

# Whose choice is it?

*Gender Imbalance in Vocational School---A Case Study in Yunnan Finance and Economics School*

Lingyuan Chen



Institute for Education Research  
Comparative and International Education

UNIVERSITETET I OSLO

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# ABSTRACT

Gender is one of the central organizing principles around which social life revolves. Gender imbalance in education is linked with social, cultural, historical, economic and political factors. Although there are a set of laws to protect women's rights and the Chinese government has been improving the social status of women, emphasizing the equality of men and women in both public and domestic sphere, China is no exception in terms of gender inequality in education field and labor market. For example, some academic or career fields are highly dominated by one gender. Compared to higher education, vocational education is at a lower level in Chinese education system. Gender research in this field could shed light on gender equality in Chinese society. This study explores the factors which could have contributed to the gender imbalance in a vocational school in China. I investigated the influence from four aspects: family background, cultural factors, Chinese higher education expansion, and labor market, using the qualitative approach with semi-structured interviews.

The study concludes that the four aspects are inter-related and interact with each other. The family SES background and higher education expansion influence the attitudes of students and parents towards education and education return, especially in rural areas. Furthermore, the rural families seem to be influenced by traditional culture factors more than urban families. Gender stereotypes, gender inequity in culture and gender bias in labor market lead to the gender imbalance.

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Statement of the Problem and Motivation

My study is focused on gender imbalance in a vocational school in Southwest China. It looks at the contributing factors to the observed phenomenon that there are predominantly more girls than boys at Yunnan Finance and Economics School.

*Gender* is a term utilized by feminist theoreticians in the 1970s to differentiate between the biological and cultural aspects of the lives of men and women. Gender refers to the understandings, explanations and actions that organize difference between them (Malik & Lie, 2006). Vocational education is a separate stream. Unlike general academic schooling, vocational education is specifically geared toward entrance into the labor market (Carnoy, 1994). In other words, it can provide students not only a clear aim, but also specific training and relevant education. In Some developed countries, such as Japan which has fairly high vocational school shares, there are strong government interventions in education in order to address pressures caused by a lack of skilled workers (Gill, 1999). But in some developing countries such as China, vocational education is the choice of people who don't have access to academic education, for example, people don't have enough money or good academic performance. Different from the gender imbalance in higher education, gender imbalance in vocational education can reflect not only the social and cultural factors, also the labor market influence obviously.

Although there are a set of laws to protect women's rights and the Chinese government has been improving the social status of women, emphasizing the equality of men and women in both public and domestic sphere, China is no exception in terms of gender inequality in

education field and labor market. For example, some academic or career fields are highly dominated by one gender. Gender research in this field could shed light on the gender structure in Chinese society. This study explores the factors which could have contributed to the gender imbalance in a vocational school in China, Yunnan Finance and Economics School.

Yunnan Finance and Economics School is a vocational school located in the city of Kunming—the capital of Yunnan province in southwestern China (see more details about Yunnan Finance and Economics school in Chapter 2). I worked as a teacher in this school from 2005 to 2007, during which I consistently observed that the number of girls greatly exceeds that of boys. For instance, in June of 2005 when I came to this school, there were 921 students who graduated in July and the number of female students was 795. In September, the number of new students was 1008, and female students were 834. In addition, I observed a similar gender imbalance in 2006 and in 2007. Due to great interest in this case, I chose to go back to this school and conducted a five-week field study in 2008, trying to understand and explain this phenomenon: what are behind this phenomenon? This is the question I will explore in this study. Table 1.1. and 1.2 further illustrate this imbalance.

Table 1.1 Enrollment divided by gender from 2005 to 2008

	Male students	Female students	sum
2005	294	505	799
2006	288	512	800
2007	301	617	918
2008	286	704	990

Table 1.2 Gender distribution related to different specialization in 2008

class	specialization	Male students	Female students
1049	Financial accounting	7	46
1050	Financial accounting	10	42
1051	Financial accounting	8	44
1052	Financial accounting	7	45
1053	Financial accounting	7	46
1344	Computerized accounting	15	38
1345	Computerized accounting	16	37
1346	Computerized accounting	16	37
1347	Computerized accounting	15	37
1348	Computerized accounting	22	36
1349	Computerized accounting	19	34
1350	Computerized accounting	17	38
1351	Computerized accounting	14	40
1406	Computer science	25	12
181	Advanced financial accounting	25	58
182	Advanced computerized accounting	33	48
5003	marketing	19	26
8004	Trade business	11	40
sum		286	704

(Source: Admission and Enrollment Report of Yunnan Finance and Economics School in 2008)

## 1.2 Research Questions

The overall research question is:

- **What are the factors that cause the gender imbalance in Yunnan Finance and Economics school?**

In order to answer the overall research question in this case study, cultural tradition, family backgrounds, labor market as well as other relevant factor such as Chinese higher education expansion are taken into consideration, thus a set of sub-questions are formulated :

- **How do the family backgrounds of students influence this imbalance?**
- **How do the social and cultural factors influence this imbalance?**

- **How does the Chinese higher education expansion influence this imbalance?**
- **How does the labor market influence this imbalance?**

### **1.3 Significance of the Study**

The significance of this study is to raise gender awareness within the field of vocational education. While the body of research on vocational education is voluminous, topics related to gender imbalance in vocational training have received much less attention than higher education. But questions related to gender are an important area for further research in vocational education. In China, scholars are inclined to focus on the gender imbalance in higher education while ignoring vocational field which is tied to labor market at basic level. Gender study in vocational education can not only reveal the influence from Chinese society and culture which can coincides with some researches in higher education, but also can discover the vicious circle in labor market and influence from traditional culture in rural areas.

### **1.4 Limitations**

The constraints in my field work and the relatively small sample decrease the generalizability of findings. Thus the norms of representativeness were not met, due to the specific context of the study and a lack of resources available. The field study is conducted in a finance and economics vocational school in southwest China. There are some differences between western areas and eastern coast in China, for example, the average education level is higher in eastern coast than western China. Although the result can not be generalized to all vocational schools in China, this unique concerning gender imbalance in a vocational school. It may fill up some blanket in the field of gender research of Chinese education.

## 1.5 Thesis Structure

This thesis includes 6 chapters. The first chapter gives a brief introduction of the whole thesis, including the motivation of choosing this topic, significance of this study and research questions.

In the second chapter background setting, some traditional opinion related to family and women in Chinese society are represented, including the influence of Confucianism which is helpful to analyze and understand the gender bias in before 1949, empowerment of women rights after 1949. Furthermore, Chinese education nowadays and an introduction to Yunnan Finance and Economics school are mentioned as an indispensable background.

Chapter three is the literature review and theoretical framework. My study intends to discuss gender imbalance in vocational school. The discussion and presentation of former researches and literatures highlights the views and ideas from other writers who work in the similar area. These literature reviews contain previous researches on both vocational education and gender issue. Feminism theories related to gender inequality, gender difference, gender stereotype, and are explained. Furthermore, the relationship between education and employment, different education expectations among two genders are illustrated briefly.

Chapter four is the methodological chapter where method and design of the study are dealt with. The ethical issues concerning the study and limitation are also addressed in this chapter. In chapter five, the findings gained during interviews with the participants are presented. According to the research questions, chapter five presents and analyzes the data guided by research questions along four themes:

- **The family background and social-economic status (SES) of participants. (parents' education background and career, financial statement, family composition)**
- **The influence from Chinese traditional culture**
- **The influence from Chinese higher education expansion.**
- **4. The influence from labor market**

Chapter six is a final chapter of the study where the results are discussed. Here the research questions, the empirical data and the theoretical framework are all brought back into play.

## **1.6 Conclusion**

This chapter explains the purpose of the study, describing the main research questions and sub-questions. Besides showing the significance of the study, it provides the introduction of target school---Yunnan Finance and Economics school. The introduction could be helpful to understand some contents in this thesis with the outline of thesis structure.

# **2 Background Setting**

## **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter aims to present an overall backdrop to my research by introducing and describing some characteristics related to the gender issue in Confucianism as it was the core of Chinese traditional culture before 1949 and continues to influence people's daily life nowadays. Furthermore, a brief introduction to Chinese education in modern times is given, including Chinese education system, Chinese education reform which began in 1990s, Chinese vocational education as well as relative international perspectives.

## **2.2 The Family Intergeneration and Gender from Confucianism Perspective**

Knowledge of the cultural framework within which everyday behavior takes place is beneficial to the individual because the reactions of others can be predicted (Malik & Lie 2006: 27). Individual behaviors are closely interacted with social and cultural structures. Therefore, it is indispensable to review Chinese ideology which influence guide the society (Zhao, 2008: 18).

Prior to 1949 establishment of the People's Republic of China, the official ideology has been Confucianism, which was the dominant moral philosophy in thousands years of Chinese society. Although Confucianism is often followed in a religious manner by the Chinese, arguments continue over whether it is a religion. Confucianism lacks an afterlife, its texts express complex and ambivalent views concerning deities, and it is relatively unconcerned with some spiritual matters often considered essential to religious thought, such as the nature

of the soul (Introduction to Confucius, <http://wapedia.mobi/en/Confucius>). Ideas and principles of Confucianism were widely accepted and they built the basis of common Chinese tradition and beliefs such as strong familial loyalty, respect of elders by their children and of husbands by their wives).

During the imperial era in China, filial piety was the central value of the family life. Down through the centuries, parents constantly stressed to their children that the way they treated their elders was the central measure of their moral worth. There are obligations to defer to parental wishes and tend to parental needs (Whyte, 2004). Scholars regard filial piety as “the metaphor for religion and community organization in China” (Liu, 2005: 260). The notion of filial piety required that all children should respect, obey and serve their parents. In a world, parents had absolute power to control their children. Moreover, filial piety extended to carrying on the family line, providing the ancestors with descendants, namely male offspring. Son favoritism is a natural consequence of a culture that praises males and devalues females. On the one hand, it is largely due to the Confucianism (Arnold & Liu, 1986). On the other hand, son favoritism may also be due to a complex interplay of economic, social and psychological factors (Liu, 2002). During the long time of human beings history, especially in eastern Asia, sons were regarded as the only blood to continue the existence of their family while married daughters could not be regarded as the family member anymore as males burdened the obligation to protect their family and country. In addition, to some extent, it could be due to that males were the main labor source before Industrialization<sup>1</sup>. According to different roles males and females have played, parents typically have had different expectations and treatment of their sons and daughters. It was common that daughters were deprived of the right to get educated and the opportunity of working before 1949. During the next 20 years, China will have increasingly more men than women of reproductive age, due to

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<sup>1</sup> Industrialization is commonly known as a complex process involving the transformation from an agricultural society to an industrial one by expanding capital and the labor market, applying innovations in energy and technology, mechanizing production (Chow,2002)

the bias in favor of male offspring. In 2005, births of boys in China exceeded births of girls by more than 1.1 million. There were 120 boys born for every 100 girls. By 2020, there will be 30 million more Chinese men between the ages of 24 and 45 than women (Lafrianiere, 2009)<sup>2</sup>. Decreasing female population will lead to low percentage of female students in all levels of education (Zhao, 2008: 102)

Under Confucian ideology, women's place was limited within domestic sphere. And women were born with lower status. It goes without saying that in a family structured by the father-son ties, the ancestor being honored are men. In such patriarchic families governed by descent, women were dependents of men, serving as instruments for furthering the male line. Women shouldered the importance responsibility of maintaining the family. Therefore, it is natural that a woman who gave birth to sons would be valued by her family (Zang, 2003). Before 1911 when the Qing Dynasty was over, most women were not allowed to have a job and their obligation is to take care of parents- in -law, husband and children. In a long feudal period, women were given education for a totally different purpose from men's. Men received education in order to become officials<sup>3</sup> while women were taught the ethic code of "three obedience and four virtues"<sup>4</sup> which governed the specific implementation of the principle of "husband guides wife". A woman's worth in life was to "assist her husband and teach her son" (Yu, 1995)

After 1949 when the People's Republic of China was founded, women have the same right as men to find a job and become independent. However, most female still prefer to have jobs which are defined as leisure and stable in order to spend more time on children.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://bbs.chinadaily.com.cn/viewthread.php?tid=632268>

<sup>3</sup> The feudal imperial examination selected successful candidates for high official positions to safeguard feudal rules at all levels.

<sup>4</sup> The "three obedience" require woman to obey her father before marriage, her husband after marriage and her son after her husband's death. The "four virtues" placed strict demands on women in morality, in speech, in appearance and manner, and in household duties.

## 2.3 Gender Equality Policies in the People's Republic of China

With the development of human rights and equity, as well as the dramatic change in economical structure in modern China, females are getting more and more respects and protection. In 1954, the First National People's Congress adopted the first Constitution of the People's Republic of China. On the basis of the "Four Equalities between men and women as specified in the Common Program, the Constitution further stipulated that women in China enjoy equal rights with men politically, economically, culturally, socially and in home life (Yu, 1995:43).

