

## **(Not) Return to Work: A Comparative Study of Chinese Stay-at-home Mothers in Shanghai, Singapore, and New York**

Juggling work and parenting is often a complicated and demanding task, especially for mothers. As evolving gender norms encourage women to be both successful workers and devoted mothers, many struggle with work-family conflict as they try to “have it all”. How this norm of having it all affects mothers' work decisions can vary, depending on the prevailing societal expectations. However, most studies on stay-at-home mothers focus on a single cultural context, and on their decisions to leave the labor market. We propose a comparative lens to explore how college-educated, stay-at-home Chinese mothers make sense of their decisions of returning or not returning to work, and what the obstacles they face. Chinese mothers in three cities all state their non-working status as temporary and express desires and preparations for return to work. They all claim that they need support to make it happen. However, mothers vary in types of support they want — in Shanghai, it is the lack of flexible job opportunity; in New York, it is the affordability of childcare, and in Singapore, it is the combination of the two. The results call for a cross-cultural perspective in relation to societal prevailing gender norms.