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Domestic Violence in Chinese Families: Cold Violence by Men towards Women

By Helen McLaren¹

Abstract

China has experienced rapid social and economic transformation since the early 1990s. While state control has attempted to maintain a collectivist spirit that emphasizes communal goals and obligations over unrestricted capitalism, rapid economic growth has weakened socialist ideals and individualism has thrived. The present paper draws attention to potential associations between the rise of capitalism, individualism in mainland China, the one-child policy and changes in domestic violence laws with the increased perpetration of cold violence by some men towards their female partners. Cold violence refers to an emotional form of domestic violence characterized by a complete withdrawal of all verbal and physical communication by one member of an intimate relationship towards the other. Identified from discussion with key informants and preliminary analysis of English and Chinese literature, the phenomenon of cold violence is suggested to be increasingly used by urban living, educated, wealthy men. While the competing interests of traditional patriarchy and policy supporting women's gender equity is discussed, it is proposed that post-socialist transformations in urban China that are characterized by rapid socio-economic change and individualism may have provided fertile ground for the rise of cold violence by some men towards their female partners.

Keywords: China, cold violence, violence against women, economic change, individualism

Introduction

Western conceptualizations of individualism are represented by freedom, democracy and equality. When translating the notion of 'individualism' into Chinese understanding, it is best conceived as 'me-first-ism' and it implies a self-fulfillment ethic. Individualism has historically been criticized as subordinate to collectivism, however ideology in China has changed due to exponential economic transformation since the early 1990s (Li & Zhao, 2007; McLaren, 2016c; Meng, 2007). Rapid economic change, together with China's 1994 housing reforms (Liu, Winter, & Zilibotti, 2015), have made possible significant levels of individual accumulation of wealth (Meng, 2007). In this space the Chinese government has attempted to maintain a collectivist spirit that emphasizes communal goals and obligations over individualism and unrestricted capitalism (Du, Li, & Lin, 2015; Steele & Lynch, 2013). Maintaining a form of collectivism has been salutary to the rural and lower classes (Cheung & Leung, 2007), but China's contemporary market economy encourages entrepreneurialism in the interests of national prosperity (Wu, 2010; Zhao, 2008). As a result rapid economic growth has provided conditions in which socialist values and state control systems have weakened (Fang & Walker, 2015) and the individualist profit maximizing characteristic of 'me-first-ism', particularly in China's urban regions, has thrived.

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Authors suggest that individualism is most observable among China's men who are urban living, of the one-child generations², who are educated and have achieved newfound success in the capital market (Shen & Wu, 2012; Sima & Pugsley, 2010; Sun & Wang, 2010). With respect to women, socialism attempted to reduce inequality in spheres such as urban employment and income (G. G. He & Wu, 2014; F. Wang, 2008) and the new socio-political order continues to emphasize gender equality (Chan, 2013). However, there remain historical influences of Confucianism in the Chinese social ethic and political ideology that keep patriarchy and men's privilege in place. These include traditional Confucian ideals relevant to class systems, heterosexuality and women's obedience to men (Cao, Yang, Wang, & Zhang, 2014; Jolly, 2011; Xia, Wang, Do, & Qin, 2014). As such, these ideals inform expectations of women's obedience and they remain a salient feature of Chinese society that continues to oppress women in all spheres of life.

In order for men to ensure women's subservience in marriage in a changing socio-economic context, this paper explores the literature reporting on cold violence by men towards women; cold violence being an emotional form of domestic violence characterized by a complete withdrawal of all verbal and physical communication by one member of an intimate relationship towards the other, no warmth, no love and no care towards the other party in marriage. This form of domestic violence is said to enable abusive men to maintain financial control in marriage and to circumvent China's family and anti-domestic violence laws should women speak out or seek divorce. Cold violence is said to torture women mentally (D. M. Y. Tam et al., 2016), force women's subservience in marriage and render women incapable of achieving justice when seeking to terminate their marriages, as discussed later in this paper.

