irritated thus want to terminate the phone interview. Moreover, the location where the interviewees answer the phone is uncontrollable; there may be noise around no matter if they are indoors or out. It is also possible that an interviewee may not be alone at the time of the phone interview, so it may affect responses, in terms of the sensitivity of content, that is to say that interviewees may alter their true sentiments due to the company they are with.

3.3 Subjects

The Chinese teachers are the most concerned stakeholders in this research. There are twenty-nine teachers from a local senior high school in Heze city. Twenty-three of them are females and six are males. Their ages range from twenty-five years old to thirty-eight years old. Their teaching subjects cover English, Chinese, Russian, chemistry, dancing, psychology, physical education (PE), mathematics, physics, politics, art and geography. All the interviewees participated anonymously and privately in order to achieve a better result. The distribution of their age, sex, and marital status is shown in Figure 1:
The interviewees are selected through personal contacts and snowball sampling. In the beginning the author contacted the initial participants by phone calls and kept contact with some other teachers who are interested in participating. Searching for interviewees was difficult, due to the teachers’ lack of time or the dialect barrier. As a result, twenty-nine teachers participated in this research and phone interviews were scheduled.

### 3.4 Procedure

To get the most out of the interview and to answer the research questions, the author first selected the most relevant aspects from Nussbaum’s central human capability approach. Out of the ten aspects previously mentioned, only “care” and “other species” are not directly related to these research questions. The author devised a few focus questions that convert the selected aspects into concrete answerable questions. Other types of questions include personal factual questions, questions about attitudes, normative standards and values (Bryman, 2016). Open-ended questions are preferable as the purpose is to encourage the interviewees to reflect and to tell stories of their
lives. The focus questions are concerned with the teachers’ health condition, roles in the workplace, roles at home, their leisure time, attitudes toward marriage, financial situation and gender difference in classroom (see Appendix A). The interconnectedness of the interview and research questions is shown in Table 2:

Table 2: Highlights from the Interview Guide

Pilot interviews were done and the order of questions was rearranged afterwards in order to make the interviewees feel more relaxed and willing to talk, as certain sensitive questions caused awkwardness in the conversation. During the interviews, respondent validation was used to test validity. According to Bryman (2016), a respondent validation aims to seek a good correspondence of the findings, and the
perspectives and experiences of the participants. So I fed back to the interviewees what I had found from previous interviews to seek confirmation. In order to verify in detail how and why things had happened as well as have a deeper insight, after twelve interviews, I reviewed the gathered data and used the method of triangulation, which focuses on methods of investigation and source of data. I checked out the transcriptions of the interviews to see whether I misunderstood what the interviewees have said. In the following interviews, I readjusted the order of questions and asked questions in different ways so that the interviewees were encouraged to reflect gender difference in different situations (see appendix B). Overall, respondent validation and triangulation make the data more comprehensive and credible.

In the new interview guide, the aspects were compressed into four categories: roles in family, roles in the workplace, attitudes toward marriage and lifestyle. It was during the mid-term when the first interview was carried out. Apart from the daily teaching task, the teachers also needed to take roles as examiners, invigilators, and graders during mid-term and final exams. The school itself is also a test center, so the teachers working there need to help as invigilators when there’s a national exam. Due to the tight work schedule, the last few interviews were not done until they began their summer vacation. All the interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed for analyzing the content later.

3.5 Data Analysis

The interview questions are designed to have a better understanding of the teachers’ experiences and perceptions of gender roles, both at home and in the workplace. In the coding process, the notes were put in a numerical order, ie, the first interviewee is coded as “1” and the twenty-ninth interviewee as “29”. By using numbers the author wants to focus on the content of the data, regardless the interviewees’ age, gender, marital status, educational background, etc., so as to have an objective understanding of the results. Thematic analysis was used when analyzing the data. Categories including role in the family, role at the workplace, attitude toward marriage and
lifestyle are identified and relate to the research focus. Patterns under each category emerged, as shown in Table 2.

3.6 Reflexivity and Bias

Reflexivity in qualitative research concerns with a process when the researcher continuously reflects on the effect of his or her identity on the research process and the data that has been found. Gender, class, ethnicity, cultural background and values may influence data collection and analysis. In development research, Sumner and Tribe (2008) have argued that it is important for researchers to make clear the biases that might arise from who they are. To cope with this, the triangulation method is used to examine the source of data. Results are presented to a few interviewees and the author got confirmation from them that the findings are consistent with their perceptions, in one way or another.
IV. Findings

The results of this research, mainly obtained from interviews show a complexity of gender roles both at workplace and at home. Capability approach, as addressed in earlier part, is used to reflect on what men and women can do and what they actually do in the Chinese context. The approach tends to examine the freedom of a person to choose between different ways of living. According to Sen (2003), a rich human being is the human being in need of a totality of human life activities and simultaneously the man in whom his own realization exists as an inner necessity as need. He provided a general framework that differentiates functionings and capabilities. However, he has not come up with specific index to apply and to reflect on gender inequality. Thus Nussbaum’s (2011) theory is favored in this research and used as a guidance of the interview, since she listed ten central human capabilities to suit different contexts. The findings are presented in line with the order of research questions. The author summarizes the findings concerning participants’ physical health and their attitudes toward social activities, which participants’ responses are most consistent. It is then followed by the varying attitudes and experiences on gender inequality at home and in the workplace. Italic headings are used to refer to the key questions that are the most relevant to the research questions.

