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**STUDIES OF MEN AND MASCULINITIES  
IN CONTEMPORARY CHINA**

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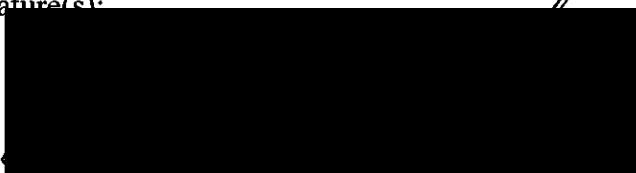
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## ABSTRACT

Since the 1995 UN Beijing Conference, gender issues have become increasingly prominent in China. Gender equality has been officially endorsed by the Chinese government as a fundamental state policy. What is the current situation of gender relations in China? How can studies of men and masculinities contribute to gender equality?

This thesis first looks at the broad picture of men and masculinities in Chinese gender politics. It includes three essays on 1) the issue of men keeping mistresses (*bao ernai*) from the perspective of men, masculinities and power; 2) issues of nationalism, racism, sexuality, and the Internet in the process of globalization by examining an incident triggered by an English weblog; and 3) the transformation of men's practices and the need for change in areas such as men's violence against women. In all three essays, intersectionality (race, gender, class, sex and sexuality) and globalization are highlighted. It is argued that culture, corruption, gender and sexuality are intertwined and masculinities are at stake in the controversial phenomenon of *bao ernai* and issues of racism and nationalism. There is much to be done in educating men and boys to be 'gender conscious' in China.

The second part of the thesis is based on eight months of ethnographic fieldwork in an

eastern China village. The dynamic nature of gender construction is examined in association with the local culture, politics, and economic development. From extensive life history interviews with 20 men and 10 women, detailed case studies are provided with an analysis based on Connell's four-dimensional framework of analysing gender relations. A unique feature of the thesis is the importance of women in the construction of masculinity, women's perspective of masculinity (fatherhood, intimate relations, etc), and the discussion of female masculinity (embodiment of masculinity with heterosexual women). The construction of masculinity is closely associated with social changes in rural China in the last six decades, with collectivization, de-collectivization, urbanization and globalization.



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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

ACWF	All China Women's Federation
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NBSC	National Bureau of Statistics of China
PRC	People's Republic of China
SRB	sex ratio at birth
TNC	transnational corporation

## NOTES ON MEASURES

### Weight

1 *jin*=1/2 kilogram

1 *liang*=1/20 kilogram

### Area

1 *mu*=1/15 hectare

1 *fen*=1/150 hectare

### Distance/length

1 *li*=1/2 kilometre

### Currency

1 yuan (*renminbi*)

1 jiao=1/10 yuan

1 fen=1/100 yuan

- (The value of the Chinese currency against major foreign currencies has always been changing. The exchange rate between the *renminbi* (yuan) and US dollar is about 1 US dollar =6.8 yuan.)

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# **PART I**

## **PRELIMINARIES**

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The main goal of this study is to investigate issues about men and masculinities in China through the lens of gender. Its rationale comes from questions about the nation-wide gender order of contemporary China.

After the Chinese Communist Party [CCP] had secured nationwide rule of all China except the island of Taiwan, the regime sought to establish a socialist system following the Soviet model under the principles of Marxism and Leninism. The CCP intended to transform China from a backward agriculturally-based country to a strong, modern and advanced nation with heavy industry as the pillar of its economy and workers as its ruling class. As part of this agenda, women, who had been confined to the private space of the household and had been subordinated to men under the traditional order of *nan-zun-nü-bei* (male superior, female inferior) for more than two millennia, were to be liberated. New laws, in particular the 1950 marriage law, gave women the right to choose their own spouses (against arranged marriages) and the right to inherit property. On a very large scale, women were mobilized to enter the workforce in both industrial and agricultural production.

At the time, all these moves were attributed to the radical thinking of Chairman Mao Zedong, whose comments on women resonated with women and men beyond mainland China. Among them the best-known were:

Women hold up half the sky.

Times are different. Males and females are the same.

What men can accomplish can be accomplished by women too.



Sixty years after China's liberation and more than forty years after Mao's proclamations, at the end of the first decade of the 21st century, what is the situation regarding gender in China? In their review of the development of women's studies and the sociology of women/gender, Chow, Zhang, and Wang (2009) raise some important questions for studying gender in contemporary China:

How is gender different from sex, femininity, and sexuality? What is (are) Chinese feminism(s) and what are their indigenous characteristics? How has nationalism, and now socialism with a capitalist twist, benefited or not benefited women? How do gender interests intersect with class and other interests? In what way does patriarchy enter the analysis? How can men's subjectivities and masculinities be incorporated in such as analysis? Is the CCP's Marxist perspective on women a form of Marxist feminism? Is the marriage between Marxism and feminism a happy one and why? (pp. 84-85)

These questions have yet to be answered, both inside and outside China. This project seeks to help in providing answers to these questions, with the under-researched topic of men and masculinities as the chief concern.

### **1.1 The changing gender order**

There is a paradox in contemporary China regarding men's general relations with women. On the one hand, many Chinese men (and women) believe that Chinese men are suffering as women's position and power rise. The Marxist view that treated women as labor power meant a decline in the role of women as housewives. With social childcare facilities in cities, childcare by the elderly in the country, and later the one-child policy, women were positioned to devote more time and energy to productive work. Women's contribution to the family income is as important as, if not more important than, their husbands'

contribution to the household. Some scholars claim that women have taken the jobs of the men, and that the country has paid a price in low efficiency labour as women joined the workforce (Sun, 1994). This in turn, has led to a feeling among many men of being impotent, as they could not maintain the breadwinner role (Li, 1995). This framework defines women as naturally weaker than men (Zheng, 1994) and implies that all women should be married and dependent on men by carrying out the roles of mother and wife. Therefore it implicitly endorses heterosexuality and heteronormativity.

On the other hand, in many aspects of social practices and representation, men's domination continues to exist. Men comprise the large majority of high officials and managers of major businesses. With recent neoliberal globalization, the situation is getting worse for at least some groups of women, such as those of rural origin who come to cities to seek employment: many of them end up as sex workers, second wives, or sweatshop workers. When there is an economic crisis, women are the first to lose jobs. There are major inequalities about retirement. Women are now demanding policy changes in the unequal treatment of retirement where women are forced to retire about five years earlier than men despite the fact that they live longer on average than men (Liu et al., 2003).

There is, therefore, considerable turbulence and debate about gender issues in contemporary Chinese public life. Currently, women's groups are asking for increasing women's representation in key positions in the state and local government (administrative and law-making institutions). The age gap in retirement of public servants is debated. In the realm of law making, there are issues about sexual harassment, and about favouring men in recruiting of university and business position.

In the realm of media, there are changes of femininity and masculinity as demonstrated in TV talent shows and entertainment programs. A case in point is a popular talent show on Hunan TV (a regional station in Hunan province broadcasting nationally via satellite). The

format is a mimic of popular TV talent shows such as *American Idol* and *Australian Idol*. But the programs are gender-segregated, unlike the British, American or Australian talent shows of similar character. The ‘Super Girl’s Voice’ (*chaoji nüsheng*) TV talent show hosted by Hunan TV enjoyed tremendous popularity in 2005. Li Yuchun, the top prize winner of that year, is both loved and hated in China, partly for her neutral gender appearance (and her rumoured homosexuality) in addition to her musical talent. For the 2005 contest, only girls were in contest. In 2007, boys are competing against boys in a similar contest known as ‘Happy Boy’s Voice’ (*kuaile nansheng*).

Also in the media (from newspapers, magazines, radio and TV, and increasingly on the Internet) are the issues of a rising divorce rate, sex revolution, sex industry, extramarital affairs, men and women finding marriage partners, etc. Fashion shows, car sales, modelling and the film and TV industry are tending to glamourise beauty and youth, consumerism and the so-called capitalist lifestyle.

Praises are sung of heroes and heroic traits, but meanwhile the human side of heroes has been discussed and motives questioned as publicity increasingly means monetary benefits. Sex and sexuality have been commercialized. Women’s and men’s bodies have been commercialized too. With the influence of globalization, sexual minorities are more likely to be tolerated, though they are discussed by only a small number of researchers. In the field of social research, gender-related issues have become a more important area. Fathering, domestic violence, family planning and forced abortion are issues that cause concern in contemporary Chinese society.

Education, especially higher education, has seen a boom in the last three decades. Nine years of compulsory education for all children has been implemented, to ensure that the future labour force of China is literate, regardless of their gender or place of origin. The year 1999 marked the beginning of a rapid expansion of university enrolment (*kuozhao*), a

'leap forward' at both undergraduate and post-graduate level. This has implications for gender relations as well. Masculinity has been at stake in some public outcry that girls have taken over boys in academic achievements both in numbers of enrolment and in national scholarships awarded – a core point in a country where traditionally higher learning was a realm exclusively of men. There have also been public debates about gender bias in enrolment and more prominently about employment discrimination against female graduates.

## 1.2 Questions about men and masculinities

In 1994, an edited volume was published under the title of '*Yanggang yu yinrou de bianzou*' (*Changing Rhythms of Masculinity and Femininity*). The chapters were contributed by historians, philosophers, anthropologists and psychologists, most of whom holding distinguished positions in their own fields. The main thesis, as summarised in the concluding chapter by its chief editor Min Jiayin, who is himself a philosopher, is that throughout Chinese history, when the *yanggang* (masculine) quality of men prevailed, China was a strong nation. That explained the rise of Tang Dynasty China as the world's leading power. Since the Song Dynasty, however, as Chinese (mainly today's Han nationality) men were losing their *yanggang zhiqi* (the Chinese equivalent of masculinity), the power of China started to go along the downward slope. These claims reflect a widely held view among Chinese scholars that men should by nature be *yanggang* (masculine), while women should be content with their *yinrou* (feminine) dispositions. This is echoed by male sociologists Zheng Yefu (1994) and Zheng Yefu (1994), who argue that the Maoist gender equity or sameness policy has been detrimental to Chinese society. Their views have been strongly criticised by Chinese feminists (e.g. Li, 1995).

This discussion is one indication of the emergence of questions about men and masculinity in China. There was media discussion on the topic of 'Shanghai men' in 1997 triggered by an article in the influential *Wenhui Daily* in Shanghai. In her article 'Ah!

Shanghai Men', Long Yingtai, a renowned author from Taiwan, praised Shanghai men (married men in particular) for showing care for their wives by sharing housework and childcare. There were protests from men in Shanghai who took the article as an insult to their masculinity, though Long, who had a feminist perspective, claimed later that this was not her point. Still, there were stereotype images on Shanghai men popularized by well-known mainland authors such as Yi Zhongtian (1999/2007) who made similar comments to Long's (1998). The Shanghai based dramatist Sha Yexin was author of a popular movie '*Looking for the Real Man*' (1986) depicting a story of an unmarried woman (who has passed her best age for marriage) seeking a real man as her husband. Sha (1998) later claimed that he wrote the script in a wish to find masculinity in Chinese men and women (see Chapter 16 for discussion of female masculinity). The women in Sha's drama, who was categorized as '*daling nüqingnian*' (female youth of big age) in the mid 1980s, would be a member of a larger category of women—*shengnü* (leftover women) if she lived in the end of the first decade the twenty-first century. These 'leftover women' are usually well-educated and have successful careers. Their not being able to find good marriage partners has been regarded as a social problem that needs to be studied from the lens of gender.

Scholarly research in women's or gender studies has contributed to the understanding of gender patterns in various dynasties as well as modern and contemporary China (e.g. Ebreý, 1993; Mann, 2005; Judd, 1994; Wang, 1999; Croll 1994). To the extent these studies revealed masculinities, the focus has been on the elite, or the powerful, dominant or dominating groups of men. As will be seen in Chapter 2, elite culture has been the focus of most English-language discussions of masculinities in China.

It is only recently that some researchers have turned attention to ordinary people, not members of the elite. Prominent in this trend are Fang Gang (2009), Yan Yunxiang (2003), Zheng Tiantian (2009a), and Shen Hsiuhua (2008a, 2008b). Fang, Zheng and Shen have provided important observations on gender issues regarding the intersections between

gender, power and sexuality in the context of the city, with business people, officials, and migrant workers as their respondents. Yan's focus has been on rural communities; and it is the emergence of this issue that provides the focus for this thesis.

### **1.3 Rural issues**

What is often not realized outside the country is that the majority of the Chinese population are still rural residents. The recent official figure puts (NBSC, 2008) 727.5 million people, or 55 percent of the total population, as rural residents in 2007. The first 27 years of CCP rule was marked by land reform and numerous movements of collectivization. The announced goal was to achieve common prosperity for all peasants. For instance, a guiding principle for the CCP at the time was to bridge the so-called 'three major gaps': the urban-rural gap, the worker-peasant gap, and the mental labour-physical labour gap. The focus was class, and class with 'Chinese characteristics'. The first gap overlaps with the other two: almost all peasants resided in rural areas. Most workers resided in cities and towns and almost all mental labourers resided in cities and towns. The intellectuals or '*zhishi fenzi*', in other words, the mental labourers, were regarded as the group that was most prone to bourgeois influence and hence liable to become corrupt.

The Chinese word '*nong*', which is usually translated as 'rural', has a specific contextual meaning in contemporary China. It is different from 'rural' settings in English-speaking countries (Kenway et al., 2006; Campbell et al. 2006). It is also different from the rural in the sense that scholars traditionally regarded China as a country with a history of agricultural civilization. In this study, I will take 'rural China' in the triple sense of contemporary usage, known as *sannong*: agriculture (*nongye*), countryside (*nongcun*), and peasants (*nongmin*).

Though the great majority of the Communist leaders in the Chinese revolution had rural backgrounds, the orthodox Marxist-Leninist doctrine that the CCP adopted made the

urban proletariats the leading class. As a result, from the late 1950s, the ruling CCP adopted a dual household registration system separating people on an urban-rural basis. This prevented mobility from one group to another. The exceptions are rural young people who have received tertiary education and are hence regarded as 'state cadres' and the few actual party members who are promoted from local to higher level administrative positions. Another exception was the campaign of 'educated youth going up mountainous regions and down to countryside' (*zhishi qingnian shangshan xiexiang*) during the Cultural Revolution, when school leavers from senior or junior high schools in cities and towns were sent (down or up) to live and work with peasants in villages. Most of these young people returned to cities in from the late 1970s to the early 1980s.

After the launch of economic reforms, the situation of urban to rural migration experienced a reverse. Migrant workers from the countryside flocked into cities and towns to seek employment and business opportunities. The household registration (*huokou dengji*) system designates people living in rural towns were in the category as *chengzhen jumin* (city or township residents), which means they are not regarded as rural. For people without the urban residency, they were regarded as rural even if they live and work in cities and towns for most part of the year except the Chinese New Year holiday season.

Officially, in the framework of worker-peasant alliance, the peasants are a joint ruling class of the nation. In reality they have been at the bottom of social strata, many of them living for bare survival and continuation of the lineage as traditional Chinese values require them.

The reform initiated in the late 1970s started with the rural structure of production, to free peasants from rigid central planning so that the incentives of peasants to production could be extracted. This proved to be successful as production of grains increased. Industry and commerce were allowed to develop under the collective township enterprise or even

village enterprises. In this sense, peasants were allowed to enter the more profitable field of industry and commerce which the household registration system had formerly forbidden them to do. At that time, scholars such as Fei (2007) advocated the model of Jiangsu which he summarized as ‘leaving the land yet sticking to the countryside’ (*li tu bu li xiang*).

However, many of the township enterprises failed to produce the productivity and profitability hoped for. In the late 1990s, when neo-liberal thinking was pushing China to further embrace the market economy and develop its private sector, the country experienced a tide of ownership-transfer (*zhuanzhi*). This process of privatisation, followed by the passing of the property right law in 2007, is controversial as China declares itself a socialist country and still defines public ownership as hegemonic. Yet a rich class of rural entrepreneurs have emerged in coastal provinces of China, one of which is Zhejiang, where this study is located.

#### **1.4 Rural gender relations**

Given the importance of rural society, gender relations in the countryside become particularly important for understanding the overall gender order of Chinese society.

The changes in rural economy and government policy just outlined have impacted on local customs and culture, though in varying degrees. At the rural community level, change has not been dramatic in gender relations as in other aspects of life. Housing, marriage arrangements, and caring for the old and the young seem still to reflect the traditional gender order of patrilineal household, that is, for a man to take in (*qu*) a wife and for women to give herself away (*jia*) to a man. Marriage is almost universal, as indicated in the saying ‘men and women reaching mature age should get married (*nan-da-dang-hun, nü-da-dang-jia*)’.



It is generally believed that rural women have less equality with men than their urban counterparts (Li, 2006). Rural women today are faced with both the disadvantage of less-stable job opportunities and more oppression in their decisions to find marriage partners and have children. In childbearing, there is a continuing contradiction between the state policy of birth control and family expectations of producing sons (Cao, 2005; Li, 2009). The economic reform has provided rural women with more opportunities to seek employment in non-agricultural sectors. But they are a vulnerable group, exposed to exploitation either in their physical labour (Jacka, 1997) or their emotional and sexual labour (Zheng, 2009a). Within the rural setting, there are issues about women's inheritance and the rising imbalance in the sex ratio at birth (SRB). There are also new versions of generational tension. For instance, the well-documented tensions between the mother-in-law and the daughter-in-law have new manifestations (Wolf, 1972; Yan 2003).

In the local setting studied in this project, men still enjoy important advantages: their symbolical power as 'head of family', in a context of patrilineal inheritance; their domination in positions of power and authority; their privileges in production (land distributed according to male-headed families) and consumption (ritual spending in the men's name, gambling, smoking, etc.); and their practices in sex and sexuality, including access to commercial sex services – which very few women would dare to seek.

### **1.5 Focus and plan of the thesis**

Given all this background, a study that focused on the making of masculinity in Chinese rural life seemed strategic. The project is broadly ethnographic, though it uses life-history interviewing as its key method. It has a strong element of oral history. It also breaks with ethnographic convention by setting the rural investigation against a backdrop of cultural and mass media debates about men and masculinity occurring in contemporary China.

The thesis consists of six parts. Part I provides the background to the study. After this

introductory chapter, an overview of the development of the field of critical studies on men and masculinities is given. In this review of literature, three tasks are fulfilled: a discussion of the theoretical debate on definition of masculinity and the concept of hegemonic masculinity in the field of men and masculinities, including some comments on the idea of female masculinity; a critical review of works on Chinese masculinity published in English; and a critical review of works on Chinese masculinity in Chinese. Chapter Three introduces the methodology of ethnography and life history interviews with both men and women. In analysing gender relations, the four-dimensional analysis developed by Connell (2000, 2009) is adopted as the main analytic tool.