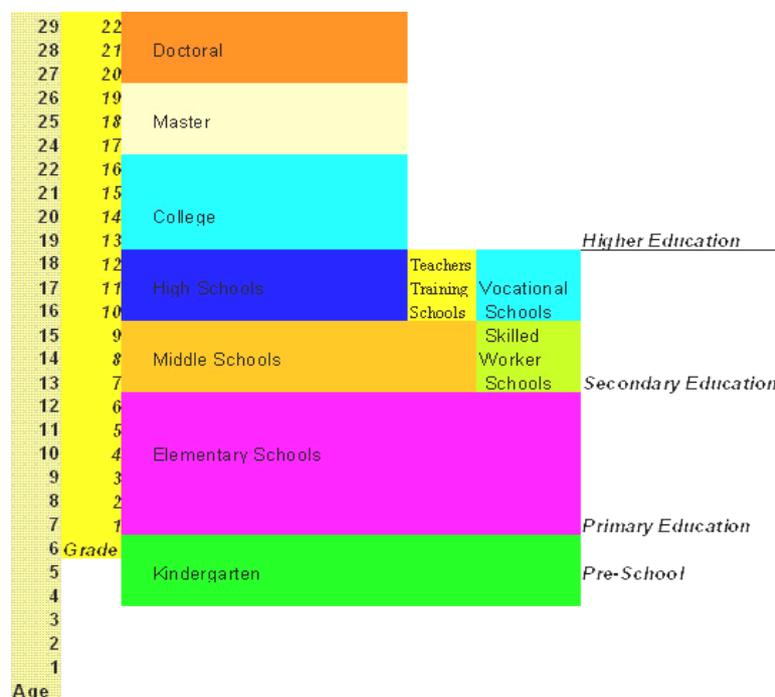
In 1988, The Regulations concerning the Labor Safety of Women works was published in order to assure women of special treatment before and after childbirth. In 1992, *The Law of the P.R China on the Protection of Rights and Interest of Women* was passed to protect women's lawful rights and interests, to promote the equality between men and women, emphasizing the equality of education for women and men: "the state shall guarantee that women enjoy equal rights with men with respect to culture and education, shall guarantee that women enjoy with men, to work, the participation of women in paid labor force has to be required" (Appendix in Yu, 1995:345, cited in Zhao, 2008). It emphasized that "school age children, whether boys or girls, are mandated to take compulsory education." Furthermore, it stated that "the government should guarantee the equal rights of women to work. In such aspects as promotion in post or in bank, evaluation and determination of professional and technological titles, the principle of equality between men and women shall be upheld and discrimination against women shall not be allowed" (Appendix in Yu, 1995: 346, cited in

Zhao, 2008). The law marked the great success of the women’s movement in P.R. China and contains new provisions on the basis of new development and issues. It embodies in it the principle of the equality of women and men and the provision of special protection to women (Yu, 1995:43).

## 2.4 Gender imbalance in Chinese Education

The main body of Chinese education includes primary education, secondary education (including middle school, high school and vocational school) and higher education. With the adjustment of education structure during recently years, Skilled Worker schools have been removed out of public education system and Teachers Training schools have been merged into college system. Compulsory education in China includes primary education (elementary school) and lower secondary education (middle school). According to the law, all of Chinese citizens can enjoy compulsory education almost free of charge.

Figure 2.1 Chinese Education System



Source: <http://www.waet.uga.edu/wiki/index.php/China>

Despite the government advocates women’s participation into education and employment, emphasizing the equality of women and men, still there is no systematic supervision of the implementation. The laws mentioned above tried to eliminate the difference between men and women at social level. However, the cultural factors were ignored. As Rosen (1992) has argued, there was little has been done to change the domestic position women had in the family and those equality is a political strategy rather than empowerment of women. Furthermore, the economical situation in rural areas and in western China is another obstacle to improve the gender equality, especially in educational field.

Table 2.1 percentage of youth 10-18 years of age who are currently in school of those who ever enrolled in 2000

Percentage currently in school,2000				
age	Rural boys	Rural girls	Urban boys	Urban girls
10	99.21	99	99.52	99.61
11	98.59	97.97	99.3	99.13
12	97.1	95.44	98.81	98.87
13	94.01	90.43	97.55	98.4
14	84.63	80.04	96.39	95.69
15	65.74	60.05	90.3	92.26
16	45.54	40.15	82.83	84.84
17	28.28	23.65	72.41	74.34
18	16.47	13.28	48.97	49.53

Source: Connelly & Zheng(2007) Enrollment and graduation patterns as China’s reforms deepen, 1990-2000. In Hannum & Park (eds.) *Education and Reform in China* (p.83).London: Routledge.

Table 2.1 gives the comparison of school attendance rate between rural areas and urban cities, divided by gender. In order to explore the influence of higher education expansion, I choose the data of the year of 2000 as an example. Comparing the urban and rural youth in 2000, the gap between urban and rural rates clearly increase as the children age. At age 10 and 11, the proportion of rural boys and girls who are enrolled in school is closed to the urban rates. But by the time a child researches 13 or 14, the urban /rural gap is evident and is substantial by age 15 and 16(age of ending compulsory education, see figure 2.1). To some extent, it indicates the influence of increasing tuition fees. Rural girls have the lowest rates of school attendance at every age from 10 to 18 while the urban girls occupied more percentages than urban boys at every age. The difference between rural boys and girls increases as the child ages increase. The differential between rural students and urban students increase with the educational levels.

Table 2.2 shows that the average school attendance rate among youth aged between 10 and 18 in 1990s. We can clearly see that proportions varied considerably across provinces, from highs in 80 percent range in developed areas, such as Beijing and Shanghai, to lows in the 30 percent range in undeveloped areas, such as Yunnan, Gansu, and Sichuan, etc. urban rates were always higher than rural rates, both for boys and for girls; girls usually had lower rates than boys did, with small differentials in the urban areas and larger differentials in rural areas. As stated above, when we put the gender policy into practice, more obstacles could emerge. Access to education is closed linked to some characteristics, such as location of residence and economic status. My data analysis in Chapter 5 also supports this opinion.

Table 2.2 Percentage of 10-18-year-olds in school by province and gender

	Boys		Girls	
	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural
All China	73.64	54.55	71.96	44.37
<b>Beijing</b>	<b>82.70</b>	<b>71.02</b>	<b>85.89</b>	<b>68.18</b>
<b>Shanghai</b>	<b>86.34</b>	<b>69.34</b>	<b>80.08</b>	<b>72.67</b>
Tianjin	85.40	64.74	87.87	60.77
Hebei	75.64	56.78	71.49	52.61
Shanxi	69.82	51.88	69.52	48.33
Inner Mongolia	67.05	53.11	71.58	46.10
Liaoning	77.86	59.37	75.04	57.10
Jilin	71.58	54.74	72.80	49.80
Jiangsu	76.36	63.14	71.77	53.02
Zhejiang	64.78	44.32	57.80	39.31
Anhui	65.99	52.76	62.09	37.00
Fujian	74.05	50.95	67.59	38.76
Jiangxi	72.42	53.88	70.03	35.45
Shandong	76.04	59.53	75.21	47.34
Henan	72.07	54.47	67.28	44.72
Hubei	77.75	53.94	73.25	44.00
Hunan	71.52	55.42	68.78	43.74
Guangdong	79.57	66.94	76.26	55.53
Guangxi	71.54	59.14	71.50	48.06
Hainan	69.25	66.02	59.48	58.69
Sichuan	69.79	46.50	69.59	36.57
<b>Yunnan</b>	<b>76.39</b>	<b>50.65</b>	<b>75.35</b>	<b>36.30</b>
Gansu	74.48	52.63	74.6	36.91
Guizhou	64.34	52.58	55.93	34.61
Shanxi	75.69	54.52	74.69	48.93
Qinghai	74.37	40.07	76.68	29.32
Ningxia	74.15	53.23	75.86	39.93
Xingjiang	67.57	49.32	67.42	49.32

Source: Connelly & Zheng(2007). Educational Access for China's Post-Cultural Revolution Generation: enrollment patterns in 1990s. In Hannum & Park (eds.) *Education and Reform in China*. (p.70).London: Routledge.

## 2.5 Higher Education Reform in 1999

Chinese economic system used to be very highly centralized. To adapt to that, the former higher education system was also centralized, with education provided by the central and local governments respectively and directly under their administration. With the economic reforming, the Chinese government began a serious effort to restructure the national higher education system. At the mid-1990s, central government carried out the plan of emerging Chinese higher education institution. By 2004, there had been 420 cases of mergers which had involved more than 1000 higher institutions (Li, 2005: pp1-2). In 1999, the Chinese Education Ministry began the second stage of reform: “expansion” and “decentralization”.

In June 1999, the 3rd National Educational Conference was held in Beijing, “*the Decision of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council on Deepening Educational Reform and Comprehensively Promoting Qualification-Oriented Education*” was issued. It aims to reduce Government bodies and give more power to the local government as well as to readjust relationships between government and education institution. Most higher education institutions which have been administered by central government were handed over to local governments dealing with education, followed by the adjustment of rights of universities. For example, some “key” universities had the priority to design entrance exam by themselves, other universities could follow the exams designed by central government or local governments. In the following 3 years, various policies such as “cooperation” and “joint establishment” continued to put forward to strengthen relationship between universities and local governments. Someone hold it can be attributed to market—economy force, since both universities and local government could gain profit from cooperation. Gradually, higher education institutions are becoming independent units to deal with school-management according to requirement of market economy, including recruitment of students, adjustment to

subject and international exchange. Government should be responsible for the overall planning and macro management instead of direct administration.

Before 1999, access to education in China has the shape of a pyramid: Levels of attendance is around 90% in elementary school, but drop significantly in higher education due to a shortage of resources and places available. Traditionally, learning used to be highly esteemed because of the Confucian tradition, university graduates were once regarded as “heaven's favored ones” who would never worry about employment. But in recent years, it has become increasingly difficult for university graduates to find jobs because of the “Marketization” of Chinese higher education. Quite a number of university graduates have taken jobs as housemaids, security guards or unpaid trainees. Even so, half of the more than 4 million graduates remained jobless after leaving school (National Center for Education Development Research, *Green Paper on Education in China, 2007*).

In light of this, Ministry of Education officials in charge of student affairs have made a public appeal that university graduates should be prepared to compete with “ordinary laborers” in the job market, which raises the question: If a university graduate is like an “ordinary laborer”, what is China's higher education for? Furthermore, it could make some students who have planned to enter higher education to choose vocational education instead because of the increasing tuition fee for higher education and devaluation of university diploma.

However, we still can hear different voice, the headmaster of Yunnan Finance and Economics School believes that Chinese vocational education have got great pressure from the expanding of higher education since 1999. He indicated that the expanding of Chinese higher education has attracted some good students, who would like to choose vocational school at the

beginning, because it is very easy for them to go to university. He mentioned that the average level of students' academic performance is much lower than students' in 1990s.

In some western countries, vocational education became increasingly important from the second half of the twentieth century in accommodating mass higher education (Trow, 1974). Some countries such as France that have massively expanded their university system have reduced their university funding rates. Other countries such as Canada, USA, and to a large extent, the UK have accommodated massively expanded higher education students in vocational education institutions that were established or expanded to fill this new role. Vocational education institutions are not funded for research and so are cheaper than universities. In this approach, governments often make access to lower level and lower cost tiers reasonably broad and limit the funding needed for higher level and higher cost tiers by limiting access to them (Moodie, 2008)

## **2.6 Discussions on Vocational education**

### **2.6.1 Vocational Education and Training**

In the human capital framework, general education creates 'general human capital' and vocational and technical education 'specific human capital' (Becker, 1964). The former is portable across one's life and from job to job, while the later one is not and hence many advocate general education, as more suitable to the flexible labor force that can change task and even the type of work; but the later one has an advantage, imbibing specific job-relevant skills, that can make the worker more readily suitable for a given job and would make him/her thus more productive. Hence both are important, and education systems in many countries therefore include both general and vocational streams of education in varying proportions.

Vocational education, increasingly known as career and technical education, is a longstanding program whose place in education continues to evolve (U.S. Department of Education, 2004 cited in Ahemd, 2007). Vocational education aims to produce recruits to the profession that have professional ideology, especially in relation to understanding good practice and service (Jarvis, 1983 cited in Ahemd, 2007). According to Tight (1996), in this type of education, the value of the educational encounter between teacher and student lies partly in the external purpose which it serves. Therefore, the curriculum must be planned in terms of specific objectives which arise from an analysis of what the economy needs or what skills certain occupations demand. The content of the curriculum must be relevant to industry and commerce.

Vocational training refers deliberately organized measures to bring about learning as preparation for work tasks in designated occupations or cluster of kindred occupation, especially applies to preparation for crafts and skilled industrial work below technician level (Lauglo, 1993).

Generally, Vocational subjects have low attraction because students realistically perceive better labor market opportunities in other occupations than those for which vocational subjects purport to prepare. General education subjects are a better bet for possible further academic study (also for higher education in technological fields) than are vocational skills. When access to particular occupations is difficult, even for those with seemingly “relevant” occupational skills from their schooling, general education is a better bet for the labor market than occupation-specific skills (Foster, 1965; Lauglo, 2008). Vocational education has traditionally been considered an inferior alternative reserved for students who are unable to achieve further academic education

## **2.6.2 Vocationalisation**

The term “Vocationalisation” refers to efforts by schools to include in their curriculum those practical subjects which are likely to generate among the students some basic knowledge (Bachuss, 1988:31).

Vocationalisation differs from school-based vocational education and training (VET). Under VET, a student’s timetable is dominated by practical skills learning and by directly related theory. Under Vocationalisation, the bulk of the students’ timetable consists of general education subjects, and the main purpose of their course is general education (Lauglo, 2005). Under Vocationalisation, vocational subject matter takes only a minor portion of total curriculum time (typically one-tenth to one-fifth). This allows the student to pursue a sufficient load of general education courses to qualify for higher stages of academic education.

Lauglo and Lillis (1988) are of the opinion that Vocationalisation policies are a quest for greater labor market relevance of education. For better articulation between the content of schooling and subsequent application of acquired skills, attitudes and knowledge in the world of work, both in obtaining a livelihood and in becoming more productive in the work obtained.

## **2.6.3 Vocational education in China**

In Chinese education system, after finishing compulsory education, a standardized test determines the following education. Students who do well on the test are sent to high school where they are prepared for university. For the others, there is a range of agricultural, technical and other vocational schools available that usually prepare them for some kind of trade or manual work.

According to the Chinese Education Ministry in China (2003)<sup>5</sup>, there is a rapid expansion of the scale of vocational education in China. During the 15 years between 1980 and 2001, the proportion of regular senior high school students among all the students in senior secondary education has decreased from 81% to 54.7%, while the proportion of secondary vocational school students has increased from 19% to 45.3%. Furthermore, significant progress has been made in vocational education in rural areas of China. Students from rural area are more likely to be encouraged by government funding for vocational education than students from cities. In 2002, NCVER (The U.S National Centre for Vocational Education Research) finished their comparative study in vocational education and training system in nine countries. One of their conclusions is the rapid economic growth in China has been accompanied by a considerable degree of industrial and social disruption. China is searching for new approaches to VET and its relationship to the mainstream education system. There are major challenges for the direction and funding of VET. In the context of an emerging market economy, the strengthening of the demand side is arguably the major challenge.