On the whole there is no significant difference among the interviewees’ responses in terms of their physical health and to what extent they enjoy socializing. When asked how energetic they feel about themselves compared with most people of their age and whether their health in any way limits their daily activities, the majority of the interviewees deemed their physical health is on a average level, despite around twenty percent of the female participants responded that their fitness level is declining due to insufficient physical activities or obvious fatigue that they often feel. The time spent on socializing varies a lot among the interviewees. Unmarried interviewees use more time to socialize while married interviewees, especially those who have children use much less time to do it. But nearly all the interviewees stated they enjoyed the social activities once they spent their time on it.
Never the less, experiences and perceptions of gender roles in family, at workplace, in classroom vary to different extents. There are also varying attitudes toward marriage and lifestyle. Details can be seen below.

### 4.1 Role in Family

In this research, there are fourteen interviewees that are married and fifteen are unmarried. A majority of them, married or not, live with parents. But on weekdays, some of them choose to live in the free dorm on campus provided by the school for the sake of convenience.

**Family Decision Making**

For unmarried interviewees living with parents, they are not very active role in family decision-making process unless an issue has much to do with them. They may give suggestions but it is usually the parents make the final decisions. More than seventy percent of them expressed that they hope with their future spouse they can put their heads together to decide on something. However, there are twenty percent of the unmarried females stated that they prefer their future husband takes more responsibility when it comes to important decisions. For instance, interviewee No. 1 said: “I would like someone to help me make decisions. I hope he is strong-minded, of course he needs to talk over with me, but I still hope he can make major decisions.”

For married interviewees, half of them stated that family decision is often made through a discussion between the couple. A few of them said they sometimes asked advice from parents, either to show respect or they actually need to. Nearly thirty percent of married interviewees said it is usually the wife that decides on most affairs. Discussion was only needed for a huge issue, which barely happens.

**Housework Division**

For unmarried interviewees living with parents, unless they take the initiative, it is always the parents who do the housework. When asked how they want the housework
to be divided after marriage, more than half of them emphasized they would like to split the work evenly. A few female interviewees, however, stated that they would not mind doing most of the housework.

According to married interviewees, only one third think they shared the housework in a relatively equal way with their spouse. The rest of them stated that it is either the wife, or the parents they live with that do the housework. It can be seen from interviewee No. 27’s words: “she does eighty percent of the housework, and she complains sometimes. When I can see that she is about to complain, I’ll do some. It is a small thing that does not cause a big conflict”. Another common thing among the married interviewees is that it is usually the mother or the grandparents who look after and educate the children.

**Household Finance**

The most popular opinion among the unmarried interviewees is the wife should be in the controller role with respect to the household finance. It is followed by the idea of having a shared bank account in addition to having personal accounts. The common way to deal with it among married interviewees is to have individual but transparent accounts. Nearly one third of them stated the wife indeed controls the household finances.

**4.2 Role at Workplace**

**Attitude towards Work**

Nearly all interviewees think working is very important. Most of the females believe that earning their livings is the way to be independent and raise their status in the family. The rest of them believe that the purpose of working is not to be financially secure, but to build self worth as well as to enrich their lives. Two female interviewees indicated that their husbands had actually suggested they quit work so that they could take better care of the family; one even tried to stay at home for two
years, but she felt her life was “…meaningless. Restricting myself to family trifles resulted in a narrow vision. It also had negative impact on family relationships (interviewee No.7).” While among the male interviewees, they think it is a personal choice whether to work or not. Meanwhile, they admit that it is difficult to have only one breadwinner under great social pressure, even though some take it for granted that men should take more responsibility in the family.

In this senior high school, the teachers’ working hours vary from eight to twelve hours a day, depending on whether they are the form teacher of a class. Working on Saturdays is common. Their daily routine includes lesson planning, giving classes and grading homework. Besides teaching, form teachers also need to spend time communicating with students and their parents. They need to do be present in morning and evening study sessions where students study by themselves, but usually having a teacher in charge of the class order. As it is a boarding school, they also need to check doors at students’ bedtime. In return-as form teachers-they earn around $66/$60/$54 allowance per month. The amount of the allowance is based on the performance reviews.

**Gender Difference**

There is no significant gender difference in terms of an individual’s influence on other people in the workplace. According to the interviewees, it is usually the teaching experience, age and professional title that matter in the school. The senior teachers are always respected and cared for when there is a need to arrange overtime work.

A striking impression is in the leading group in the administration of this school are mostly males. “Top leaders include the principal, the vice principal, the secretary and the director of the executive office, they are all males,” said interviewee No. 16. No. 16 continued: “only one or two female leaders at the middle-level, the majority are still male leaders”. A few of them stated that the school actually encourages female teachers to compete for management positions. The way of encouragement, according to interviewee No.24 is that “in the local area, schools need to reach the requirement
to have certain ratio/number of females participate in the administration. Since it is mandatory, rather than optional, it entails that female teachers are more vulnerable. If it was a balanced ratio, there would be no need to have such a rule.” When asked about the reasons why there is uneven ratio of leaders in administration, some interviewees said men are deemed more powerful, more persuasive and more capable to get things done. Due to the unique food culture in China, problems can be solved at dining table, “sometimes drinking and smoking are necessary part when leaders establish and maintain connections with each other, but it might be in the way if it is a female leader [as a woman of virtue is not supposed to drink or smoke]”, according to interviewee No. 15. A few other interviewees confirmed this phenomenon. No. 21 said: “People take it for granted when men make progress, but if a woman stands out, they tend to think she is a ‘tough woman’ who does not care about her family, children, and husband. It is acceptable if the man is not a family man, but not the same for a woman.”