The three chapters in Part II deal with different aspects of contemporary debate in China about men and masculinities. Chapter Four discusses men, masculinities, and power by commenting on the phenomenon of *bao ernai* (keeping mistresses) among rich and powerful men. The analysis takes a lens of intersectionality to examine class, gender and sexuality in social transformation. Here deeper structures of inequality come into view, including the urban-rural divide, the power of the state, and the relations between Taiwan, Hong Kong and mainland China in the business circle, providing bases for the emerging business masculinity as observed by Zheng (2009a). The topic of Chapter Five is a controversy in late 2006 and the following year over an English blogger who posted his diaries with graphic accounts of his sexual adventures in Shanghai, the largest and most cosmopolitan city in China. The chapter follows the blog and the development and impact of the incident in terms of race, post-colonialism, pornography, and nationalism. This demonstrates the need to study the relationship between masculinity and globalization. Chapter 6 provides more details of the emerging men's movement in China and the recent development in the field of men's studies, together with a discussion of men's violence against women and education of men in contemporary China.

Parts III, IV, and V present data collected from a rural community in eastern China's

Zhejiang province. Chapter 7 gives an account of the research site. Chapters 8 to 12 present snapshots and extended case studies of men from the village, their experience of life as men and their construction of masculinity. In Chapter 8 men of different generations, occupations, and education talk about their experiences in settings ranging from schools to military camps, factories, hotels and pharmacies. Chapter 9 and 10 present case studies of men from two generations, whose main experiences have been within and around the village. These two men have been involved mainly in farming and transport services. Chapter 11 and 12 give case histories of men from the village who actually had little experience of farming themselves. One has a life trajectory of factory worker, trader, and entrepreneur. The other has been a village cadre for ten years. These men are reflexive on their lives, and offer information about generational conflicts and sexuality that is significant to the construction of masculinity.

An important feature of this project is its attention to women's roles in the construction of masculinity. This is represented by the four chapters in Part V. Chapter 13 gives a general account of the women respondents from the village. The experiences of these women are not as bitter and miserable as the 'talking bitterness' genre would suggest. But these interviews are nonetheless full of mixed feelings towards their husbands and fathers. In Chapter 14, a wife and mother in her 30s comments on her life and her relations with her husband. In Chapter 15, a university student gives the story of her love-hate relationship with her father. Chapter 16 discusses the issue of female masculinity through the life story of a middle-aged woman.

The thesis ends with Chapter 17, which attempts to bring together all the recurring issues. Here I offer suggestions on the implications of the findings for understanding gender relations in China and its social development, for understanding the world gender order, and for research on men and masculinities in general.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1 Enter masculinities studies

Academic research on men and masculinities is a relatively new field of social science. Since the mid 1980s, interest in gender issues about men and masculinities has been demonstrated by empirical and theoretical research across the social sciences, humanities, the biological sciences, and in other fields (Connell, Hearn & Kimmel, 2005, p. 1). This is also supported by the publication of numerous monographs, anthologies, and launching of journals, and encyclopaedias. The global development and collaboration between scholars of different parts of the world is another feature in the development of the field. At the same time, public interest in men's and boys' identities, conduct, and problems has also been growing.

#### *Naming the field*

Within the English-speaking countries, together with Scandinavian and German-speaking countries, where the earliest men's movement and men's studies emerged, there have been debates about the name of the field. The idea of 'Men's Studies' emerged in the late 1970s amid the establishment of 'Women's Studies' departments in universities in North America during the second wave of feminism. The term 'men's studies' was unpopular with some (women) scholars who regarded it as men's ill-defined reaction against women's studies (Clatterbaugh, 1998). Elsewhere the discipline is known as the 'new sociology of masculinity' (Carrigan, Connell & Lee, 1985), 'studies of men *as men*' (Hearn & Morgan, 1990), or 'critical studies of men' (Hearn, 2004), or simply 'masculinities studies' (Gardiner, 2002). By including men and masculinities, and sometimes 'critical', it is implied that the focus is the lives of men (as in an influential anthology edited by Kimmel and Messner, *Men's Lives*, now in its eighth edition).

Currently the preferred term is 'Studies on Men and Masculinities', as reflected in the change of title of the journal *Masculinities* to *Men and Masculinities* in 1998 and the publishing of the *Handbook of Studies on Men and Masculinities* (Kimmel et al., 2005) and *International Encyclopedia of Men and Masculinities* (Flood et al., 2007). In this study I will adopt the full name 'critical studies on men and masculinities' as the formal name of the subject and in the text use 'masculinities studies' as a shorthand version. The main reason for the choice is that I want to problematise men and masculinities and differentiate between masculinities as embodied in men and the possibilities of female masculinity. In other words, the binary between masculinity and femininity is scrutinized in the perspective of gender, which is understood as socially constructed, and culturally differentiated, as well as experienced by the body.

#### *Development of pro-feminist masculinities studies and its feminist heritage*

In 1987, a series of books on men and masculinities were published by authors from four rich English-speaking countries: the US (Kimmel, 1987; Brod, 1987), the UK (Hearn, 1987), Canada (Kaufman, 1987), and Australia (Connell, 1987). There were numerous other books and journal articles published around the time on the issue of men, but these few books stood out because together they signalled a change of focus in the study of men: from the dominant concept of 'male sex role' to the prominence of masculinity/ies. This was followed by more works in the global north and the rich periphery: Hearn & Morgan (1990), Brod & Kaufman (1994), Cornwall and Lindisfarne (1994), Hearn (1992), and Connell (1995). Meuser (2009) records that discussion of men's studies took place within German women's studies around 1988. Around the same time in Nordic countries such as Norway, there was well developed research on men (Holter, 1997, 2003).

Gender theory became a key issue in the second wave of Women's Liberation in the 1960s and 1970s. In fact, as Lynne Segal (2000) observes, feminism and gender as a central

category of analysis were born together. In feminist theories, gender is conceptualized as a category of analysis in an attempt to explain and remedy women's subordination to men, a theme shared by different schools of feminist theory. Some men who were sympathetic to feminist causes drew on feminism in their work on men and masculinities. An early example was Tolson's (1977) pioneering work on different cultural patterns of men's lives inspired by socialist feminists' distinction between the economic roles of working-class men and bourgeois men.

Attempts have been made to theorize the basic structures that contribute to gender inequality. A central conception has been that of patriarchy. Mitchell (1966, 1971) criticizes the simplistic attribution of women's domination to economic causes such as capital and private property (which dates back to Engels, 1884). Instead she proposes that four structures should be examined integratively: production, reproduction, sexuality and (childhood) socialization. Rubin (1975) discusses the 'sex-gender system' which she defines as the set of arrangements by which a society transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity, and in which these transformed sexual needs are satisfied. Catherine MacKinnon (1989) attributes male dominance over women and discrimination against women in the United States to a 'built-in tension' existing between a 'concept of equality, which presupposes sameness' and a 'concept of sex, which presupposes difference' (p. 216). More recently, Walby (1986, 1990) adopts a dual systems framework of analysing patriarchy together with capitalism. She argues that patriarchy is composed of six structures: production, paid work, the state, male violence, sexuality and cultural institutions.

What all these theoretical frameworks have in common is their approach to analysing issues of gender and sexuality as patterns or structures, in the belief that social structure conditions practice. To make the complexity within the gender system visible, we need to acknowledge multiple dimensions in gender relations. Under these frameworks of gender

relations, concepts of 'patriarchy' and 'class' are useful for exploring the causes of women's subordination to men. Jónasdóttir (1994) adds the concept of 'love' as another dimension in theorizing patriarchy by analysing the socio-sexual relations of men and women and how women's 'love power' is exploited.

Mies's (1986/1998) discovery of a connection between patriarchy and capitalist accumulation builds up the connection between women's oppression and exploitation under colonialism. She uses the metaphor of an iceberg, with capital and waged labour as the visible economy that is 'above the water', and housework, work in the informal sector, work in the colonies and nature's production forming the underwater part of this economy (1998, p. xi). Based on five years of living in India, Mies's theory reflects the views from feminists who represent the minority groups in the industrialized societies and the majority of women from the global south.

As in feminism, there are different schools within the camp of studies on men and masculinities. This reflects the different schools of knowledge and understanding and different traditions in doing academic research. Both theoretical and methodological issues have been debated. There have been a few books published on the different perspectives for study of men and masculinities. Clatterbaugh (1990) and Edley & Wetherell (1995) provide a synthesis of men's studies in different disciplines, among which feminist inspired gender theory has been an important source for both the academic 'men's studies' and political men's movements (Messner, 1997).

### *The ethnographic moment*

The 'ethnographic moment' (Connell, 2000, p. 9) in studies on men and masculinities has brought about excellent studies on the formation and transformation of masculinities in different regions and arenas. Some cases in point are North American athletes (Messner,

1992) and schoolboys (Thorne, 1993), ordinary men in Mexico City (Gutmann, 1996), Australian gay men (Dowsett, 1996), men in transition at eastern Europe and former Soviet Union (Burawoy & Verdery, 1999), men working at a garage in Malaysia (Mellström, 2003), and peasants in a Portuguese village (Almeida, 1996).

The ethnographic moment has contributed to the formation and confirmation of theories of masculinity as historical, relational, plural, and dynamic. For instance, Gutmann's (1996) study reveals the real-life complexities of Mexican masculinity that exists today. By asking what 'being a man' means, Gutmann explores how masculinity is negotiated and renegotiated in daily practices and rituals enacted in multiple sites. He concludes that masculinity is not made just by men but by men and women. He further argues that not one, but a variety of masculinities are in play in today's complicated worlds of Mexico City.

From his ethnographic study in a Portuguese village, Almeida (1996) finds the conception of hegemonic masculinity a useful tool. He stresses the importance of constantly connecting local discourse with the notion of the nation-state and the global economy and culture, and paying attention to concrete men rather than 'men' as an abstract category (p. 168).

Mellström (2003) focuses on the social construction of masculinity in the intersection of race and class within a group of technical specialists of a Chinese background in Malaysia's Penang State. Though the author starts from investigating into the 'masculinisation of power within worlds of technology' (p. 19), he ends with an intersectional analysis that examines gender, race, class and nation as systems mutually constructing one another.

Through life histories of male Japanese youth Taga (2003) explores the impact of



romantic love on the gender formation of men. His research confirms the significance of conflict about masculinity, and variation in gender formation.

These ethnographic studies on men and masculinities are inspirational. However, ethnographies of men and masculinities in China are yet to come.

### *Globalization and masculinities*

According to Connell et al. (2005), the analysis of masculinities, men, and men's place in the gender order has become a worldwide undertaking. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005, p. 849) suggest a framework for studies of masculinity by analysing empirically existing hegemonic masculinities at three levels—the local, regional, and global. Particularly relevant to this study is the point they make regarding developing countries, where 'the processes of globalization have opened regional and local gender orders to new pressures for transformation and have also opened the way to new coalitions among groups of powerful men' (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 854). An ethnographic approach has been adopted for this project in order to investigate at the local level the construction of masculinities 'in the arenas of face-to-face interactions of families, organizations, and immediate communities' (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 849). It will proceed to search the links between the local, regional and global levels, as it is argued that 'global institutions pressure regional and local gender orders, while regional gender orders provide cultural materials adopted or reworked in global arenas and provide models of masculinity that may be important in local dynamics' (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 849).

Since the late 1980s, there has been a proliferation of literature in globalization research. Globalization is 'a set of complex, contradictory processes in which gender, race, ethnicity, and class play an important role' (Marchand & Runyan, 2000, p. 11). Globalization, as

Appadurai (2001) puts it, is demonstrably creating increasing inequalities both within and across societies. According to Desai (2002, p. 15), the impacts of globalization contain contradictions: while the global market has been shaped by transnational corporations (TNCs) and international financial institutions through global production, consumptions, and capital flows in a homogeneous manner, heterogeneity has been observed in interactions and exchanges between different cultures as a result of the increasing flows of people, ideas, and images.

However, most of the works on globalization are gender-neutral, with the implicit assumption that to talk about men is to talk about the general situation (Acker, 2004, p. 20). In her article 'Masculinities and Globalisation', Connell (1998) transposes the conceptualization of hegemonic masculinity to a global level. She observes the emergence of a 'transnational business masculinity' in an attempt to understand men as global gender-system participants. It is argued that 'globalization has already emerged as an arena for cultural reconstructions of masculinity' (Connell & Wood, 2005, p. 349).

Discussions of globalization take different forms, covering a variety of fields of study in which masculinities are problematised, such as Enloe's (1990/2000) study on international relations, Nagel's (1998, 2003) study on nationalism, Hooper's (2001) study on discourse and international relations, Kimmel's (2003) article on the emergence of far-right extremist groups in Europe and the US, and Pease and Pringle's (2001) anthology on changing men's practices.

There are works that represent different regions and subject matters that are closely tied to globalization, including rural masculinities (Campbell et al., 2006; Kenway et al., 2006), international sex tourism (Altman, 2001), gender and development (Cleaver, 2006), African masculinities (Morrell, 2001; Ouzgane & Morrell, 2005), Islamic masculinities (Ouzgane, 2006), and changing male identities and practices in Latin America (Gutmann,

2003).

### *Specific patterns of masculinity*

The field has developed by discussions of specific patterns of masculinity. Inspired by theories of late modernity, postmodernism and poststructuralism, a number of Anglophone scholars, particularly some stationed in Britain from the fields of sociology and Cultural Studies, have been studying the culture of masculinity from men's lifestyle magazines (Beynon, 2002; Benwell, 2003; Edwards, 2006; McKay et al., 2005). Their common interests are the two groups of men that they call the 'New Man' and the 'New Lad'. The New Man reflects positive responses to feminism. These 'new men' are bold enough to free themselves from the shackles of traditional masculine norms and abandon their pretence of cool masculinity. Their demonstration of respect for women represents the more gentle and empathetic side of men. Many of the New Men share housework and childcare with their partners. The 'New Lad', however, reflects backlash against feminist movements. They shun the 'New Men' as hypocritical. A case in point is the British magazine *Loaded*, which was initiated in 1994. It advocates genuineness: men hanging out with buddies in pubs drinking heavily, seeking risks, talking dirty, and chasing beautiful and slim girls. Critics point out that these 'new lads' in fact have returned to the hegemonic masculinity of their forefathers: seize the moment, have fun, and sex. Beynon (2002) sums up the preoccupation of the 'New Lad' as alcohol, football and sex. Both of these patterns define masculinity mainly in terms of consumption, so consumer society has emerged as an issue in masculinity studies (Segal, 2007).

Rural masculinities have also become a focus of research more recently. Two English language books were released in 2006. In *Country Boys*, Campbell, Bell and Finney collects papers that cover the practice, presentation and change in rural masculinities in New Zealand, Australia and different party of the US. The papers support the usefulness

of the conception of hegemonic masculinity in its reaffirmation of the following: the socially constructed basis of masculinity; the role of history on construction of masculinities; the continuing invisibility of masculinity; the idea of plural or multiple masculinities; and the interaction between representations and practices of masculinity in its multiple and relational forms. Kenway, Kraack and Hickey-Moody's (2006) study looks at the holistic picture of young men's lives in out-of-the-way places (beyond the major cities) in Australia using a 'place-based global ethnography'.

## **2.2 Debate on 'masculinity' and 'hegemonic masculinity'**

I have provided a brief outline of the evolution of the term for the field of critical studies on men and masculinities. I shall now discuss at length the debate on inclusion of the word 'masculinity', or 'masculinities', in the new field of study. In Connell (2009), she defines the aim of the profeminist men's studies as an 'analysis of men as participants in gender relations', or 'studies of the configurations of social practice associated with the position of men in gender relations, i.e. patterns of masculinity.'

Connell (1995/2005) defines masculinity as 'simultaneously a place in gender relations, the practices through which men and women engage that place in gender, and the effects of these practices in bodily experience, personality and culture (p. 71)'. There are three key components to this definition of masculinity: 1) place or position of men and women in gender relations; 2) configurations of social practice of both men and women with the gender order (the implication of this is that there are patterns of masculinity to be theorised and changed); 3) the multiplicity of masculinities as experienced by different bodies, personalities and cultures.

This definition, together with (supported by) the rich ethnographic documentation of men and women in different cultures and locations, was formulated as a result of a critique of 'male role' theory, pop psychology, etc, which treat men as a homogeneous group and

masculinity as a fixed, ahistorical entity (Connell, 2009).

Prior to the emergence of feminist interrogations of the roots of women's subordination, the issue of masculinity had not received the same amount of attention as femininity (Segal, 1990/2007). Masculinity could be regarded as the social norms and expectations of the 'male sex role'. Accounts of the cultural construction of masculinity often describe it in metaphors of roles, performances and scripts. During the late 1980s, this conception of masculinity was challenged by some pro-feminist scholars (Carrigan, Connell & Lee, 1985) who argued that masculinity and femininity are socially constructed.

Kimmel (2009) points to the tendency of pop psychology or the general public in Euro-American cultures to define masculinity as negation of the feminine, or negation of the homosexual. The idea of women or femininity or a perception of effeminacy in other men prompts some men to enact their own masculinity (Kimmel, 2006, p. 5). For instance, manhood is associated with autonomy and responsibility, defined as the opposite of childhood. Slaves and servants, though physically mature, had always been labelled 'boys', as they were regarded as not fully men. Masculinity as a set of behavioural traits and attitudes were historically constructed with femininity (2006, p. 81). At the turn of the nineteenth to twentieth century in America, the compulsive attempt of the white males to develop manly physiques was a reaction to the influx of supposedly weaker and less virile races and ethnicities for fear of cultural feminization (2006, p. 82).

There are different views even within the pro-feminist masculinities studies field regarding the concept of masculinities, as is indicated in different preferences over the naming of the field. Hearn (1996, 2004, 2007a), one of the most important contributors to the development of the field, argues that the word masculinity is problematic at least. He proposes that the focus should be turned back to men, as the title of his 2004 paper suggests, *From Hegemonic Masculinity to the Hegemony of Men*. Other contenders

including Clatterbaugh (1998), Peterson (1998), and MacInnes (1998) also argue that the term masculinity is so fluid in meaning that *the end of masculinity* (MacInnes, 1998) should be declared.

In response to the criticism on the notion of masculinity, Connell (2000) gives a brief defence: There are differences between the concept of masculinities in the social sciences as ‘actual pattern of conduct and representation’ and the non-academic usage of masculinity which stood for ‘an ideal existence of men, or a deep essence within men’ (2000, p. 16). For Connell, because men and masculinity are not one and the same thing, we need the concept of masculinity (or femininity) as a way of naming conduct which is oriented to or shaped by the domain of gender, ‘as distinct from conduct related to other patterns of social life’. Here and elsewhere (Connell, 1995/2005) she reiterates the importance of acknowledging that ‘some masculine conduct or masculine identity goes together with a female body’ (2000, p. 16).

This leaves room for thinking about ‘female masculinity’ as Judith Halberstam’s (1998) influential book is entitled. Earlier, Cliff Cheng (1996, p. xii) had argued that ‘writing about masculinities need not be about the male sex. Masculinity can be and is performed by women’.

