

Son Preference or Son Pressure?
Narratives of Fertility Decisions from Chinese Female Migrants

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ABSTRACT

Though son preference has been identified as a major determinant for the imbalanced sex ratios at birth in China, little about how son preference influences fertility decisions. Most studies either assume Chinese parents prefer sons as rational choices because of sons' higher wage-earning or the ability to provide old-age support, or for cultural reasons such as lineage preservation and prosperity. By exploring narratives of fertility decisions for 42 Chinese female migrants, this article argues that son preference is not an individual choice per se, nor a joint decision by the couple, but a pressure descending from the upper generation of the husband's family, from mothers-in-law in particular. The results suggest the importance of an intergenerational perspective in exploring son preference in the Chinese context.

The sex ratios at birth in China, as defined by the number of boys over 100 girls, has skyrocketed since the 1980s. The officially reported sex ratios at birth have increased from 108.5 in 1982, to 113.8 in 1990, 119.9 in 2000, and 120.5 in 2005 (National Bureau of Statistics 2007). The actual ratio could be slightly lower, if one considers the underreporting of daughters in censuses (Goodkind 2004, 2011; Zeng et al 1993). However, China's sex ratios at birth fall far out of reach of the biological stable range between 104 and 106 (Dyson 2012). Guilmoto (2012) predicts that these male-dominated sex ratios will generate 50% more prospective grooms than prospective brides for the next three decades. The problem of surplus men will profoundly affect social lives such as marriage and crime (for reviews, see Hesketh and Xing 2006; Dyson 2012; Zeng et al. 1993).

Son preference is one major determinant for the rise of male-dominated sex ratios in China. A cultural tradition that prevalent in China and other Asian societies (Das Gupta 2003; Hesketh and Xing 2006), son preference used to be manifested by excessive female mortality in childhood and early adulthood in Asia (Wyon and Gordon 1971; Miller 1981; Saito 1992; Lee et al. 1994; Caldwell 2001). The recent sharp increase of sex ratios is the result of this old desire equipped with new technologies in a new situation: the son preference has been manifested by the availability of prenatal sex-selective technology and the fertility constraints by one-child policy (Das Gupta 2005; Guilmoto 2009; Li, Yi and Zhang 2011; Zeng et al. 1993). While gender selection and fertility control jointly produce the observed male-dominated sex ratios, son preference is a fundamental cause that drives the selection of male over female offspring in China.

Given the critical role son preference played in the male-skewed sex ratios in China, it is a little surprising that how son preference is enacted in everyday life receives little research. Son preference is often perceived either as a rational choice -- because of the son's higher wage-earning

capacity and/or the ability to provide old-age support -- or deeply rooted in Confucius culture for lineage preservation and prosperity (for reviews, see Hesketh and Xing 2006; Purewal 2010).

Little research has examined how, or whose preference influences fertility decisions. Here we provide a qualitative examination of the process of making fertility decisions described by Chinese female migrants. In our interviews with 42 participants, we found that son preference is not an individual choice per se, nor a joint decision by the couple, but a pressure condescending from the upper generation of the husband's family, from mothers-in-law in particular.

EXPLANATIONS OF SON PREFERENCE

Scholars often attribute the existence of son preference in Asia to three mechanisms: sons are preferred because (1) their higher wage-earning capacities, especially in agrarian economies; (2) their ability to provide old-age support; (3) their ability to carry the family line (Hesketh and Xing 2006; Purewal 2010). We'll discuss each mechanism in turn.

From the rational-choice perspective, parents prefer sons because sons can bring better benefits than daughters. The first advantage of sons over daughters is their higher wage-earning capacities, particularly in agrarian economies in which productivity was heavily relied upon physical strength (Basu 1989). This claim is supported by the fact that male-dominated sex ratios at birth declines with economic development in other Asian societies that shared the similar cultural heritage, such as Japan (Kureishi and Midori 2011), South Korea (Chung and Das Gupta 2007) and Taiwan (Lin 2009). Moreover, son preference also declines as women improve educational attainment and increase labor force participation (Tang and Sharp 2011; Mills and Begall 2010). Such claim has been challenged, however, by the fact of the persistent male-dominated sex ratios at birth in China, India and other Asian countries up to date despite

their economic development (Dyson 2012).