In drawing from a preliminary exploration of English and Chinese literature, coupled with the author's curiosity of cold violence from scholarly discussions when working in Beijing³, this paper considers socio-political factors contributing to the emergent recognition of cold violence in urban China. In questioning why some men may resort to the complete withdrawal of all forms of communication towards their wives, the relatively small but growing quantity of literature available via English and Chinese language databases highlight complex interactions between cultural traditions, individualism, class systems, education, law and the men's aspirations to maintain luxury life. All these issues offer plausible explanations for the rise of cold violence by men towards women in China. However, variables cannot be isolated as causal factors with any certainty due to the silence and shame associated with domestic violence and limitations of existing research. The strongest arguments seem to be those that make associations between the changing social contexts associated with China's economic development, gender equity and communication in Chinese families (Ye, 2008, 2011). These are discussed.

While I do not seek to quantify the extent of and prevalence of cold violence, I suggest that post-socialist transformations in urban China characterized by rapid socio-economic change and individualism has provided fertile ground for the increased use of this particular form of emotional domestic violence by men towards their female partners. It is important to briefly consider, in the first instance, how domestic violence is conceptualized in China.

² The one-child policy was introduced in 1979 as a measure to limit China's population growth. While there are exceptions and changes to policy have since been implemented, the policy generally limits couples to having one child and strict penalties exist for parents who violate the policy (McLaren, 2016c).

³ The author was a research fellow at the Department of Sociology, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, in 2012. In preparing this article, the author acknowledges subsequent research assistance of a Chinese national, Ms Xiangrui (Abby) Wang, who interpreted from Chinese to English the academic literature located via the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI); the primary database for academic literature in China.

Domestic violence in China

The All China Women's Federation (ACWF) reported in 2002 that approximately 30 per cent women in China's 270 million families had experienced domestic violence (cited in Ye, 2010). In a later study (2014, cited in Leggett, 2016) the ACWF they identified that 39% of Chinese women aged 18- to 49- years of age have experienced domestic violence by their male partners⁴. Men are most often noted as the perpetrators of domestic violence in Chinese families (Leggett, 2016; Ye, 2010; H. Zhang, 2013), which is not dissimilar to the disproportionate rates of male perpetrated domestic violence towards women across Asia and the Pacific (Fulu, Jewkes, Roselli, & Garcia-Moreno, 2013; Heo & Rakowski, 2014; McLaren & Goodwin-Smith, 2016). Chinese researchers suggest that little has changed over the last decade, which is a result of the Chinese government attaching low importance to domestic violence due to political bias in favor of economic growth and national prosperity (X. He & Ng, 2013; Hong-ying, 2008). While Chinese law provides some protection of women's rights in marriage and divorce, there are still gaps due to non-recognition of all forms of domestic violence and the legacy of Confucianism that demands women's subservience to men irrespective of human rights.

Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states: 'All human beings are born free and equal with regard to dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood' (United Nations General Assembly, 1948). Further, Article 16 states, 'Men and women ... are entitled to equal rights as to marriage, during marriage and at its dissolution.' However, in reality, women in China do not experience equal rights with men in marriage and in its dissolution due a range of factors. One includes the ongoing influences of Confucian ideals that value hierarchical order; husband is superior and wife is subordinate. Reinforced in childhood socialization, Confucianism also emphasizes that 'harmony comes first' (D. S. Wong, 2014, p. 1). X. He and Ng (2013) explain that this ideology effectively serves to erase domestic violence in marriage though holding mostly women accountable for achieving harmony, expressed through their obedience to men and tolerance of his violence.