The publication in 1985 of the paper ‘Toward a New Sociology of Masculinity’ by Carrigan, Connell and Lee is now regarded as marking the beginning of a new era in the study of men as gendered beings (Schrock & Schwalbe, 2009). Prior to that, sociological thinking about men has been changing already (Kessler & Mekenna, 1978; Pleck & Sawyer, 1974; Tolson, 1977). However, the predominant concept was the male sex role or masculinity as a singular trait.

The paper laid the foundation for masculinity studies in 4 ways through reorganizing:

- Hierarchy (power) among men as well as between men and women;
- Link between masculinity and heterosexuality;
- Masculinity as a form of collective male practice instead of a trait;
- The concept of hegemonic masculinity.

Schrock and Schwalbe (2009) review the literature on men and masculinities studies and point to two current trends that are problematic. The first is the problem with masculinities as plural. The accumulation of the 'men-and-(fill in the blank)' (which refers to the researches under titles of 'men and' with whatever topic is in question) researches has evaded the question of which of men's practices constitutes masculinity. The second issue is that the notion of masculinity or even the concept of hegemonic masculinity could not effectively explain the general pattern of gender inequality. On account of these, they suggest that researchers reclaim key insights from Carrigan et al. (1985) and from interactionist analyses of gender. Schrock and Schwalbe (2009) argue that the focus in masculinities studies should be on 'what men do, individually and collectively', or on practices and processes, how males construct themselves as men and themselves as its members, and the symbolic interactionist concept of self or identity.

### *Hegemonic masculinity*

If talking of 'masculinity' is problematic, the widespread use of the concept 'hegemonic masculinity' appears to be more contentious. The conceptualisation of hegemonic masculinity (Carrigan, Connell & Lee, 1985; Connell, 1987, 1995/2005) has been the main guiding theoretical framework for researchers in a variety of areas into men's relations with women and among men, men's health, violence, rural masculinity, etc. The core of Connell's analysis is that there are different and conflicting ways to be a man and that in most social settings only one of these ways is dominant. This form is called hegemonic masculinity.

For more than two decades, the concept of hegemonic masculinity has been an influential theoretical framework that inspires research into men and masculinities. It was systematically presented by Carrigan, Connell and Lee (1985) and elaborated in *Gender and Power* (Connell, 1987), but the most frequently quoted definition of the term comes from *Masculinities* (Connell, 1995/2005):

... the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answers to the problem of legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women. (p. 77)

While only a small number of men enjoy the position of hegemony, other three categories are allocated to men of different positions: subordination, complicity and marginalization. At any given time, one form of masculinity is likely to be culturally exalted over others. The recognition of the existence of multiple definitions of masculinity, and of hierarchies of power, authority, and recognition among men, has been the most significant contribution of the concept to have guided research in the field.

Donaldson (1993) points to the invention of the term as an attempt in gender politics to distinguish masculinity as an independent structure that has been constructed throughout history and possibly across cultures that naturalizes and legitimizes male dominance over women. Hegemony involves persuasion of the greater part of the population, particularly through the media, and the organization of social institutions in ways that appear 'natural', 'ordinary', and 'normal'. (Donaldson, 1993, p. 645)

Whitehead (2002, p. 93) argues that the term hegemonic masculinity has been 'increasingly used as a blanket descriptor of male power', which renders the subject invisible and the individual lost. Whitehead admits that the concept of hegemonic



masculinity speaks of fluidity, multiplicity, difference and resistance, which, in my understanding, opens up new space for progressive and emancipatory challenge to the rigid gender roles under previous theorizing of gender as fixed entities.

Critics argue that the concept of masculinity is 'elusive' and making it plural does not solve the problem of it being 'slippery'. In response to suggestions to abandon the concept of masculinity, Connell & Messerschmidt (2005) reiterate the social science and humanities definition of masculinity/ies as 'configurations of practice that are accomplished in social action' and emphasized that masculinities can differ according to the gender relations in a particular social setting.

This clarification is of critical importance as many critics are trying to reduce the concept of masculinity to referring to singular types of men, forms of being manly, or ideal traits, characters, and expectations.

Moller (2007) actually reinforces the conception of masculinity in that he calls on researchers to explore the 'plurality, complexity and contradictions of masculine experiences and feelings'. His critique lies in the taking hegemonic masculinity as a 'single' 'coherent pattern of masculinity' (p. 275). I find that Moller is much in agreement with Connell though the former points to the tendency of masculinity studies writers of associating power too much with domination and oppression and too little with negotiation and consensus building (Moller, 2007, p. 266).

Beasley (2008) suggests that the term hegemonic masculinity should first be narrowed to the notion of 'political mechanism' or a 'political ideal', an 'enabling mode of representation'. This reduces the concept to the level of discourse, which is exactly what Connell is against. For the notions of both masculinity and hegemonic masculinity, there is a tendency of slippage from 'configurations of practice' into 'actual ideals, norms' or an

ideal type of men.

Messner (2007, p. 476) points out that hegemonic masculinity is 'always contingent and contextual' and that challenges are 'possible, perhaps inevitable'. He suggests that desirable or positive images of hegemonic masculinity such as compassion and care might become hegemonic over the current dominance of toughness in politics.

For Lusher and Robins (2009), hegemonic masculinity is a multilevel concept operating at local, regional, and global levels that also simultaneously engages cultural, individual, and structural factors. Lusher and Robins provide a comprehensive review of the critiques and defence of Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinities. Their conclusion supports the usefulness of the concept. In particular, they suggest that

an examination of hegemonic and other masculinities in local settings is necessarily limited by two crucial issues: (a) the interdependency between structural, individual, and cultural factors, and (b) a conceptualization of local context within which masculinities take place. (Lusher and Robins, 2009, p. 419)

Messerschmidt (2010) highlights the importance of a sense of hierarchy and legitimacy in defining hegemonic masculinity. He distinguishes hegemonic masculinity from 'dominant' and 'dominate' forms of masculinity: Neither 'dominant' nor 'dominate' masculinities 'legitimate a hierarchical relationship between men and women, masculinity and femininity' (p. 38). The importance of acknowledging the legitimating process is also observed in Almeida's (1996) Portuguese rural ethnography, arguing that 'hegemony is a form of domination in which the dominated takes part in his or her domination' (Almeida, 1996, p. 163). Messerschmidt (2010) points out that

even though hegemonic masculinities at times may also be dominating and/or

dominant, dominating and dominant masculinities are never hegemonic if they fail culturally to legitimate hierarchical gender relations between men and women, masculinity and femininity (p. 38).

This is a crucial criterion that differentiates hegemonic masculinity from other versions of masculinities even though they are dominant or dominating.

Meuser (2009) observes that the advantage or the reason for the popularity of the term hegemonic masculinity in the German speaking literature on masculinity is because it conceptualizes masculinity as 'relational' and a 'processual' category. The problem is that there is a tendency for it to be used in an inflationary way.

The distinction between hegemony, subordination, complicity and marginalization, conceived as different modes of masculinity, is often neglected. Sometimes all forms of male domination are identified as 'hegemonic' masculinity. (2009, p. 38)

Many critics attribute the conflation to the conceptual blurring of the original theorising. But Martin Dinges (2005, cited in Meuser, 2009, p. 38), and Wetherell and Edley (1999), among others, point out that the vagueness of the concept might have been one of the reasons for its popularity.

The importance of change should be recognized. Dasgupta (2009, p. 80, 90) observes that in Japan during the 1990s and early 2000s (the 'lost decade'), men's lives and masculinity became available for scrutiny and discussion both in academic and public discourse. However, the 'hegemonic hold of the work-focused, white-collar salaryman as the icon of Japanese masculinity has definitely loosened'. In its stead, multiple masculinities become visible in such groups as the *freeter* (a temporary/casual worker).

### *On female masculinity*

Halberstam (1998) challenges the limitation of seeing masculinity as synonymous to men and maleness by her notion of 'female masculinity'. Halberstam's focus in the book is on female masculinity coupled with lesbian desire. She does not theorise on heterosexual female masculinity because to her female masculinity should not be defined as 'a female version of male masculinity' (p. 29).

Lately there have been some discussions on the relationship between female masculinity and hegemonic masculinity. Inspired by Connell's (1987, 1995/2005) original conceptualization of hegemonic masculinity and multiple masculinities, Schippers (2007) develops her model of hegemonic femininity and multiple femininities.

Hegemonic masculinity is the qualities *defined as manly that establish and legitimate a hierarchical and complementary relationship to femininity* and that, by doing so, guarantee the dominant position of men and the subordination of women. (p. 94, original emphasis)

Hegemonic femininity consists of the characteristics defined as womanly that establish and legitimate a hierarchical and complementary relationship to hegemonic masculinity and that, by doing so, guarantee the dominant position of men and the subordination of women. (p. 94)

Paechter (2006) argues, following Connell (1987), that we cannot talk of 'hegemonic femininity' the same way we talk of hegemonic masculinity because

masculinity and femininity are not just constructed in relation to each other; their relation is dualistic. A dualistic relation is one in which the subordinate term is negated, rather than the two sides being in equal balance. Femininity is, thus,

defined as a lack, an absence of masculinity. (p. 256)

Paechter argues that Halberstam neglects the grammatical and sociological implications of her preferred formulation and tends to conflate 'female masculinity' and 'masculine women', 'as if they refer to the same thing' (2006, p. 261).

Using 'masculinity' as a noun suggests that there is a thing that is being named, that masculinity is something definite. But masculinity, particularly when disassociated from maleness, is rather more complex and shifting than that. (p. 260)

A discourse in which 'man', 'woman', and, if an individual wants it, 'intersex' (or something else entirely) is the noun, the solid term, with 'masculine' and 'feminine' as qualifiers, is one that allows for variety and variation, over time, place, social circumstances, and biography. (p. 261)

The above seems to be in agreement with Hearn's argument for the current debate of the object of study in pro-feminist men's studies to go back from masculinity to men, or 'men as men'. Paechter takes gender as an identity of oneself, rather than what others see in her/him. She goes on to argue that notions like 'masculine female' allows for girls and young women to behave in masculine ways, 'without having this as their central defining quality' (2006, p. 261). But there is a lack of discussion of power and agency, as in writings on how society and culture suppress transgressive gender behaviours (femininities in men/boys and masculinities in women/girls) as well as protest masculinity and other counter-hegemonic practices exhibited by either male or female bodied persons (Wetherell & Edley, 1999; Coles, 2008).

Messerschmidt (2010) believes that 'focusing solely on the activities of men occludes the practices of women in the construction of gender among men'.

As is well shown by life history research, women are central in many of the processes that construct masculinities—as mothers, as schoolmates, as girlfriends, as sexual partners and wives, as workers in the gender division of labour, and so forth. ... This concept of emphasised femininity focused compliance to patriarchy and remains highly relevant for contemporary mass culture. (2010, p. 39)

### *Going back to gender*

In my view, the debate might have to do with the different understanding of the term gender. Studies on men and masculinities have links with feminists' problematising of gender. As Hearn (1992) observes,

Feminist critiques of men, in theory and practice; gay studies and gay critiques; anti-sexist critiques; the critique of men—all contribute both to making men and masculinities explicit, and paradoxically to the deconstruction of men and masculinities. (p. 18).

Reviewing the literature by the early 1990s, McMahon (1993, p. 675) argued that 'the masculinity literature selectively appropriates forms of feminism whose accounts of gender relations de-emphasize key issues of sexual politics.'

The word gender is borrowed from grammar which denotes specific distinctions between classes of nouns in many languages. Its common use in social sciences is to serve as an alternative to the term sex, which denotes biological differences between male and female, to mark the social and psychological differences between men and women. The US psychiatrist Robert Stoller (1968) is generally regarded as the first person to have used the term gender to designate psychological, social and cultural aspects of maleness and

femaleness in contrast to biological differences of the two sexes. He defines gender as ‘the amount of masculinity or femininity found in a person’ (1968, p. 9).

That gender is constituted in and by society and culture, rather than nature and biology, is also a basic tenet of most schools of feminism. Judith Kegan Gardiner (2005) observes that

The most important accomplishment of 20th-century feminist theory is the concept of gender as a social construction; that is, the idea that masculinity and femininity are loosely defined, historically variable, and interrelated social ascriptions to persons with certain bodies—not the natural, necessary, or ideal characteristics of people with similar genitals. (p. 35)

This definition is contested as it has often been related to dichotomous views of gender difference with implications of legitimizing the domination of men over women. A more liberal conception of gender consists of understanding gender as a social structure, involving social relations, social practices, and a specific relationship with bodies (Connell, 2002). In this study, gender is defined as

the structure of social relations that centres on the reproductive arena, and the set of practices (governed by this structure) that bring reproductive distinctions between bodies into social processes (Connell, 2002, p. 10).

Lorber (2005, p. 171-176) provides a collection of the different components of gender that include 1) gender as a social institution: gender statuses, gendered division of labour, gendered kinship, gendered sexual script, gendered personalities, gendered social control, gender ideology, gender imagery; and 2) gender for an individual: sex category, gender identity, gendered marital and procreative status, gendered sexual orientation, gendered

personality, gender process, gender beliefs, and gender display.

Brownwell & Wasserstrom (2002, p. 1) believe that gender is not simply ‘a collection of roles, symbols and behaviours that are always attached to two incommensurable sexes’, but should be approached as ‘an important organizing principle of an entire worldview’. They recognize ‘the polymorphous, plural nature of gender constructs’.

Connell (2009) discusses gender theory both within and beyond the global metropole. She argues for adopting ‘multiple perspectives on gender issues’ (p. 49). The Chinese perspective on gender is discussed in the next section.

### **2.3 Gender studies and masculinities studies in contemporary China**

In China, concepts like sex and gender are terms borrowed from western scholarship. Sex is translated as ‘*xingbie*’ (sex category), while gender is translated as ‘*shehui xingbie*’ by adding the Chinese equivalence of the word ‘social’ to sex category. This reflects an understanding of the concept of gender as socio-culturally imposed notions of maleness and femaleness. The implications are that first, there are two and only two genders, as corresponding to two sexes; and second, that being male or female, one is subject to different norms and expectations consistent with one’s socio-cultural background. However, there are also scholars who accept the notion of gender plurality. For instance, historian Lung-Kee Sun believes that ‘as cultural constructs we must refer to multiple masculinities and femininities, or even the protean “third sex.”’ (2002, p. xix).

#### *Previous works on gender, sex and sexuality in China*

As Brownwell and Wasserstrom (2002) rightly observe, earlier contributions to Chinese gender studies tended to focus almost exclusively on male views of women or the experiences of women only. These are reflected even by the titles of some of the



significant books: *Women in China* (Young, 1973), *Women in Chinese Society* (Wolf & Witke, 1975), and *About Chinese Women* (Kristeva, 1977). Feminist writings on the universal oppression of women often cite as examples Chinese customs of foot binding, female infanticide, and polygamy (e.g. Daly, 1978).

Tarni Barlow's (1994) important discussion on the different terms used to name woman is insightful to the research into gender in modern China. Historically, a woman was 'nü' (daughter) before marriage, 'fu' (wife) after marriage and 'mu' (mother) after having children. Today, the generic terms *funü* or *nüxing* are used interchangeably to refer to all women. Barlow argues that *funü* (kinswoman), the term preferred by the CCP, could be understood as a statist category, while *nüxing* (woman) suggests more of the individual identity.

The theorizing of woman through different terms used, merits following up because in the study of gender in China, the nomenclature does reveal significant meanings in making alliances and enmities, i.e. gender politics. My understanding of the more recent change is that the state, as represented by the CCP and its affiliated *All China Women's Federation* (ACWF), which sticks to the use of *funü* as a generic term for women in China, is still constructing women as its legitimate partners in assuming power to rule. It implies that women should first establish a *jia* (family), and then they can contribute to the *guo* (nation). The idea of woman as a sexed being has been picked up by the media and medical profession in the diffusion of romance and talk about health conditions.

Evans (2002) has pointed out correctly that in the period after Mao, 'the refeminization of images of women corresponds both with the attack on the 'gender sameness' of the revolutionary years and with the possibilities for individual expression and experimentation that the market economy has legitimized.

The state's continuing interest in regulating sexual practice at a time of market-oriented economic reform has contributed to the emergence of sexuality, particularly female sexuality, and gender as a contested terrain. On the one hand, woman is constructed as the key agent of sexual and marital order, enjoining to patrol her own sexual conduct for the sake of marital and familial harmony. On the other hand, she is represented as an object for men's sexual gratification, waiting to be made whole, even given life, by the active and dominant male. (p. 354)

There are also a growing literature on sex and sexuality in China, both based on historical records (Hinsch, 1990; van Gulik, 2002; Zhang Zaizhou, 2001) and those of the contemporary era (Jeffreys, 2006; Pan, 2006). One aspect of the literature deals with the tradition of homosexuality. There was a problem in labelling certain practices or records in Chinese history using the western notion of homosexuality. Some records clearly indicate same sex attraction, but the obscurity in the allusions and poetic metaphors used in the records make it hard to definitely categorize. Hinsch (1990) is right in observing that instead of judging what someone 'is' (in this case, gay or lesbian), the reader could only learn about what someone 'resembles', 'does' or 'enjoys' (p. 7). Zhang Zaizhou's accounts cover the long Chinese history from the earliest records up until the founding the People's Republic of China. He collects records both from official and unofficial, fiction and non-fiction, from emperors, court officials, entertainers, to rural women, and hence is a valuable source for further research.

From the above account of the English and Chinese literature on gender, sex and sexuality, it is established that the field is growing both internationally and domestically. Theoretically gender as a perspective has been embraced by the academic circle in China and the term 'gender studies' is gradually replacing the previous focus on 'women's studies'. This has implications for the inclusion of men and masculinities as universities in China are establishing centres for gender studies.

### *Chinese men and masculinities*

An English-language literature on Chinese masculinity has emerged (Zhong, 2000; E. Zhang, 2001; Louie, 2002; Brownell and Wasserstrom, 2002; Song, 2004; Huang, 2006), and another literature in Chinese published in China (Huang, 2004; Fang and Hu, 2006; Fang, 2006a). Clearly the issue of men and masculinities has attracted growing interest in the academy. However, the majority of these works fall into the humanities and there is a lack of research using approaches of the social sciences (with E. Zhang (2001) and Jancowiak (2002) as exceptions).

Brownell and Wasserstrom (2002) collect works from authors whose works evoke a sense of how femininity and masculinity in China are constructed and performed as *lived experience*, as opposed to being represented in artistic works or dealt with in formal government policies. They criticize the two extreme versions of gender studies approaches: the inequality-patriarchy and difference-gender.

The yin-yang dichotomy still prevails in most Chinese people's conception of masculinity and femininity: 'there is femaleness in maleness, there is maleness in femaleness, and the two are in constant motion relative to each other' (Brownell and Wasserstrom, 2002, P. 22). Throughout Chinese modern history, there have been 'breaks and discontinuities as well as steady development and continuities, and thus manifests the complex and often fragmented nature of gender constructs among various categories of people and in various realms of life in China' (Brownell and Wasserstrom, 2002, p. 23).