Even though female teachers are encouraged to take an active part in administration, they are still not actively involved. The consensus among them is that they still have traditional thoughts. Women put family first and are not as ambitious as men in setting career goals. Moreover, the time and energy they spend in family and at work is double burden, which may hinder them to achieve a higher goal in their career. “Even if they participate, it is usually men who can get further in a competition. A woman may have difficulty to gain recognition as a top leader” according to No. 17 and other interviewees.

Another striking feature is men are usually preferred when they select a form teacher of a class. When asked about the reasons, they think it is necessary that a form teacher is “commanding” and “energetic”. It is deemed that men are able to undertake such “big task”. Interviewee No. 25 said: “Being a head teacher is a tiring job. As it is a boarding school, form teachers need to show up during students’ self-studying sessions in the mornings and in the evenings, and also need to check doors at students’ bedtime. Sometimes we could not finish our work until 22:30. So it is difficult for
female teachers to take this work if they have family, parents and/or children to take care of. ”

**Gender Roles in the Classroom**

During the interviews, almost all teachers stated that they treat male and female students in the same way except when they give criticism and legwork. The common impression the teachers have about female students is that they are of low self-esteem and are more sensitive. They tend to pay attention to girls’ subtle change in feelings. When they criticize, the tone is softer, and euphemism is always used. For male students, teachers are more strict and direct. A common example the interviewees gave is that a timeout punishment is seldom given to female students. Instead, most teachers tend to address the issue without naming names. Interviewee 9 recalled: “I do not think I treat female students as strictly as male students. If I find a boy snoozes during the class, I will give him timeout directly, but if it is a girl, I would ask if she is feeling unwell, then I will further decide on that.” According to a few interviewees, it is easier to joke with male students in general. If there is something funny to demonstrate in class, it is usually male students who take the role. When it comes to legwork, the consensus is to let the male students do more manual and labor work such as carrying heavy things or cleaning. Female students may be asked to do work that needs more concentration and patience, such as checking test results and making transcripts.

It is also notable that in dancing class and PE class, the contents of training for male students and female students are different. They are separated in dancing class for the reason of a better feel of the dance. “Generally boys dance more vigorously and girls dance more gracefully. I may give harsh criticism and be more strict to male students.” said interviewee No. 6. In PE class, male students have different training program and training intensity from female students. Interviewee 10 said: “I let boys do pushups and girls do squats. Sometimes boys may joke about why the girls do not do the same [implying why they have to do more]. We know that certain training may be
difficult for the girls. Of course boys can do the same as girls do if they mind. But most of the time they do not really care. As long as I insist on them doing it, they will do it.”

During the interviews, several female interviewees expressed that from their heart they favor female students. One (interviewee 3) said that she set clear rule for her class that under no circumstance a boy can beat a girl. Interviewee 12 said girls are hard working and well behaved, she is more patient answering their questions. On the contrary, interviewee 21 thinks she treats girls more strictly no matter it is in or after class. If a girl breaks the classroom rule, she criticizes by name, or gives timeouts.

When asked what qualities they had tried to convey to the students in and after class, the teachers said they told girls to be “self-disciplined, reserved, and gentle”, and boys to be “broad minded, reliable, and responsible”. Some teachers also tried to make the students realize that men and women are not equal in this seemingly less traditional society. They encourage female students to strive and pursue happiness, so that they do not have to limit themselves and be reliant on others. However a few interviewees stressed that society puts more pressure on men, so being strict with male students, they hope they could eventually help them to reach a higher goal.

4.3 Attitudes toward Marriage

“Getting married after twenty-five is a late marriage”, said interviewee No. 6. For most of the interviewees, it is not a common thing to get married after 30. “Not only because of the physical reasons, but also the pressure from parents, relatives, friends, neighbors, etc. ”, interviewee No. 25 explained. However, it is looser age criteria for men as people think it is necessary for men to have a stable or even successful career before they get married. More than half of the interviewees had the experience of being urged to marriage by parents and relatives, either by means of verbal suggestion or forced on blind dates.
**Premarital Sex**

Less than half of the interviewees think premarital sex is acceptable. For those who are not against it, they think it is a natural thing in the current society where people are more open-minded than before. Interviewee No. 1 said: “My attitude changed. When I was younger, like in my twenties, I thought I should save the most important thing for the most important day. But now I think as long as I feel the person is right, and I’m not forced, we both feel right, then it [premarital sex] is fine. It is the age difference that makes me change my attitude, and I think now I can take accountability for myself in a real sense.” Seven interviewees are strongly against it. According to them, virginity is very important, especially for women. Thus women are more vulnerable in a relationship. Another six of the interviewees stated that it is acceptable only on the condition that the two persons in a relationship both intend to marry each other. One interviewee expressed the view that “I’m not for it and I would not do it. I demand more of myself.” About one third of the interviewees made it clear that they do mind if their partner had already lost their virginity.

**Caregiving**

More than sixty percent of the interviewees stated that they are equally happy having a daughter or a son. Among the rest interviewees, half prefer having a son in the future. The reasons they gave include “boys can do more than girls,” “a continuation of family line,” and “pressure from parents.” Interviewee No. 5 recalled: “Our first child is a girl. My husband is traditional and he tried to persuade me to abort the child during my pregnancy. I rejected and we quarreled. At five months of pregnancy I even thought about divorce. Later on we had our second child, a boy, our relationship has become more harmonious”. On the contrary, another half of the rest of the interviewees prefer having a daughter in the future. Besides all good qualities of girls they can think of, they also gave reason that it is very expensive to raise a boy concerning the betrothal gifts the boy’s family needs to give out. And men take more responsibility in most cases. “My brother and I are the only children in my family. I
witnessed how stressed my parents were about buying apartments [as betrothal gifts] for us. From my own experience there is greater pressure for a family to raise a boy. Buying betrothal gifts, such as an apartment, and/or a car, ninety percent of the cost the parents need to pay”, interviewee No. 27 said.