As mentioned above (see page 11), Skilled Worker schools have been moved out of public education system and become private schools. These kind of schools can provide trainees with short-time period training (usually 3months) in relevant field such as cooking, car repairing. The training schools don't have right to award trainees any academic diploma while the contents of curriculum are full of skilled course. By comparison, Chinese vocational schools belong to public system, students can get academic diploma (equal to high school diploma) after graduation. The contents of curriculum contain both academic and skilled courses. With the cooperation with Chinese universities getting deeper, some Chinese vocational schools have transferred into Vocationalisation schools (see chapter 5).

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.moe.edu.cn/>

## 2.7 A brief Introduction to Yunnan Finance and Economics School

Yunnan Province is located in Southwestern China. It covers a total area of 394,000 square kilometers. The population in Yunnan is 43 million, of which the 25 ethnic nationalities take up over 14 million. Due to the restrictions of transport and geological conditions, Yunnan, a mountainous and frontier province, is an under-developed region. Influenced by the lower speed in economical development, the education in Yunnan province shows weakness such as inadequate financial support from government, the low attendance rate in rural areas.<sup>6</sup>

Figure 2.2 The location of Yunnan Province



Source: [www.wiki511.com/index.php?doc-innerlink-云南省](http://www.wiki511.com/index.php?doc-innerlink-云南省)

Kunming, the capital of Yunnan province is located in the center of the province. It covers a total area of 21,100 square kilometers, with elevation from 1,500 to 2,800 meters. Yunnan Finance and Economics school was found in the city of Kunming in 1930s. It is administrated by both the Finance Department and Education Department in Yunnan Government. In the 1980s and 1990s, it attracted a large amount of excellent students and most graduates

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<sup>6</sup> [www.newsgd.com](http://www.newsgd.com)

occupied most vital positions in Financial Department in local government, local banks and commercial companies. Before the middle of 1990s, the school had set 8 specializations: agriculture accounting, industry accounting, finance accounting, bank accounting, management accounting as well as budget accounting, statistics and commodity price study (*The History of Yunnan Finance and Economics school*, 2000). Furthermore, the design of curriculum is similar with higher education, including basic courses such as language and Mathematics, specialization courses such as Macro Economics and Accounting Theory.

After 1999, the school has been losing attraction to excellent students, especially to students in urban areas. Furthermore, with the modification of Chinese Accounting Principles and influence from economical system transition (here it indicates the change of structure of economy, transition from agriculture economy to industry economy), the curriculum was changed. There are only 2 main specializations in school now: finance accounting and computerized accounting, nearly 90 percents of students study these two programs while less than 10 percents of studying Marketing and Business Trade. In terms of course arrangement, general education such as mathematics, language) take up 30%, while vocational training taking up 70%.

In 2003, Finance and Economics school began to cooperate with The South Finance University. The graduates of Yunnan Finance and Economics school can go to South Finance University to study finance subject if they can pass the entrance exam designed by the university itself and entrance exam is easier than the national entrance exam. The school adjusted the course arrangement for students who want to attend the higher education and a new program name “pre-college” was established. The curriculum design of this program is closed to “Vocationalisation”: vocational subject matter takes up only a small portion of total

curriculum time while academic subjects taking up almost 70 percents. This program has attracted a great amount of students, especially in urban areas (see chapter 5)

## **2.8 Conclusion**

This chapter aims to present an overall picture of Chinese education system and education reform in late 1990s, with emphasis on the higher education and vocation education in China. Furthermore, it explains the family culture and gender bias derived from Confucianism. This chapter helps to obtain the glimpse of Chinese society in which gender imbalance in vocational school occur. As the chapters go on, the picture of gender imbalance in specific context will be unfold.

# 3 Related Gender Theory

## 3.1 Introduction

My study intends to discuss gender difference in a vocational school. The discussion and presentation of former research and literature in this chapter highlights the views and ideas from other writers who work in the similar area. I attempt to develop a theoretical lens through which we can explore the hidden factors behind gender imbalance. These are mainly based on book *Gender Inequality: Feminist Theories and Politics* (Lorber, 2005); book *Education and Gender Quality* (Wrigley, 1992) and article *Theoretical Perspective on Gender in Education: the Case of Eastern and Southern African* (Mannothoka, 1999) The literature referred to comes from the database in UIO library, literature and government reports in China as well as internet database.

## 3.2 Definition of Gender

*Gender* is a social status, a legal designation, and a personal identity. Through the social processes of gendering, gender divisions and their accompanying norms and role expectations are built into the major social institution of society, such as the economy, the family, the state, culture, religion, and the law-the gendered social order. In the 1960s and 1970s, Liberal feminism emphasizes on the difference between *gender* and *sex*: Compared to *Gender*, *Sex* is a complex interplay of genes, hormones, environment, and behavior, with loop-back effects between bodies and society (Lorber, 2005: p.9).

ILO (International Labor Organization) gave a definition of *Gender* in 2003 as the following statement:

*Gender refers to the array of socially constructed roles and relationships, personality traits, attitudes, behaviors, values, relative power and influence that society ascribes to the two sexes on a differential basis. Whereas biological sex is an acquired identity that is learned, changes over time, and varies widely within and across cultures. Gender is relational and refers not simply to women or men but to the relationship between them.*

Furthermore, *Gender* is a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived difference between the sexes, and gender is a primary way of signifying relationships of power (Scott, 1988). The perceived gender differences often enact an unequal power relationship between women and: the unequal access, control, and distribution of values, resources, and justice.

### **3.3 Previous Research Review**

#### **3.3.1 Previous Research on Gender in Vocational Education**

Gender is an important variable that western countries have in common for the explanation of differences in attitude. Both in an affective and in cognitive sense boys have a more positive attitude than girls towards technology (Walters, 1989). The book *Gender and Racial Differences in Vocational Education* (Boyer & Rodgers, 2006) gives us an international picture about this phenomenon. Distributional analysis was applied to cross-country data from UNESCO to examine proportions of secondary school students attended in the vocational track, by gender. It has documented the extent of girls' under-representation in non-traditional high school career and technical education courses and examined the role of sex discrimination in these disparities.

A case study which was conducted by World Bank in 1990 shows female enrollment situation in vocational education in Bangladesh. They selected 8 technical vocational education schools randomly to look at the enrollment divided by gender. And female students occupied only 6%. In the next year, the World Bank selected a much bigger sample of 51 vocational schools and in situations in Bangladesh, female only occupied 2%. To my surprise, before the survey, the local government and constitution said many of the right things about equity of the gender in vocational education and employment. The unique two year plan for 1988-1990 include the following language: women are the most neglected segment of the nation for whom the plan intends to put maximum emphasis of the spread of education and skill development through vocational education and skill training, a total of 187,000 women will be trained in animal husbandry, garment making, food processing and other fields at 250 skill development training center and vocational schools. Unfortunately, plans were far better than the fact, the 250 skill development centers for women were never really developed. Those facilities that were created were at higher VET levels ---4 engineering colleges, and only one for women. Lower level VET for women was largely overlooked. (Bangladesh---vocational and technical education review, 1990)

Jon Lauglo (2005) indicated there are gender biases in vocational enrollment of Kenya, Ghana and Botswana. Boys gravitate towards subjects that are associated with traditionally male occupations: building and construction, and mechanical workshop subjects. Home economics is nearly exclusively taken by girls. Business subjects and office skills have a degree of mixed recruitment.

### **3.3.2 Research on Effect of Family Background in Vocational Education**

Sube (1981) investigated the influence of parents and friends in choosing a career in East Germany. Data indicated that the influence of parents and friends was of major importance for over 50 percent of young people in choosing a career. Children of cooperative farmers are more inclined to choose a career and see social prospects in agriculture than children with a different background. Similar with his survey, my data in file study indicates that students whose parents and relatives works in financial and accounting field are more inclined to choose similar career and relative school than other students.

Codling (2006) investigated whether family background and the choice of vocational field explain the observed gap in dropout rates from vocational upper secondary education between natives and children of immigrants in Denmark and to investigate ethnic and gender differences in educational choices in article *Ethnicity, gender and vocational education in Denmark*. This article drives me to think about the factor of the difference between urban family background and rural family background. With the expanding of big cities in China since 1990s, a huge amount of people from countryside have moving into cities, which caused a social problem: the education of their second generation. From my data analysis, we can see they have different attitude, choice toward school type and future career.

## **3.4 Related Gender Theories Review**

### **3.4.1 Gender Inequality in Feminism**

A theory is a proposition about the relationship between things. In principle, a theory is universal, applying at all times to all instances of thing in question. In the social sciences, the notion of “theory” needs to be treated more cautiously than in the natural sciences, because of

the complexity of social phenomena and because people react to knowledge about themselves in a way that chemicals and forces do not (Denscombe, 2003).

My focus is the gender imbalance in vocational education, in order to understand women in a historical perspective, I briefly reviewed feminism. The goal of feminism as political movement is to make women and men more equal, legally, socially and culturally. Gender inequality which we speak of is usually women who are disadvantaged relative to similarly situation to men. (Lorber,2005: p.5).Theories which focus on inequality explanations describe women's situation in terms of Liberal feminism's view of unequal opportunity structures and Marxist explanations of women's position as part of a complex class system of exploitation both in terms of gender and social class (Lengermann and Niebrugge-Brantley 1992, cited in Mannothonka, 1999). And the ideology of sexism sustains beliefs about the biological differences between men and women that account for their different social fortunes (Mannothonka, 1999). Radical feminism perceives all society as oppressive to women. Every institution is a vehicle by which men dominate women resulting in gender oppression. They perceive gender oppression as a system of patriarchy, to them patriarchy is the least noticed and yet most important structure of inequality (Measor and Sykes 1992). The radical feminists are concerned with investigating how patriarchy spreads its web in society. For instance, in schools males dominate females in classrooms which have a negative impact on females' life chances. Therefore males are viewed as a major (not sole) source of the problems that females encounter in schools. Radical feminists also investigate the sexual harassment of females in society (Mannothonka, 1999).

Liberal feminists revealed that women's primary location was viewed in the private sphere and men's in the public sphere, and the socialization of children was viewed as a preparation

for their adult roles and work in the spheres appropriate for their sex (Mannothonka, 1999). The private sphere is composed of unpaid and undervalued activities linked to child rearing, housework and support of adult men. In contrast, it is in the public sphere that the true rewards of social life are to be found –status, power, money, freedom, self-esteem and personal development. Women were concentrated in lower academic ranks and were little involved in decision making committees and academic administration.

Liberal feminism theory insists that biological difference should be ignored in order to achieve gender equality. And it has made important contributions to improve the gender equality in workplace. More and more women have entered fields formerly dominated by men, such as science. However, sexist patterns of hiring and promotion still produce workplaces where men and women work at different jobs (Lorber, 2005: p.29). But liberal feminism has not been able to overcome the prevailing belief that women and men are intrinsically different.

The biological differences theory traces the different personality structures of men and women to their different physical bodies, and different cognitive and affective processes (Connell 1987). The fundamental assumption of it is that the physiological make-up of human bodies is the foundation of the social relations of gender. These theories maintain that biology determines gender and society reflects what nature determines. *Gender*, like *race*, has both a biological and a social component and can be highly visible. From birth, the biological differences between the sexes are used to established gender roles, or societal expectations about proper behavior, attitudes, and personality traits (Healey, 2007 p. 11).

Difference theory was used to illustrate the phenomenon of differences in academic achievement between women and men. Countries studies have indicated that male students

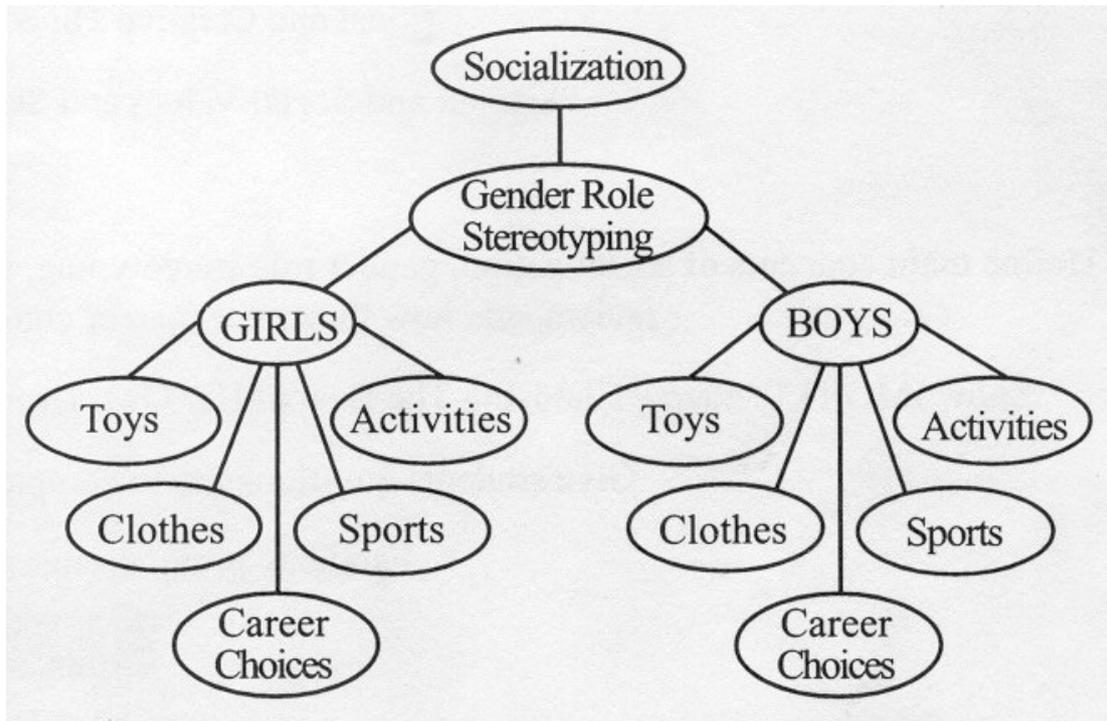
appear to be more skillful, knowledgeable, and confident in information technology attitudes, use, and skills when compared to female peers. Difference in performance can be mediated by age and by type of cognitive activity (Kaufman and Richardson, 1982, cited in Mickelson, 1992).for example, girls usually do better than boys in primary school and girls tend to be outperform boys in verbal tasks, while boys do better in quantitative activities. Girls are not pursuing math-related careers in proportion to boys. These forms of gender bias undermine girls' self-esteem and discourage them from pursuing nontraditional courses of study. These gender differences appear particularly in vocational education, where sex segregation of the work world is mirrored in the students' enrollment.