Li Zhang's (2001) ethnographic study of *Wenzhoucun* in Beijing, on Chinese migrant entrepreneurs, local government and their employees, has a grip on the issues of power in various layers in contemporary China. There is the tension between the state, local

authorities and the migrant community; the migrant leaders and the rest of the groups; men and their wives as the *laoban* (employer) family; employee-employees, exploitation, sexual abuse, limitation of space.

In Louie and Low's (2003) anthology on Asian masculinity, 4 chapters are devoted to Chinese masculinity, among which there is one on the literati of the Qing Dynasty, one on the works of a contemporary Chinese novelist, one on a contemporary poet and his poetry, and one on Chinese men living overseas. However, in this volume there is no empirical data on the lived lives of ordinary men in contemporary China.

Race and ethnicity are a sensitive issue. In mainland China, women from minority groups and their colourful dresses and 'strange' customs arouse the curiosity Han tourists; they are regarded as exotic but backward. It appears to be post-colonialism with Chinese characteristics. But two recent studies by Americans have addressed this issue. In *The Violence of Liberation: Gender and Tibetan Buddhist Revival in Post-Mao China*, Charlene Makley (2007) presents a sophisticated ethnography and analysis of gender and identity in a Tibetan community in China. In *Down a Narrow Road: Identity and Masculinity in a Uyghur Community in Xinjiang China*, Jay Dautcher (2008) conducted extensive and perceptive ethnographic fieldwork in Xinjiang. His focus has been the marketplace as not only a locus of everyday interaction for male members of the community, but also as the engine of social change.

In their review of the development of the two fields of women's studies and sociology of women/gender, Chow et al. (2009) admit that the study of patriarchy and masculinity has just begun in China. There is an effort by a small number of researchers, both men and women, who have been working to launch the new branch of gender studies—men's studies (*nanxing yangjiu*). Among them the most prominent figure has been Fang Gang, who is a journalist-turned researcher in the field of gender and sexuality, with a particular

interest in men and masculinities. He is one of the first men who introduced the new discipline of masculinity studies and is an advocate of a Chinese version of 'Men's Liberation' (Fang, 2006a). He has published more than ten books and numerous journal articles in the last decade. He has interviewed gay men and male sex workers and published books on them. His most recent publication is based on his PhD thesis on male sex workers in Shenzhen, Beijing, and Taipei (Fang, 2009). He used life history interviews and adapted Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity. The relations between male sex workers and their customers (mainly women, but sometimes men) and female sex workers demonstrate the power relations between sex service providers and consumers. The complexity added richness to the analysis of gender.

Zheng Tiantian's (2009a, 2009b) study on female sex workers in the north-east coast city of Dalian is also significant. Zheng presents the following picture about women being represented in Maoist era:

The media extolled the female militant: Iron Girls, robust and muscular women taking the public role as proletarian workers and rejecting their former role as stay-at-home wives. They were represented driving tractors, trucks, and diesel locomotives or repairing high-voltage electric wires. (Zheng, 2009a, p. 118)

Here Zheng is using the Mao era gender equality policy and rhetoric to explain two beliefs. 1) It liberated neither men nor women; men were emasculated, while women's masculinisation did them no good, either. 2) In the reform era, those men who used prostitutes or *bao ernai* (keeping mistresses) use the idea of emasculation as an excuse for compensation. Their wives were not feminine enough. They resemble the state in the Mao era, which had made the men effeminate. Zheng used these men's jokes about having sex with their wives as '*jiao gongliang*'—'turning in the grain', a metaphor that associates semen to grain as both are precious and limited resources. Zheng argues that men in the

Maoist era felt that they had been turned into eunuchs by the Maoist state. They wanted to be the real men and sexual potency is a way to recover from emasculation. The masculinisation of women did have a backlash.

In China, with the development of the sociology of gender as a new field, research has been changing in the new millennium from 'applied, policy-oriented fields for solving women's problems to more theoretically relevant and empirically grounded fields incorporating a gender perspective' (Chow et al. 2009, p. 88). It can be expected that studies of men and masculinities will be the next issue in the agenda.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

This chapter deals with the methodological issues relevant to the research. It responds to the debate on method and methodology in gender studies, particularly in critical studies on men and masculinities. It argues that it is crucial to incorporate both women and men as respondents and researchers. The unique context in rural China and Chinese scholarship on rural Chinese society are introduced. This calls for new thinking into the relationship between the local, regional and global.

#### **3.1 Methodology in critical studies of men and masculinities**

According to Hearn's account in the *International Encyclopedia of Men and Masculinities*, the most common research methods in studies of men and masculinities are: social surveys; statistical analysis; ethnographies; interviews; qualitative, discursive, deconstructive, textual and visual analyses; and various mixed methods. (Hearn, 2007a, p. 434)

The choice of methods has to do with the perspectives researchers take. In their review of the main perspectives and theories of men and masculinities, Edley and Wetherell (1995, p. 5) argue that 'research on forms of masculinity must be conducted from an interdisciplinary standpoint'. The main perspectives assessed in Edley and Wetherell (1995) are biological analyses, psychoanalysis, role theories, social theories, cultural studies and feminism.

By now the field of critical studies on men and masculinities has expanded globally to include men in different geographic, cultural and economic backgrounds. There has been an 'ethnographic moment' (Connell, 2000) that has produced excellent studies on men in diverse historical periods and localities. A framework of 'global masculinities' has been

proposed to study men and masculinities on a world scale (Connell, 1998, 2000).

A recent example of survey research is Chilla Bulbeck's (2009) uses of questionnaire in her research into young people's attitude to feminism and the women's movement in ten Asia Pacific countries. She engages 2000 young men and women to respond to the questions. This is a wonderful project in gaining the cross-cultural understanding of how feminism is regarded by middle-class young people of some of the most dynamic regions of the world (China, India, USA, Indonesia, Japan, Viet Nam, Thailand, Canada, Australia, and South Korea).

Good examples of research into masculinities include those using historical records (for instance, Michael Kimmel (2006) on manhood in America, John Tosh (1999) on masculinity in Victorian England, and Mrinalini Sinha (1995) on colonial masculinities), and Hooper's (2001) analysis of discourse from the influential magazine *The Economist* in a study of masculinity in international relations. The post-modern turn has prompted research on masculinity using popular movies, music and images from TV commercials and other forms of advertisement. There is a variety of studies using ethnographic approaches such as Herdt (1981) on men's cult and initiation rituals in Papua New Guinea, Gilmore's (1990) attempt to look for a deep structure of manhood cross-culturally, Thorne (1993) on school boys' and girls' gender play in American schools, and Gutmann (1996) on Mexican men. There are also life-history studies such as Messner's (1992) study on sports in America, Connell's (1995) study of four groups of men in Australia, Dowsett's (1996) research on gay communities in Australia, and Messerschmidt's (2004) study on violent youth in an American city. Messerschmidt's work (2004) is inspirational to this study as he interview girls as well as boys and has discussed the issue of female masculinity.

Despite the development in masculinities in a global scale, men from the global south are



still under-represented. It is even rarer for men and women from the south to study men and masculinity in their own cultures and introduce them to a global audience.

There has recently been some research into Chinese masculinities (Zhong, 2000; Louie, 2002; Song, 2004; Huang, 2006). The methods they adopt have been mainly from literary criticism, historical analysis or cultural studies. The men in their books are novelists and literary critics in the reform era, men in Chinese classics such as the fragile scholars, the court officials of imperial dynasties, and the legendary general Guan Yu. There is a lack of empirical data from the lived experiences of contemporary men and women in China.

Fang Gang conducted the first doctoral research on masculinities in mainland China by collecting life history interviews with male sex workers in two cities in China. He encountered media uproar when he finished it in 2007. Among Chinese scholars, there are still some who think sex workers are not worth studying. Some critics questioned the legitimacy of such a project. Fang's manuscript could not get published in Mainland China. Luckily, with the help of some Taiwanese scholars, it was published in Taiwan in 2009.

Zheng Tiantian's (2009a, 2009b) study of female sex workers in the city of Dalian in north-eastern China is significant in that masculinities are scrutinised as she interviews both female sex workers who serve as hostesses in Karaoke bars and their male clients. Her method was very effective in revealing the dynamics of gender, power, sexuality and HIV/AIDS transmission. Liu Jieyu's (2007) study is a good example of life history interviews with women who call themselves 'the unlucky generation'—women workers who lost their jobs in the downsizing and restructuring of the 1990s. It is an important study as it presents 'the gendered consequences of economic reforms' (p. 3) which have not been given due attention.

Reading about research on masculinities, I find the life history and ethnography combined an appropriate mix for the study of rural Chinese masculinity. My choice of rural ethnography is based on an understanding of masculinities described in Chapter 2 as configurations of practice that are socially and culturally constructed. This fits the understanding of gender that underlies this study, best summarised in Connell (2009, p. 30)

In talking about gender, we are not talking about simple differences or fixed categories. We are talking about relationships, boundaries, practices, identities and images that are actively created in social processes. They come into existence in particular historical circumstances, shape the lives of people in profound and often contradictory ways, and are subject to historical struggle and change.

Within gender studies (masculinities studies as part of it), there have been different foci on the material and the discursive in analysis. A tendency now is toward 'spanning both the material and the discursive in analysis' (Connell, Hearn, & Kimmel, 2005).

### **3.2 Rural research**

In their discussion on the geography of masculinities, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005, see also Messerschmidt 2010, Chapter 2) call for understanding masculinities at local, regional, and global levels. This has been discussed in Chapter 2 of the thesis. In China, the urban-rural divide is a distinctive feature of the social structure. Moving from rural to urban residency constitutes an upward social mobility and hence something desirable. In the 1960s and 1970s, the urban-rural divide resulting from a policy of segregation under a rigid household registration system made it extremely difficult for people to migrate. Since the reform and opening-up from the late 1970s, rural to urban and cross-regional migrations have become more frequent. With the development of industrialization, urbanization and telecommunication, the rural is joining the urban and even the international at a faster pace. This thesis attempts an understanding of both urban and

rural issues, though its ethnographic focus is rural. Part II starts to look at the regional and global gender patterns and other issues relevant to men and masculinities to provide a background for the ethnographic study of a rural setting, reported in Parts III-V.

An ethnographic tradition in Chinese rural study has been cherished by Chinese researchers since Fei's (1939) classic work *Peasant Life in China*. Anthropology and sociology were disrupted during the Mao era (especially between 1957 and 1976). But in the reform era, Fei's books were re-published and he led the revival of the research tradition by focusing on the rural setting. Fei strongly advocated the field work tradition of cultural anthropology.

More recently, Cao Jinqing (2005) wrote an influential book based on his rural field work in north China's Henan Province which has been translated into English as *China along the Yellow River*. It provides rich information derived from informal interviews with numerous rural cadres and peasants. Another influential book of a more journalistic genre has been Chen Guidi and Wu Chuntao's (2004) *A Survey of Chinese Peasants (Zhongguo Nongming Diaocha)* which has been banned in China but published in English internationally under the title *Will the Boat Sink the Water? The Life of China's Peasants* (Chen & Wu, 2007). Both books are ethnographic by nature and reveal the tension between peasants and the state, as well as the rural cadres caught in the middle.

Rural research has used life history method too. A good example was published in English based on diaries kept by a late Qing rural scholar in Shanxi Province (Harrison, 2005). This person was extraordinary in that he kept a diary of about 50 years from the early 1890s to the early 1940s. Another recently published diary by an ordinary peasant named Hou Yonglu (2006) covers six decades from the 1940s to 2004.

Most rural research in China does not focus on gender. However, gender is examined in

studies such as Parish and Whyte (1978) and Croll (1981) for the collective era, Judd (1994), Yan (2003), and Yuen et al. (2004) for the reform era. The study by Yuen, Law and Ho (2004) is based on interviews with both men and women in a village near Hong Kong in south China's Guangdong Province. The influx of investment from Hong Kong and female migrant workers from inland provinces of China has had tremendous impact on the local gender order in the village of Baixiu. I draw on Yuen et al.'s study in their view that the traditional cultural context of rural China and the constraint that society places on human behaviour should guide researchers in doing rural ethnography (pp. 214-215).

### **3.3 A combined-method approach**

#### *Ethnography*

Following Hammersley and Atkinson (1983), I define ethnography as a social research method in which the ethnographer

participates, overtly or covertly, in people's daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions; in fact collecting whatever data are available to throw light on the issues with which he or she is concerned (p.2).

This seemingly straightforward definition has now been complicated by postmodern thought which challenges the notion that the social world is just like the natural world for scientists to discover. This raises the question of representation regarding social reality: to what degree can ethnographic accounts legitimately claim to represent an independent social reality (Hammersley, 1992; Clifford & Marcus, 1986). As Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) observes:

It is also important to recognize that research is an active process, in which accounts of the world are produced through selective observation and theoretical interpretation of what is seen, through asking particular questions and interpreting what is said in reply, through writing fieldnotes and transcribing audio- and video-recordings, as well as through writing research reports (p.18).

Several issues are at stake in doing ethnography. The first concerns the role of the researcher: Should a naturalistic or positivistic stance be taken? Should unsolicited accounts be regarded as legitimate data, i.e. data that comes from the respondents more or less spontaneously? I have adopted a more naturalistic approach. Both participant observation and interviews are used in data collection. Informal, unstructured interviews are combined with some in-depth life history interviews with a selected number of participants representing a variety of people.

### *Life history interviewing*

Dollard (1935) defined life history as 'a deliberate attempt to define the growth of a person in a cultural milieu and to make theoretical sense of it'. The term 'life story' is often used interchangeably with 'life history'. Plummer (2000, p. 18) called the life story simply 'an account of one person's life in his or her own words'. As Robert Atkinson (2002, p. 125) puts it:

A life story is the story a person chooses to tell about life he or she has lived, told as completely and honestly as possible, what the person remembers of it and what he or she wants others to know of it, usually as a result of a guided interview by another.

The classic example of life history was Thomas and Znaniecki's *The Polish Peasants in Europe and America* (1958), which was first published 1918-1920. Thomas and Znaniecki

famously claimed that life histories ‘constitute the *perfect* type of sociological material’ (1958, p. 1832). As Plummer (2000, p. 40) argues, ‘the life history technique is peculiarly suited to discovering the confusions, ambiguities and contradictions that are played in everyday experiences’. Apart from documenting personal experience, ideology and subjectivity, life histories also document social structures, social movements and institutions (Connell, 1995/2005, p. 89).

For my research project, life histories were obtained through interviews. An earlier work that uses life history interviews is the edited volume by Sheridan and Salaff (1984) *Lives: Chinese Working Women*. For Sheridan and Salaff, the life history method is ‘a mode of investigation that blends history and biography in order to explore the effects of social structures on people and to portray the ways in which people themselves create culture’ (p.1). This means that a person’s life is the product of the era, but in turn, the active agency of people constitutes the social-cultural trend of that era. Sheridan and Salaff insist that ‘an individual’s life must be investigated in its historical context’ which can be analysed at three levels. The first is the level of social and economic opportunities. At a global level, are we talking about feudal, industrialised or market economy? The second is the economic, political, educational and other social institutions that affect family and personal life. This could be understood as the regional or local level. Are we dealing with collective, contracted (private) mode of production? Are factories or business opportunities available? The third is the personal level—the course of a person’s life as it is influenced by her social position (Their example is the adopted daughter-in-law).

Sheridan and Salaff (1984, p. 2) highlight the importance of notions of ‘historical time’ and historical specificity in what they label as ‘the life course perspective’. Sociologists stress the sequencing and timing of transitions between the stages of the lives of individuals. Psychologists examine the content of stages of the lives of individuals in particular settings and may dwell upon key turning points of life.

### **3.4 Women and masculinity**

A relational approach implies that the role that women play in the construction of masculinity is foregrounded. Women can be legitimators of masculinity and guardians of the male ego (Skeggs, 1991, p. 134). Female bodies are possible to embody masculinities, as Halberstam's (1998) study demonstrates.

Recognizing the important role of women in the construction of masculinity is significant to research method in that women's experiences should be taken as seriously as men's. This understanding guides the project design in ethnography and life history interviews to incorporate both men and women. In the fieldwork women are taken as respondents in interviews and discussants in groups discussions.

That women could embody masculinities is more complex and controversial in that there is seldom agreement on the definition of masculinity, as discussed in Chapter 2. However, if masculinity is defined as characteristics of male, some women do claim they behave or share some qualities with men. Though in this case, what is traditionally or predominantly defined as masculine may in fact be something that both genders could embody. In that sense, masculine traits should be subverted and the hegemonic masculinity or the foundation of it (i.e. to related positive traits such as aggressiveness, assertiveness, wisdom, leadership etc) will be shattered.

### **3.5 The fieldwork**

#### *Entering the site*

After I had decided to focus on construction of masculinity in rural China, I started to contact my relatives in China. Through a telephone conversation with one of my cousins,

I learned that a former teacher, Mr Bai, from my middle school is now party secretary of a nearby township. I got his contact details and made a phone call. I have been away from my hometown for more than 20 years and it was a surprise for Mr Bai to receive the call. After I had told him that I was doing my PhD in Australia and introduced to him my topic, he congratulated me. But when I asked for permission to find a village and stay there to do fieldwork, his first response was rather cautious. He did not reject my request. However, he did say that I should not take it as an opportunity to disclose how backward China is to foreigners. I assured him that my purpose of research is not for revealing the dark side of China. Instead, I wanted to research into gender relations so that gender equality (which is the national policy of China) could be reached. He was relieved and agreed to provide document of approval.

In January 2008, I went to the township office building to see Mr Bai. I gave more detailed account of my study and he said that I should meet Ms Xu, the director of women's affairs. We had a nice meeting and they recommended that I choose from two villages based on my introduction of the study. I chose the village of Xinyue and Ms Xu said that she will make a phone call to the leaders in the village.

After I had selected the village, my next task was to find a host family. I remembered that my sister has a good friend who was married to someone in that village. Her friend recommended that I went to see her father-in-law. The next day, I went to the village office building and met the cadres there. Ms Xu was also there to introduce me to them. It was a brand new three-storeyed building located at the side of the main road connecting the village with two county seats. I was introduced to three women cadres and three men. I was well received. They even told me that I could have lunch with them at the canteen. I was taken by the accountant of the village to meet Zhang Ah Shun, who was a going to be my landlord.



I made three trips to the village of Xinyue between January 2008 and August 2009, with a total stay of about eight months. My ethnographic work included living with a local family, going to the teahouse at the village market, and visiting factories, canteens, the local clinic, and households, as well as the office of the Villagers Committee. In the first trip, from early January to early March 2008, I experienced winter and Chinese New Year. The second trip was between late June and early September of the same year, which was mainly summer. The third trip was between late May and early August of 2009 during which I observed the important silkworm raising season. For the two summer-time trips, I would often ride a bicycle through the fields where the villagers are doing farm labour and visit households from one hamlet to another.

As some of the people from the village have recently moved to the county town for various reasons, I also went to the town to meet them. They are teachers, hotel managers, storeowners, even people working in village factories and living in the county town. My way of meeting people in the village was mainly through my frequent going to the public venues in the village and talking to people who were curious about my presence or had seen me riding my bicycle in the fields or hamlets. I was also helped my landlord and his extended family to meet new people.