The second, and probably more recognized benefits of sons are their ability to provide old-age support. In China and other East Asian societies, a married son is responsible for caring for parents at old age, whereas a married daughter is supposed to prioritize her husband's parents over hers (Sun 2002). Ebenstein and Leung (2010) show that parents without sons are more likely to participate in the pension system and have greater savings than parents with sons. Bhattacharjya and his colleagues (2008) suggest that parents who opt for sex-selection in China are expecting their sons to marry and bring home a daughter-in-law who will support them in old age. However, studies suggest that daughters can provide equal, if not better, support for elderly parents as sons. Xie and Zhu (2009) show that married daughters, especially those living with parents, provide greater financial support for parents than married sons do. Daughters also provide better emotional support for their elderly parents than sons -- parents enjoy better relationship with children, and also maintain a better cognitive capacity and lower mortality risk when cared by daughters compared by sons (Zeng and Vapuel 2008). Direct evidence discrediting this claim can be found in East Asian immigrants to Canada, who still select sons over daughters even though the need for old-age support is largely absent (Almond, Edlund, and Miligan 2013).

Finally, from a cultural perspective, a son is preferred over a daughter because merely a son can carry the family line. Lineage preservation and prosperity are the core values of the Chinese patriarchal family system, and can only be carried out by sons (Chu and Yu 2010; Freedman 1966). In traditional China, "family was thought of as everlasting male-linked chains extending from distant ancestors to distant descendants." (Greenhalgh 1988:648). Daughters, on the other hand, are raised to bear sons for the husband's family. Because of this reason, parents value sons more than daughters, as "a son keeps incense at the ancestral alter burning" while "investing in a

daughter is like watering the neighbor's garden" (Attané and Guiltomo 2007).

The direct examination of this mechanism is limited, but it seems to be a clear association between son preference and the patriarchal family system. A comparative study among China, India and South Korea concludes that son preference in these three societies is rooted in their similar patriarchal kinship systems (Das Gupta 2003). In rural China, the desire for sons is positively associated with patrilineal family structures and practices (Murphy, Tao and Lu 2011).

AN INTERGENERATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

All mechanisms summarized above assume the fertility decision is made within the couple. A valid assumption for fertility decisions in the United States, it may not accurately describe the fertility decision process in societies with more collectivist orientations than in the United States (Jayakody, Thornton, and Axinn 2008; Thornton and Lin 1994). East Asian countries, in particular, possessed strong beliefs regarding the importance of both living parents and deceased ancestors (Goode 1970; Lee and Wang 1999). Parents' attitudes and expectations, therefore, should strongly influence their children's fertility behavior.

DATA

We conducted 42 interviews with female migrant workers in four neighborhoods in Beijing: Leng Quan, Liu Niangfu, Tian Cun, and Hai Dian. Interviews took place in shops. Women were recruited across the age spectrum.

RESULTS

Lineage Preservation, Mothers-in-law and Son Pressure

Most scholars recognized old-age support is a major incentive to select sons over

daughters in China, especially in rural area. Because rural China lacks a universal pension system, parents count on sons to support them when they get older (Bhattacharjya et al. 2008; Ebenstein and Leung 2012). Some rural mothers did cite old-age support as a major reason to have more children. As case 34 (age 36, two children, son-daughter) said,

"We rural people cannot compete with urban citizens. They have jobs and [old-age pensions], we have nothing. What else can we depend on except for children? The more children the better, we often think, more relatives, the better. We don't want to just a few kids¹."

However, they did not delegate such responsibility exclusively to sons. Some participants want daughters, particularly for old-age support. "*A daughter is good*," as commented by case 13 (age 43, two children, daughter-son), because "*when you get old, she is going to take care of you*²."

Instead, most participants cited lineage preservation as the reason to have sons. As Case 12 (age 43, two children, daughter-son) explained,

"Rural area is like this. [Every family] wants a boy to carry the family line³."

The need for sons to carry the family line also drives multiple childbearing in rural China.

Case 12's husband explained,

"We continue to have babies because we must have a son. If all the previous children are girls, ...we just continue to have another child, and another one, until we have a son. We just need one son. Just like that⁴."

This supports the cultural claims that Chinese wants to have at least one son, is deeply rooted in its rigid patrilineal family system that only sons can carry the family line, maintain genealogies, and inherit parents' properties (Chu and Yu 2009; Das Gupta 2003).