### **3.4.2 Gender Stereotype**

According to Hargreaves, sex roles are the behavior patterns which are differentially displayed by the sexes. Sex-role stereotypes are the beliefs that people hold about these patterns (Hargreaves, 1986).

Sex-trait stereotypes appear to be involved in the manner in which females and males are treated in the areas of education and occupation. For example, if teacher believes that males have certain characteristics and female have other characteristics, and then they may recommend certain course of study to boys and other to girls. At the level of higher education, if admitting officials believe that women are better suited to certain programs of studies and men to others, then their admissions decisions may reflect these beliefs. In the occupational sphere, if administrators believe that certain types of work are more appropriate for men and other types of work for women, then the employment opportunities for the sex may differ as a result (Williams & Best, 1990: 289).

Figure 3.1 Gender Stereotype



Source: <https://rundle10.wikispaces.com/Stereotyping>

Gender theories in China are influenced much by gender stereotype and coincide with some western theories. The ancient Chinese labeled them as Yin and Yang. Yin represents the female, the negative, the darkness and softness. The Yang, on the other hand, represents the male, the positive, brightness, and hardness. Yin and Yang, according to the Chinese, interact with each other and thusly balance the universe. The primitive gender stereotypes found throughout Chinese history can be attributed to the strong belief of Yin and Yang, which decides the nature of female and male. Men and women take their responsibilities respectively according to the division of the natural characteristics of gender. The gender stereotypes are reflected in various fields, such as marriage, family, politics, and economy.

### **3.4.3 Differences in Returns on Education**

Mickelson (1992) also pointed out there are differences in returns on education: members of the working class, women, and minorities are more likely to receive lower returns on their education than men, or middle class members. The primary reason is that men and women continue to work in sex-segregated labor market that has different career ladders. Secondly, Social powerlessness theory indicates that women usually feel that they can not expect equitable returns on their education, no matter how well they have done in school, and realized that they have to seek a husband if they wish to be socially and financially secure. They strive for future status and success by choosing a ‘promising’ husband rather than by focus on a career. Thus the primary evaluation of social returns on their educational achievement will not be made in labor market, but in marriage. Furthermore, based on reference –group theory, women could evaluate their education return by using the standards of other women, as a point of reference. It may explain why women do not regard the educational return of elder women to be unfair. The returns are fair in terms of a sex-segregated occupational structure, especially when a woman sees that her role model’s education can make a big change in her life, for example, from a lower-status to a higher status.

### **3.4.4 Gender Perspective in Employment**

As I stated in Chapter one, vocational education is straightly linked to labor market, and lots of research results emphasize the “labor market demands” theory to explain the gender difference in education. Investment in education is usually seen productive and there may be existing beliefs that, there is a straight and positive correlation between education and employment (Tight, 1996) Education in most countries, including in China, is becoming a kind of business, therefore, in order to attract more students, schools have to meet the demand

of labor market since the employment is becoming the most significant factor which the students will consider when they plan to choose school and subjects. Turning to the more general question of sex stereotypes and occupational suitability, we note that in every country there many occupations that are highly sex-typed: that is, persons in these occupations are primarily of one sex or the other. This effect can be seen across many different occupational field and at various occupational levels (Williams & Best, 1990: 293). The fixed image has rooted in people's mind, society choose several kinds occupation for the female instead of themselves, such as nurse, teacher and so on. Both collective data and interviews showed that, to large extent, the image of female which appear in introduction materials such as text book for primary school could affect students' further education and career expectation in the future (Zheng, 2000). Zheng chooses 3 text books for primary school randomly, and found that all of roles the female played in these books appeared as teacher in primary school, house wife nurse whose job are not hard. Meanwhile, the gender –biased, child-rearing practices within the home setting have an important influence.

Since the gender bias in labor market can not be eliminated in a short time, thus it directly leads to the gender imbalance situation in school on all of levels. At the university level, it has been approved that gender factor is the third important element which impacts the employment of college graduates. Female employment discrimination often arises in enterprise. The first Green Paper *Women in China 1995-2005: the Report on Chinese Gender Equity and Development* was published in March of 2006. It indicated that the employment situation was quite stern and the female being employed is more difficult.

As a substitute of higher education, to a large extent, vocational education are also facing the same problem, perhaps , it is more worse since the graduates from vocational school has

lower expectation to their future career. Career education programs, such as vocational training programs, internships, and on-the-job training, are an important way for the female to gain the skills they need in order to get a good job with good pay. However, some schools or programs may not give female students an equal opportunity to succeed in career education. Such programs might make education difficult for females by treating females differently or because they have rules or policies that are unfair to females.

*Science and development network* presented a report in 2007 to criticize the gender imbalance, female scientists and engineers in China continue to face discrimination in the workplace. It noted that there are few women amongst the country's top-ranked scientists and suggests that gender equality should be written into laws relevant to science. It found that there were nine million women in science and engineering in the world in 2005 — one third of all scientific and technological professionals were in China. However, these women were not as successful as their male colleagues. Of the female professionals interviewed, 93.8 per cent said they believed they had been discriminated against when trying to find a research job. The report also found that female scientists and engineers take a more practical view of their professions than their male colleagues. Most women interviewed cited job stability and high salaries as the main reasons for entering the profession, rather than a personal interest in furthering science. Many female scientists and engineers also have to cope with running homes and caring for children in addition to their research duties.

Tight (1996) comments that belief in a close and manageable linkage between education and economy may be seen in operation on at least three levels: those of individual, the organization and of the whole society. At the individual level, the participant in education learning or training may regard this as a personal investment in their own future, during which

some financial return may be expected. At the level of organization, the belief takes the form of regarding expenditure on staff training and human resource development as an investment in the survival and development of the organization. At the level of the society, it supports measures taken by the nation for instance in the issues like employment so as to encourage increased participation in further, higher and continuing education and vocational preparation, training and updating (Tight, 1996). When talking about employer' interests, there are significant differences between industrial interests and the interest of other employment sectors. Employers may require certain technical and scientific skills in their labor force at any given time, but the range and the pace of innovation in modern industrial process makes specific skills redundant. Employers now require skilled workers with flexibility, adaptability and discipline which would enable them to be quickly trained for specific job. It is argued by Kuroda (1999) that the content of education does not matter as much as the diploma because employers select applicants on the basis of how much education they have received. Sometimes, employers openly say they don't want female or prefer male applicants. Or through eliminating female applicants at initial stages of competition, firing pregnant women or transferring them to jobs with severe working conditions, women are forced to quit. Furthermore, the discrimination is still an important cause of the gender pay gap. Based on former studies in developing countries, it is found that, both before and after leaving vocational training, women typically had substantially lower hourly wages than men. This is true for a wide range of programs, including technical college training, and secondary vocational-technical education.

### **3.5 Conclusion**

This chapter is intended to provide a theoretical lens for the research and give a brief review of concepts which are relevant. The main perspectives we discuss are gender inequality,

gender difference, gender stereotype and education return. Furthermore, relevant concepts such as gender, gender role stereotyping are introduced. Concerning the emphasis on vocational education, previous researches on effect of family background and gender are reviewed. My study will take into account these theories and data will be analyzed and presented in light of them.

# **4 Research methodology**

## **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter is meant to explain the methodological issue that is used to govern the process of data collection and analysis. These reasons for choosing and using those methods will be explained in this chapter. It is the intention of this chapter to explain the field work which I did last semester. Therefore some issues including the sampling, data collection as well as validity and reliability keeping will also be discussed. Basically, this study used qualitative approach; the collected data in this study are mainly from face to face interview. However, some basic statistics methods were also used as necessary supplementary in order to display the general picture.

## **4.2 Qualitative versus Quantitative Methods.**

There are two main approaches in conducting research. Generally speaking, scholars distinguish them by arguing that quantitative research emphasizes quantification in collection and analysis of data whereas qualitative approach emphasizes words rather than quantification. Qualitative method was defined as: an inquiry process of understanding a social or human problems, based on building a complex, holistic picture, forms with words, reporting detailed views of informants and conducted in a natural setting(Creswell, 1994). It facilitates study of issues in depth and detail. On the other hand, quantitative approach requires the use of standardized measures so that the varying perspectives and experiences of people can be fit into a limited number of predetermined response categories to which numbers are assigned (Patton, 2002)

Besides, many writers have suggested that the differences between the two approaches are deeper than the superficial issue of the presence or absence of quantification since they differ with respect to their epistemological and ontological foundations, and as well as the principal orientation to the role of theory in relation to research (Bryman, 2004).

Quantitative approach entails a deductive approach to the relationship between theory and research, in which the accent is placed on the testing of theories. It has incorporated the practices and norms of the natural scientific model and of positivism in particular and embodies a view of social reality as external, objective reality. By contrast, qualitative approach emphasizes an inductive approach to the relationship between theory and research, in which the emphasis is placed on the generation of theories. It has rejected the practices and norms of the natural scientific model and of positivism in particular in preference for an emphasis on the ways in which individuals interpret their social world and embodies a view of social reality as a constantly shifting emergent property of individuals' creation (Bryman, 2004).

In qualitative research, researchers' role is to interact with those being studied in their natural settings in order to seek an understanding of how people make sense of their lives, experiences, and their structure of the world. They need to rely on voices and interpretations of the participants (Creswell, 1994), which means it is almost impossible to remain at an objective distance from participants. On the contrary, the qualitative researchers try to minimize the distance between participants. For this reason, the qualitative investigator admits his/her values and bias, as well as the value of information gathered from the field (Fengshu, 2002).

For the above-mentioned characteristics, qualitative approach enabled me to explore the meanings derived from the respondents' ideas. It could best serve the purpose of exploring the factors which contribute to the gender difference and obtaining a more realistic picture of the target school.

### **4.3 Sampling Strategy and Sample Size**

In qualitative research, participants are carefully selected for inclusion, based on the possibility that each participant will expand the variability of the sample. Such a purposive sampling increase the likelihood that variability common in any social phenomenon will be represented in the data, in contrast to random sampling which tries to achieve variation through the use of random selection and large sample size (Fengshu,2002).

In this study purposive sampling is useful in attitude and opinion surveys because of its relative low cost and convenience (Andrea, 2005). It is essentially strategic and entails an attempt to establish a good correspondence between research questions and sampling (Bryman, 2004). In other words, I sampled on the basis of wanting to interview people who are relevant to the research questions.

Compared to theoretical sampling which entails sampling interviewees until the categories achieve theoretical focus, the snow sampling is a form of convenience sample. It allows the researcher to make initial contact with a small group of people who are relevant to the research topic and then use these to establish contacts with others. I adopted snowballing sampling in my study, considering the convenience and limited time. I found some students who I taught before as my first group of interviews. Considering I would ask some questions related to family background and financial statement, the students who were my students could be the best choice because they would like to talk about their family with a person who

they are familiar with rather than a stranger. Then, I asked them to introduce me and this research to their friends and classmates. Surprisingly, I got lots of response that they would like to take part in this research. But based on the characteristic of purposive sampling and limited time, I only choose some of them to be my interviewers.

In line with the reasons mentioned above and qualitative design in this study, 22 current students in Yunnan Finance and Economics school were selected on purpose in order to include as many as possible kinds of background and current situation that the participants have. It is composed of 17 female students and 5 male students. The reason why I didn't choose 11 girls and 11 boys is that most of the current students are female students, occupying nearly 75 percent of the total number of students in school. Moreover, according to my research questions, it was crucial that I got enough female students to conduct interviews. However, it didn't mean that the interviews to male students were not important because they could provide some other different opinions from different perspective of the male. Furthermore, 3 former students (who are employers in company now) were chosen as an indispensable part of the sampling population in order to get necessary information from labor market. They could look at this gender difference both outside and inside with their own studying and working experience.

I used to two ways in which I would like to vary participants are by study specialization and by the grade they are in; by gender and by family background. According to my research question since these factors are more likely to influence the gender difference. Furthermore, sample composition could illustrate some likelihood in one group as well as compare different opinions between different groups.

Table 4.1 sample composition by specialization and grade

	Finance Accounting	Computerized Accounting	Finance and Trade	total
Grade 1	4	3	0	7
Grade 2	2	3	0	5
Grade3	8	2	0	10
Former students	1	0	2	3
total	15	8	2	25

Table 4.2 sample composition by family background and gender

	urban		countryside		total
	One child family	More than one child	One child family	More than one child	
Female participants	7	2	0	11	20
	3	0	0	2	
Male participants	3	0	0	2	5
	10	2	0	13	
total	10	2	0	13	25

## 4.4 Data Collection

Since I conducted the field study in school where I worked before and I am quite familiar with the staffs and leaders. I contacted the school leaders and former colleagues in July in order to get their admission and support. After I started my data collection, they gave me lots of help, for example, the school leader allowed me to borrow school annual reports which provided me useful information about gender distribution in the past three years.

Based on the research question, I adopted a face to face, semi-structured interview as the major instrument for data collection. On one hand, Compared to structured interview, semi-structured interview is more flexible. There is much greater interest in the interviewee's point

of view. The interviewing interviewers can depart significantly from any schedule or guide that is being used. It is possible to ask new questions that follow up interviewee's replies and can vary the order and even the wording of questions (Bryman, 1988). On the other hand, compared to unstructured interview in which there may be just a single question than the interviewer asks and the interviewee is then allowed to respond freely, semi-structured interview require researchers to prepare a list of questions or fairly specific topics to be covered which is often referred to as an interview guide.

In my each interview, I asked around 15 questions to each participant. Sometimes, I changed my question and question order when participants felt it was hard to answer or had very different opinion. It was to make them open ended so as to let the respondents explain issues without limitations. But the interview guide was important so as to make sure that the same information is obtained from a number of people by covering the same material.

Each interview used a maximum of 40 minutes. The interview session was divided into two parts: introduction and discussion. In the introduction session, I introduced myself to participants in order to build rapport and establish the confidence between researcher and participants. I also informed them they could choose answer question s or not and all of answers will only be used in academic research, not in commercial business. Meanwhile, I also asked participants to tell us some personal basic information of themselves, such as name, gender, and hometown. This session made some participants who were a little nervous at the beginning much more active in the second session

What is worthy mentioning is that I did a pilot to test my research guide and sent the sample to my tutor. The feedback from my supervisor reminded me some basic and crucial

qualification criteria that a researcher should have in qualitative research: establishing and maintaining a positive interviewing climate maximizes the chance of successful interview (Patton, 2002). This requires that the interviewer knows his/her questions well, listens more than talks, and is genuinely curious about the topic and what the interviewee has to say about it.