4.4 Lifestyle

When asked whether they are free to decide for themselves how to live their lives, a majority of them gave a positive answer. However, there are a few interviewees that mentioned their worries about family pressure. As interviewee No. 3 stated: “Self-effort plays a big part, but family and society are the hindrance. Take my parents for example. They plan a path for me, I might resist, but finally I have to compromise.” A few more interviewees also stated they have their thought about their career plan and way of living, but are unable to give it a try if their family thinks it is unrealistic. Moreover, two interviewees mentioned the most influencing factor is their children, who could even make them to change the whole plan for the future.

When asked if they are free to apply creativity and imagination in their lives, most of them stated they do input a lot of it in their teaching practice, but after work only half of the interviewees think they do as a result of a lack of resources, or a “fixed” mindset. Interviewee No. 7 recalled: “Bringing up a child is so energy consuming. I knew all about it when my child was born. In my teaching, I think over about how to help the students acquire the knowledge, instead of about how to make them interested.”

Nearly half of the interviewees stated their current accommodation is not meeting their needs. Most of them live in the dorm room provided by school. In each dorm there are three bunk beds, meaning that up to 6 persons can live in it. There is no shower, laundry room, network, and the taps function only at certain times a day. For those who have their own apartment, some think there is not enough space for each person. The per capita living space ranges from 10 to 23m².
In Their Spare Time

In terms of whether they are able to allocate their spare time according to their own wishes, most answers are positive except for some married interviewees. They spend most of their leisure time in looking after children and barely have social life. Below is an extreme example an interviewee gave:

“My husband and I both like travelling. But I feel all my spare time has been taken by my family, children, and him. For instance, before, if we were to travel, he never discussed with me beforehand about where to go, with whom and how to get there. He always gave me a last minute notice, literally on the same day we needed to set off. I was very irritated and tried to communicate with him many times. He has changed compared with the earlier years of our marriage, but not very much. Last year was our tenth year of marriage, but it was also on the rock. I realized I had lost myself after sacrificing for him and for the family. I had lost my friends and classmates. I imagined if lost my marriage, then I would be all alone.”

When asked who has more leisure time in a relationship, no striking gender difference was found. Having summer and winter holiday makes it difficult to compare teachers’ leisure time with their partner’s who works in a different field. Moreover, some interviewees are colleague with their partner, either they are equally busy, or the one who is a form teacher is busier.

Gender-based Injustice

When asked if they had been the subjects of gender-based injustice in life, A few female interviewees shared their experience including: (1) being underestimated by male colleague, (2) facing a cold shoulder in some situations, (3) being rejected when seeking employment. It is common that female candidates are disfavored in the job market, especially unmarried candidates. According to some interviewees who worked or applied for jobs in private enterprises, it is not only difficult for female candidates to get the job offers, but also to keep the job. It is believed private
enterprises are profit orientated. Taking marriage leave and maternity leave will affect
the stability and proficiency of enterprises. Moreover, taking business trips and
having frequent business dinners where drinking and smoking is a necessary part,
females are seen as unfit for the work. In some job advertisements, it specifies
candidates be males or married. Interviewee No. 3 said even in some schools’
postings, they write up a clear description that they only hire married or male
employees. The interviewee further explained the reason why they favor married
candidates: “if the school does not offer permanent contracts, it is prone to losing
unmarried employees.” In response to the question of gender difference in job market,
interviewee No. 26 recalled: “In general there are less men who study this major. In
the job market, they can easily get the job opportunity without having to meet every
qualification as we do, no matter in which field”. However, there was also an
interviewee that indicated that for certain type of work, it is especially tough for
females. He stated: “In some job advertisements it is explicitly mentioned the limit to
gender, but we cannot blame all to discrimination. I worked in the geology and mines
bureau before. We needed to go to the mountains carrying equipment. It is not
suitable work for women.”
V. Analysis and Discussion

In this part the results presented earlier will be analyzed. Looking back to the central human capabilities, the author concludes that overall, the participants in this research are able to have normal health, attachments to things, to form practical reason, to live with affiliation, and to enjoy recreational activities. But mentally, they are confined to traditional thoughts and are unable to control their own environment. Outside work, it is difficult, especially for women to be able to use their senses and imagination, due to lack of energy or resources. The results indicate unequal cultural basis of gender roles and participants’ different perceptions and experiences that affect their teaching practice. Below the author will discuss about the findings in line with research questions and look into the possible reasons that hinder the “functionings”.

5.1 Domestic Life

Gender roles are influenced by a mix of modern ideas and Confucian and patriarchal ideology in domestic life. When influenced by Confucianism and patriarchy, gender relations are more conservative. On the contrary, when influenced by modern ideas, they are more equal. Having conservative thoughts, people tend to believe in or rely on male authority in conjugal negotiations. Men are supposed to be provider of the family and household work remains the task of women. Feminine virtues are valued and premarital sex is less acceptable.

Modernization and patriarchal ideology influence people to different extents. When it comes to decision-making, the majority of unmarried interviewees prefer a democratic atmosphere in their family in comparison with that a few female interviewees who expressed that they hope their future husband can take a leading role. Among the married interviewees, only half of them actually adopt a democratic process. From this the author concludes there is a transfer of rights, either an active or a passive one. An active transfer is when one spouse does not want to trouble their mind or makes effort of making decision, a passive one is when they are subject to
their surrounding environment, not being able to participate effectively and decide on things associating with their life. Interview No. 20 shared her experience: “We live with my husband’s parents. My mother-in-law cooks as well as looks after the child and. My in-laws usually decide on important things for the family. Sometimes I make suggestions; sometimes I do not take part. Overall, my suggestions are seldom adopted.”