To arrange for people to be formally interviewed, I would first get someone that I had already met to introduce me. When I found I had enough rapport with them, I would ask for permission to interview them. Some declined, and others agreed to an interview on condition that it was not recorded. But I still got 20 men and 10 women who agreed to recorded interviews.

The interviews took place mainly at homes and offices of the informants, but I also invited some to my rented house in the village. One of the interviews was done in a noodle shop with the shop owner between lunch and dinner when there was no customers.

The interviews ranged from one to three hours. In each interview, I would start by telling them in detail about my research topic, and explain to them about getting permission for recording and signing of informant consent forms. I then started with the formal part of the interview by asking the informant to give his/her life history, usually in chronological order. There are some exceptions. For example, after having listened carefully to my introduction of my project, Guiying (Chapter 15) took the initiative of giving her experience as only-child and female, to comment on gender bias, before I asked her to tell about her life course.

In summer of 2008, when I learned that many of the university students from the village had returned home for vacation, I asked two students that I had already met to arrange for meetings. I managed to get two focus group discussions on educated young people's lives, mainly about growing up in the village and receiving education in the city.

The village administration was very helpful to me during the whole fieldwork. They provided me with documents of the village census, power structure and economic development. They let me observe when there were meetings such as one with all the heads of villagers' groups to discuss the planning for 'New Rural Society' (*xin nongcun*). They let me go anywhere and meet any person I chose to.

Upon my leaving the village in August 2009, I learned that there was going to be some significant change happening in the village. Many households will have to be relocated when a new railway linking Shanghai and Hangzhou starts construction. There will be a station nearby and I can foresee that in the near future, the village is to undergo significant changes. The process of urbanisation has already started as many well-off families have purchased apartments in the county seat and sent their children to school there. When I went to say farewell to the village CCP branch secretary, I expressed my intention for

future research projects. He told me that I was always welcome.

### **3.6 Data analysis**

I have an advantage of knowing the dialect of the region. All interviews except two were conducted in the local dialect. After returning from China, the interviews were transcribed and translated from Chinese to English.

In analysing the data, I take careful account of issues about language. Riessman (1993) points out that in traditional ethnographies, language is viewed as 'a transparent medium, unambiguously reflecting stable, singular meaning'. For the more sceptical readers, such as those of the post-structuralist school, language is understood as deeply constitutive of reality, not simply a technical device for establishing meaning. Informants' stories do not mirror a world 'out there'. They are 'constructed, creatively authored, rhetorical, replete with assumptions, and interpretive' (p. 4). Because the approach (collection of respondents' stories and systematic narrative analysis) gives prominence to human agency and imagination, it is well suited to studies of subjectivity and identity.

In this study special attention is paid to the fact that most of the informants have limited educational background and their life histories should be taken as oral histories. Hence, local tradition, customs, beliefs and characteristics of the local dialect are frequently invoked in the process of analysis.

To make the construction of masculinity a prominent issue, I adopt a structural analysis of gender relations (Connell, 2000, 2009) as my main tool of analysis. I will follow Connell's (2009, pp. 75-85) revised four dimensions in gender relations to analyse the life stories that I collected:

- 1) power relations: direct, discursive, colonizing

- 2) production, consumption, and gendered accumulation
- 3) emotional relations
- 4) symbolism, culture, discourse.

These dimensions provide a framework for classifying material from both interviews and ethnographic observations. They are discussed in more detail in Chapter 7 where I introduce the local gender order.

The data collected from fieldwork are written in the form of case studies. The case study method usually involves participant observation and semi-structured interviews, which are core components of this study. Yin (2003, p. 14) insists that the case study method is ‘a comprehensive research strategy’ that comprises the ‘logic of design, data collection techniques, and specific approaches to data analysis’. Berg (2009, p. 17) defines case study as an approach that is ‘capable of examining simple or complex phenomenon, with units of analysis varying from single individuals to large corporations’. In line with Yin and Berg, my ethnography at Xinyue village can be treated as a case study. But in writing up the village ethnography, I am treating each individual life history as a case study of one man or woman. I present four cases in Part IV and three cases in Part V to make sense of the individual lives so that some patterns of the construction of femininities and masculinities can be drawn. From the data, the dynamics and mechanisms of gender relations in the context of dramatic social change are examined.

In Parts IV and V of the thesis, case studies are reported based on the body of interview data. Not all the men and women interviewed are included in this presentation for the following reasons. Two men were later found not to be residents of Xinyue Village: one of them is a businessman from a nearby village who has contracted construction work of digging ditches for Xinyue Village. The other is a close friend of Jiangyang’s from another nearby village. The local word for village (*cun*) is sometimes confusing in that it

may either refer to the administrative village (*xingzheng cun*, such as Xinyue) or a natural village (*ziran cun*, which I refer to as hamlet in English). There are three college students who attended my recorded group discussion session, but since I already used two one-on-one interviews with male university students, I decide not to use that discussion. I had technical problems with two other male informants in which only part of the interviews were recorded. Altogether 12 female informants' accounts were included in the thesis. Two of them (Yulan and Huilin) only agreed to be interviewed without being recorded. I took field notes instead.

### **3.7 Reflexivity and other ethical issues**

#### *Ethical concerns*

Apart from the three traditional guidelines: informed consent (receiving consent by the respondent after having carefully and truthfully informed him or her about the research), confidentiality (respect the respondent's right to privacy, protecting the identity of the respondent), and protection from harm (physical, emotional, or any other kind) (Fontana & Frey, 2005). The nature of the research and the characteristics of the site require the researcher to be doubly careful in explaining the project and informing them about the risks and potential benefits involved. Gender and sexuality could be topics of daily jokes, but for the stories or views of the ordinary rural individual to appear possibly in international journals or books may be rewarding but also fearsome.

There are some practical problems in my fieldwork. The first was how I positioned myself. It was impossible for me to be like an ordinary villager, as my educational background and age have made it impossible for me to be a peasant again. The second is how I deal with villagers of different status. I could sense there was some conflict of interest between village cadres and the villagers. I had to befriend both of them and try my best to be neutral in disputes. Luckily, there was no tension or conflicts that I actually had to involve

myself in.

Questions may also be raised about impact on informants. One of my informants, Hongbing, a 21 year-old university student, is the only person with whom I had two interviews, first in 2008 and again in 2009. In 2008, he was one of the participants in a group discussion of the lives of young students, involving three boys and two girls. Hongbing was one of the most active participants in the discussion. His assertiveness and frankness were impressive, which was the reason I asked him if he would be willing to do a personal interview. However, to my surprise, he did not turn out exactly the same confident and assertive young man that he was the previous year in the group. There are two possible reasons: the first is the different conversation mode; the second is the change he experienced in the year. Hongbing is less confident but more reflexive, as demonstrated in his concluding remarks.

When I asked him as a last question whether the almost two-hour long interview would have any impact on him, Hongbing put it thoughtfully as follows:

Without your asking me such questions, I would not have recalled so many events, not have recalled so many people, and not have recalled so many feelings (*ganjue*). I think, after all, such feelings will accompany you through your lifetime. Some events and some feelings may be forgotten in a few years' times. This will be somewhat regrettable. It can be said that I have been idling around killing time (*hunrizi*) at university. I could call it '*hunhun'e'e*'—having no clear goals. Now that you have recalled those events and had an idea of how you have come through in the past, you can think about what to do next in the future. In my case, the next semester is time for me to consider my way out (*chulu*) in future. It is time to think about it. Therefore I think to me the interview is of...(hesitation, looking for words) help. I hope it is of help to you to.

## *Reflexivity*

The choice of the research topic and the field work site has to do with my own background. I have the advantage of knowing the local dialect and some of the customs of meeting people and building rapport. Yet the limitations are also obvious. As an outsider I could be seen as someone who wanted to intrude, or as someone who might be of help to the villagers. In one encounter with an elderly lady, I was taken as someone from some state authority. She asked if I could help her to make complaints to higher authority about some land disputes.

I did not anticipate so much change in local life style. Unlike my childhood memory that it is common for people to visit households impromptu, or joining late night talks in summer time at courtyard gatherings, most households are empty during the day and doors are closed in the evenings. Hence I had to get a local mobile-phone SIM card and make phone calls to contact and make appointments with people. Before entering the field, I had thought I just needed to go and meet the people wherever they were.

The importance of having a network of key informants became obvious. This began through my acquaintance with my landlord and his extended family, and through another friend of mine from the region. The village cadres were also of great help. I was deliberately not getting too close to them, as I did not want to be seen as someone from the authority.

There is also the concern of authenticity. Atkinson and Silverman (1997) have cautioned against the 'uncritical fashion' of the contemporary 'interview society'. Though they are commenting on Western society, the situation in China may also apply in that the interviewer and interviewee cooperatively construct the narratives in an interview. The strategy to avoid the pitfalls is to be reflexive and always have the social and cultural context in mind in reporting on the life stories gathered from the interviews.

Hugh Campbell's (2006) discussion on public masculinity in small town New Zealand points to the fact that certain spaces in rural settings are occupied exclusively by men and ethnographic research in these settings are an important source of information. In the village of Xinyue, the market street (where there are teahouses and noodle shops) is space that men traditionally occupy for socializing and purchasing of daily necessities: food and kitchen utensils, tools, fertilizers and pesticides. More importantly, tea and alcohol consumption are gendered. Campbell asks a good question: 'Where are the women?' Well, they are making breakfast, clothing and feeding the children, and feeding the livestock, and in silkworm raising seasons, picking mulberry leaves and feeding silkworms. The patterns of gender segregation in tasks are changing of course. For instance the couple who keep the largest teahouse also serve noodles, keep a stand which sells meat and vegetables, and in different seasons are involved in other money-making trades such as buying beans from individual households in small amounts and wholesaling them to larger businessmen. Of that couple, the wife seems to be more capable in business dealings and the husband stays at the teahouse serving tea and noodles to customers.

There is need for caution against generalizing gender patterns and ideology about masculinity. For instance, in *Country Boys*, it is suggested that in the USA the rural has been designated as the masculine (Campbell et al., 2006, p. 2). In the case of current China, though some politicians would proudly call themselves 'sons of peasants', the general discourse treats the urban as more masculine than the rural, as for the last 60 years government policies have consistently favoured industrial and urban development. The urban is related to the educated, cultured, knowledgeable, well-mannered, and class-conscious pioneers in social reconstruction. The rural is related to the backward, illiterate, barbarous, uncultured, uncivilized, short-sighted, bad-tempered, and dirty.

In choosing rural Chinese masculinities as my research interest, I am aware of



methodological problems that arise when I try to adopt both theoretical frameworks and methods developed in the West to studying gender-related issues in the Chinese context. As Maria Mies (1980, p. 26) observes, theories, concepts, categories developed through research on western societies often do not have even an equivalent in non-western societies. This should not be understood as an overall rejection of importing concepts, theories or methods. The key questions here, as I take it, involve first of all the researcher's perception of his/her subjectivity, a thorough appreciation of the uniqueness of the culture of the society to be studied, and a keen interest in discovering the nature of the problems in question.

Although studies on men and masculinities are growing rapidly at a global scale, research in the field is still at its infancy in China. The large amount of literature available currently is mainly in the English language and both theoretical and methodological frameworks are predominantly 'northern', as Connell (2007) points out in *Southern Theory*. Concepts and analytic tools developed outside China may or may not be applicable to the Chinese context. The researcher is well aware of the danger and risks involved in adopting foreign theories and methods. In the meantime, the existing literature in the field of masculinities studies and the broader feminist, women's and gender studies does provide the researcher with useful guidance.

It should be pointed out that this research project is an exploration of analyzing gender relations in China, with a focus on rural masculinities. In Parts IV and V, a four-dimensional analysis of gender relations (Connell 2000, 2009) is used for analysis of some but not all life histories. There is some inconsistency in use of the four dimensions of gender. Different means of analysis are adopted because the stories have different features.

# **PART II**

## **MEN IN CONTEMPORARY CHINESE GENDER POLITICS**

## CHAPTER 4

### REFLECTIONS ON THE PHENOMENON OF *BAO ERNAI*

#### 4.1 The controversy around *bao ernai*

In April 2007, a story about a wealthy businessman keeping a young college student as his mistress (*ernai*) spread quickly among users of the Internet in China. What attracted media attention most was the existence of a ‘*baoyang xieyi*’— an agreement of extramarital relationship. According to the *South China Cosmopolitan Newspaper (Nanfang Dushi Bao)* (Feng, 2007), the 21-year-old student, under the pseudonym of Guo Fang, was a freshman in 2005 when she first met Chen Ming, owner of a private enterprise. Guo’s father had died a few years earlier, leaving her mother with Guo Fang and her two younger brothers. She had been in debt for paying her university tuition and had worked as a tutor. Chen offered her a monthly payment of 10,000 *yuan* in return for being his mistress. Guo Fang agreed, and to ensure that she was paid she drafted a contract which was signed by both parties, each of whom kept a copy. The contract specified the financial obligations Chen should undertake and the sexual service and companionship Guo should provide; it also stated that she should not date any boyfriend or have sex with any other man during the contract period from May 2005 to July 2008. The affair was later discovered by a private detective hired by Chen’s wife. They were stunned when Guo produced the contract, which she had kept in her purse. Guo Fang was reported to have shown no sense of shame or guilt, insisting that she was just carrying out an agreement involving mutual rights and responsibilities<sup>1</sup>.

‘*Bao ernai*’ (keeping mistresses) has been a hot topic of public debates in China over the last two decades. The literal translation of the term is ‘contracting second wife/wives’. The verb *bao* denotes claiming exclusive rights over something, usually involving items that could be given a certain price or value. For men to contract a woman implies both a financial transaction and exclusive rights to a woman’s body and her sexuality. In the

official disciplinary code (State Council of PRC, 2007), the practice is labeled *baoyang qingren* (keeping a lover), which will cost civil servants their positions. The verb *baoyang* here is a combination of ‘contract’ and ‘financially support’. It therefore follows that the practice requires men to have necessary resources, either wealth or power.

The phenomenon started in the wake of China’s reform and its opening up to the west in the late 1970s, when business owners, managers and professionals from Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore and other countries and regions arrived in mainland China for prolonged stays (Lang and Smart, 2002; So, 2003; Tam, 2004; Shen, 2005; Yeoh & Wills, 2004). The obscure nature of the practice has made it difficult to come up with exact figures of the number of men involved in *bao ernai*. Nevertheless, according to Tam (2004), in the peak years of the early 1990s, every year more than 60,000 Hong Kong men crossed the border to work in mainland China. Among them, one in six kept mainland mistresses. The seriousness of the matter could be further supported by a recent Hong Kong news report estimating that the number of illegitimate children parented by Hong Kong residents in mainland China was about 50,000 by 2006 (Dagongbao, 2008).

Official discourses in China have advocated women’s rights for decades. It is not surprising that the *bao ernai* phenomenon has encountered fierce condemnation in public opinion. There has been talk of amending existing criminal and marriage laws to penalize the perpetrators. Scholars have linked the practice to bigamy, prostitution or sexual bribery (Jeffreys, 2006). There are also debates as to who should take the blame: married men who keep mistresses, the mistresses, or even the men’s legal wives. Most media coverage of the issue points to the moral decadence of Chinese society under the influence of capitalism and appeals for enhancing moral education for both men and women. Relatively less attention, however, has been paid to the structural causes of the phenomenon from the perspective of gender relations.

This chapter offers a discussion of the issue from a gender perspective by revisiting the notions of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1987, 1995/2005; Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005) and the hegemony of men (Hearn, 2004, 2007b). It attempts to analyze sexuality in contemporary China as ‘a set of relations, activities, needs, desires, productive/reproductive powers and capacities, identities, values, institutions, and organizational and structural contexts’(Jónasdóttir, 2008, p. 16). It argues that unequal relations between men and women and amongst different groups of men are major contributing factors to the emergence and persistence of this new version of Chinese gender relations.

#### **4.2 Gender and sexuality**

Gender relations in mainland China have undergone significant changes since the founding of the People’s Republic of China in 1949. Prior to the reforms and opening up in 1978, the Chinese Communist Party had succeeded in ending polygamy and outlawing mercenary marriage, female serfdom, and prostitution. It advocated the principle of autonomy and free will in choosing marriage partners for both men and women (known in Chinese as *ziyou lian’ai*, or free courtship). In terms of femininity and masculinity, women were encouraged to compete with men as equals under the famous slogan of Chairman Mao ‘Women hold up half the sky’. Sex, sexuality and romantic love were openly discussed in the media in the 1950s (Evans, 1997), but during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) they were taboo in official media, literature, films and drama. It was an era when gender equality in the form of sameness was promoted while issues of sex and sexuality, even romantic love, were silenced by the discourse of revolution. Sex was confined to the private household of married couples, and mainly for reproductive purposes. Both extramarital sex and pre-marital sex were strictly prohibited. Outside marriage, even consensual sex between adults could risk being charged with the convictable offence of *liumangzui* (the crime of being a rogue).

The spread of the practice of *bao ernai* has coincided with significant changes in people's views on sex and sexuality in China. After 1978, romantic love became a legitimate theme. Gradually sex and sexuality entered everyday discourse through books, magazines, films, radio and television. Pan Suiming (2006) believes that there has been a sexual revolution going on in the reform era. Sexual pleasure has become a legitimate right for both men and women to pursue. The booming economy in mainland China is being accompanied by a rise in the divorce rate, premarital sex, extramarital affairs and the anxiety of impotency for men. Though prostitution is illegal, services exploiting young women's bodies and sexuality are now widely available. Business people often entertain their business partners and governmental official in hotels, restaurants, and Karaoke bars where sexual services of both a legitimate and an illicit nature are provided by the so-called *san-pei* girls (or 'three companionship' girls who legally offer companionship in singing, dancing and drinking, but illicitly offer sexual services).

Meanwhile, there have been gradual changes in the relations between men and women and among members of each gender. Hegemonic forms of masculinity have shifted from the former emphasis on 'redness' (from a poor background, being revolutionary, love of the party and state) and towards more global images of elitism and upward mobility in economic and political senses. Though women still strive to compete with men for success in careers, they are expected to maintain the more traditional Chinese stereotype of being 'a virtuous wife and good mother' (*xian-qi liang-mu*). Being feminine is again seen as desirable, as it is reflected in the popular TV drama *Yearnings* whose heroine Liu Huifang became a model women of the early 1990s (Rofel, 1994).

Although women formally enjoy equal rights with men in contemporary China, men's dominance can be seen in the distribution of wealth and power, opportunities in education and employment, the gendered division of labor, romantic relations, and discourses on gender and sexuality. Also, there is a structural hegemony of certain groups of men over

other groups: for instance, overseas Chinese men over mainland men, government employees over private sector employees, communist party members over non-party members, business owners over employees, city residents over rural inhabitants, Han Chinese over minority groups, even taller men over shorter men.