The second session was the discussion whereby interview questions were asked, answered, tape recorded. It aimed to explore the factors which have contributed to gender difference in target school, try to find the answer to research question----why there is a gender difference in this school. Most participants expressed their interests to my questions, in addition, they indicated that nearly all of students could feel this gender difference, but few people thought about a research on it.

As mentioned above, I adopt snow balling sampling to get these participants. It means most of them known who I am and some information about the research. It saved me some time for the interview proper by smoothing the way so that we could come to the point soon after we met. An appointment suited to their convenience was made during phone talk or message. All of current students were studying in school regularly from Monday to Friday. The interviews had to be conducted after school or during weekend.

I borrowed a room which is used to have weekly meeting to conduct my interview, and prepared some cookies and tea, which created a very good interview climate. Some interviewers liked this room very much because it can relax them. But some other students preferred coffee bar or their own rooms.

## **4.5 Transcribing the Interviews**

In my study, I tried to transcribe the audio taped interviews right after they have been finished. There is an obvious advantage in transcribing an interview soon after it has occurred while it is still fresh in the researcher's mind. It helps the researcher to better capture the meaning in particular context. As the researcher listens to the recorded conversation, all of details that accompanied the interview, the atmosphere, the facial expressions and body languages come back to the researcher's mind. However, because of the limited time I had, I failed to transcribe all of them right after there were conducted. Some of my interviews were transcribed after I came back to Norway.

Furthermore, during the whole data collection, I used Chinese to talk with all of participants. Even the English level of Chinese students has been improving quite a lot, although they would still have some difficulties to express them clearly in English. Since both researcher and all participants used Chinese to finish interviews, data were needed to be translated into English, it took a quite long time but on the other hand, it helped me to summarize some important information and was useful to data analysis, as it often happens while translating something into another language, some subtle aspects in the original conversation were hard to capture during the translation. In such case, I tried my best to do it as closely as possible while at the same time using some notes or make some marks to further illustrate it. Besides, I only translation some information which I thought is useful instead of the whole conversation.

## **4.6 Validity and Reliability**

According to Patton, Validity refers to the degree to which a study accurately reflects or assesses the specific concept that the researcher is attempting to measure. While reliability is

concerned with the accuracy of the actual measuring instrument or procedure, validity is concerned with the study's success at measuring what the researchers set out to measure (Patton, 2002).

As Neuman (2000) indicated, face to face interview allows the researcher to listen to what the participant say at a most convenient distance when they feel most at ease. In such a situation, the researcher can expect to have the highest response rate to the questions, can observe the surrounding and the body language of participants which often tells a lot. Thus, it could benefit the validity and reliability to use face to face interview as the main instrument in data collection.

Besides, qualitative research is context-bound. Different researchers or researchers using alternative measures will get distinctive results. And data collection is as an interactive process in which particular research operate in an evolving setting and the setting's context dictates using unique mix of measures that cannot be repeated.(Fengshu, 2002). Therefore, the intent of qualitative research is not to generalize findings but to form a unique interpretation of events, although replication is not impossible (Merriam, 1988).

It is important to understand some of the problems concerning validity and reliability which might arise. It would be ideal to reliably measure, every time, exactly those things which we intend to measure. However, researchers can go to great lengths and make every attempt to ensure accuracy in their studies, and still deal with the inherent difficulties of measuring particular events or behaviors.

The critique of qualitative research claims that qualitative research is too subjective. Qualitative findings rely too much on the researchers' often unsystematic views about what is significant and important, and also upon the close personal relationships that the researcher frequently strikes up with the people studied (Bryman, 2004).

Before I started my field study, I have had some meeting with my tutor and discussed some challenges which I could meet during my field work and affect the validity and reliability of the research. Firstly, during the field study in developing countries, power imbalance between researchers and participants exist on two levels: real difference associated with access to money, education and other resource, and perceived difference which exist in the minds of those participants who feel they are inferior, and researchers who give the impression that they are superior (Scheyven & Nowak, 2003). In fact, I am not only a researcher but also their teacher for some participants, which could make them feel a little pressured and begin to worry about their answers, especially under the traditional background of China. Some participants answered these questions passively, seemed to give the answers what I expected. Secondly, I have worked in this school for nearly two years, which brought me some convenience and relevant knowledge, also gave me the inspiration at the beginning to choose this topic. However, some opinions and attitudes which formed before really influenced the objectivity at the beginning of field study, leading to ignore the new findings.

However, various techniques were planned to ensure that validity and reliability are kept at a reasonable quality level:

At the beginning, the interview questions have been prepared to control consistency in the information gathering process. Then, according to the qualification criteria of a good interviewer, I tried to talk not too much, which made the interviewee passive, and didn't talk

too little, which may result in the interviewee feeling he or she was not talking along the right lines. After I got the feedback from my tutor, I used more words to explain the research purpose and the role I play in the study. It was obvious useful to make participants to be relaxed and enjoy the free and fair atmosphere.

According to Brock-Utne (1996), native researchers know the environment better than any expatriate and therefore will be more likely to ask the right questions provided that they are free to ask any questions. Therefore, the role I am in as an “insider” could lend more reliability and validity to the study.

During the process of data collection, the subjects were informed on the purpose of the study. All of students were also asked if they willing to be tape recorded and they had their right to answer questions or refuse to answer them. Even a few of them showed their hesitation at the beginning, but they agreed to use tape recording finally. Only one of the participants didn't want to answer some questions related to his family background. Considering the critique to qualitative research---- qualitative researcher are more likely to be influenced by their own subjective opinion. I avoid using some words to mislead participants or lead them to the answers which I would like to have, listening to them seriously and writing down the answers objectively. The participants began to talk much more than at the beginning and try to express their own opinions on this topic, including some aspects which I ignored before.

## **4.7 Ethical consideration**

Smith (1990) holds that ethics has to do with how one treats those individuals with whom one interacts and is involved and how the relationships formed may depart from conception of an

ideal. At a commonsense level, caring, fairness and the truth seem to be the important values undergirding the relationships and the activity of inquiring. In my study, I told all of participants not only the purpose of the study but also show my respect to their choice, keeping a free and fair atmosphere during the data collection process.

Even though my study does not have to do with any sensitive issues, still, the issue of confidentiality was also considered, it is to protect subjects from any adverse political or economic consequences of participating in the study. The best way of achieving it is through anonymity by allowing responses to be taken without names. I would not mentioned real names of participants. Instead, I used alias when any of them has to be mentioned in the thesis.

# 5 Data Analysis and Presentation

## 5.1 Introduction

This chapter intends to present and analyze the data guided by the research questions along four themes:

1. The effect of family background and social-economic status (SES) of participants.  
(parents' education background and career, financial statement, family composition)
2. The influence from cultural norms and values
3. The influence from Chinese higher education expansion.
4. The influence from labor market

The analysis will be done in relation to the concepts and theories taken up in Chapter 3 and as stated in Chapter 4, the participants for this study are current and former students in Yunnan Finance and Economics school in Kunming. An open-ended interview was used in which participants were encouraged to talk generally about their studying and life experience and future plan. Data will be presented in a descriptive and narrative form in accordance with the qualitative research design outlined in Chapter 4. To further understand what is presented in the interviews, I would like to present the interviewees' background with the following tables.

Table 5.1 A profile of participants by gender, family background and social-economic status (SES)

name	gender	Family background and SES						
		Urban or rural	Father's education	Father's occupation	Mother's education	Mother's occupation	Financial statement (SES level)	No. of siblings
Xiang	female	rural	Middle school	Self-employed	Middle school	House wife	Media level	1 sister
Wei	female	rural	Middle school	Self-employed	Middle school	House wife	Media level	1 brother
Dan	female	rural	Middle school	peasant	Middle school	peasant	Lower level	1 brother
Guo	female	rural	Middle school	peasant	Middle school	peasant	Lower level	1 brother
Juan	female	urban	High school	worker	High school	worker	Media level	0
Ya	female	rural	High school	peasant	High school	peasant	Lower level	1 brother
Sheng	male	rural	Middle school	peasant	Primary school	peasant	Lower level	1 sister
Yan	female	rural	Middle school	peasant	Middle school	peasant	Lower level	1 sister
Ying	female	urban	Middle school	worker	Middle school	housewife	Lower level	0
Wei	male	urban	College level	Business man	College level	Company staff	Higher level	0
Na	female	rural	Middle school	Peasant	Primary school	peasant	Lower level	1 brother
Xiaoya	female	urban	College level	Business man	College level	House wife	Higher level	1 sister and 1 brother
Jiang	male	urban	College level	clerk	College level	nurse	Media level	0
Peng	male	rural	Middle school	peasant	Middle school	peasant	Lower level	1 brother
Ming	female	rural	Middle school	worker	Middle school	peasant	lower level	1 brother
Ni	female	urban	College level	School staff	High school	Company staff	Medial level	0
Fang	female	rural	Primary school	driver	Primary school	peasant	Lower level	1 brother
Lang	male	urban	College level	Company staff	College level	Company staff	Higher level	0
Na	female	urban	College level	accountant	College level	accountant	Medial level	0
Xia	female	urban	College level	accountant	College level	nurse	Medial level	0
Xiaoai	female	urban	College level	accountant	High school	casher	Medial level	0
Baozhu	female	urban	High school	worker	High school	worker	Lower level	0
Hua	female	rural	Middle school	peasant	Middle school	peasant	Lower level	1 brother
Aihua	female	rural	High school	worker	Middle school	worker	Lower level	1 brother

## 5.2 Family Background Analysis

### 5.2.1 Urban Background vs. Rural Background

Individual interviews were held with each respondent, first eliciting general information on their family social-economic status (SES), and then asked to comment in some detail on their own experience including background, their parents' education and occupation, their residence and family composition. According to Liu (2005), parents who work in the government, stated-owned or joint enterprise management level, and educational institution at various levels and so on, often in urban cities, can be considered of higher social-economics status (higher SES). Parents work in rural areas farm lands, laid-off factories, or jobless, can be defined of lower-economic status (lower SES). In my study, there are some participants whose family background is between lower level and higher level, in order to distinguish them, I use the term of "medial level" to refer to these participants.

Table 5.2 Participants' backgrounds divided by gender

	male		female		In sum
Lower SES	<b>2</b>		<b>12</b>		<b>14</b>
	urban	rural	urban	rural	
	0	2	3	9	
Medial SES	<b>1</b>		<b>7</b>		<b>8</b>
	urban	rural	urban	rural	
	1	0	5	2	
Higher SES	<b>2</b>		<b>1</b>		<b>3</b>
	urban	rural	urban	rural	
	2	0	1	0	
In sum	<b>5</b>		<b>20</b>		<b>25</b>

As table 5.2 shows, of the 20 female participants, 12 persons have the lower SES background and 9 of them come from rural area; 7 persons have the medial SES background and 5 of them come from rural areas, only 1 person has the higher SES background. On the other hand, of the 5 male participants, 2 persons are from rural areas with lower SES background, 3 persons come from cities with middle or higher SES background. There are 14 participants who have lower SES background, and 11 of them come from rural areas while there are 11 participants who have medial or higher SES background and 9 of them come from cities. Furthermore, there are 3 persons who have higher SES background and none of them come from rural areas. Despite the small sample in my research, it reflects the general rural--- urban disparity in China.

In China, the gap between cities and rural areas has been widening, cities provide much more opportunities for young people to be successful. For people who come from rural areas, education could be the only hope to be resident in cities and improve their family condition, by graduating from school or university and finding a job in cities, then changing to the permanent residence. To a large extent, it can be attributed to the Chinese residence system (*Hukou*).

*Hukou* is basically a resident permit given by the government of China. It is issued on family basis. Every family has a *Hukou* booklet which records information about family members. Every Chinese citizen is associated with an “agricultural” (rural) or “nonagricultural” (urban) *Hukou* classification. Agricultural *Hukou* provides access to farmland, whereas nonagricultural *Hukou* gives urban citizens access to jobs, housing, food and state-sponsored benefits. *Hukou* location specifies where one is entitled to the above resources and is, in essence, where one belongs (Wang, 2005; Yu, 2002).

Hukou system creates the inequity between cities and countryside, for example. If a person who comes from rural area wants to stay in cities permanently, he or she has to get an urban residence permit (urban Hukou); otherwise, he or she can not enjoy the welfare and their children probably can not enjoy the education resource in the future. Although this system is widely regarded as unfair, we do see the challenge to remove it. The benefits the government gives to people with different Hukou are different, especially in city and rural area. If it is abandoned, a short time chaos may take place, many people move from rural area to city and from smaller city to larger cities (urban expansion). If it is not handled well, it may cause big problems.

As I mentioned in Chapter 2, Yunnan and Finance Economics is located in city of Kunming-the capital of Yunnan province. Compared to other places in this province, Kunming is the biggest and busiest city. It is attractive to students who come from rural areas in Yunnan province. Although it is not a university, still it can provide students working opportunity to stay in big city.

*Although I can not go to university, I still satisfied with this school, at least it takes me away from the countryside. I don't want to be like some friends of mine in my village. They get married very early and then have children. In my mind, they will be tied to the land, their husband and their children forever. I hope I can find a job in this city after I graduate, I don't want to go back again. -  
---Hua (female student)*

For some student whose academic performance can not meet the requirement of higher education, vocational schools in urban area provide them with another opportunity to stay in

cities. According to the social powerlessness theory and reference---group theory stated in Chapter 3, we see that education could allow a woman to meet men who are likely to have suitable futures as breadwinners. For female students who come from rural areas, especially with low SES background, it could enable them to move from an unskilled and tedious position to a higher-status one. The answer of Hua, to some extent, explained the reason why there are more students from rural areas than from cities.