Feminists and human rights advocates have achieved some positive change for women. China's early reform period saw the passing of legislation that established women's freedom in marriage, right to divorce and property ownership rights (Leggett, 2016). Domestic violence was banned as a result of China's Revised Marriage Law in 2001. But despite these legislative changes, most property is owned by men and legal definitions have resulted in domestic violence being perceived as merely physical violence (Chen & Shi, 2013), not sexual, emotional or psychological violence. For women who cannot prove physical injury, there may be no grounds for compensation (X. He & Ng, 2013). Thus, laws hold inherent assumptions that privilege men's entitlement to property. According to Chen and Shi (2013), few women are relieved by the system because the system rewards men's dominance and women's loyalty in marriage. It forces women's submission and silence irrespective of the form of domestic violence, which is due to women's accountability to ensure harmony. As a result, China's Revised Marriage Law compels women to remain in

⁴ It is difficult to estimate domestic violence prevalence in China due to shame and silencing, as well as law and dominant social discourses that do not acknowledge particular forms of domestic violence, including sexual assault and emotional forms of violence that include cold violence. The small change noted here from 2002 to 2014 is likely a representation of changing understanding on what constitutes domestic violence as opposed to any changes to prevalence.

abusive marriages. In March 2016 China implemented anti-domestic violence laws that hold abusive husbands criminally liable and ‘victims can seek restraining orders’ (Barua, 2016). It is an advancement for women that the anti-domestic violence laws recognize both physical and psychological abuse. However, legislation still does not recognize sexual abuse and economic control in marriage as domestic violence, nor forms of emotional abuse that involve the prolonged absence of actions such as with cold violence.

Many Chinese women continue to be prevented from speaking out. If allegations of domestic violence are made and cannot be proven, the women may be deemed at fault for disrupting marital harmony. For this reason, formal institutions contribute to the women’s silence. The core problem here is gender inequity that stems from a disparity of power in which men’s superiority is historically entrenched and deep-rooted in Chinese culture (Xin, 2012; Q. Xu & Colanese, 2014; L. Zhang, 2014). As well, the scope of the domestic violence definition in China’s new laws remain narrow, purposely vague, conservative and unlikely to make much of a difference for women. The anti-domestic violence laws, one could suggest, are a token deed aimed at placating feminist unrest in the face of traditional Confucian informed patriarchal interests, more so than protecting women. Either way, narrow definitions, vagueness and entrenched patriarchy mean that non-obvious forms of domestic violence are unlikely to be perceived as ‘real’ by politicians, the criminal justice system and by mainstream Chinese society. These pressures add to the burden of women’s suffering, particularly when the particular form of domestic violence experienced effectively does not exist.

In many respects, domestic violence by men towards women continues to be constructed as a man’s prerogative and a private matter rather than a public concern. While Chinese feminists, educated women and human rights advocates have broadened their understandings of the many types and forms of domestic violence, including cold violence, mainstream social attitudes are still very much influenced by traditional concepts and ideals. I reiterate here that if women seeking divorce speak out about but cannot prove domestic violence, the laws are geared up to punish the women and support men to retain their wealth. Most property, according to Leggett (2016), is in the man’s name. Educated and wealthy Chinese men currently hold the balance of power in divorce.

It is the associations between cold violence, individualism and men’s retention of their wealth following marriage breakdown that is attracting ongoing and increasing legal and scholarly interest in China, which is of interest to this paper. The methods informing a preliminary review of literature, as contextual themes associated with cold violence, is provided next.

Methods

A literature search was undertaken to inform a preliminary examination of cold violence perpetrated by men towards women in China. Google scholar and the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) databases were searched using English combinations of the words *domestic cold violence* and in the CNKI database Chinese simplified words for *domestic cold violence* [家庭冷暴力]. In total, 1613 articles were identified. Many articles were duplicated across both languages, but in many cases only the titles and abstracts were available in English, not the full manuscript – duplications were excluded. Upon refining the search with the use of the word *females* in English and Chinese [女性], the data set was reduced to 348 articles. Titles of articles were screened for relevance and 85 articles remained. Abstracts were read and material focused predominantly on laws, children, prevention and non-factual storytelling associated with cold

violence were excluded. The refined search resulted in six articles in English language and nine Chinese language articles focused on men's perpetration and/or women's experiences of cold violence. As a preliminary review of literature, this paper provides discussion from the main themes identified from these English and Chinese language articles as narrated below.