### **4.3 Social change and patterns of masculinity**

With the advent of economic reform, it has been a hegemonic discourse that capitalist overseas Chinese men are the embodiment of superiority in management styles, technology, equipment, and investment. The Communist government allocated special economic zones and offered favorable conditions to accommodate foreign capitalists. The communist ideology was in conflict with capitalist life styles, but soon the former surrendered to the latter. This could be regarded as a typical case of economic base determining the superstructure. It is generally believed that the change in attitudes of the Chinese people toward sex and sexuality has largely been affected by influence from outside, from romantic novels and popular music, to films and TV programs and the booming pornography industry (although pornography is illegal in China and often the target of crackdowns). Again, the sources are mainly western, with Hong Kong and Taiwan serving as sites for both production and distribution. In this sense, the sex industry in China is a part of the global network, with capitalist Hong Kong and Taiwan providing a key link between the west and China. They produce new forms of pornography, reproduce traditional Chinese pornography and import western pornography and then bring them to mainland China. All of these have been regarded by many commentators as evils that have followed economic reform; of these evils, *bao ernai* is one of the most significant and controversial phenomena. The stakeholders have been changed since the early 1980s with changes in Chinese social stratification and the migration of people for opportunities in investment, employment and education. For instance, men who keep mistresses come from a greater range of backgrounds than before, with an increasingly larger number of government officials and public servants. It was reported that 95% of

high profile corruption cases involve these men's sexual liaison with beautiful young women, often several women for one man (China Youth Daily, 2006).

To attribute the phenomenon of *bao ernai* exclusively to the influx of western ideology and lifestyle is, of course, simplistic. Researchers have pointed to a more complex picture. Shen Hsiu-hua (2008a:59) finds six main themes commonly provided by Taiwanese businessmen having sexual liaisons with mainland women: sexual 'play' as a part of business operation; biological needs and emotional loneliness while away from home; mainland women as cheap and loose; common practices among other transnational, privileged men; performing charity; and peer pressure. These justifications have missed an obvious factor: (mainland) women's inferior position to (Taiwanese) men. Women have been objectified and commoditized when 'sexual consumption of women is seen as an expression and display of the wealth, status, and manliness' (Shen 2008a: 67). Yeoh and Wills (2004:158) also observe that 'the temptation is particularly strong because a Chinese girlfriend or mistress demonstrates men's virility and economic status, and feeds into men's masculinized sense of self'. Likewise, Hong Kong media depict men's involvement with second wives as indications of 'chivalry and masculinity' (So 2003). All these seem to be in line with Connell's (1998) theorizing of the existence of 'transnational business masculinity'.

Mainland sources offer a slightly different picture of the reasons mainland men give for keeping mistresses (*Xinxi Shibao*, 2004, Jiang, 2005, Huang et al., 2008): compensation (for those men in their 40s and 50s who have experienced hardship in their earlier lives); adventure (from a sexual point of view); boredom with their first wife; belief in polygyny (or the Daoist belief that the more women a man makes love with, the healthier he will be, and the longer he will live); and the influence of western ideas of sexual freedom.

There are different emphases in the analysis but a similar pattern regarding Chinese



masculinities is found amongst both overseas and mainland Chinese men: the notion of male ‘play’. Men who keep mistresses usually would not choose to abandon their first wives. If their first wives found out about their affairs, the men would try to settle the crisis by assuring their wives that their relations with their mistresses are not serious. A common strategy is the use of the very popular saying ‘*fengchangzuoxi*’— playing impromptu games as circumstances requires, or ‘casual play’ (Shen 2008b). The kind of socializing among business circle (often involving public servants as in China the party-state plays a key role in business transaction) is generally known as *yingchou* (ritual socializing), which takes places in venues such as hotels, restaurants, and KTV (karaoke television) bars where services from women are available (Zheng 2009). Prostitution is illegal in China and therefore risky, while keeping mistresses is a much safer strategy. The discourse of ‘play’ and peer pressure reflects a male dominated corporate culture in the business world as well as in the world of politics. When peers are taking young and beautiful women as mistresses, the competition is not who can resist the temptation, as the moral-ethical code of society in general would expect, but rather, who has the most beautiful and elegant of women or who has the largest number of mistresses. The dream pairing of hero (*yingxiong*) and beauty (*meiren*) is still fantasized. In this male culture, winning the heart of a beautiful young lady is most manly of all the successes that a man could achieve. A preferred model of *bao ernai* for many men is virtually a new form of polygamy: a successful man married to a wife and having steady relations with one mistress or even multiple mistresses. Hence a new saying ‘*jiazhong hongqi budao, waimian caiqi piaopiao*’ (the red flag flies at home, while colorful flags abound outside).

#### **4.4 The class and regional divisions behind *bao ernai***

The theories offered in the previous section are mainly from a social-psychological point of view. If masculinity is understood as configurations of gender practice, we need to look at how social structure constructs the practice and look at the economic and social marginality of the women involved in these practices.

The contemporary practice of *bao ernai* emerged in the 1980s when China established special economic zones in its south eastern provinces of Guangdong and Fujian to attract foreign investments. Many Hong Kong and Taiwanese businessmen came in without bringing wives and children. They met with migrant women from central and eastern provinces of China who flocked to the south-east coast of China to seek employment. Many of these women ended up in the service and hospitality sector, where it was easy for them to meet the businessmen. There are also large numbers of young migrant women working in firms owned by foreign companies. So the *bao ernai* phenomenon was first found in, though not limited to, liaisons between the above two groups of migrants.

Chinese men from mainland gradually followed the practice of their overseas counterparts when they had accumulated enough wealth. In the 1980s, the mainlanders who got rich first were self-employed men who opened private businesses in the city and work-contractors who served as brokers between urban employers and rural laborers. Since the early 1990s, private firms along the east coast of China started by mainlanders have also been allowed to employ workers from central and western China, and the booming market-oriented economy has created a new class of rich entrepreneurs. Another prominent group of men who keep mistresses are government officials and employees. Zheng Tiantian's (2009a) study of female sex workers in the northeast coastal city of Dalian provides a good case in point.

The development in different regions of in China and the distribution of wealth are extremely uneven. The rigid household registration (*hukou*) system still maintains the urban-rural divide. As a result, there has been a pattern between the *bao ernai* men and their mistresses: men coming from more prosperous classes and regions, often older and established in their careers, and women from poorer classes and regions and much younger or in junior positions. More recently, female college students have become more

avored targets. They fit in the pattern too, as they have a heavy burden with rising tuition fees and living expenses while China does not have a social network for college students to be employed part-time. Of course, the number of female college students who actually become *ernais* might have been exaggerated by the media.

#### **4.5 Objectification and stigmatization of *ernais***

Apparently the flags in the saying quoted earlier are a metaphor for women. This is just one example of objectification in the discourse of gender relations in China today. Here is another example of how one mainland businessman rationalizes the need to *bao ernai*: 'For a man to go around in this world, he will be belittled without a "xiao'er". What's more, he won't be successful in business.' (Mao 2003:197) The use of the term *xiaoer* for *ernai* is revealing. 'Xiao' is the Chinese for 'small' or 'little' and 'er' is the Chinese number two or second. In most cases, 'xiao' has a derogatory connotation, as when Chinese soldiers refer to Japanese soldiers as 'little Japanese' (*xiao riben*) in World War II movies. Also the combination *xiao'er* reminds people of the twos in a set of playing cards. Another case in point is the recent '3377 incident', in which a woman who first dated a married man and then married him after he divorced his first wife was dubbed a 'little third' (*xiaosan*). (In net codes, 3 refers to the third party and 7 refers to the wife as the pronunciation of the word for 'wife' (*qi*) in Chinese is the same as 'seven' (*qi*).) The objectification of women in relation to extramarital affairs is also reflected in an earlier version known as '*gao poxie*', or 'do broken shoes' (here '*gao*' is euphemism for the word fuck). Here a woman who had more than one sexual partner was compared to broken shoes worn by more than one man.

While men could justify their practice as 'natural' and 'universal among men', harmless to family, or claim that they are not seriously involved, women who are in the position of mistresses become targets of criticism and stigmatization. The lower class and regional background of these women makes them easy targets for media and folk portrayal of them

as evil ‘gold diggers’ or trashy ‘husband stealers’ (Shen 2008b). As Shen (2005: 422) concludes, the sexual liaisons of Hong Kong, Singaporean, and Taiwanese businessmen with Chinese women in China are constructed by these three societies as dangerous to family harmony and national borders. Shih Shu-mei (1998: 315), on the other hand, observes that representations of mainland women in the mass media emphasize their cultural difference from the women of Taiwan and Hong Kong and are filled with patriarchal injunctions and eroticization. For example, the Taiwanese expression *dalumei* (little sisters from the mainland) denotes fear of contamination. In mainland China, rural migrant women are constructed by the state, the market, and intellectual discourse as second-class citizens who are sexually promiscuous, dangerous, and threatening (Zheng 2007, 2009a). To some first wives whose interests conflict, *ernais* are ‘thieves and prostitutes’. Zhang Yufen, the famous ‘*ernai* killer’ who has had a ten-year legal battle with her husband over his betrayal of marriage and now works as a private detective specializing in the investigation of *ernai* cases, comments that *ernais* “don’t know how to respect their own body and emotion, unrestrainedly destroy legal families and conjugal attachments”(Liu 2008). Though Zhang also realizes that her campaign against the mistresses rather than the men who keep mistresses is tragic (she calls it a ‘war between women’), she laments that men are absent in the war, as there is not even a name for the man who keeps mistresses. (The term ‘*bao ernai* men’ seems clumsy.) He is just a *man*, unlike *ernai* or *xiaosan* for women! This again reveals the unequal treatment of men and women in such incidents. For each corrupt official who had met his downfall, there was a woman (or, rather, women) behind it. The Chinese idiom ‘*hongyan huoshui*’ (red complexion, source of peril) might be translated as ‘women are the root of all evil’. Women are both the victims and villains.

#### **4.6 Power and women’s agency**

As with the previously cited justifications by foreign men (Shen (2008a), Chinese men provide only flimsy excuses for their behaviour. For instance, Zheng (2006:165) finds

claims of biological determinism made by men who justify their sexual exploitation of women as 'men's normal biological nature to crave sex just like food'. Party and government officials who were caught often blamed the temptations that they had encountered, just as Taiwan and Hong Kong businessmen blamed mainland girls for seducing them. My observation is that these are again justifications or excuses for men to behave badly. Missing is the fundamental issue of patriarchal power these men possess over other men and women.

The agreement between the college student and businessman partly reveals the incentive for her to have the relationship. She seems to have taken it as a business transaction. Most of the cases of *bao ernai* reveal that the main incentive for being *ernais* is to be rid of poverty. Genuine love and affection may develop, but it often comes after the relationship has begun. Pan Suiming (Pan et al., 2004:269), a sexologist based in People's University in Beijing, emphasizes the economic factor in extramarital affairs in general. His research finds that, overall, 45.1% of respondents among the top 5% of highest income group have reported extramarital sex, while only 5% of respondents of the lowest 40% income group have reported extramarital sex. It should be pointed out that the great majority of the top 5 percent income earners are men.

Zhàng Li (2001) tells the stories of how powerless wives of rich businessmen felt when their husbands started to have relations with other women, as the businesses are in the hands of the husbands even though wives' contributions have been indispensable. This has to do with the division of labor in family-run businesses in which the wives are usually responsible for what would conventionally be referred to as 'domestic' tasks such as monitoring workers and inspecting the quality of products while husbands are usually responsible for 'external' tasks such as purchasing materials, the distribution of products and dealing with financial matters.

Sometimes, men don't have to be extremely wealthy and powerful to exert their power. Meanwhile, women can also still demonstrate their agency in fighting for their own rights. There have been both individual women and women's organizations that strongly condemn men's *bao ernai* and call for establishing new laws to prohibit it. Even some mistresses are seeking protection of their rights. Here I will quote another high-profile case in China.

Xie Lijun has been the center of media attention since early 2006 when she revealed her story as an *ernai*. She was a divorced and unemployed woman who used to earn a living by using her private car as a taxi, which is called *kai heiche* (drive a 'black' car) or *feifa yingyun* (illegal operation of transport). She was caught by a policeman in 2004, just a month after she had bought the car with a loan from her brother. To evade punishment she submitted to the sexual request of the police officer, whose surname was Chen, and maintained a relationship with him for more than a year. Chen was a married man in his early 40s. She even became pregnant. After an accidental abortion, the relationship turned sour. Xie suspected that Chen might have wanted to desert her for other lovers and deliberately induced the abortion. After this dispute Chen sided with his wife who had beaten Xie twice in public. Xie reported Chen to the authorities with sex videos as evidence. Chen received disciplinary punishment for adultery but no legal liability. Xie thought the punishment was too lenient and started to publicize her story on the Internet by threatening to release the sex video. She later started a website under the name of *Ernai Weiquan Wang* – Protecting Rights for *Ernaies*.

(From Su, 2006, *The woman who fought for the rights of 'ernais'*)

Xie might be an atypical mistress—she was by all measures a stigmatized woman: a divorcée, an illegal operator of a small business, a mistress, and an advocate of rights for

*ernais*. But how she became a policeman's mistress merits scrutiny. Whether women act voluntarily or under coercion to become mistresses, only the rich and powerful can afford to keep mistresses (*baoyang ernai*), demonstrating that power asymmetries based on gender, class and place of origin must be an important factor in analysis. Xie has recently been involved in two agendas: fighting (so far unsuccessfully) a legal battle for compensation and publicly warning young women of the doomed fate of mistresses. For those women like Zhang Yufen, who believe that young women should have the moral discipline not to sabotage other women's marriages, no rights should be granted to mistresses.

#### 4.7 Conclusion

Despite criticism from women's rights groups, media and public outcry and party-state sanctions, men who keep mistresses are the elite business and political power holders who otherwise appear to be role models of '*chenggong renshi*'—successful people. To some extent, *bao ernai* is paradoxically both an indication of a man's moral degradation and a symbol of his manhood. The former is just a minor flaw (*xiaojie*) while the latter is of vital importance to a man's capability to achieve great feat (*dashi*). It is not difficult for one to read in Chinese history that men who achieve great feats do not have to mind their minor flaws.

From the phenomenon of *bao ernai*, we could observe what Connell and Messerschmidt (2005:852) refer to as the potential 'internal contradiction' within all practices that construct masculinities. For instance, keeping concubines had been condemned by progressive intellectuals of the late Qing and early Republic of China (from mid 1800s to mid 1900s) but it was practiced even by many of the intellectuals themselves (Wang 1995). Today *bao ernai* is a controversial issue of similar nature. On one hand, it is regarded by public opinion as a form of corruption. On the other, it is practiced by the most prestigious classes of men. This may not appear to be hegemonic at all. However, if

we look more carefully into what is implicated from the practice of *bao ernai*, we can find that there are certain elements that reflect the hegemonic masculinities of men throughout Chinese history apart from sexual gratification and emotional fulfillment: demonstration of virility (with a body that appears to defy the aging process), ability to maintain the patrilineal family, economic resources to support such a lifestyle, possession of young women's body and heart.



## CHAPTER 5

### AN INTERNET MANHUNT FOR A WESTERN BLOGGER IN CHINA

This chapter was originally written for a conference in 2007. The interest in the topic at the time was to discuss issues related to masculinities, globalization, and nationalism in the era of blogging. As my research into the blog and its reaction unfolds, issues of pornography and sexuality evolved. I am including here a shortened version of the focusing on gendered colonialism on the Internet, nationalism and patriarchy and anxieties about masculinity in this historical moment in China.

#### 5.1 The incident

On 26 August 2006, a call for an Internet manhunt appeared on the personal blog of Zhang Jiehai, a researcher at Shanghai Academy of Social Science. The posting, which was entitled *Wangluo Zhuizhu Liumang Waijiao Da Xingdong (Great Campaign to Chase down a Lewd Foreign Teacher)*, harshly attacked an English language blog which was filled with accounts of a western man's sexual exploits with numerous Chinese women. Zhang called for Chinese netizens to search for the identity of the foreigner, who was most probably an English teacher in Shanghai, and drive him out of China. This 'Internet warrant' immediately triggered a heated discussion on the issue of romantic relationship between foreign men and Chinese women, with implications on other issues such as racism, sexism, nationalism and freedom of expression.

The blog in question is entitled *Sex and Shanghai: Foreign Scoundrel in Shanghai Tells All* (<http://chinabounder.blogspot.com/>). The main language used in the blog is English, with occasional appearance of Chinese characters. Alongside the English title, there are four Chinese characters: *Yu-wang Shang-hai*, or *Desire Shanghai*. The blogger identifies himself as a British expatriate who has taught English at various institutions in China for

several years. He names himself 'Chinabounder'. He was known in Chinese media as *liumang waijiao*—the lewd foreign teacher.

The first posting of Chinabounder blog is dated 7 May 2006, starting with a romantic story of the blogger's affair with a married Chinese woman doctor, who, like the great majority of women in the later postings, is a former student of the English teacher. More postings were added at a very high frequency. By the end of August 2006 when the blogger abruptly stopped posting (possibly in response to protests from the Chinese netizens), there have been 49 postings. The number of Chinese women with whom Chinabounder claims to have sexual relationships exceeded 40. There are not only explicit and graphic depictions of Chinabounder's sexual adventures, but lots of comments amongst the narratives of the love-making scenes. Moreover, there are comments on Chinese men in general as being dull, unimaginative, impotent and wicked. Occasionally, he would use issues of human rights and international relations to attack the Chinese government, or the Chinese society in general. There were no more postings after 28th August, 2006 until the blog came back in February 2007. This time there was a change in its themes from sexuality to the more standard genre of blogging, though still sharply critical of China.

The analysis in this chapter will focus on the 49 postings during May to August, 2006 which constitute the main body of the blog that triggered protests by Prof. Zhang Jiehai and other Chinese netizens. At the time this incident attracted both domestic and international media attention. Zhang compiled a book on the controversy, which was released in January 2007. The title '*I am Enraged*' (in three Chinese characters '*wo fen-nu*') appears at the centre of the covers together with a picture of the author, which highlights his angry face.

In his call for tracking down and expelling the '*laji laowai* (rubbish foreigner)', Zhang

Jiehai listed four major sins of the Chinabounder blogging:

- 1) Chinabounder uses his position as a teacher to seduce Chinese women, most of whom are his students, and then uses extremely obscene and dirty language to record the encounters;
- 2) Chinabounder vilifies Chinese men, ridicules their sexual potency and depicts them as dull;
- 3) Chinabounder hurts Chinese people's national feeling by defending Japan on its refusal to apologize to the Chinese people for Japan's war crimes during World War II;
- 4) Chinabounder openly spreads ideas of separation (of Xinjiang and Taiwan from China) and pursues actions of separating China. (Zhang, 2007, pp. 115-117)

Complicating the controversy are questions that arise as to whether the accounts are realistic descriptions or mere fiction. What are the purposes for Chinabounder in boasting of his sexual encounters and expressing his views on China in such an outrageous and deliberately provocative manner? Who actually posted the blog, one man or a group of men and women? Professor Zhang and many other Chinese netizens took the blogging as realistic accounts and wanted to find the real person and drive him out of China. However, in an email response to Associated Press, the blogger claimed that it was actually a hoax devised by 5 performance artists from 4 countries: a British man, an Australian woman, two Chinese men and a Japanese woman, to test the reactions from readers (Sydney Morning Herald, 2006).