**5.2.2 How Do Parents’ Education Backgrounds Influence the Students?**

Table 5.3 parents’ education background of 25 participants

	father	mother	In total
Primary school level	1	3	4
Middle school level	11	10	21
High school level	5	6	11
College level	8	6	14
In total	25	25	50

The table 5.33 shows that in my study, most parents have middle school or high school education background. Only 14 persons have college education background, including 8 fathers and 6 mothers. By contrast, there are 3 person have only primary school education background, including 1 father and 2 mothers. What is worthy mentioning is that all of the three persons come from rural areas while all of parents who have college education background come from urban cities.

Two interviews are very interesting. The comparison between them indicates parents with different SES background have different expectations to their children.

Fang, a female student from a small town, is the second ---year student in Yunnan Finance and Economics school. She comes from a family with low level SES background and both of her father and mother graduated from primary school.

*Lingyuan: why did you choose this vocational school?*

*Fang: at that time, what I was thinking about is how to reduce the financial burden of my family. I didn't want them to spend too much money on my study. Actually, we can not afford the high school and university tuition fee. My plan is to find a job after graduation to support my family.*

*Lingyuan: how about your academic performance in your middle school?*

*Fang: it is ok; I can pass the entrance exam of high school and university.*

*Lingyuan: but, why did you give up?*

*Fang: as I said just now, my family could not afford it?*

*Lingyuan: did your parents want you to go to university in the future?*

*Fang: I don't know, they hope I can have a good life in the future, but they don't have any specific expectation to me.*

Lang, a male student is the second-year student in Yunnan Finance and Economic school. Both of his parents have college education background.

*Lingyuan: why did you choose this vocational school?*

*Lang: because my academic performance in middle school is not good, I couldn't meet the entrance requirement of high school. But this school can provide the bridge to university. They have cooperated with Southwest Finance University for several years.*

*Lingyuan: do your parents want you to go to university in the future?*

*Lang: Definitely! It will be very hard to find a good job if I only have vocational school diploma nowadays! I plan to attend the entrance exam of Southwest Finance University.*

*Lingyuan: was it your own opinion to choose this school?*

*Lang: no, actually, my parents made this decision, they have a friend who works in this school and they got some information about this school and then they made this decision.*

As this comparison revealed, the parents with higher education background are more inclined to have higher expectation to their children. It coincides with the study conducted by Zhao (2008) which was related to gender distribution at university level in Shanghai in 2008. Her study also revealed parents encourage and afford children to achieve higher academic pursuit in family which has good cultural background and stable income. Such family can be considered of urban middle class origin. By contrast, the rural families have lower academic expectation to their children, especially to girls. A female participant from rural areas explained a very strong opinion from her mother:

*In my mind, a man must be successful in career life. He should be able to support the family after marriage, not only financial support, but also spirit support---to make wife and children feel safe. Men need to study hard to get a good job and work hard to earn enough money or get a higher position in society. By contrast, women should be gentle and pretty. It is more important to have a good marriage and stable life than to have a successful academic and career life for women. And a wife should leave enough time to take care the daily life of the whole family in order to make the family to be harmony.*

It can be seen that the answer above is in line with the opinion of Mickelson (see Chapter 3) on education return perspective. There are differences in returns on education: members of the

working class, women, and minorities are more likely to receive lower returns on their education than men, or middle class members. It can be used as one basis to explain why parents are inclined to have lower expectation to girls in rural areas. The other is that parents with lower education level background are more likely to be influenced by the opinion of women's primary location is viewed in the domestic sphere.

### **5.2.3 How Do Parents' Career Backgrounds Influence the Students?**

“Son inherits the career life of father” was one aspect of Chinese family culture, which has been continuing to influence the decision of both parents and children. It is easy to find “lawyers’ families”, “doctors’ family” and so on. Similar to this, I found some “accountants’ family” in my study.

Na, a female student from urban city, is the third-year student in Yunnan Finance and Economics school. Both of her father and mother are accountants.

*Lingyuan: why did you choose this vocational school?*

*Na: My parents made this decision.*

*Lingyuan: why did they choose this school for you?*

*Na: I guess they know this field very well. Both of them are accountants and they know some persons who work in this school.*

*Lingyuan: can you talk about your future plan after your graduation?*

*Na: I plan to go to Southwest Finance University.*

*Lingyuan: what kind of subject would you like to choose in the future?*

*Na: I think I will choose the same subject as now.*

*Lingyuan: what kind of career life would you like to have in the future?*

*Na: I guess I will become an accountant or have relevant job in the future?*

*Lingyuan: is it your parents' expectation too?*

*Na: yes, I think so. You know it is very hard to find a good job nowadays, but my parents have some personal links in this field. I think it will be helpful.*

Personal links plays a significant role in Chinese society. People would like to establish a personal link net which concludes others in similar group or power group. Parents want to use personal links to help their children, meanwhile, they hope their children can continue the personal links and make it stronger.

Besides the participants whose parents are accountants, most other participants mentioned they got lots of influence from family members or friends who work in financial relevant areas. Furthermore, for some students, the reason why they choose this school is that there are some relatives or friends working in this school, who suggested students to choose Yunnan Finance and Economics school. Furthermore, parents hope their friends or relatives can take care of their children.

*My uncle has worked in this school for almost 17 years. He recommended this school to my parents last year. My father thought it could be the best choice for me. I didn't meet the entrance requirement for high school and we don't know any person in other vocational school--*  
*Baozhu(female student)*

The effect of personal link explains the situation that parents who works in this field are inclined to choose the future career of finance or accounting for their children, but how it affects the gender pattern in this case? The reference –group theory explains s that women

could evaluate their education return by using the standards of other women as a point of reference, and usually they will use the standards or experience of elder generation of them, such as mother or aunt. On the contrary, the elder generation could use their own experience to design the future career of their children as well. Based on this point, it is necessary to find out why parents think the career or this subject is a good choice for girl, but not for boy? And why students are inclined to follow their parents?

## **5.3 Culture Influence Analysis**

### **5.3.1 “Follow the Parents” ----the Influence from Filial Piety**

It reveals that, from the analysis above, students are more likely to follow their parents' words rather than their own opinions; even they didn't have their own plan. In another word, they rely on their parents very much. Students seldom insisted their own opinions when they had disagreement with their parents.

As I mentioned in Chapter 2, parents had absolute power to control their children in empire China. This kind of “control” can be regarded as “mind control” to a large extent. During my interview, students believed that it was quite different from before, parents would like to respect children's own opinions and give them the “freedom” that they have been fighting for. However, children want to be free during daily life more than when they need to make decision. For example, they would like to be free to make friends with others, to arrange their leisure time, by contrast, when they meet the “cross of life”, they prefer to rely on their parents.

Ming, female student, comes from rural areas; this is a part of our interview:

*Lingyuan: why did you choose vocational education?*

*Ming: my family can not afford the university tuition fee for two children.*

*Lingyuan: did your brother go to university?*

*Ming: yes.*

*Lingyuan: why was not you?*

*Ming: his academic performance is much better than mine.*

*Lingyuan: do you think your brother has priority in your family, compared to you?*

*Ming: no, I don't think so; my parents treat me very well.*

*Lingyuan: why did you choose this school?*

*Ming: actually, my father made this decision?*

*Lingyuan: did you agree with him at the beginning?*

*Ming: I am used to follow them.*

*Lingyuan: why?*

*Ming: I don't know, but I think they are the only person whom I can rely on and trust.*

*Lingyuan: why don't you trust yourself?*

*Ming: me? That is impossible. They have much more experience than I do. I think they will choose the best way for me.*

“The salt we have had is more than the rice you have had!” we can hear such similar words usually. Admittedly, parents have much more life experience than children; they can analyze the future better than children. So, Chinese parents are used to arranging all of future plan for their children. If there is disagreement, children are more likely to compromise. Generally, people, especially young people would like to follow or trust person who is successful, who has higher position. In family, it indicates the younger generation respect or follows the older generation.

### 5.3.2 The Influence of Traditional Gender Stereotypes

After the New China was founded in 1949, in line with the gender quality it advocated and strived to achieve, the government condemned the Confucian ideas that put women in a subordinate place (Liu, 2005) Nevertheless, although today few will openly adhere to the notion of “men are born superior to women” any more, the existence of opinion of “men take care of the outside while women take care of the inside” still survived:

*I come from rural area and I have an older brother. I don't think the former opinion of “men are born superior to women” existent in my family and my parents treat us equally, both my brother and I get education opportunity. But my parents expect me to have a good marriage rather than have a good career life. Why I choose this subject? Actually, this was not my decision. My mother told me it could bring a job with stable salary, furthermore, it will not be a hard job and I can have enough time to take care of the family. ---Wei*

*I decided to go to another vocational school at the beginning---Kunming Technology school because technicians are in great demand in labor market now. But my parents didn't agree with me. They insist that Technology school is not suitable for girls as it is not a relaxed job to be a technician. If I chose to be a technician, I would work as hard as a man. The role women play in society and in family is quite different from men. I don't think women should work so hard to support the family as men do. I expect I can find a job which is not hard, for example, I can stay in the office and have fixed time table. ---Dan*

In my study, nearly all of female participants showed their expectation of working in finance and accounting field. It is the first choice for them to be an accountant, at least to be a cashier

or accountant assistant after graduation. Furthermore, the reason why they prefer this job is almost the same: it is not a hard job!!

Actually, it is well accepted in Chinese society that: female should spend more time on family rather than career. This idea is in line with the finding of Liberal feminism: women's primary location was viewed in the private sphere and men's in the public sphere. For example, even though parents hope that their daughters can be good at study, can find a good job in the future, they care about the daughters' marriage most, as the old saying always said: "What the boy is afraid of is to find a wrong job while what the girl is afraid of is to marry a wrong person".

I presented an example about gender roles in text book in Chapter 3. These description in text book, on one hand, reflect some gender bias in society, on the other hand, strengthen the influence of gender bias. The role that female should play have become a fixed image. People call successful business woman as "strong woman", female pilot as "female pilot" while never calling male pilot as "male pilot" since in people's mind, it is reasonable that male can be pilot, but female can not be. Similar with this, people call male nurse as "male nurse" while never call female nurse as "female nurse".

This is what we can hear usually in Chinese society: "as a man, I don't have much expectation of my wife in her career life. I hope she can have a good job, but, the most important is that she can take care of the family, including the older and the child. After all, I am the one who is supposed to support the family. So I have to be successful in my career life, otherwise, people will look down on me."

The parents of participants in my study were born before 1970s. They got much more influence from traditional culture than their children. They would like to use the traditional value standard to make decision.

“I think female is more careful and patient than male” ----this is what I heard in my study most frequently. All of female participants emphasized these characteristics. In their mind, these are the advantages that the female has, and the reason why they chose Finance and Accounting.

Ni, female student, comes from urban area. When I asked her why she chose this school, she answered:

*My father made this decision, and I agree with him. What else I can do? I don't know what is the best for me? So I just follow them. How I think of the gender imbalance here? I guess it is because female is more careful than male, and it is what we need if we works in financial field.*

Xiang, female student, comes from rural area. When I asked her whether the female students discussed the reason why they came to this school, she answered:

*I guess most people hold that accounting and finance is tightly related to patience and carefulness. That is why the female apply to this subject more than the male. And the male students, probably they would like to choose other school such as metallurgy school rather than finance school. There are about 50 students in my class, but only 5 boys. We haven't had any discussion about this question before, but the reasons, in my opinion, are quite similar. First, our academic performance are not good enough, second, our family, our parents think this subject will bring a better future to girls than other subject will.*

Surprisingly, answers from male students are different from this opinion above.

Jiang, male student, comes from urban area:

*I don't think that is the reason why they chose this school. In my experience, male students are at least as careful as female students are, especially in some subjects such as mathematics. Probably, female is more careful than male in daily life, such as taking care of others, that is why nearly all of nurse are female. Why I choose this school? That is really hard to answer, I am getting tired of studying, I don't want to go to university, and I think that is the waste of money and time. It is not so hard to find a job if I studied accounting, at least, all of companies, all of institutions, even the government, they need accountant.*

My working experience in this school shows that there is no obvious difference about carefulness and patience between male students and female students, considering their academic performance. The key factor to study this subject very well is to understand the basic theory. However, there is also something to do with the culture influence. On one hand, in people mind, female is more likely to be described as “gentle and patient”, furthermore, female would like to define themselves as careful and patient. On the other hand, most students lack of understanding of the subject of Finance and Accounting. It can be proved from the analysis below: a large part of students didn't understand this subject until they began to study. They or their family got information from personal links more than other channels, such as consultation.

The effect of traditional gender stereotypes is further relected in student's choice of specialization. As it is introduced before, there are two main specializations in Yunnan

Finance and Economics school: Financial Accounting and Computerized Accounting. It shows that although nearly the 70 percents of current student are female in this school, the gender distribution in Computerized Accounting is more balanced than in Financial Accounting specialization.

Class 1049, in Financial accounting specialization, has 53 students. There are 7 male students, occupying 13 percents while 46 female students occupying 87 percents. Class 1348, in Computerized accounting specialization, has 58 students. There are 22 male students, occupying 38 percents, while 36 female students, occupying 62 percents.

Juan, a female student, studies in Financial Accounting. There is a part of our interview:

*Lingyuan: as far as I know, there are two main specializations in school, financial accounting and computerized accounting, which one is your specialization?*

*Juan: financial accounting.*

*Lingyuan: is there any difference between the two specializations?*

*Juan: not so much. I have a friend in another specialization. According to the curriculum, they are almost the same. The difference I feel is they focus on computer skill more than we do.*

*Lingyuan: how about the gender distribution in her (or his) class?*

*Juan: more balanced?*

*Lingyuan: did you think about "why it is like this"?*

*Juan: something related to the computer. The parents of boys prefer computerized accounting because boys like computer.*

*Lingyuan: is there any difference about the academic performance in computer course between two genders.*

Juan: yes, I think so.

Juan: at least in my class, all of boys are better than girls in computer course, for example, they type much faster than we do. I guess it is because that they like computer, they spend much more time on computer than we do, it similar with girls would like enjoying fashion rather than computer.