Cold violence

Literature holds that cold violence is perpetrated predominantly by educated middle-class men. There are two main reasons provided for men's use of cold violence: to discipline their wives into submitting to the men's power and to enable his 'me-first-ism', self-image and hedonistic indulgence. In some cases cold violence is said to ensure women's acquiescence to the men's taking of a mistress (Tao, 2013), despite China's marriage law prohibiting cohabitation of married persons with any third party (Wei, 2011; Xiaodong, 2013). Literature confirms that cold violence is a purposeful act of men who seek to drive their wives to put up with the men's digressions or leave the relationship with no share of marital wealth, no property division and no child support (Thurston, Tam, Dawson, Jackson, & Kwok, 2014). Cold violence is recognized as an act, particularly of men of middle to high economic status, aimed to avoid paying compensation to their first wives. This frees up the men to take a 'trophy wife' that they perceive better matches a *nouveau riche* (those who have experienced newfound wealth and achieved associated increases in class status) and higher class status (Chang Ping, 2014; T. Zheng, 2012). Chinese law further protects the men's wealth in his new relationship, having been legislated that the women may not be entitled to compensation out of the men's prenuptial wealth should they also divorce.

As an emotional form of domestic violence perpetrated increasingly by men, existing literature presents the voice of Chinese women in describing cold violence as the complete withdrawal of all physical, financial, spoken and emotional communication – the women describe feeling as if they do not exist (Ying & Jianqing, 2007). In some cases, the men are reported to openly have love affairs in disregard of the women's feelings, which influences the women to seek divorce and/or leave (Qu, 2007; Y. Y. Wang, 2007; Y. Y. Zhang, 2010). As experienced by these women, cold violence is more than just a 'cold shoulder' as described in Western literature (Cyr, McDuff, & Wright, 2006; Stets, 1991). It is more than a mere lack of verbal communication, or low libido; nor is cold violence a disapproving stare (Ye, 2010). Cold violence involves the persistent shutdown of all forms of communication and warmth by one partner toward the other.

For Chinese women, cold violence is reported as torturous and as damaging to their mental health as is physical or sexual violence (Hong-ying, 2008; Ling, 2005; Qin-hui, 2008; Shi-min, 2005; D. Wong, 2014; Ye, 2008, 2010, 2011; Ying & Jianqing, 2007). Disregard in acknowledging this form of domestic violence is based on social myths, informed by Confucian ideals, that position women's non-conformity as being partially to blame for their fate (Leggett, 2016). Such heteronormative myths that blame women in their relationships are not exclusive to China (for example, see McLaren, 2013, 2016a, 2016b; McLaren & Goodwin-Smith, 2016). As a result, I suggest here that cold violence is an insidious form of domestic violence and it severely impacts the fundamental human and personal rights of women, their mental, physical health and social life.

Cold violence and divorce

On the surface, seeking divorce in China appears relatively easy. Couples are required to attend mediation and resolve their disputes. Due to high court costs and Chinese people

traditionally not being litigious, divorce in most cases is settled out of court. For those matters that are decided in court or court ordered mediation, getting compensation is not easy. Research highlights how women in China are hampered by insufficient access to legal services (Leggett, 2016) and by the court system and ideals of the judiciary that fail to recognize domestic violence (X. He & Ng, 2013). Jian Wang's (2013) Foucauldian analysis of mediation processes highlight how divorce mediators are infrequently impartial. They most often employed their own traditional patriarchal values to influence decisions on who was to blame for domestic violence in failing relationships, or they otherwise ignore women's allegations of abuse. Hence women's ability to achieve compensation in divorce matters involving domestic violence is fraught with dilemma because they tend to be disregarded by the system.

Cold violence, due to having no physical appearance of evidence, does not fit current legal definitions in China's legislation (Hong-ying, 2008; Y. Y. Wang, 2007; Y. Y. Zhang, 2010) - including in the new anti-domestic violence laws (Barua, 2016; X. He & Ng, 2013; D. S. Wong, 2014). Women's experiences of psychological trauma as a result of cold violence most often renders them mentally incapable to engage in mediation or legal action (Huang, 2013; Kan & Li, 2014; Y. Y. Wang, 2007; Yang, 2011; Y. Y. Zhang, 2010). For these women, the fight is even harder when the system attaches little importance to cold violence (Hong-ying, 2008; Qin-hui, 2008). Women who are traumatized by cold violence risk divorcing with no compensation and, should they leave with the children, there is no child support (X. He & Ng, 2013; Thurston, Tam, Dawson, Jackson, & Kwok, 2016).