The persons behind the Chinabounder blog revealed their identities about two years later. In an exclusive interview with the British newspaper *The Guardian* (McCurry and Watts, 2008), David Marriott, who is a British citizen and had worked in China for many years, claimed that he was the main author of the postings with some pieces jointly written by Karl Lacroix, a Canadian who has also worked in China. The two have co-authored a book on China in 2008. As I was presenting this chapter as a paper at the conference, I

pointed to the fictitious nature of the Chinabounder blog and argued that it revealed a world of male colonialist fantasy of the orient. That the accounts of the entries in the blog were fictitious was admitted by Marriott and Lacroix (2009) in their book.

## **5.2 Themes of the blog**

The major content of the 49 postings gives accounts of how Chinabounder meets, seduces, and sexually conquers the Chinese women. These women vary in age, marital status and dispositions. Chinabounder lists more than 40 Chinese women as having had sexual relationship with him in a span of 6 years. They include virgins, married women and unmarried women with boyfriends. The sexual activities range from fellatio and cunnilingus to anal penetration, with even a fantasy of lesbian (one man two women) sex. The episodes move around different locations and venues in Shanghai: bars, hotel rooms, apartment buildings, even parks and taxis.

In the blog, all women are easy prey for Chinabounder. They may appear shy and reluctant at the beginning of their rendezvous, but they all submit to him eventually without much resistance. However innocent and inexperienced they might be, once they have been seduced, they are willing to explore everything.

A few samplings from the original entries in the Chinabounder blog will suffice to illustrate the above summary.

In *Fucking Tinging*, the blogger comments on Chinese women in general:

I believe that Chinese women are creatures of passion, eroticism and desire, of creativity and joy in bed. But they are taught to believe all this is wrong, that it is dirty, that they should just lie back, in the dark, for the two or three minutes it takes the average Chinese guy to come. They are taught it, I say, and try to live up to it; but such

is their passionate nature that they never truly believe this lesson. And so one does not have to delve very deep to bring this true nature out. A few words, some tender care, a joyful, open attitude to sex and the woman will turn from a squib to firecracker. (14/05/2006)

Here's another excerpt from *Seducing Lucy* with a depiction of Lucy after she has taken her shower in a hotel room:

She was lying on this (large armchair), still wrapped in a towel; nervous, timid, but positioned sexily, invitingly, expectantly, wanting what she feared, too. (20/05/2006)

Chinabounder repeatedly boasts of his skills in arousing women, making them 'hot', his knowledge about different positions and styles, his stamina, his ability to control his own organism, and above all, the huge amount of his 'come' at ejaculation. In *Undressing Tingting*, he accounts for his masturbation with Tingting giving a helping hand after the fourth time they made love:

Once again I came all over her, and she enjoyed it, great thick gouts of come all up her body, pooling in the hollow of her neck. The excitement of a new woman always makes me come big, and I guess this, and the obvious excitement on my face, gratifies her. (12/05/2006)

I will cite more examples as I analyse the blog in the next sections.

### **5.3 Pornotopia—the fantasy world of pornography**

*Desire Shanghai* may be read as a contemporary version of the genre of pornographic fiction. Discussions on pornography in the west usually distinguish pornography from erotica by pointing out that the former objectifies and degrades women, while the latter

celebrates female sexuality. For instance, psychologists attempts to define pornography by distinguishing between 'non-violent pornography', 'violent pornography' and 'erotica'. 'Non-violent pornography' is described as 'objectifying', 'degrading' and 'dehumanizing' to distinguish it from 'erotica' (Ciclitira, 2004, p. 286). The Chinabounder blog might be regarded as at least 'non-violent pornography' even on western standards.

While it could be argued that in the accounts of the Chinabounder, all the sexual exploits involve adult women who are consensual to the relationship, there are plenty of evidences that he patronizes and objectifies these Chinese women. In a new posting on 22 March 2007, he still insists on the veracity of the blog. If there is any truthfulness in the stories, I would say that they are mixtures of reality and fantasy. The blogger has been self-centred, sexist and racist. He does not have any consideration about the possible hurt feelings that the women involved may experience. Instead, these women were depicted as mere sexual beings with bodily sexual gratification as their chief goal in life. He even put himself in a position of a liberator, a knowledge conveyer (teacher) of the ignorant and innocent women. He may not have physically hurt any of the women had these affairs been real.

In *The Other Victorian*, Steven Marcus (1964) coins a word 'pornotopia' as a hypothetical and utopian conception of pornography: 'The literary genre of fantasies—particularly when they appear in the shape of pornographic fiction—tend most to resemble is the utopian fantasy' (p.268). The most prominent characteristics of the Chinabounder blog reveal itself to be a new pornotopia on the Internet.

The fantasy component is manifest in a number of obvious ways:

- 1) Women as whores. Female desire is shown as active, as climaxed in orgasm or multiple-orgasms; and women are always sexually available and accessible. As Marcus (1964, p. 29) observes, in pornography, all women—including wives—are excited and behave like courtesans all the time.

2) Boasting of men's physical stamina. As Buchbinder (1998, p. 105) observes, in pornography, men are always capable of performing sexually. They are 'indefatigable, apparently never experiencing brewer's droop, impotence or premature ejaculation'. For Chinabounder, there have been no experiences of failure in seducing the women he finds attractive. Some do leave him, but he does not consider it as loss. Instead, he takes it as opportunity for him to look for new targets. He often dates several women at the same time and while one romance is waning, another is emerging.

3) Hypocrisy and contradiction. For Chinabounder, he claims himself as a bounder and scoundrel regarding moral assessment of his behavior. But the accounts are full of instances of his deceptive behaviour of trying to appear truly in love with someone and being faithful to her.

4) Boasting of manliness, or the masculine identity. This demonstrates the close link between sex, sexuality and power in porn. As Buchbinder observes,

'power is an integral part of the construction of masculinity within patriarchal ideology, sexual activity and prowess, together with a generous genital endowment, are important signs in the semiotic of patriarchal masculinity, and most obviously so in the pornographic text' (1998, p. 107).

#### **5.4'Chinabounder's sexual ideology: the persistence of gendered colonialism on the Internet**

The records of Chinabounder's sexual conquest of Chinese women resonate with the history of imperialist conquest of the periphery that could be found in Anne McClintock's (1995) comments on the adventurers in colonial years. He names most of the Chinese women with English names, just as early conquerors were endowed with the male prerogative of naming the virgin land in their exploration. He praises the naivety and innocence of Chinese women, saying that some had never eaten a piece of toast before, or did not know how to open a bottle of beer. Though he was not referring to all of them as

virgin, he still seems to indicate that he finds in Chinese women a virgin land, for him to explore, to conquer. He actually used the exact word 'conquest' for the night with Tingting, a doctor who has been married for 6 years. Later he boasted how he brought new experience to Tingting,

her eyes widened to a whole new level of feelings she's never had before, a whole vista of fresh pleasures, undreamt of experiences. (*Undressing Tingting*, 12/05/2006)

In his letter to Tingting, who is a married woman, he is trying to educate her on the western values of passion, freedom and adventure:

You can still care for and love your husband; with me you are just looking for something he cannot provide, perhaps. Dear, life is short; people must make the most of life while they can. Yes, I know you feel guilt; but your husband will never know about this. This is part of your life only, not his; you told me you give him a lot of freedom, and I guess there are parts of his life which are private to him, too – parts which you know nothing about. Dear, this is just the way life works. (*Aftermath of Adultery*, 15/05/2006)

This could not even be regarded as acceptable in western culture, let alone to be held as universal values. It definitely does not fit in with the Chinese values.

Chinabounder's boasting of his the ability to provide sexual gratification for Chinese women is also a manifestation of his fantasies of unlimited power. This is a documentation of both paranoia and megalomania, as commented by McClintock (1995, p. 27) on the male imperial discourse of the Western conquerors of the periphery. It was always Chinabounder who took the initiative in the relationships. As observed by McClintock (1995, p. 30), within patriarchal narratives, to be virgin is to be empty of



desire and void of sexual agency, passively awaiting the thrusting, male insemination of history, language and reason. Women are the earth that is to be discovered, entered, named, inseminated and, above all, owned (p. 31). Here's an example of the way Chinabounder talks about making love:

Now once I had found my rhythm, found the ideal stroke and ideal state of mind, I could have ploughed away all night. But Sweetie was getting a little pained with it, so I said that perhaps we should conclude. '*You can control it?*' she asked, in some surprise. (*Sweetie Continued*, 21/06/2006)

There are two striking things in this passage. First is the use of the word 'plough'. Chinabounder is using this word as a metaphor commonly found in the colonial conquest by the west of the colonies. Women compared to the virgin land to be ploughed. Another word is control as out of the mouth of Sweetie. Actually, Chinabounder has repeatedly boasted of his ability of both self-control (of his orgasm) and the control (or manipulation, depending on the perspective one takes). He depicts himself as in a position of power and knowledge over the women.

Chinabounder repeatedly emphasizes the fact that the women he has had sex with enjoy multiple orgasms, which their Chinese partners had never facilitated. In a sense, he has liberated the women to realize the potential to enjoy the pleasure of sexuality. He puts himself in a position of their savior (of sexuality). He writes that this is "ego-boosting". On the other hand, he himself could exert control of his orgasm, depending on how much the women would like him to prolong or shorten. He is always in control of the situation. As far as power is concerned, he was the master and the women were the willing slaves, never rebellious, seldom struggles, even when they does struggle, it is their mental struggle, feeling guilty of betraying their husbands or boyfriends, rather than struggling to escape his control, as he was their patron.

Chinabender's sense of patronizing, liberating the Chinese women, rather than merely seducing. In the first piece under the title of '*Undressing Tingting*', he commented that

It is women like her who makes life joyful here—and not just for the sheer easy sex of it, but also for the wonderfully ego-boosting kick of giving them a pleasure they have never felt before. (12/05/2006)

This comment was made after he discovered from Tingting that in her marriage of six years, her husband has never thought to try anything beyond the missionary position, has never even gone down on her and has never had sex in the morning, and that she should be willing to try new moves with the foreigner and enjoy it. He goes on to boast of his penis size (he later told about how Tingting and many other Chinese women were bothered by the small size of her breasts) and how he cared for her when he notices she has been awake the whole night.

The women were always passive, they 'want to be wooed, loved, charmed,' while their husbands are 'useless, unimaginative, dull'. In the piece that probably insulted all Chinese men, he wrote:

'Chinese men are nice, kind, decent...And dull, passionless. They're often less voracious than Western guys, have fewer of their—our—wolvish ways. But they are dull, dull, dull.' (*Married Women and Boring Husbands*, 07/05/2006)

And he defends his philandering as a liberating move because all the married Chinese women he has contacted are 'either unsatisfied or outright unhappy with their marriages'. This seems to justify his behavior as one that enlightens them. By depicting Chinese men as ignorant, impotent, and sexually illiterate, the Chinabounder is using knowledge as a

power. He is empowered with knowledge, while the Chinese men are not.

Chinabounder's sense of masculinity as compared with Chinese men could be detected in the following quote:

The first few times, I want the woman to feel like she has never felt before. I want her to think I am a fantastic lover. I want it to be the best. (*Last time with Lucy*, 27/05/2007)

Chinabounder repeatedly boasts of his penis size, skill, stamina, and his ability to gratify his partners. This almost always ends with a comment on the gratification he gets out of it, as a 'boost' of his 'ego'.

Here's how Chinabounder describes what a Chinese men would do after his girlfriend dumped him for a relationship with a foreigner:

...he would, running to Mummy, bursting with the urge to snitch and blab. This is how it is – a man here faced with a setback will not take it like a man but will instead plot and cheat and twist and stab, get his revenge meanly, huddled in the shadows, sniping and smirking. (*Crazy Chinese guys*, 25/05/2006)

The following is the remark he gives when boasting of his insightful remark on complimenting Chinese women while Chinese men do not know the art:

This goes to show what a stolid and unimaginative fish China Man can be. But I am glad of it, for his sexual naiveté is why lechers like me do so well. (*Shanghai Girls*, 01/07/2006)

He goes on to attack everything Chinese:

All China's woes are blamed on others, from the Western countries' invasion of China in the 19thC (*sic*) and the Japanese in the second world war to perceived discrimination today from 'the West.'

But this is the logical choice. China must have someone to blame, since facing the truth of the matter would be too psychologically devastating. The truth is that China savages itself, rips and wounds itself; all China's ills are inflicted by its government, its organizations and institutions. By its citizens, in a word, from the president on down. And how many people could face such a truth as that? How can they admit that since 1949 their own government has brought them nothing but misery, murder and death? That they and no-one else are to blame for their woes?

And so Chinese society is stuck in deep denial, and the people who know least about modern China are the Chinese themselves. Chinese people, in general, know nothing about their society and are simply not interested in finding out. (*Shanghai Girls*, 01/07/2006)

If the above is targeting the Chinese government, this next one is about its national character.

Unlike conventional pornography, the Chinabounder blogging is a bit more complex in that it covers a wide variety of topics such as politics, diplomacy, religion, family values, culture, human rights, corruption, etc. However, it reflects western views of freedom, democracy, and individualism, not the new post-modern, post-colonial questioning of these 'universal' values of the conservative extreme rightist view. It is full of stereotypical generalizations on China:

This society is too selfish for solidarity. And too apathetic; the students just accept their lot without ever asking if it is right, without ever seeking to change it. I guess so many years of being beaten down, of being crushed under the contempt and despite of the government, have long since erased even the hint of an echo of a thought of self-determination, independence, rebellion. (*Sex as Rebellion*, 02/07/2006)

Chinabounder's confession of chasing Chinese women:

Dating someone from another culture gives us a safety zone, a barrier, so that we can keep our lives, our sense of self, our secrets. Chinese woman will never be able to read us like white woman, and that is why we want her. (*White women and Chinese women*, 03/06/2006)

By posing himself as superior both Chinese women and men and attacking the Chinese society and government, Chinabounder is using what Ashis Nandy (1983:4) terms 'the homology between sexual and political dominance' to legitimize Europe's post-medieval models of dominance, exploitation and cruelty as natural and valid.

### **5.5 The responses: nationalism and patriarchy**

The reaction of Chinese people, especially men to the Chinabounder blog started from Zhang Jiehai's Blog:

Today, with tremendous anger, I will tell you the story of an immoral foreigner and I call upon all Chinese compatriots to get together and kick this immoral foreigner out of China.

This is how it is: Several days ago, a friend told me about a blog run by an English man in Shanghai. I read it and I was shocked, angered and disgusted ... after I read

his blog, I had only one idea: This is intolerable and this piece of garbage must be found and kicked out of China!!! (Zhang Jiehai 2007, p. 115)

The call was made on 26 August 2006, but his anger could still be sensed when his new book *I am Enraged* was published in 2007. In the book, he writes that his anger is not only directed to the foreigners in China, but more to the widespread phenomenon of '*chong yang mei wai*' (admiring everything foreign and pleasing foreigners) among many Chinese people. After attacking the 'foreign rubbish', he goes on to criticize fellow Chinese men of discrimination against people from particular regions and angrily asks Chinese women: 'What's wrong with you, Chinese women?'

Another comment on the Chinese netizens' criticism on Chinese women dating foreigners is the Chinese eight-character saying '*ai qi buxin, nu qi buzheng*', which could be used as typical *wenren* (scholars) attitudes towards someone's misfortunes caused by their own failings. It could be translated as 'sympathetic of someone's misfortunes, but angry for his/her own insensibility'. To some Chinese critics like Zhang Jiehai, the women in the blog postings were first of all considered victims of the 'foreign rubbish' who treated them as playthings. They have only themselves to blame for as they are vain (taking foreign boyfriends as superior to Chinese men), money oriented (believing the myth that all foreigners are rich), and trying to use the relationship as a means for them to go abroad. However, there is one letter in Zhang's book written by a Chinese woman who has had a foreign boyfriend. She has been dumped by her English boyfriend but there is no feeling of hatred. She says that her relationship with the foreign is not for money, fame, vanity or the practical reason of going abroad; it is for love. She observes a sense of pride among some Chinese men to compete with foreigner in winning Chinese women and even white women. They take this as patriotic. It could be explained in what Bulbeck (1998) calls 'anti-racist racism': they first regard themselves as the victims of racism and treat the so-called

racist in the same way.

However racist or sexist, Chinabounder does raise the issue of women's agency in sexual experience and sexual expression or know about body and desire. Actually, as the Bounder has suspected, some of the women he knows are not so 'naïve', or 'innocent'. That all Chinese women are naïve, ignorant and innocent is merely his fantasy. He has often suspected that they are faking or cheating him as well. They are playing games and the Chinese women in these relations are far from being the pure victims.

In a globalized world, inter-racial dating has become common. In the male netizens' eyes, Chinese women belong to them and the foreigner has violated their exclusive rights to their own women. Professor Zhang Ming wrote in a newspaper article that in the uproar, the Chinese netizens, particularly the Chinese men, are still taking the Chinese women as 'our women', which in a historical sense, should be the exclusive right of Chinese men to own, just like their property.

In her concluding remarks on China's crackdown on pornography or 'yellow materials', Harriet Evans points to its failure to address the issue of gender:

No comment was made about the unequal power relations between men and women that are inscribed in 'visual images of sex'. The fact that the production of 'yellow' materials depend predominantly on appropriating the female body for male absorption, perusal and use, and on the female's sexual and physical subjugation to male and commercial exploitation, seems to emerge as a generic signifier of degeneration, vulgarity and criminality. (Evans, 1997, p. 181)

Ten years later, the situation does not seem to have changed. For anti-pornography

crusaders like Zhang Jiehai, the main concerns of Chinabounder's crimes do not lie in his fantasizing of Chinese women as objects of sexual gratification. Rather, it is his criticisms of the Chinese men, government, nationalism that are more serious. The Chinese women, who prefer Western men to Chinese men, are stigmatized as either naïve or willingly subject themselves to deceit and abuse by foreigner. They deserve such treatment because they are vain and unpatriotic. At first glance, Chinese critics are concerned with the welfare of the Chinese women. What concerns them most is the fact that they feel insulted as their masculinity were ridiculed. There is a sense of a possession lost to outsiders: 'our' women have been insulted by the 'other'. Ironically, in Zhang's (2007) book, the first chapter starts with a survey with Chinese men on whether they would care for dating foreign women. I'll not report on the result of the survey here; the fact that this question is asked is itself revealing. It is some kind of a sense of revenge, which resembles some men on the Internet boasting their experience of dating foreign women as an act of patriotism.