However, lineage preservation is not an individual choice per se. It is not even a joint

¹ 我们农村人吧，咱跟人没法比啊，人家城市里面有工作，有什么啥的，咱么老了靠什么啊，孩子多了，孩子那什么，亲人多好，都那样想。完了，那什么都不愿要孩子少。

² 老了能照应一下。

³ 农村都是一样的，都想要一个男孩，因为传宗接代。

⁴ 我们喜欢男孩就一直生，万一前面的一直都是女孩还要...再要男孩，就是不见【男孩】还要要，总共要一个男孩就行了。

decision made by the couple. In most occasions, it is a pressure descending from the previous generation of the husband's family, and from mothers-in-law in particular. Some of the rural mothers indeed prefer sons, and this desire drive them to have more children. As Case 14 (age 45, two children, daughter-daughter) commented on her sister's childbearing experience, "*she wants a son at all. She had a daughter at her first, but she wanted a son. She had twins with a boy and a girl.*" For almost all mothers, they feel the pressure of having sons from mothers-in-law, despite their own sex preference. In fact, most of them prefer girls over boys, and it is their mothers-in-law who hold strong son preference (Table 1). Comments like the following permeated the entire transcripts.

"Elderly definitely wants a son⁵." (case 11)

"In rural China a boy is necessary. Because of lineage preservation. This is the tradition in rural China. The elderly endures this tradition⁶." (case12's husband)

Table 1: Sex preference from the respondent, her husband, and her mother-in-law, N = 40

Sex preference	respondent's		her husband's		her mother-in-law's	
	n	Percent	n	Percent	n	Percent
Son	2	4.88	7	17.07	18	43.90
Daughter	11	26.83	5	12.20	2	4.88
No Gender Preference	19	46.34	13	31.71	7	17.07
% NA	9	21.95	16	39.02	14	34.15

Several women explained the major reason they have another child was because their parents-in-law wanted them to. For example, when asked why to have another child, case 12 said, "*My in-laws want a boy, that's the reason I have my second⁷.*" Even for those who did not marry or had children yet, they knew that they were expected to have sons. For example, Case 18, who only had a boyfriend, said affirmatively that she sensed that future parents-in-law would prefer boys to girls. "*We haven't talked about this, but I feel that my parents-in-law and my husband like boys. I*

⁵ 家里老人的思想肯定要男孩。

⁶ 农村都是一样的，都想要一个男孩，因为传宗接代，农村那个老思想，他们老人都有点那个思想。

⁷ 公婆想要男孩，所以才要了老二。

*can feel from their discussion*⁸."

Sometimes, women could escape the son pressure if the extended family (i.e. the brother-in-law) has one son already. Like case 46 said her parents-in-law preferred her daughter to her son because "*my daughter is the only daughter in the entire big families*⁹." Another example, Case 9, who only had a daughter, said she did not have any pressure to have a son because,

"My brother-in-law's family already has a son, so it does not matter whether we have a son or not. Because the extended family has one son already [to carry the family line]¹⁰."

The reason that mothers-in-law have such an important influence on the couple's fertility decision-making process most likely to lie on the filial piety, the Confucius value that respect for one's parents and ancestors. Often times, it is the de-facto attitudes towards the parents-in-law's request. For example, Case 11 said, "*the elderly wants to have a boy. You have no choice but to obey*." The same account can also be found from case 1. She said,

"The husband has to listen to his mom. She said you need a son to carry the family line. Like my sister, she had her first a daughter, the elderly got upset, very upset¹¹."

Not only mothers-in-law exert son pressure on our participants, but rural communities also have strong social sanctions against women with no sons. Case 28, who had one daughter and two sons, said,

"In rural area, people will look down upon you if you only have daughter(s)¹²."

Case 33, who is single, vividly experienced the community pressure in her childhood. She said,

"My third uncle only had daughters. When I was young, I often heard my third aunt got attacked by other relatives for not having sons. However, now these attacks are seldom made¹³."