Traditional gender relations still influence people in terms of housework division. Conservative attitudes towards household work still persist, even though more than half of the participants stated that they would like to share the housework in a relatively equal way with their future spouse. There is no single case among the interviewees showed that men take the majority of housework. Meanwhile, some female interviewees expressed that they do not mind doing more housework than males. For instance, one interviewee said that she wanted his future husband to be “chivalrous” who does not necessarily have to do the housework, but only needs to know the skill. Among all the participants in this research, it is always the mother who takes care and educates the children in a family. The father rarely takes part. This also corresponds to the Confucian thought that emphasizes women’s main roles as mothers and wives, and daughters in relation to their in-laws.

It seems to exemplify a number of research that males are reported to be endowed with more social responsibility and women with more familial responsibility. Accordingly, men pay more attention to personal career development and household finances, while women pay more attention to rear and educate the children and daily family life. However, research also showed that conflict over housework does not only exist, but also has negative affects on marital happiness of women. In the worse case, it may even be positively correlated with possibility of divorce (Frisco & Williams, 2003; Gjerdingen & Center, 2005). This warns the spouse to divide the household workload properly so that both side have relatively equal chance to participate, both in housework and in childrearing.

With respect to virginity and premarital sex, men and women tend to have different
opinions. On the same condition, males have more modern thoughts thus are more open-minded while females have more traditional thoughts thus are more principled. Among the participants it is usually the females who care about their partner’s previous sexual experiences. For them, it is more acceptable when their partner is not virgin, rather than themselves. Again an influence of Confucian ethics and virtues that impose on women can be seen.

Never the less, another particular tendency found in this research, is that some females are taking an active role in the household finance management as well as household decision making. According to the interviewees, it is more common that the wife in the family does control the finances than the husband, if one has to take the leading role. Some unmarried interviewees, regardless male or female, also indicate that the wife in the family should take charge of the finance. No direct link has been found explaining why this happens. But it is obvious that the female participants deem economic independence and self-sufficiency are essential. Taking control of the household finance can be seen as an endeavor from both sides to raise the status of females. It also reflects a liberal feature when self-sufficiency is valued as an important goal in human development.

**Role of Parents**

Parents play an important role in the family. The unmarried participants commonly live with their parents. Among the married, patrilocal family arrangements coexist with neolocal residence. Neolocal couples maintain active relationships with the parents. According to married interviewees, living with parents means having helpers in their life. Parents do most of the housework including looking after the grandchildren. They can influence a family decision, even though most of them avoid doing. However, in some families, there is a reliance on parents to make decisions. Or patents’ interfere with children’s life and make “better” choices for them. It is in nature a paternalistic trait that commonly happens in the families of which the children are unmarried. A statement exemplifies this phenomenon is when
interviewee No. 21 responded to the question “how difficult do you find it to enjoy love and support from your family,” interviewee No. 21 stated: “It depends on whether they support the cause. Take my previous relationship for example, I broke up with my ex-boyfriend under the pressure from my parents.” Interfering life of married children, as a result, may cause tense relation between parents and daughters-in-laws as it is more common the patrilocal family arrangements that the wife lives with the husband’s family.

5.2 Gender Difference at the Workplace

Cultural norms and values influence the workplace environment and hinder female teachers’ self-development. But both male and female teachers are constrained and made to live according to the values that have been imposed on from the outside. Womens’ workload from housework and childrearing is incompatible with their career development. Female teachers are encouraged to compete for management positions. However, their participation is low because females have limited energy on one hand, and the pressure they need to face from outsiders’ cynicism on the other hand. A female who stands out may be morally hijacked by cultural norms and deemed as a person who does not care about family and children. Females who have ambitions in management positions or are very active may have to endure other people’s snooping and judging on them.

However, it is partial to conclude that females are the vulnerable group at the workplace. In terms of welfare, females have paid maternity leave and breastfed leave. They also benefit on international women’s day when school sends gifts to female employees. In comparison, male employees have no special holiday benefits.

And there is widespread stereotype that men are more suitable and capable for more important tasks that are both time and energy consuming. It is also natural thing that they do more labor related work if there is a need. Some female teachers see it as bias, but some only have the impression that their male colleagues are very understanding.
In the school where the participants are working, gender does not have a direct impact on their income, which turns out to be more performance based. No striking gender difference was found concerning the freedom to express and the influence in decision-making. Based on what the participants stated, it is in sense a hierarchical structure that leaders on a higher level make decisions. Both female and male interviewees avoid expressing their ideas and give suggestions, as they know it will make no difference to the result.

5.3 Gender in the Classroom

In this research, it is noticeable that there is gender difference when teachers give criticism and assign legwork. Male students in general are treated stricter than female students. To male students, it is common among the teachers to use harsh language, strong and critical tone, while to female students it is a softer tone and indirect way. There is a gender division of work that male students are supposed to do more labor-related work such as carrying heavy things, while female students may be asked to do work that needs more concentration and patience. Due to traditional influence and social pressure, they are also expected to have different qualities.