The increased incidence of cold violence is recorded as most prevalent among educated or wealthy families (Huang, 2013; Thurston et al., 2014; Y. Y. Wang, 2007; Y. Y. Zhang, 2010). It is also understood as a mechanism in which spoilt, greedy and intolerant men (Huang 2013; Zhang 2010) circumvent family and divorce laws for wealth retention. As a result, one could hypothesize that cold violence is a preferred form of violence among China's educated *nouveau riche* men. While China's laws have attempted to protect women from domestic violence, cold violence is the new form of domestic violence being used by men to circumvent laws and control their wives. This may be because 'me-first-ism' limits men's desire or capacity to share or care about others, while fear of going backwards in social status impels the men to find new ways to keep their women and their wealth in order.

The women and their children

Cold violence is frequently described in the literature as a disease that is killing marriage, family and moral society in contemporary China (Hong-ying, 2008; Huang, 2013; Qin-hui, 2008; Shi-min, 2005; Shuyan, 2011). This is due to persistence of traditional patriarchal attitudes at play in a changing individualist (Huang, 2013), market driven (Y. Y. Wang, 2007) society. The use of domestic to ensure women's subservience can be conceptualized as a legacy of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in which wife-beating was institutionalized to properly ensure male dominance (Gilmartin, 1990), now cold violence functions for the same purpose.

Considering the urban dynamics of family and high cost of living in Chinese cities, it is usual for both the husband and wife to work to meet the cost of urban living. Xu and Colanese (2014) explain that among Chinese couples, traditions still expected that the male has a higher education, salary and political status. If this pattern does not hold, domestic violence becomes a means for the male to express his dominance in the home. In socialism and with the one-child policy, in which women are said to have experienced increased educational and employment

opportunity (Tsui & Rich, 2002; Veeck, Flurry, & Jiang, 2003), education and earning capacity of women is often attributed to the creation of tensions in relationships. As such, literature indicates that cold violence enables men to maintain dominance in educated, two income families (Huang, 2013; Y. Y. Wang, 2007; Y. Y. Zhang, 2010). These and other authors argue that women's educational and employment opportunities are contradictory to social realities in China (W. Zheng, 2000) as many women in relationships remain financially dependent upon men. This plays out when becoming a house-wife; many women work in the family business under their male partner's management, when women earn an income it is managed by the man and economic dominance tends to be maintained by men (Shu, Zhu, & Zhang, 2013; D. M. Tam, Dawson, Jackson, Kwok, & Thurston, 2012). For women who are more educated and earn more than their male partners, Bertocchi, Brunetti, and Torricelli (2014) confirm that these are proxies for both marital instability and women's reduced economic power in the family—this is not unique to China.

With limited financial independence, few informal supports, and little faith in the legal system as a defender of human rights, many women are known to opt for suicide as an alternative to pursuing divorce and the shame associated with change in social status (Huang, 2013; Kan & Li, 2014; Thurston et al., 2014; Y. Y. Wang, 2007; Yang, 2011; Y. Y. Zhang, 2010). Lee (2014) and others (Devries et al., 2011; Wong, Wang, Meng, & Phillips, 2011) suggest that Chinese women's suicidal and self-harm behavior is conceptualized as a form of female agency in which women air their painful emotions resulting from the abuse; as well, it is an expression of their individual rights and aspirations for freedom. While it may be seen as an expression of women's power, some of these authors (Huang, 2013; Kan & Li, 2014; Y. Y. Wang, 2007) propose that suicide and self-harm may be the only choice that the women perceive available to them. Suicide and self-harm, as an option to escape cold violence, is evidence of women's enduring suffering and powerlessness at the hand of the husband and her extended family and community.