⁸ 这事倒是我们也没有正经八百的做一块说说，就是我感觉。凭我感觉，从他们聊天中能听出来。

⁹ 其实我们家全是，就我们家一个女儿，全是儿子。

¹⁰ 公婆也没有，我家大哥，就是我们老公家的各个，家有男孩，然后我们生男孩女孩就都无所谓了，反正有一个男孩了。

¹¹ 男的还得听他妈的啊，她说传宗接待，要个儿子。那时候，就不说远的了，就说我妹妹吧，头一个女孩，生气，老人在背后，生气。

¹² 农村吧，有的时候，你要是一个闺女，人家都看不起的。

¹³ 我三伯家，他们家就女儿，那时候，我大伯母，妯娌之间吵架，吵架的时候就说你家儿子也没有了。但是现在这方面从来都不提了。

The Sex of the First Children and the Enactment of Son Pressure

Mothers did not feel the pressure of having sons at the beginning. The pressure rose when their first child was a daughter. In other words, mothers-in-law would request the participants to have a second child if the first one is a daughter. If the participants did not want more than two children, her second child had to be a boy. The timing is consistent with the empirical findings of sex ratios at birth by parity -- the first birth in China has a balanced sex ratio, while the male-dominated sex ratios started at the second birth (Das Gupta 2003).

When a woman had her first child, she usually did not experience son pressure. For example, When asked whether she preferred a boy or a girl in her first birth, Case 28 said,

"It does not matter whether it is a boy or a girl. I didn't think about it¹⁴."

Case 34, in the same narrative, said the sex of the first child was not a big deal,

"It does not matter the sex of the first child. Because it is the first child, daughters or sons are all my children. I did not think about it¹⁵."

This situation is also backed by the sex ratios at birth reported in our sample. At the first birth, the sex ratio of our small sample is 58.8, with 10 sons and 17 daughters.

Son pressure mounted if the first child is a daughter. For women whose the first is a boy, they don't feel strong pressure of having another child. Some of them still want a second, or their mother-in-law wants them to have the second to accompany with the first, or to achieve a sex balance in children. However, such pressure cannot be compatible with the pressure women feel whose the first is a girl. Case 35, said that the sex of the second child is the key,

¹⁴ 闺女儿子都行，那时候啥也不想。

¹⁵ 头一个孩子我感觉女孩男孩都无所谓，头一个，因为它头一个孩子，女孩男孩都是自己孩子，是吧？没有想别的问题。

"If you have a girl, you will feel a lot of pressure. You will definitely want a boy"¹⁶."

Those women whose first is a daughter was requested to have a second child if the mother-in-law wanted a son. For them, the pressure is sometimes a daily struggle. For example, case 29 who had a daughter her first and a son as her second child, described her life after having her daughter as "very stressful",

"When I had my daughter, my mother-in-law was unhappy. I felt very stressful. I personally did not care whether it's a girl or a boy, neither did my husband. It is my mother-in-law and sister-in-law who disliked my daughter"¹⁷."

The majority of them conceded to have another child. Several women confessed that if not of her mothers-in-law who demanded another child, she would not bear her son. Case 31, who had an older daughter and a younger son, mentioned that her decision to have the second child is exclusively to satisfy her mother-in-law,

"My first was a daughter, then my mother-in-law wanted [me] to have another child. So I did. Otherwise, I would not [have my son]"¹⁸."

Even for women who had a son as their first children expressed the need for sons if they were "not lucky enough." For example, Case 2, who had a son as her first child, said,

"My mother-in-law wants sons. I didn't feel much pressure because my first was a boy. If the first were a girl, I had to listen to her to have another [child]"¹⁹."

Some of them knew the expectation from the experience of their close relatives. For example, case 3, who had just one son, said,

"If the first is a girl I definitely need to have a second [child] ...My younger brother had a daughter first, and now he is trying to have the second child"²⁰."

¹⁶ 第一个嘛，生第一个的时候，什么孩子都想，女孩男孩都无所谓。关键是生第二个孩子，如果再生个女孩，那压力挺大的。特别想要一个男孩。

¹⁷ 生我闺女的时候，他家里，我婆婆就不高兴。我当时自己心里压力大啊...毕竟是自己生的啊。我老公也不嫌他。就是婆婆小姑他们嫌。

¹⁸ 完了第一个是姑娘，完了婆婆就想着再要一个吧，要不就要一他，要不然就没有他了。

¹⁹ 老人喜欢儿子，男孩。我也没什么压力，第一个就生了小子了。要是万一第一个是女孩什么的，我还得听婆婆的，再生一个。

²⁰ 如果第一个是女孩的话肯定的要第二个...我弟家一个女孩，现在在要第二胎。

Case 45, who had one son, said she did not feel the pressure to have sons from her mother-in-law herself, but her mother-in-law certainly preferred sons over daughters, because of her brother-in-law's experience,

"My husband's elder brother had a daughter of his first, and now he is having a son [as his second]. He is the only one having two children in [my husbands' family]. My husband's sister, his younger brother and I, we were lucky to have a son at our first²¹."