Different ways of giving criticisms, according to the teachers, is out of the reason that female students have low self-esteem thus are more sensitive. However, no identical conclusion was found in previous research concerning self-esteem among adolescents:

For instance, Birndorf et al. (2005) researched on gender-related differences in the self-esteem among adolescents in US. Using Rosenberg’s self-esteem scale, they conducted a National Education longitudinal Study that studied the longitudinal trends, sex differences, and protective factors of adolescents in their eighth, tenth and twelfth grade. They measured changes in participants’ self-esteem and found that boys were more likely to report higher self-esteem in all grades compared with girls. Another

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3 Rosenberg’s self-esteem scale is a self-esteem measure widely used in social research. It uses ten items with the item answers on a four-type scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree.
research on 193 students from three high schools in rural Pennsylvania, US also found that rural male adolescents have higher level of self-esteem than rural female adolescents (Puskar et al., 2010).

However, a group of researchers who studied on gender differences in self-esteem across forty-eight nations show different results. Overall, they concluded men tend to have higher self-esteem than women do. But in many Asian countries, such as Thailand or China, they found particularly small gender differences in self-esteem. (Bleidorn et al., 2016)

In China, a research investigating students’ self-esteem in relation to personality traits in 2006 indicated that gender influence in self-esteem is not as significant as personality traits. In the study, Rosenberg’s self-esteem scale and Big Five Inventory\textsuperscript{4} were used to investigate 1432 students from four schools in Beijing city and Xi’an city. Male students are reported to have higher self-esteem compared with female students. Never the less, when the five personality traits are entered into the regression equation, there is no significant difference found in self-esteem between genders. Instead, it is indicated that personalities, specifically, by neuroticism, openness to experience and extraversion influence the self-esteem level (Zhang et al., 2006).

In this research, the teachers all know they should be fair to students in and outside classroom, professionalism also requires them to do so. They are aware of the importance of empowering females. Thus they convey to female students some qualities such as being independent or self-reliant. But the questions the author wants to address here are: whether unconsciously favoring one gender over the other, and/or being stricter to one group than the other contribute to gender equality; as it is a fact that male students and female students are expected to have different qualities and traits, whether this overemphasis on gender difference concerning personal qualities contributes to gender equality. Certainly the students’ state of mind requires teachers

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\textsuperscript{4} Big Five Inventory is a model describing the human personality. Factors include openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism.
to be flexible in their teaching practice, but the author believes that personal traits like “self-disciplined, reserved, and gentle”, and “broad minded, reliable, and responsible” does not have to be gender based. In other words, they are traits that teachers should transmit to all students. When overemphasizing gender difference in classroom, there is possible consequence that it may be later moved out to the society by students themselves.

Another group of Chinese researchers have studied Chinese university undergraduates’ personality types and concluded that androgyny (bisexual personality) is the ideal gender role type (Huang et al., 2012). In the research, 434 undergraduates were classified as masculine, feminine, androgynous, or undifferentiated based on Bem’s (1974) four gender role types. The researchers examined the relationships among personality type, trait coping style, and level of self-esteem. The result showed that “male masculine” was much more frequent in the demographic distribution of gender role types than “male feminine”; and “female feminine” was much more frequent than “female masculine”. This indicated that the traditional concepts of gender roles still have its influence on males and females. With respect to the level of self-esteem, androgyny personality scores highest, followed by masculine, feminine, and undifferentiated. The research result is corresponded to Cai et al.’s (2008) research which showed that individuals with androgynous personality are more self-confident. Besides, they are also found to have the highest subjective well-being (ibid).

Concerning the gender roles in school, more than a decade ago, researchers have advised that in school, teachers should see the merits of androgynous gender role education instead of focusing on the traditional gender roles. They should encourage androgynous gender-role development of students (Li & Zheng, 2002). However, it still does not change much after years. There is a Chinese saying that “a strict teacher has excellent students”, the author argues that the strictness should apply to all students. Personal traits such as “self-disciplined”, “reserved”, “gentle”, “broad minded”, “reliable” and “responsible” should not be considered or even labeled as either masculine or feminine, but qualities that teachers should encourage all students
to develop.

Sen (2003) has stressed that educational advancement can contribute to a better distribution of incomes and resources, which can be concentrated into various functionings and ways of living. It influences the development of valuable capabilities and on the process of human development. Education is the means against structural inequalities thus teachers should help in civic friendship and in the intelligent choice between different types of lives that a person wants to live.

Gender inequality restricts the functionings of different ways of living. In school it also affects teaching and learning. Teachers have the potential to offload the burdens that society has imposed on males and females, resulting from a Confucian and patriarchal ideology. To deal with it, the author suggests a gender-neutral education that frees both genders from a vulnerable position. Teachers should let the students know that a free person is the person who is free to develop his or her personality, masculine or feminine, and who frees himself or herself from gender role stereotype. As one interviewee stated: “It is unfair to judge the students neither by gender or by grades, the concept of class is the whole.”

There is research showing that schools construct and reproduce the gender injustice of the social culture through multiple dimensions, which include the visible and the invisible curriculum, and the teacher’s behavior (Gao’s, 2009). Gao further argued that in relation to gender equality, the social culture and the school culture are like two separate “circulations” that have the same inner structure. As a cultural institution, the school not only reflects gender injustice, which is a fact in our society, but also reproduces the injustice through various activities and practices. Teachers have occupational prestige and are students’ potential role models, how they perceive, experience, practice and pursue gender equality has much to do with the actualization of gender equality in China. Thus it is important for schools and teachers to recognize their influence in both school culture and social culture. They can contribute to driving the larger transformation of gender equality in the social culture by respecting
difference, as well as giving students free choice of what kind of person they want to be.