As a result of experiencing cold violence in a rapidly changing society, many studies present reports of Chinese women feeling depressed with no energy and limited social support to leave their partners, or to pursue divorce settlements (Hong-ying, 2008; Huang, 2013; Kan & Li, 2014; Ling, 2005; Qin-hui, 2008; Shi-min, 2005; Y. Y. Wang, 2007; Yang, 2011; Ye, 2010, 2011; Ying & Jianqing, 2007; Y. Y. Zhang, 2010). Even in cases where the women work, these studies suggest that many Chinese women are forced to remain in their abusive relationships because the men manage the finances and the women may have no access to the shared family assets (Huang, 2013; Kan & Li, 2014; Qu, 2007; Y. Y. Wang, 2007). Women's shame with regard to their situation also pressures them to remain with their abusive men.

Y. Y. Wang (2007) argues that many women are too ashamed to tell their families about the cold violence, and their families may not believe the women or understand the abuse type as significant. Others may be geographically distanced from family due to internal migration for work (McLaren, 2016c) and therefore have a lack of family or formal supports to help them. When women divorce, then working, caring for family and paying for housing in a city that is not their own *hukou*⁵ on a single income is difficult. The shame and humiliation, as well as possible abuse by the women's family for divorcing, renders divorce and returning home or to extended family untenable. Finally, remarriage in China is historically patriarchal; remarriage rates for divorced women is very low (Dommaraju & Jones, 2011; Gu, 2013; G. Zhang & Baochang, 2007). This means that divorced women are likely to endure life beyond divorce as single, isolated and

⁵ Hukou is the Chinese household registration system, usually by place of birth, which entitles people residing in their own residency region to certain welfare supports, including health care, public housing and government school education.

unsupported. If suicide is not an option, then remaining in marriage and enduring violence may seem a viable coping mechanism for some women.

In terms of child custody, traditional gender and family roles have held strong and this renders obsolete China's policy shifts towards women's equity and shared parenting. Most children remain in their mother's custody following divorce, which makes it more difficult for women to remarry (Gu, 2013; Wei, 2011). While by law women may be entitled to compensation following divorce, Leggett (2016) argued that in practice few women succeed with their claims against the men. Even if cold violence is coupled with other marriage violations that may qualify the women for compensation, such as the man's extra-marital affair, these acts usually are have no witnesses.

When men refuse to compensate, out of his own greed and self-interest, this is not only affecting the divorcing wife but also any children remaining in the care of the mother. Hence, women are often left to support their children in poor circumstances. The inability to produce evidence of either the abuse or the man's indiscretions means that the women and her child/ren are left helpless. While this is a human rights violation against women who divorce as a result of cold violence, his failure to compensate is neither in the best interests of the woman nor the child. These women endure hardship and the men are set free, with no family responsibility. They are free to continue their hedonistic *nouveau riche* lifestyles and the me-first-ism that is consistent with having no regard and no responsibility for others. While the men live on well, I learned from discussions with scholars at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing how many women who escaped cold violence and were living in impoverished circumstances in Beijing were increasingly leaving their children unsupervised or with poor quality private schools so that they could work and survive. The life chances for their children looked bleak.

One-child

Many early authors characterize the first generations of male youth resulting from China's one-child policy as the beginning of an ideological crisis (Kwong, 1994; Yan, 2009), describing them as dishonest, arrogant, individualistic and part of the me-first-generation that is self-centered (L. Xu, 2002). As men of the one-child generation have become older, many who have been successful in China's capital market are reported as being excessively hedonistic adults (Huang, 2013). While once spoiled and pampered by their parents, wealth has allowed for the men's self-indulgence to take over. Many of the one-child men have not grown up with sisters under the new reforms, and, as a result of smaller family units, they have not learned how to manage gender equity in the family. Instead, they practice 'me-first-ism' while also taking up the patriarchal Confucian values of their parents in which men are revered over females (Cockain, 2012). This has adverse implications for the women who marry these men.