It is not simply the case to have another child, but to have a boy. In other words, if the second child is a daughter, our participant is expected to have children until they have a son. As case 13's husband commented,

"We need a son. If all previous children are daughters, we continue to have children until having a son. If the first is a boy, we would continue to have another girl. But if it is a boy again, we stop to have two boys instead. But it's not ok to have two girls only. Two girls, the parents will insist having a boy²²."

Case 34 also gave an example of her neighbor who kept having children until had a son, and ended up with six daughters and a son. She said,

"If not a need for a son why should she had so many daughters? She got a girl, but wanted a son, but she kept having daughters, and finally had six daughters without sons²³."

Ironically, in our sample, all but one woman whose first child was a girl and had a son as her second child. Though the number is uniquely high because of our small sample size, this pattern is consistent with the quantitative observations that the sex ratio at birth is male dominated at parity two and beyond (Das Gupta 2003). One would imply that some prenatal sex-selective technology had been used to achieve such goal. However, neither ultrasound nor sex-selective abortion was mentioned in the interview. Most respondents referred it to "luck". We did gather

²¹ 我们知道他们家反正老大头一个是女孩啊，这不又生了一个儿子。最后老大就两孩子。但是我们接下来那姐妹三个，他妹妹，包括他弟弟，我们都是刚好投胎就生了个儿子。

²² 一定要有个儿子。生女孩还要。要是生了，就把女儿藏起来，或者给别人，再要男孩，就是不见还要要，总共要一个男孩就行了，都那样的。就一个男孩，再生一个女孩，就这样。要是再生一个男孩，就要两个男孩。两个女儿就不行了，两个女孩，家里坚持要一个男孩。

²³ 最后不是又要个儿子嘛。要不哪要这么多闺女。她就有一闺女，完了，她还想要儿子，接着来一闺女，完了一下子来了六个闺女，没有儿子。

some evidence that it was commonly acceptable to use ultrasound and prenatal sex-selective abortion to select sons. Case 40, the only participant had two girls in our sample, attributed the birth of her second daughter to a mistake made by ultrasound. Her husband did not want to have a second child at all, he said,

"Go for an ultrasound. If it's a boy, keep it; If it is a girl, get rid of it"²⁴."

Perhaps the participants who felt the strongest son pressure are the ones who refused to have a second child after having a daughter. For case 30, the daily struggles between her and her mother-in-law finally made her move out of her mother-in-law's house and took care of the baby by the couple themselves, which was very uncommon in China given the geographical proximity between the two families. She recounted that portion of life as very stressful,

"I had my daughter, but my mother-in-law was very unhappy and petulance. She did not take care of the baby. When my baby cried, became fussy, or even needed a diaper change, she did not help me at all. I left her place when the baby was three months old. My daughter only started to see her grandma again when she was six years old. I did not talk to her for nine years"²⁵."

Most women did not use such a confrontational tactic to avoid having another child. Some of them tried to postpone the timing of an additional child. For example, case 36, who did not want to have another child but the mother-in-law demanded, said her mother-in-law tried to persuade her to have another child whenever she came home. The way she avoided is to "*work hard* (折腾)", which gave her little time and energy to have another child. She would postpone it until the mother-in-law naturally gives up.

Others avoided the discussion at all. These women did not go to her husband's home to discuss the issue with the mothers-in-law. The migration gave them an opportunity to do so. For

²⁴ 去做 B 超吧, 男孩就留着, 女孩就做了。

²⁵ 我们生了一个小姑娘, 她奶奶就不愿意, 这心里就别扭, 老跟我闹气。那时候哄孩子, 一个婴儿, 叽里呱啦, 成天拉屎拉尿的, 她也懒得弄, 她也不给弄。后来三个多月, 我就抱着我家孩子到这边来, 我自己找了一间房, 然后自己开一个店。我家孩子六岁才回去的, 我跟她赌气堵了九年。

example, case 39 who was demanded by the mother-in-law to have another child, did not meet her mother-in-law by "*not going home.*"

Future of Son Pressure

Scholars have observed that son preference in China is on the wane. Hesketh and Zhu (2006) show that there is a greater proportion of women nowadays prefer girls or have no sex preference. We also find in our interview that the son preference is declining, which is related to three factors: (1) the rising cost of having sons, (2) the increasing benefits of having daughters, and (3) the disappearance of son pressure.