Computerized Accounting, as defined in Yunnan Finance and Economics school enrollment booklet, is a specialization which focuses on accounting practice based on accounting software. Compared to Computerized Accounting, Finance Accounting emphasizes the understanding of basic theories of Accounting. However, the course designs of two specializations are almost the same:

Table 5.4 Comparison of course design between Finance Accounting and Computerized Accounting

	Finance Accounting	Computerized Accounting
The first semester	Chinese literature, English Mathematics, Basic theory of computer	Chinese literature, English Mathematics, Basic theory of computer
The second semester	Chinese literature, English Mathematics, basic theory of Accounting, basic theory of Macroeconomics, basic theory of Finance	Chinese literature, English Mathematics, basic theory of Accounting, basic theory of Macroeconomics, basic theory of Finance
The third semester	Finance accounting, <b>Management accounting, Budget accounting, Banking accounting</b>	Finance accounting, <b>Computerized accounting, Accounting software analysis</b>
The forth semester	<b>Computerized accounting, accounting software analysis</b>	<b>Management accounting, Budget accounting, Banking accounting</b>
The fifth semester	Finance , basic theory of Marketing	Finance , basic theory of Marketing
The sixth semester	Practice and field work	Practice and field work

Different from the introduction written in school enrollment booklet, the comparison above only shows the students in these two specializations have the same courses to study. The only

difference is that students in Finance Accounting study Management accounting, Budget accounting, Banking accounting in third semester, study Computerized accounting, accounting software analysis in forth semester while students in Computerized Accounting study Computerized accounting, accounting software analysis in third semester, study Management accounting, Budget accounting, Banking accounting in forth semester.

After interviews, I consulted the chief officer in administrative office of Yunnan Finance and Economics school. He explained that according to the local government's requirement, the school has to set the two different specializations, although there is almost no difference between them. It aims to show the emphasis on the universality of accounting software. But, he admitted that introduction printed in the enrollment booklet mislead some students, and the influence is what they didn't anticipate before.

Ming, female student, studies Finance Accounting. She explained her opinion about the introduction printed in school enrollment booklet:

*I hadn't known the details and difference between the two specializations before the enrollment day. My priority of application is computerized accounting at the beginning. But I changed my mind after I saw the enrollment booklet. The introduction of computerized accounting emphasized the importance of mastering computer practice. And you know that female students are not as good as male students at computer.*

Lang, male student, studies the Computerized Accounting.

*I never think about another specialization, not at all! I like computer, I think all of boys like computer. However, our studying experience told us there is almost no difference between the two*

*specializations. In my opinion, they have the same content with different names. It is very funny!*

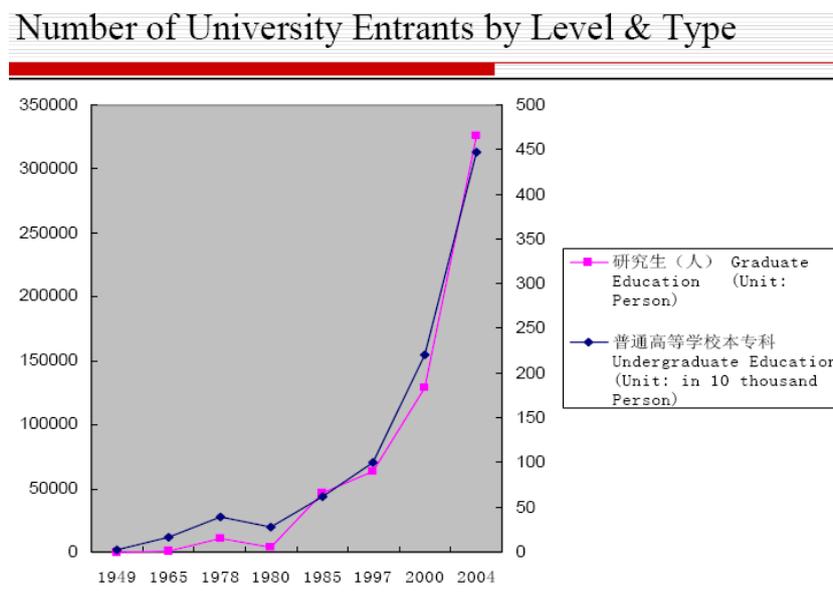
*But I agree that boys are good at computer. I don't know how to explain it, perhaps, it comes from the difference between boys and girls, and I mean learning ability. Meanwhile, it could be due to that boys like computer more than girls do.*

## **5.4 Influence from Chinese Higher Education Expansion**

### **5.4.1 Influence from Higher Education Expansion**

Based on the introduction to Chinese education reform in 1999(see chapter 2), it can be clear seen that one of the key words in this educational reform is “expansion”, including the expansion on students’ enrollment and school tuition fee. From the image below, it can be clearly seen that the number of undergraduates per year in China have been increasing dramatically from 1997, reached the amount of 4.5 million in 2004, nearly 10 times more than it in 1997. The number of graduates in 2004 was more than 300 thousands of people, nearly 7 times more than the number of 1997. After decentralization in administration system, financial expenditures for education have declined for three years since 2002. (2002: 3.32%; 2003: 3.28 %; 2004: 2.79%). Admittedly, GDP rose by 2.3 trillion Yuan in 2004, and therefore the amount of money on educational budget is actually rising. However, administrative expenditures increase dramatically without restraint, while education expenditures have grown more slowly. Local governments still play a leading role in the economy, but their function in issues as education, healthcare, employment, living quarters and social security is very questionable (Postiglione, 2006).

Figure 5.1 Number of university entrants by level and type from 1949 to 2004



Source: Qinghua University Database

Under the pressure of reduction of educational expenditure, reforming public universities and research institutes became a popular topic- to push them into the market. At least 300 research institutes were transformed into business entities during the educational reform in 1999, followed by the expansion of the university system as well as incredible increase of the number of university entrants and tuition fees.

It is an indisputable fact that education tuition fees have already become a heavy financial burden for a family in lower class. In impoverished regions, the problem is much more serious, student who can not afford tuition fees have to face the risk of losing opportunity to accept higher education. Postiglione(2006) points out many parents took their daughters out of university and work at home in western rural China from the middle 1990s. Such decision could be affected by the fact that upon the marriage. Many rural girls moved to their husbands' families, thus householders see little investment return they pay to school. The 10th report of the China Youth Research Center in 2007 showed that China's university tuition fees

were normally 5,000 to 10000 Yuan per year. Compared to 1989, tuition fees have increased by about 25 times. But, the annual per capita income of urban residents increased by only 4 times, considering the deducting price factors, the actual growth is of 2.3 times. The cost of their children's education is more than the cost of pension and housing. The survey conducted by the Bank of China revealed that the "save for education" has become the primary purpose of savings; China's growth rate of student tuition fees is far faster than the national growth rate of financial investment (*2007 Green Paper on Education in China*).

Figure 5.2 Heavy burden on the shoulders of parents



Source: [http://www.webo.com.cn/webo/html/2007-1-15/content\\_285394.html](http://www.webo.com.cn/webo/html/2007-1-15/content_285394.html)

(Chinese Youth Newspaper)

It was mentioned in Chapter 2, that there are different opinions on vocational school development under the higher education expanding. Someone believed vocational education would lose the student resource because the university entrance requirement is lower than

before, while others hold that the expanding of higher education could make students who originally planned to enter higher education to choose vocational education because of the financial burden from increasing tuition fees. During my study, there are some students, who agreed with the latter opinion.

Yan, female student, comes from rural areas, has a sister.

*In the past, all of children in my village wanted to go to university as we could find a good job in cities after graduated from university. But, there are only a small part of students in middle school choose the higher education because most of us can not afford the tuition fee nowadays. Furthermore, it is common that graduates from university can not find a job. On the contrary, students from vocational school are in great demand. All of my relatives suggested me not to choose university and my cousin who has his own shop also agree with them. He graduated from Yunnan Finance and Economics school in 2003.*

It seems that the graduates from university are getting involved into a dilemma. They spend much more money than students in vocational school, than the graduates in the past. However, Chinese higher education are becoming “general education”, the university diploma have been devaluing. The employers can not provide with the same salary and welfare as before. According to the local policy, vocational school can get the extra funding from local government, in order to finance students from poor family. Participant show their different attitudes towards the policy.

Peng, male student, comes from rural areas, has a brother.

*This policy is perfect, at least for lots of students from poor family. It can cover the living cost of one week for me. Even though it is not so much, but, it does help me. But I would still chosen the vocation education if thee were no funding from government. You know, the tuition for higher education is too high to afford for my family, and I have a brother who is in middle school now and we have to consider him.*

Xiaoyan, female student, comes from urban city, has a brother and a sister.

*That is not important for me, my parents provided us with good life condition. Perhaps it can attract some students who has problem of financing their study. But in my opinion, students care about the job opportunity much more than the funding.*

Obviously, the Chinese higher education expansion influenced the former composition of student resource for vocational education. Increasing tuition fee forces students with poor family background (most in rural areas) to give up attending higher education, which can explain why most students in vocational school come from rural areas. Furthermore, Tight (see chapter 3) comments that at the individual level, the participant in education learning or training may regard this as a personal investment in their own future, during which some financial return may expected. If students or the parents of students can not expect the education return from higher education, which they are satisfied with, they could choose vocational education instead. The increasing number of students from rural areas could be a main reason to explain why the gender imbalance in Yunnan Finance and Economics school is more serious than before. During the period from 1987 to 1994, the female students occupied around 57 percents while the male students occupied around 43 percents (The History of Yunnan Finance and Economics school, 2002). Students from rural areas are more likely to be

influenced by gender stereotype and gender difference. Thus, they prefer to choose the subject or the future career which is suitable for girl or suitable for boy.

#### **5.4.2 Another Bridge to Higher Education**

As mentioned above, due to the reduction of central budget and funding, universities and colleges chose to increase the tuition fee. Besides, some universities try to seek extra student resource, such as graduates from vocational schools. Even the increasing tuition fee for higher education made some students, especially students from poor family, to be inclined to vocational education. However, vocational education still shows its disadvantages towards the students coming from urban cities, especially from rich families.

During my interviews, around 50 percents of participants admitted that they chose vocational education was because they couldn't reach the entrance requirement of high school and higher education. A part of them emphasized on the possibility of entering university which Yunnan Finance and Economics school provide.

Yunnan Finance and Economics school has cooperated with South Finance University for some years. The graduates of Yunnan Finance and Economics school can go to South Finance University if they can pass the entrance exam designed by university itself. This entrance exam is easier than the national entrance exam.

Some students in interview mentioned that this kind of "bridge" is the vital reason why they chose this school.

*I hope I can go to university, and I have to go to university. Otherwise I can not have a good career life in the future. As far as I know, the lowest requirement for most position is college diploma. Yes, I know that the skilled worker is in great demand under the current situation, but it also very hard to get higher position if the skilled only have vocational school diploma. What will I prefer to study if I can go to university? I will choose the same subject which I have now. What I learned in this school will help me to be better during my university life-----Xia*

Meanwhile, there are also students who give up the original plan.

*At the beginning, I thought this school was a good choice. My academic performance was not good in middle school, but it could provide me the opportunity to access higher education, I was so happy. However, I change my mind; I don't think it is worthy to go to university now. It is totally the waste of time and money.*

Cooperation between university and vocational schools provide students whose academic performances are lower with another approach to achieve higher education. It seems to be extra attractive for students who have rich family background, but with low-level academic performance. But students from areas show great interest in this program.

A female participant explained her opinion on this program:

*I think it is perfect, because it can provide me with two approaches, or an alternative. I will try to find a job firstly if the employment situation is optimistic. If it is not, I will attend the entrance exam to Southwest University.*

## 5.5 Employment Analysis

### 5.5.1 Gender Distribution at Different Levels of Position

Finance and Accounting is the art of recording, summarizing, reporting, and analyzing financial transactions. It seems that there is no gender bias in this field; at least, the job description doesn't show us any special requirement for man or woman.

An accountant is an individual who performs accounting tasks for individuals or companies. The exact material that an accountant handles generally includes financial records, taxes, and responsibility for the issuing of financial reports. In a small firm or organization, an accountant may be responsible for keeping all financial records. Such as accounts receivable, retail sales. In larger firms or big organization, accountants also perform internal audits, to ensure that the financial records of the company are accurate. In most cases, an accountant will choose to specialize in a particular field such as audits, book keeping, or taxes. In other instances, an accountant may acquire a wide range of skills to better serve his or her clients. This is common with certified public accountants (CPA) who handle the books for several small businesses at once<sup>7</sup>.

The higher education expanding did not only bring the financial burden to each family, but also caused the employment pressure. Compared to university graduates, students in vocational school invest less money and time and their job expectation is lower than university graduates. That makes them to be popular among employers who need staff at basic or lower positions.

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.wisegeek.com/what-is-an-accountant.htm>

The Shanghai National Accounting Institute did a survey on salary of Accountant in 2006, the survey showed that in 2006 the average salary for Accountant is 53,918 Yuan, compared with survey data in 2004 increased by 23.65%. Sex - survey shows that there is an obvious difference in the average wage between men and women. The salary of male staff is generally higher than the salary of female staff. Meanwhile, the survey revealed that the majority of female accountant get married and have children around 30 years old, the living center of gravity shifted to the family(Zhang, 2007)

Accounting position at lower level doesn't require the accountant have to have higher education background and the working time table is regular. Although the salary is not high, female accountants are quite interested in it as they can have enough time and energy to take care of their family. By contrast, male accountant doesn't show any interest in lower level position. Higher salary and reputation is their pursuit. This difference coincide the traditional value in Chinese society which was mentioned above: "man take care of the outside while woman takes care of the inside".

Participants in my interviews showed their different attitude towards gender bias in labor market. Most of female participants hold there is no gender bias, at least, based on their own experience. But they mentioned that there are actually only basic positions available for choosing.

Surprisingly, male participants believed there is gender bias in labor market, including financial field:

*Boys can do something that girls can not do. For example, if the boss need a accountant, he will choose a person who could become not only a accountant, but also a temporary driver when he is in emergency, a employee who can go leave home for a long travel time and so on. Generally speaking, most boys can meet such kind of requirement, but girls maybe not. This is the “extra value” of boys.*

Tight (1996) comments that at the level of organization, the belief takes the form of regarding expenditure on staff training and human resource development as an investment in the survival and development of the organization. All of employers would like to spend as little as possible investment (training expenditure, salary), while gaining as much as possible investment return. This kind of “extra value” could help male applicants gain more opportunities than female applicants since women are more likely to be tied with family.