5.4 Linking Previous Research

Part of the findings in this research is consistent with those of other researchers’, however, it also differs from the previous research in a number of ways. Looking at the female disadvantage in employment, this research adds new reference to female’s low representation in leading groups. The results are consistent with the previous research that shows gender inequality in different professions (Michelson, 2009; Burnett, 2010) and work-family conflict (Ren & Foster, 2011; Woodhams, Xian & Lupton, 2014). Almost none of the participants in this research know whom they should turn to if they face gender-based injustice in life. This also corresponds to previous research findings that there is an absence of mandatory legal responsibilities for employers as well as other important institutional safeguards to protect equal rights for women and men.

Even though modernization theory entails cultural change and improvement of gender equality, for females in this research, especially married ones, the work-life conflict is an ongoing issue. They are still bound to domestic work, especially childrearing. The dilemma they face coincides with the previous research on work-family conflict that showed women feel stress resulting from the difficulty among career progress, unequal division of housework and social stereotype. (Ren & Foster, 2011; Woodhams, Xian & Lupton, 2014).

When looking at the factors that closely aligned to subjective well-being, both women and men are found to be vulnerable to the environment. Social stereotype, tradition, patriarchal influence all play a negative part in their inner life. It tends to be a mission for them to get married at certain age. Once women enter into marriage, they take on multiple roles: wife, mother, and daughter of parents-in-laws. In regard to personal traits, women are more self-disciplined. They are more confined to family chores and cynicism from outsiders when perusing career development.
Male roles in society, however, also tend to be prescriptive. They are expected to take major responsibility to raise their family. The traditional marriage custom in China, especially the betrothal gifts, impose extra burden on men’s family. Thus the author concludes that promoting gender equality does not only lessen the work life conflict for women, but also benefit men in freeing themselves from the traditional gender roles and stereotypes.

In contrast to previous research, there is widespread awareness among females, that is, the importance of being economically independent, which corresponds to a liberal feature. There is also a tendency that women are taking an active role in household finance management and family decision-making that shows the endeavor both by men and women in promoting women’ status.

To enhance gender equality in society and to move beyond deeply rooted stereotypes, raising consciousness is necessary. As culture is dynamic and people are resourceful in borrowing ideas, internal cultural criticism should be encouraged to protect women’s rights and interests from indirect discrimination rooting from social norms and cultural values. To give substance to this optimism, we must understand how the moral openness of cultures moves ordinary people (Moody-Adams, 1998), from structural inequality to the realization of dignity of life.

We should notice that people who criticize on their circumstances might lack the resources to change them. Previous research indicated that when women do find it too difficult to successfully combine motherhood with a life outside their home, they are increasingly opting to cut back on their fertility intentions rather than their working lives (Browne, 2002). Participants in this research, however, choose to prioritize family life. Either decision is bound to affect subjective well-being. Under such circumstance, the state has good reason to interfere with the violation of the norms of gender equality. Policymakers should enhance public recognition and understanding of gender equality by enacting legislation.

In policy, women are granted maternal leave and breastfeeding leave. In 2012, China’s
State Council published the Special Provisions on Labor Protection of Female Employees, which aims to improve female employees' well-being in the workplace. In the Special Provisions it specifies the duration of maternity leave and the allowance that female employees should get. Menstruation leave has also been provided or schemed up in a few provinces in China earlier this year. With the policy introduced, there should be supervision mechanism to monitor how the policies are implemented and make sure women can get the benefits in real sense. In addition, the author suggests that policy makers should consider encouraging men to be more engaged in family life, rather than just encouraging women to take an active role in the workplace. As one way to enhance autonomy, equality and individual liberty, parental leave should be a policy direction in the long run where males are encouraged to be active in family caregiving and housework.
VI. Conclusion and Suggestions for Future Research

This research is an attempt to examine on how female and male teachers experience and perceive the gender roles at home, in the workplace and in classroom in a senior high school in the north of China. By looking into how they experience and perceive gender roles in the workplace and at home, and how they can possibly influence students in classroom setting, is helpful for future research on measures to bring positive change relating to gender-based stereotypes. The findings of this study are intended to provide insights into the influence of modernization, tradition, stereotype, and self-discipline that all affect people’s inner life.

Modernization and communism are crucial factors to understand gender attitudes in the Chinese context, but Confucian influence cannot be overlooked. Both modernization and communism have positive influences on gender equality. However, Confucian ethical legacy put both men and women in vulnerable positions by prescribing specific roles and qualities for them.

Results show both males and females in this research are able to have normal health and attachments to things. They are able to live with affiliation and to enjoy recreational activities. However, both females and males are vulnerable in controlling their own environment to different extents.

Confucian values exert a considerable influence under communist rule. Patriarchal influences can be seen in domestic sphere in various aspects, such as in decision-making and housework division. Women take more responsibility in domestic tasks. Thus they are held back at the workplace by double burdens of housework and childrearing. Caring or paternalistic, parents play a very important role in the family. Conservative attitudes towards marriage and pre-marital sex still persist, more widely among women. They are more self-disciplined while men are in general more open-minded and care less about virginity. They are both flexible and willing to accept either gender of their children. But from their heart they still have preference, which is influenced by tradition and stereotype.
Influenced by modern ideas and communist ideal of gender relations, females are also consciously taking an active role in household finance management and decision-making. The ongoing work-family conflict and stereotype about gender roles stand in the way in women’s career development. The percentage of female representation in leading group is rather low. When seeking employment, females face more frustration than males.

As teachers have the capacity to influence students in their impressionable adolescence, the author also looks into the gender issue in classroom setting. It is worthy of notice that there is gender difference when teachers give criticism and assign legwork. They are more strict and direct to male students. Moreover, students are expected to develop different qualities: male students with “male characteristics” and female students with “female characteristics”. A Confucian foundation of society can still be seen.