Several participants said they didn't want sons because it was too expensive to get their sons married. For example, case 9 who had only a daughter, said she did not want sons at all because it is too burdensome for parents to get sons married nowadays, even in the rural area:

"Boys in my villages are a burden. It is not a burden at a time, but a lifelong burn. Once you had him, until your death, he is a heavy burden. To get him married, even both bride and the groom are from a rural area, you need to prepare 200,000 yuan [32,671 US dollars]. This does not include housing. You need 200,000 yuan [32,671 US dollars] just to get him married. You also need to prepare 130,000-160,000 yuan [21,236 - 26,136 US dollars] in cash and other things such as decoration, home appliance, etc. "

Similarly, case 31 said,

"Now we have changed [to like girls]. Raising sons need to prepare housing and need a lot of money; girls are better²⁶."

Moreover, many women, especially the ones with just one child, have expressed no interest to have an additional child, as it's too expensive to have two. Case 45, who had only one son, said her husband did not want to have another child because they did not have the financial capability to

²⁶ 现在老家养闺女比养儿子那什么，养儿子，要房，要钱又多，现在养闺女我觉得挺好的。

support two children,

"We don't have enough money. Why would we have two children? Think about it, we will not have enough money to raise them, no money to let them eat well and dress well, no money to provide them with good education. What's the meaning [to have two children]? It's better not to have another child. If you can provide them with a good life, you can give whatever they want, that's good. If you cannot give them [a good life], you should not let them come to this world to suffer²⁷."

The other reason of waning son preference is the rising wage benefit of having girls. Girls are more likely than boys to bring money back to the family and better take care of parents when they get older. As case 30 explained,

"They used to don't care girls. Now in rural area, girls are better than boys. Girls can find a better husband, or go out to find work in the city. When they have money, they give it back to their parents. Boys cannot change their fate [by marriage]; they have to stay in the rural area. Even boys go out to work in cities, they are not in charge the family money; it is the daughter-in-law do. They don't send money back. They spend it leisurely, do not send it back to family²⁸."

Case 12 commented that rural people still want two children, but one boy and one girl. A girl is good because "*when you get older, she is going to take care of you*²⁹."

The strong son preference from mothers-in-law to have boys are also likely to diminish. As several women who we interviewed whose sons are approaching the marriageable age, they unambiguously express will "*not push*" their daughters-in-law to have sons. Some of them felt they didn't care. Others, however, expressed their inability to do so.

CONCLUSION

Through qualitative interviews with Chinese female migrants, we found support that our

²⁷ 你说我们没这能力，生两个孩子干嘛呢？想想孩子跟着你吃不上好的，穿不上好的，也没能培养好他，你说有意义吗？还不如不要孩子我说。他跟着你天天过上好日子，过上好生活，他想要什么你能给他什么，那当然好。你给不了他什么，不让他就来到这个世界上受罪嘛。

²⁸ 以前非常不待见女孩子，现在都觉得，在农村啊，你看女儿都比儿子强，女儿出去，找个好婆家，就到外面打工啊什么的，一挣钱都给了父母，儿子呢，就无法改变他那个命运了，始终在那个山沟里熬。儿子，现在怎么说的，儿子当家的比较少吧，都是儿媳妇当家。男孩子出去打工，拿不回多少钱，吃喝玩乐，拿不回多少钱。

²⁹ 老了能照应一下。

participants had sons to carry the family line. However, such reproductive decisions, at most time, were made not by themselves, nor jointly by couples, but a demand condescending from the husband's family. Mothers-in-law, in particular, demanded their daughters-in-law to bear male offspring to carry the family line. The pressure to have sons rose after the first child was a daughter, which is consistent with other quantitative findings (e.g. Das Gupta 2005) . Facing such demand, most women obeyed with no questioning and resistance. For a few who did not follow the order, they usually used physical distance (i.e. Migrating to cities and not going back) to avoid direct contact with the mothers-in-law.

As most of our participants had sons, the future of son preference also depends upon their sex preference. Most of our participants expressed no desire for boys, and no interest to push their future daughters-in-law to realize their sex preference. Furthermore, even they have son preference; they suspected whether their attitudes would matter: "they won't listen" was often cited in this situation. These findings are consistent with Murphy et al. (2011) that son preference is diminishing in rural population.

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