Case study 1: Wei, an only child

Hi my name is Yang Wei. Yang is my surname. I am 14 years old and at middle school in Shanghai. I have no brothers and sisters. In fact, everyone in my class is an only child. My mum says she’d have more children, but we must put China first.

So, what’s it like for us, being only children? Our parents do everything for us. They try to give us everything we want. If I had brothers and sisters I would not get so much attention.

But it’s bad in other ways. When your parents have only you to think about, they put too much pressure on you, especially about school.

I have to study all the time. And not just pass exams, but do really well. I got 76% in a maths test last term and they stopped my pocket money for a whole month! All they want is for me to get into a good high school and then university and get a good job.

It’s the same for everyone in the class. Some of us study for 14 hours a day, between class and homework. I even work in the morning, before school. And my parents hate me to hang around with people who they think don’t work hard.

There could be problems in the future too. When I get married, my wife and I will have to look after our child and also help our four parents. Maybe even our grandparents, because they get only small pensions. It could be a big burden. So we’ll need jobs that pay well.

Still, the policy may have changed by then. Or I might start a business and get rich. Then I might have more than one child – because fines would not bother me.

Case study 2: Ju, a farmer

I’m Tong Ju. My husband and I are rice farmers here in Yunnan province.

We already had two daughters when the One Child policy came along. Of course we love them. But here in China people think it is better to have a son because when a daughter marries, she can’t really help you. You lose her to her husband’s family.

Then I found out I was pregnant again. The village committee called me in and gave me a hard time. Then our son Jian was born. We were so happy. We had to pay a big fine, but it was worth it.

Now our daughters are married in the next village, but our son went off to Ghuangzhou, because people earn more money in the city.

It can be hard for country people in the city, because they do not have a resident’s permit, but Jian is smart and works hard. He got a temporary permit, and has a good job in a factory. They made him a supervisor.

Jian got married 2 years ago, to Ting. Now they have a son. They work long hours so they brought the baby to us to look after. Jian sends money every month and they come and visit for a week at Chinese New Year. I do worry about the future. We don’t have much money saved. There are no old-age pensions in this district yet. We do not want to be a burden on our son. Still, as my husband says, worrying never mended anything.