The findings are intriguing and worthy of further study. By answering the research questions on one hand, this research offers new data and locates issues for future research in a wider scope on the other hand. It is noteworthy that few of the participants have benefited from or known much about the healthcare system. The author thinks it is a direction for scholars to study on how it happens and how men and women cope with health issues. The tendency that women are actively taking part in household finance management and decision-making also points to new research questions such as how both party negotiate; whether women gain the power at the expense of childrearing or taking more domestic workload; and the correlation between income and decision-making.

It is also necessary to reflect teacher practice from broader participant populations. One way of researching further could be classroom observation of teacher practice and the analysis of curriculum. It will help understand how teachers deal with the contradictions of traditional and modern values. Besides, to understand the students’ perspective and to see how they deal with the challenge of dominant gender norms should also be considered as a way of further research. By studying the students’
experiences and perceptions, it could help understand how teachers enable the students and how they could possibly realize their full potential. Longitudinal studies are needed that track gender norm development over time in patriarchal societies.

Parents’ role could also be taken into consideration for further research, for instance, their role in arranged marriages. Based on the fact that the participants in this research are in their twenties and thirties, their parents are basically capable of living independently with good health and decent salary. Thus the participants have not had much pressure from supporting their parents. However, it is worth studying the women’ responsibility in neolocal family and the relationship with parents on both sides.

New methods can be used in future studies on this topic as well. In order to reduce the negative impact of normative culture and end discriminatory practices, laws and regulations that sought to change disadvantage of either gender need to be assessed and evaluated. Further cross-cultural research will be necessary to sort out the reasons for these differing patterns of results.
References


Appendix A

Interview Guide A

Introduction (current research, my background, purpose)

Basic information:
Age
Gender
Marital status
Number of children
Highest Educational Attainment

About health:
How energetic/healthy do you feel compared to most people of your age?
Does your health in any way limit your daily activities?
Do you feel like the health system is considerate when it comes to issues specific to gender?

About work:
How many hours are you expected to work in a normal week excluding overtime and meal breaks?
How many hours overtime do you usually work in a normal week? Is that paid work or not?
What possibilities you feel that you have in decision-making process at work, any example?
Do you feel free to express your views at workplace?
At work, have you recently felt that you were playing a useful part in things?
Seeking work in the past, have you ever experienced injustice (Gender, Age-wise or else)?
Have you been the subject of any gender-related injustice at work? Exemplify?
In case you experienced injustice, would you try or do you know what do to or who to ask for help?
What is your view on women/men and work in general?

About daily life:
Do you have a clear plan of how you would like your life to be?

Are you free to decide for yourself how to live your life?

Are you being able to exercise autonomy in allocating your time? Do you feel time-related stress?

In your everyday life, do you think you are being respected? How likely do you think it is that you will experience discrimination outside your work?

Are you free to use imagination both at and beyond work?

**About leisure:**

How much leisure time do you have each week? What do you do, to what extent you enjoy it?

How easy or difficult do you find it to enjoy the love, care and support of your immediate family?

Who in your relationship has more leisure time?

**About marriage:**

According to you, at what age getting married could be a late marriage?

Have you experienced being urged to marriage? In what way? How did you deal with that?

What’s your opinion about sex before marriage/virginity?

How would you like to (do you and your partner) divide housework?

How do/would you like to make household related decisions between you and your partner?

Who controls/would you like to control the majority of the household finances? Property ownership?

Will you be equally happy having a daughter or a son? If not, why?

Do you feel free to express your views/ at home, or in a relationship?

**About economic factors:**

Your annual income?

Is your current accommodation meeting your needs?

**About teaching:**

Any example on how you mentioned gender roles in and after class when communicating with students?

As a teacher, do you feel it is necessary to transmit gender equality ideas to students, in what way you have done/would do that?
Appendix B

Interview Guide B

Introduction (current research, my background, purpose)

*Basic information:*

Age
Gender
Highest Educational Attainment
Teaching Subject
Marital status
Number of children
How do you define your role in the family?

About Work:

How many hours are you expected to work in a normal week excluding overtime and meal breaks?

How many hours overtime do you usually work in a normal week? Is that paid work or not?

Imagine if you were a male/female teacher, from his/her view, do you think males and females are equal? Can you further explain?

What is your view on women/men and work in general?

About Teaching:

Any example on how you mentioned gender roles in and after class when communicating with students?

As a teacher, do you feel it is necessary to transmit gender equality ideas to students, in what way you have done/would do that?

About Marriage:

According to you, at what age getting married could be a late marriage?

Have you experienced being urged to marriage? In what way? How did you deal with that?
What’s your opinion about sex before marriage/virginity?
Will you be equally happy having a daughter or a son? If not, why?
Do you feel free to express your views/ at home, or in a relationship?

About Lifestyle:
How energetic/healthy do you feel compared to most people of your age?
Does your health in any way limit your daily activities?
Do you have a clear plan of how you would like your life to be?
Are you free to decide for yourself how to live your life?
Your annual income?
Are you being able to exercise autonomy in allocating your time? Do you feel time-related stress?
How easy or difficult do you find it to enjoy the love, care and support of your immediate family?
Is your current accommodation meeting your needs?
How much leisure time do you have each week? What do you do, to what extent you enjoy it?
Who in your relationship has more leisure time?
In your everyday life, do you think you are being respected? How likely do you think it is that you will experience discrimination outside your work?
Are you free to use imagination both at and beyond work?
# Appendix C

## List of Interviewees

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