

Abstract:

Over 90 million Chinese only children or singletons (*dusheng zini*) reached marriageable and parental age in the past decade, and as more of them become parents they will be the dominant parent group in urban China in the foreseeable future. Their parental perceptions and practices will shape how China's next generation is brought up, and will thus be associated with and influence family dynamics and relations in urban China. Despite the abundant literature on parenting in general and Chinese parenting in particular, three gaps have been identified. First, although most research emphasizes the discourse on childrearing and the family values of parents in both traditional and modern China, parents' subjective practices and experiences have rarely been studied. Second, various dyadic relations in childcare have been well documented in the general parenting literature, but few studies have discussed multiple family relations in childcare. Intergenerational relations are central to academic discussions on Chinese parenting, but conjugal relations are marginalized. Mothering and fathering in post-reform China are analyzed as separate practices and little attention has been paid to conjugal collaboration, negotiation and conflict in childrearing. The reconciliation of conjugal and intergenerational relations in childcare has had even less coverage. Third, Chinese singletons have typically been viewed as the care recipients, and their roles as caregivers and specifically as parents are underexplored. To fill these gaps, the proposed project will investigate the parenting of urban singleton parents in post-reform China. Qualitative data will be collected through in-depth interviewing and participant observation in a second-tier city in mainland China: Changsha in Hunan province. A total of 180 informants will include urban singleton parents as the main subjects, non-singleton parents as the reference group, and grandparents as an alternative voice of intergenerational relations in childcare. By incorporating multiple voices, this project will explore 1) how China's economic development, social transformation, government policies, and changes in family structure and gender relations shape urban singletons' parental perceptions in the post-reform period; 2) how singleton parents perform physical care, emotional care, and moral discipline in their daily practices of childrearing; 3) how the state-mandated fertility transition through the one-child policy shapes gender and intergenerational relations in childcare in urban Chinese families, through comparing the gendered labor division and the intergenerational cooperation of childcare between singleton and non-singleton parents. Extending the discussion of dyadic relations in childcare, this research will contribute to the literature by investigating multiple family relations in childcare and viewing parenting as a set of relational practices constructed by various family members through their negotiation of responsibility, authority, power, collaboration, and resources allocation in their daily childrearing activities. Documenting the parenting practices of urban singletons, a unique group with more egalitarian gender values and strong intergenerational bonds, will also enrich the understanding of Chinese parenting. The findings of this research may have implications for the family policies of the Chinese government.