Research literature in the English language on men of the one-child generations and associations with either domestic violence or cold violence could not be located. However, through discussions with scholars at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, grey literature accessible via the Internet, and a small quantity of literature available via the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) academic database all gave some insights. What was can be surmised is that cold violence is most prevalent among China's urban living, educated *nouveau riche* men who are greedy, self-indulgent, and socially and politically powerful—many happen to also be men of the one-child generation. These traits are particularly obvious among men who had 'made it' in

China's capital market, but little is reported in literature due to government control over the focus of research in China.

From the available literature, it appears that the majority of men who used cold violence do so to ensure their wives were submissive and obedient. Many men who use cold violence deny divorce compensation to the women for two main reasons. Firstly, greed and not wanting to go backwards in their social and economic standing – secondly, to punish the women for filing divorce and socially embarrassing them. Zhang (2010) and others (Cameron, Erkal, Gangadharan, & Meng, 2013; Hesketh, Zhou, & Wang, 2015) provide some insights into links between *nouveau riche* men of the one-child policy and cold violence, suggesting that being spoiled during upbringing has rendered some men of the one-child generations incapable of sharing with others, unable to compromise and with no capacity to handle family issues properly. Huang (2013) adds that the moral values have changed as a result of the one-child policy, from family centered to individual centered (Huang 2013). As a result, says Huang (2013) the yearn independence, wealth and individual character of the one-child generation has manifested as me-first-ism and family conflict has worsened.

Conclusion

Reflected in contemporary family and society is Confucian hierarchical order in which men are dominant and women are subordinate (Ye, 2011). The preliminary reading of literature presented herein suggests that rapid economic, social and cultural transformations have not only reinforced patriarchal power, but also altered how power is played out in the intimate lives of wealthy Chinese households. As well, the rise of capitalism in which educated men predominantly of the one-child generation has resulted in greed being played out in married life and in divorce. While beating of women by the men was once the preferred option for keeping one's wife under control, it is not only illegal but also considered an act of the cash-poor peasantry (Xin, 2012). Beating is no longer appropriate to the desired social image of China's educated, *nouveau riche* men. For wealthy, spoiled, powerful and abusive or controlling men, they are reported as increasingly resorting to non-traditional forms of domestic violence that are easier to hide and harder for women to prove (Chen & Shi, 2013; D. M. Y. Tam et al., 2016; Thurston et al., 2016; Y. Y. Wang, 2007; Y. Y. Zhang, 2010). All this points to potential associations between the rise of individualism in China, breakdown of socialist ideals and the growing observations of cold violence by men towards women.

While divorce is reportedly on the increase in China, leaving a bad relationship is particularly difficult for women who may not have education and work skills. As well, women who are educated and work also face difficulties managing work and care for a child following divorce, particularly if they receive no share of family wealth or compensation. Compensation may be awarded by negotiation between both parties, or when ordered by court processes due to domestic violence the men's extramarital affairs. However, these are difficult to prove.

In cases of cold violence, literature discussed in this paper indicates that some men use communication withdrawal as a hidden form of abuse to ensure women's subservience and/or to circumvent laws. But cold violence is not even acknowledged as a form of domestic violence in China, by family mediators or the court system, despite being talked about more frequently by Chinese scholars and literature.

There is increased interest in cold violence, but not being able to survive financially following divorce is a real fear for women. Many may keep quiet, endure the abuse and consider

staying is a more viable option than leaving. At the extreme end, others women may contemplate suicide as an option to escape their trauma. Cold violence towards women in China is not simply a family communication issue, but a structural concern that has been made possible by rapid socio-economic change, individual participation of Chinese men in a growing capitalist market and a legal system that is ambiguous and has insufficient regard for women. Until there is broader sociological change, formal recognition of cold violence in China's laws may not necessarily mitigate against it. If cold violence is better recognized by formal structures, this may inadvertently drive this already secretive behavior further underground due the stigmatization that formal recognition might serve. While this paper achieves its purpose in highlighting cold violence as a legal, social and political concern in contemporary China, there remains many unanswered questions for future researchers about the gendered and generational effects of the one-child policy in China and its associations with cold violence.

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