### **5.5.2 “Vicious Cycle” of Gender Bias**

From the observation about Kunming labor market in the February 2007, data showed a pretty unfair situation: all of computer companies need only male applicants except one who need 3 female employees who work at reception. Taking another extreme case as example, no position available for the female to be an electronic technician and no female apply for it. In fact there were no female students who study electronic technique at that time. It has been evolved into a vicious cycle: female is not suitable → no position for female → no female students → no female applicant → no female in that position → female is not suitable.

Obviously, the attitude of employer and the labor market influence the distribution of types of study chosen by gender to a large extent. As Williams and Best comment that in every country there are many occupations that are highly sex-typed: that is, persons in these

occupations are primarily of one sex or the other. This effect can be seen across many different occupational fields and at various occupational levels (Williams & Best, 1990: 293). Vocational education is specifically geared toward entrance into the labor market, providing graduated basic level positions. If the labor market refuses one gender in some specific areas, there will be seldom female students who choose these specific subjects when they enter into vocational education.

Ya, former student, comes from rural areas. She works as a cashier in “Liufu Jewelry Company”. She talked about her own opinion on gender bias in labor market.

*No matter people would like to admit or not, at least, there are some “rules” in labor market. Take my case as an example, I never saw any male cashier in my company or in other companies. It seems that some position is designed for men while some position is designed for women. I didn’t expect any higher position when I graduated from Yunnan Finance and Economics school. I do understand that the competition is quite serious now, but I am so happy that I can have this job, it is better than being a peasant, definitely!! In my company, most staffs are female but only a few of part of us can have higher position. They graduated from famous university. I quite admire them, and I plan to have further study in the future if I can save some money.*

## **5.6 Conclusion**

This chapter aims to present the facts and opinions of both female and male students, both current and former students in terms of family background, understanding of the effect of Chinese traditional culture as well as personal opinion towards labor market and future plan; discuss the attitude toward vocational education and accounting subject, especially under

Chinese higher education reform. The field study interviews revealed various factors that contribute to the gender imbalance in Yunnan Finance and Economics school. The result of data analysis are on one hand, in line with or coincide with opinions in previous research and gender theory. On the other hand, indicated the influence from Chinese own culture factors and Chinese higher education reform.

# 6 Conclusion

## 6.1 Introduction

In this study, I have explored a range of issues concerning gender imbalance in vocational education in China today. My intent is to gain an insight and understanding of the factors which could have contributed to the imbalance phenomenon. Due to my own experience, I chose Yunnan Finance and Economics school to conduct my field study. Altogether I did 25 interviews with participants from each grade in the school, including different specializations (see chapter 4 and chapter 5). Because of the limited number of interviews, it is not feasible to generalize the findings to all vocational school in China. However, it sheds light on current situation of gender imbalance and open space for further discussion and can be the basis for further research in this field because topics related to gender differences in vocational training have received much less attention than higher education.

Throughout the study, I have tried to analyze these possible factors based on my research questions. With theoretical framework and methodology tools, the study has investigated the four themes mentioned in Chapter 5. Data analysis explained the reason why students chose vocational education and why there are much more female students who choose this vocational school than male students do.

## 6.2 Summary of findings

### 6.2.1 Family Background Factors

This part corresponds to the sub-question “how does family background influence the gender bias?” The discussions of former empirical studies (see chapter 3) unveiled the influences of

the people around students, such as parents, friends, siblings and others are important. Of all participants, only of them have indicated that they themselves decided on the type of education they wished to choose, but still there might be unseen or latent factors behind their personal choices.

In the sample of 25 participants, of the 20 female participants, 12 persons have the lower SES background and 9 of them come from rural area; 7 persons have the medial SES background and 5 of them come from rural areas, only 1 person has the higher SES background, and all of female students who come from rural area have at least one sibling. All participants received encouragement in academic pursuit from family despite their family conditions. Meanwhile, I didn't find son-favorite influence parents' attitudes very much. Female participants also admitted that they have been treated equally. But, it is obvious that parents have different expectations to girls and boys: parents usually encourage girls to choose some careers which are defined as "safe", "stable", not "hard".

Vocational education has become more attractive than higher education towards family with lower SES. The parents with higher education background are more inclined to expect their children to achieve higher educational level. By contrast, the rural families have lower academic expectation to their children. Among the parents of 25 students (50 persons in total), on one hand, only 14 persons have college backgrounds and all of them come from urban area. On the other hand, there are 4 persons who only have primary education background and all of them come from rural areas. "To get the city resident permit" has become their basic or the first expectation of their children.

During the interview, most participants' answers showed that they have been deeply influenced by their family members or friends who work in this field. Some of them admitted that the reason why they choose this school is because their family member or the friends of their parents work in this school. It reveals that Personal link plays a very important role in the process of making decision. Students and parents are more inclined to use the personal link to get information than from other channels.

The analysis of family background of participants stated the situation that there are more students from rural areas than from cities in this school. It is also related to the effect of higher education expansion. Although it can not illustrate the causes of gender imbalance directly, still, it gives us a step stone to look at the gender issue, to explore the gender imbalance with effect of traditional culture in rural areas, to provide us with a new perspective to look at the opinions on education return for girls.

### **6.2.2 Effect of Cultural Factors**

This part corresponds to the sub-question "how does culture influence the gender imbalance?" Besides the result we find that students are more likely to rely on their parents than themselves and parents are used to designing children's future plan, another conclusion comes clearly: gender stereotype and traditional opinion on gender roles continue to influence the society. As I have presented in Chapter 2 and 5, Confucianism was the dominate moral philosophy in thousands years of feudal society which emphasized that women were subordinate to men and that women's place was limited within domestic sphere. Confucianism presented a rationale for women's oppression and affected gender relationships in Chinese society and this is what liberal feminism criticized in western world. Gender stereotypes present a conventionally simplified and standardized conception or image

concerning the typical social roles of male and female, both domestically and socially. The gender stereotyping found in China is in line with western researchers' findings concerning men and women's gender roles: "although gender roles and gendered institutions differ from society to society, cross culture data reveal certain regularities. Every culture assigns certain role to males and others to females. Male roles tend to be primarily in the public sphere while female roles generally emphasize responsibilities within the family. Men's and women's autobiographies mirror these gender role differences" (Malik and Lie, 2006) . Although there are a set of laws to protect the rights of women, women still can be deprived the equal opportunities to achieve the career success.

Data analysis shows that the rural families are affected by gender stereotypes more than urban family. It can be attributed to the lower education level and the role women play in rural areas. It is widely accepted that making sacrifices for the family is necessary. If both of the couple has careers, the wife is supposed to be more supportive to husbands' career. It can explain why female students or their parents are inclined to choose Finance and Accounting subjects. It provides women with more time to take care of the family to be an accountant or accountant assistant. As explained in Chapter 5, the position of accountant or accountant assistant is at the lower level of financial career field, different from accountant manager, CPA (Certified Public Accountant) and CFO (Chief Financial officer) which are on the higher level. The lower level positions do not require advanced financial knowledge and special working experience. Due to the lower salary requirement, employers are more inclined to hire students with vocational background than with higher education background. This conclusion also coincides with the result we got from labor market perspective analysis.

Gender stereotype does not only reflect the role women should play in people's mind, but also reflect that people assume there are learning ability difference between male and female. The comparison between Finance Accounting and Computerized Accounting in Chapter 5 support this opinion. Female students try to avoid subjects related to computer science or technical issue while male students are more likely to choose it. This is in line with the opinion of former cross countries research that male students appear to be more skillful, knowledgeable, and confident in information technology attitudes, use, and skills when compared to female peers (see chapter 3). However, it will deprive women of opportunities to enter into non-traditional areas if we only emphasize on the biological difference between two genders.

### **6.2.3 Effect of Higher Education Expansion**

This part corresponds to the sub-question "how does the higher education reform influence the gender imbalance?"

Chapter 2 gives the general picture about Chinese education system nowadays. And it can be seen from the Chapter 5 that the Chinese education reform in late 1990s affected the Chinese vocational education seriously. The two key words in the latest Chinese education are "expansion" and "decentralization". They are resulted in the dramatic increase of tuition fee of higher education and the devaluation of higher education diploma in China. These two factors could be regarded as the main reason why students who have lower SES background choose vocational education instead of higher education, especially in rural areas.

Besides, the decrease of education budget forces the higher education institutions to seek extra student resource in order to increase the university income. It provides a new opportunity for students who didn't reach the entrance level before to achieve higher

education. So, the correlation between vocational school and university is a vital factor which attracts students whose academic performance are not good, but can afford the high tuition fee in university.

The analysis of this section supported the analysis of family background, it explain the why the gender imbalance is more serious than before. It is because increasing tuition fee has forced some rural studnts to choose vocaitional education instead of higher education. Based on the conclusion we got from the analysis of culture affection, we get the deeper understanding of this phenomenon.

#### **6.2.4 labor market influence**

This part corresponds to the sub-question “how does the labor market influence the gender imbalance?”

Unlike general academic schooling, vocational education is specifically geared toward entrance the labor market (Carnoy, 1994). It indicates that the labor market demands can influence the students’ attitude greatly. In other words, the requirements of labor market could affect the gender distribution in vocational school if there is gender bias in it.

The gender bias we find in Chapter 5 reflects the gender stereotypes in labor market and coincides with the conclusion in sector of culture factor analysis. The attitude of employers towards female employees decides the imbalance gender distribution at different position levels. The feature of lower level financial position, such as “ not hard” also meet the requirement of female students and their parents, to a large extent.

Compared to university student, students from vocational school become more competitive at lower level position due to the lower salary requirement. Participants from rural areas, or with lower SES background, also admitted that this factor was taken into consideration when they made decisions.

### **6.2.5 Conclusion**

To sum up, based on the conclusions above and the background setting, a final conclusion is given to answer the research question: **“What are the factors that cause the gender imbalance in Yunnan Finance and Economics school?”**

As mentioned in Chapter 3, four perspectives inter- related and interact with each other. The social factors (for instance, Chinese education system and labor market) provide the platform to cultural factors (for instance, gender stereotyping) on the other hand, the culture factors react on the social factors. The family background factor and Chinese higher education reform influence the attitude of students and parents towards vocational education firstly, higher tuition fees, lower expectation from parents who have lower education background makes the rural family to choose vocational education instead of higher education. It can explain why most students in Yunnan Finance and Economics school are from rural areas. Secondly, the rural families seem to be influenced by traditional culture factors more than urban families. The change of composition of student resource makes the gender imbalance in Yunnan Finance and Economics school more serious than before. the gender stereotypes, gender inequity in culture and labor market lead to the gender imbalance directly. People admit the different roles women and men should play as well as the learning ability difference.

## 6.3 Implications for policy and practice

It was mentioned at the beginning of the thesis: unlike general academic schooling, vocational education is specifically geared toward entrance into the labor market (Carnoy, 1994). Gender imbalance in schools finally leads to the gender imbalance in labor market. It appears that, the sex stereotypes create a barrier whenever persons of one sex seek entry into an occupation that has traditionally been occupied primarily by members of the other sex (Williams & Best, 1990:294). The analysis result reflects the same dynamics may operate when women seek to enter fields such as technical subjects.

In May 2001, China's State Council issued *the Outline for the Development of Chinese Women (2001-2010)*,<sup>8</sup> containing the main objectives below:

1. To protect women's access to economic resources, equal rights and opportunities.
2. To eliminate the employment, gender discrimination and achieve gender equality in employment, protection of women's labor rights, women employees accounted for the proportion of the total number of employees remained at 40%

.....

What kind of policies can China learn from other countries to promote gender equality, to eliminate the gender imbalance in schools, to reduce the influence of gender bias in labor market? We see that people need the correct guidance from the government or the media. Besides, I would like to take Norway where I have studied and lived for two years as an example:

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<sup>8</sup> White Paper on Gender Equality and Women's Development in China (Excerpt)  
[http://www.womenofchina.cn/Data\\_Research/White\\_Papers/3277.jsp](http://www.womenofchina.cn/Data_Research/White_Papers/3277.jsp)

In Norway, a high proportion of women has been participating in society and work for many years and rank top in Europe. Norway has strengthened women's economic independence through increasing their labor market participation.<sup>9</sup> Welfare system lessens women's family burden, and gender neutral contribute to the women empowerment. It is not surprising in Norway that women take the career of security while men take the career of nurse.

Despite the different situation we have, Chinese government could carry on policies to improve gender balance in both schools and labor market. Government should continue to support basic education in rural areas in order to improve the average educational level, eliminate the negative influence of traditional culture while improve the women salary level, on average. It could strengthen women's economic independence. Universities and schools should avoid misleading students into when they choose subjects or future career plan (from the data analysis we see that the school enrollment booklet influence the students' attitude directly). By contrast, government and schools could encourage students to choose non-traditional subjects. For example, The Chinese Airline College in Tianjin encourages the female students to choose the course of pilotage while encouraging male students to choose course of airline service. Before, it was only emphasized in a serious of laws about women rights protection, still need to be taken into practice in detail.

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<sup>9</sup> [www.undp.org](http://www.undp.org)

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# APPENDIX

Field work Interview Question List University of Oslo CIE Lingyuan Chen

## Part one Introduction: Basic information of Participants

1. May I ask you some questions about you and your family?
2. What is your name and how old are you?
3. Which area do you come from in Yunnan Province?
4. Do you have sibling? If yes, how many do you have?
5. What kind of family background do you parents have?
6. What do you think of your family finance statement?

## Part two: Discussion: Gender Imbalance in Yunnan Finance and Economics School

1. Why do you choose vocational education?
2. When did you come to this school and why do you choose this school?
3. Was there any other choice available when you made your decision? If there was, what was that?
4. Which grade are you in?
5. Which specialization did you choose, and why?
6. What do you think of this subject or specialization you chosen? Do you think this subject or specialization could be more appreciated to female students than to male students?
7. Is it your own personal choice or not? If not, who did affect your choice?
8. Do you think our culture influenced you when you made choice? If it did, how it

influenced you?

9. What kind of job would you like to have in the future? Do you think the female could be more excellent in this field than the male? Why?
10. Do you think there is gender bias in labor market? If there is, what kind of bias is it?
11. More and more vocational schools begin to provide students access to university? Do you think it is most important reason why you choose this school? If it could not provide you the access to university, would you still choose it?
12. If you can go to university, will you choose the same subject? Why or why not?
13. Which is more important to you? University or labor market? Why?