There are similarities with another controversy in China over the publication and later public burning of woman writer Wei Hui's (2001) novel *Shanghai Baby*, which is a semi-autobiographical work based loosely on life and experiences of Wei. In the story, a college educated young woman quits her well-paid job at a magazine and works as a waitress at café and meanwhile wants to write a novel. She has both a Chinese boyfriend with whom she cohabits and a love affair with a married businessman from Germany. Wei's work is a running commentary on the sex, drugs, and debauchery of Shanghai's growing Bohemian youth culture (Weber, 2002). What is relevant to the Chinabounder controversy is that in the novel Wei describes her Chinese boyfriend as sexually impotent and addicted to drugs while her foreign lover provides her with sensual pleasure. What seems to have been worrying many Chinese critics of the novel is the tendency of 'xenophilia', of admiration of everything foreign among the young generation in China (Weber, 2002).



## **5.6 Conclusion: Anxieties about masculinity in this historical moment in China**

The Internet is now playing a significant role for sociality and sexuality in China. Jens Damm (2007) observes the rise of urban consumerist lifestyles, which have changed Chinese society during recent decades and resulted in less interest in conventional politics, more fragmentation, and a stronger sense on identity politics.

The process of globalization has brought about an increasing pace of movements of capital, production and people across boundaries of many kinds and on a global basis (Acker, 2004, p. 18). The phenomenon of globalization has been around for quite a long time, dating back to the beginning of colonial conquest in the 16<sup>th</sup> century (Hirst & Thompson, 1999). In the process of colonial expeditions and explorations, the European conquerors constructed a hegemonic masculinity that combined “an unusual level of violence and egocentric individualism” (Connell, 2000, p. 47). The Chinabounder blog could be read as another example of how globalization is interacting with sex, sexuality, and gender (Altman, 2001).

Though the blogger and his critics seem to have conflicting views on every issue, one thing that they have in common is that they both take the male identity as the center of their concern. In Chinabounder, his masculinity lies in his popularity with Chinese women, his righteous attack on China’s human rights records, his self-acknowledged gentlemanliness as well as his sexual prowess. In his Chinese critics, the focus has been on the reputation of Chinese men and the hurt feeling of the Chinese people concerning national sovereignty. However, neither side takes women in inter-racial relationships as equally having the ability to know what they are doing and take responsibility for their own decisions. Neither side has asked how women actually feel if they become involved in such a controversy.

While the debate circled around nationalism, human rights and international relations, an

important aspect seems to have evaded the discussion: the issue of gender order or gender relations. Chinabounder is using both Chinese women and Chinese men as his means to prove his masculinity. While on the other hand, Chinese men are trying to regain their lost control over Chinese women to prove their masculinity. The only victims are the Chinese women involved: they have been utilized as sexual objects by the foreigner and criticized as vain, immoral and unpatriotic by the Chinese men.

The theory that the strong reaction from the Chinese male Internet users and media coverage reveal a sentiment not to protect Chinese women against deceit and abuse by foreign men but rather to protect the masculine identity of Chinese men. Chinabounder seems to be intentionally inciting nationalistic reactions from the Chinese readership.

## CHAPTER 6

### THE EMERGENCE OF PUBLIC DEBATE ABOUT MEN AND MASCULINITIES

#### 6.1 Men and masculinities in Chinese history

Once upon a time, the ‘good man’ was defined by the state and society: expressing loyalty, as a ‘big man’ (*dazhangfu*) or a ‘virtuous man’ (*junzi*). Later, the ‘good man’ was defined by the family: as a filial son, supporting the family, taking responsibility, and having meals at home. Nowadays, the ‘good man’ is defined by women: as being tender, showing empathy, and sharing common interests. (Yang, 2006, p. 37)

The above observations are made by a Taiwanese author in his writing about Chinese men and masculinities. The publication, from which I take this excerpt, is one of the first collections of writings on men’s movement that has appeared in mainland China. The fluidity, multiplicity and transformation in masculinities are apparent in the quotation. Such understanding of masculinities is based on the social and cultural norms and expectations about the ideal men and masculinity.

This type of classification and typology provides a clear and useful summary of the changing expectations about the criteria for the ideal man in the Chinese context. Though there is some truth lying under the generalization, it should be cautioned that while focusing on men’s helplessness, it has evaded the issue of men’s hegemonic position in China. The traditional, popular-culture perspectives on men and masculinity are still prevalent in China. Even some male sociologists (Sun, 1994; Zheng, 1994) hold views that men are naturally the stronger sex. (See Chapters 1 & 2 on the debate in the mid-1990s).

These texts are part of a new discussion of men and masculinities in China from an historical perspective. In China, men as '*nanzihan*' (real man), '*dazhangfu*' (giant/great man) and '*junzi*' (virtuous man) have long been idealised and normalised. These standards for being a 'true man' or 'real man' have subjected men to constant pressure. In gender relations, the ideal couplings have been *yingxiong-meiren* (hero-beauty) and *caizi-jiaren* (talent-beauty) (Song, 2004). In these two pairings, there is little difference for femininity (*jiaren* and *meiren* are virtually the same), but there is huge difference between different constructions and representations of masculinities. The *caizi*, or the man with literary talents, embodies what Louie (2002) posits as the *wen* masculinity of literary talents while *yingxiong* invokes the *wu* masculinity which is characterised by martial valour. For contemporary Chinese men, Zhong (2000) has revealed a sense of loss of manhood among Chinese intellectuals from her study of Chinese literature and literary criticism in the 1980s, as indicated in her book title 'masculinity besieged'.

The thesis that in contemporary China men have lost their power has been countered by research from various social scientists, such as Li Yinhe (2009), Zhong Xueping (2000), and Chen Min (2004), among others in China. It is also supported by China scholars from the west, such as Croll (1994, 1995), Bossom (2003), and Evans (1997). Some critics have argued the thesis of *yin-sheng-yang-shuai* (which argues that women's power has thrived at the expense of men's power being in decline) is a myth. The most recent book by sociologist Li Yinhe (2009) on a village in north China with interviews of 100 women found that women in the village still suffer from domestic violence and discrimination both in the family and in society. For instance, they are not allowed to sit at the same table when their husbands were entertaining guests. Zhong (2000) argues that the *yin-sheng-yang-shuai* thesis was based on the premise that the yang (or men) should by nature be superior to the yin (or women).

William Jankowiak (2002) observes that the difference between masculinity and femininity in the Chinese context is that boys and men have been constantly under pressure to prove their manhood by demonstrating their achievements and competencies as men in fields of literature, politics, military, and more recently, money making. In this respect, Jankowiak is in agreement with Louie (2002) that the concepts of *wen* and *wu* are important. Throughout Chinese history there were two competing emblems of maleness: the warrior or military men and the gentlemen (Jankowiak, 2002, p. 364). But in the era of neoliberal globalization, there is an emerging group of men who are successful in the marketplace. This seems to be in agreement with Connell's theorizing of an emerging pattern of transnational business masculinity (1998) as gaining a hegemonic position.

## **6.2 A new field of study in China**

The World Conference of Women in 1995 brought gender into the spotlight. The Chinese women's movement (and gender studies) has been influenced by the west, but it has its own special trajectories. It coincided with the Chinese enlightenment of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, when men fought to liberate Chinese people from feudalism, colonialism, and capitalism. Women were among the suppressed groups in the Chinese revolution before 1949; therefore, there was not a separate women's movement against men. However, women's studies re-emerged in the 1980s as China's reform and opening up exposed scholars to international women's movement and the establishment of women's studies in Chinese universities started (Li, 1988). At that time, the main school of Chinese feminism, or feminism with Chinese characteristics, was Marxist or socialist feminism represented by scholars like Li Xiaojiang and Du Fangqin (Du & Wang, 2004).

Interest in men as gendered beings has been growing in the 1990s. Fang (2008, pp. 172-178) records the major events in China regarding men's movements and men's studies. The first person to talk about men's liberation in public was sociologist Wu Zongjian who hosted a 'Men's Liberation Feature Show' within the program 'Life Hotline' at Beijing

People's Radio in 1994. Though the show was only aired for six days, it was the first of its kind that discussed men's reflections on patriarchal culture.

The second event happened early in 1997. Long Yingtai's newspaper article 'Ah! Shanghai Men' caused uproar among readers in Shanghai. The controversy centred on Long's claim that it was her intention to acclaim and welcome the changes in men's practices (Shanghai men are doing what the traditional gender role would require as women's work), while male readers from Shanghai took it as an insult. Their accusation of Long's *yi-pian-gai-quan* (using a small portion of Shanghai men as representation of all) reveals the social and ideological norms at the time were still for men to be '*nanzihan*' and '*dazhangfu*'. The debate is worth following up as some scholars have pointed out that men's involvement in domestic chores reflects a tradition of relative gender equality at local levels (Connell, 2005b). Da Weiwei's (2004) research on Shanghai men shows that this tradition persists even after their migration to Australia.

As China embraces globalization, particularly after its accession to the World Trade Organization in 2001, men's studies and men's movement have had their influence in China too. Some scholars, activists, and organizations started to take men as gendered, and issues related to men's practices as a legitimate object for study. Influences from the west, Taiwan, and Hong Kong have been a factor in the development of men's movement and men's studies in mainland China. Books were either translated (Connell's *Masculinities* was published in Chinese in 2003) or published in photocopied editions (Kimmel & Messner's edited volume *Men's Lives, 6th Edition* was reprinted in 2005 by Peking University Press). The White Ribbon movement was introduced to China. A White Ribbon founder from Canada, Dr Michael Kaufman, was invited to take part in an activity calling for men's involvement in the prevention of violence against women and children in November 2002.

The Chinese version of the slogan and notion of ‘Men’s Liberation’—*nanxing jiefang*—has been related to Fang Gang and other activists who believe that men should be aware of their own problems, which are gender specific and need to change. Fang Gang worked first as a journalist and later a researcher in the field of gender and sexuality, with a particular interest in men and masculinities. He is one of the first men who introduced the new discipline of masculinity studies and is an advocate of a Chinese version of ‘Men’s Liberation’ (Fang, 2006a). He has published more than ten books and numerous journal articles in the last decade. He has interviewed gay men and male sex workers and published books on them. Fang Gang’s own work on men’s liberation included publication of columns between 1998 and 2000 in monthly magazines such as ‘*Women’s Monthly*’ (*Nuxin Yuekan*), *Cross Century* (*Kua Shiji*), and *Healthy Ones* (*Jiankang Ren*). In 1999, his book *Men’s Liberation* was published. In the book (which was originally published in Taiwan and re-published in Beijing in 2006), Fang argues for men’s liberation from the shackles of patriarchal ideology, calling for pro-feminism as guidelines in a Chinese version of men’s movement. He also proposes a ‘Men’s Day’ to raise awareness of both men and women that men’s needs care. His thesis of ‘men’s double awareness’ is that firstly men should be aware of the harmful effect of patriarchy on women and secondly men should be aware that patriarchy is harmful to men too. This double awareness will consolidate men and women in fighting against gender discrimination. (Fang, 2006b, p. 237).

Fang Gang has collaborated with other scholars in publishing feminist and pro-feminist works to promote the cause of masculinity studies in China. One of them has been Huang Lin, who has edited a series of books under the general name of *Feminism in China* (it had released 10 volumes by 2008). Masculinity studies is one of the columns in the books since 2005. Huang is also the editor of a book on masculinity studies in China *Masculine Criticism* (2004). These books publish work by authors from Taiwan, Hong Kong, as well as mainland China.

Zhou Huashan (1999) provides one of the first empirical studies of men and masculinities published in mainland China. Xiaoli, one of his cases, fits the performative view of masculinities: Xiaoli himself is aware of his different roles played in different circumstances: 'As the first son, I take it as fundamental to be filial to my parents; as boyfriend of the American girl, I play the role of an autonomous romantic lover; as a tour guide, I must be mature, professional, and humourous, just like a "man"; as a student, I study hard to be a diligent little boy student.' (1999, p. 26)

Another important figure was Lan Huai'en, a social activist, who relocated herself to Shanghai in 2002 and promoted her notion of 'men's care' (*nanxing guanhuai*). She argues that there is a trend for women to overtake men in various aspects in the near future and men should learn to live with a new world in which male domination is not taken for granted. Women and men should work together for men to cope with the changes so that backlash against women's power could be minimized (Lan, 2004, pp. 5-7). Also in 2002, a men's group was founded in Beijing which aimed at activities 'against violence against women' and promoting gender equality. This volunteer's group did not hold on. Another significant event in 2002 was the elimination of homosexuality from China's Identification Criteria for Mental Disorders (*Zhongguo Jingshen Jibing Jianding Biaozhun*).

In March 2005, Men's Liberation Academic Salon was launched in Beijing at Beijing Forestry University, the institution where Fang Gang works. The discussion focused on the harms of patriarchal culture to both men and women. The salon attracted scholars, media practitioners and students as participants. The academic seminars held by the salon contributed to the publication of the book '*Feminist Men's Movement*' (Fang & Hu, 2006). It is an anthology whose Chinese title literally translates as '*Men Want Liberation*' (*nanxing yao jiefang*). It was the first of the book series 'Men's Studies', with Fang Gang



and Hu Xiaohong as its chief editor. This was the product of collective authorship by participants of the Men's Liberation Academic Salon.

Fang Gang's most recent publication is based on his PhD thesis on male sex workers in Shenzhen, Beijing, and Taipei (Fang, 2009). He used life history interviews in data collection and adapted Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity in his analysis. In the theoretical framework of this important study, he combines the Chinese notion of *gang* and *rou* with Connell's hegemonic and subordinate masculinities to come up with a matrix of tendencies instead of typologies of different masculinities. His purpose is to add dynamics to the static models of *wen-wu* (Louie, 2002), yinyang and western structuralism (as he understands Connell's four-structured analysis of labor, power, cathexis, and symbolism).

Both Zhou Huashan (1999) and Fang Gang (2006a) argue for men's liberation based on the assertion that men are victims of patriarchal culture as well as women. It is in women's interests to liberate men just as it was in men's interest to liberate women in the revolution. Fang (2008) is cautious about the feminist claim that men should support feminism because they are the perpetrators and profiteers of gender inequity. Instead, he insists that men as well as women are victims of the patriarchal culture. The key in process to change men is: to let men realize how hegemonic masculinity hurts men. Men's involvement in gender equality is involvement after their awareness of the fact that they have been hurt, under the condition that they share common interest with women.

Huang He (2008) provides one of the few papers in China that is written by a female researcher on masculinities in China and its relations to education in gender equality. She reports that concerns about the rising numbers of boys who appear femininised (*niangniangqiang*) in China have been expressed by educators, the media, and parents of school children in recent years. It is reported that girls account for 70 percent of the class

cadres in some schools. (Huang, 2008, p. 44) Huang calls into attention to the importance of studying the construction of masculinity among school children through sex education and building up a new gender culture (*xingbie wenhua*) in school. Research and educational reform should look into the impact of teachers on boys, peer socialization and identity formation, knowledge about sex and sexuality (including homosexuality), and the importance of sports and extracurricular activities.

As most researchers in gender issues are located in universities, to explore relations between masculinities and education is of critical importance. A case in point is a news report in 2007 about an event at a high school in Sichuan. The report said that in a survey among students at that school, it was found that the typical un-manly behaviours among students have been 'speaking in a womanly manner' and acting hesitantly and indecisively. To change the effeminate behaviour of the male students, the school put forward ten guidelines for them, each in a four character Chinese phrase: well-groomed clothing, strong body, solemn manners, toughness and sternness, tolerance and generosity, a sense of humour, optimism and sanguineness, politeness and civility, responsibility, protection the weaker and younger (Guan, 2006).

These ten guidelines are all desirable qualities for boys. It is encouraging to me that the practices of boys and the issue of masculinity and gender have been attended to. But the question is, what about the mentality behind these guidelines. By singling out boys, the school was either believing that girls have already been endowed with these qualities or girls could be excused for not developing these qualities.

Changing men's practices is critical in dealing with some current social problems in China. In the next section, the issue of men's violence against women is discussed.

### 6.3 Problematising masculinities: Men's violence against women

This section takes men's violence against women in two parts. The first deals with the issue of domestic violence. The second deals with issues of sex scandals involving men in power. The *bao ernai* phenomenon belongs to the second, but as it has already been discussed in Chapter 4, I will focus this discussion on rape in two cases: men's sexual assault on women in hospitality venues, and men involved in underage prostitution.

According to ACWF, domestic violence occurred in 30 per cent of the 270 million Chinese households in 2005 (Yan & Han, 2008). 90 percent of perpetrators were men. The main form of domestic violence has been husbands against wives. Of all the domestic violence between husbands and wives, 85 percent of the victims were women. Each year, about 100, 000 families are broken as a result of domestic violence.

There is still a hierarchical relationship between men and women as well as hierarchy in relations among men. At both domains of the state and the family, patriarchy still persists though the manifestations have always been changing, with some men experiencing subordination. Scholars in Women's studies in China have written extensively about domestic violence since 1995, with the positive influence of the Beijing Women's Congress.

Fang Gang (2007, 2008) believes that hegemonic masculinity may be a factor in domestic violence. He argues for challenging hegemonic masculinity by challenging in the Chinese context, the notion that men must be '*gangqiang*', or tough and strong. He believes in plurality and change in masculinities. The two notions he advocates are 'men's consciousness' of, and 'men's liberation' from, the rigid notions of masculinities which equals 'strength and toughness'.

Tong's (2000) analysis of domestic violence attributes it to three aspects: 1) patriarchy

realised through control and domination of women's body; 2) rationalisation of men's violence by female victims through reflexive constitution; 3) women's lack of authoritative resources and allocative resources. Based on her analysis, which is influenced by Giddens (1984), Tong argues that empowerment of women is key in the struggle against domestic violence. Like many other scholars, Tong supports a joint effort from the official women's federation, research institutes and NGOs. A highly acclaimed example of NGO work is the Beijing Red Maple Women's Psychological Consultation Centre. The women's federation at different levels involve 10 million part-time mediators who deal with 2-3 million disputes of family and marriage every year.

Through cases of women who were victims of domestic violence, Zhou Weiwen (2001, p. 197-203) adopts the gender perspective in analysing the causes and social consequences of violence against women. He argues that there are five areas of gender inequality that are causes of gender discrimination and bias in contemporary China: resources, power, division of labour at social level, norms of social evaluation and social status. The consequences of domestic violence include tension between family members, rising divorce rate, juvenile problems, crimes committed by women, and increasing number of single-parent households.

On the issue of domestic violence, men and masculinity studies is crucial. As research (Zhou Huashan, 1999, Zhou Weiwen, 2001, Chen, 2004) on domestic violence have demonstrated, some men resort to domestic violence because they felt that they were marginalised at the workplace or society, in some instances, by a female superior. For these men, the family is the only territory in which their masculinity is retained. As a result, they beat their wives and children to show that they are in charge at least in the household. Many female victims appreciate the situation and choose to endure domestic violence.

Some women who have grown up in abusive families or have been subjected to abuse prior to marriage may be complicit in the reproduction of the unequal relations. A case that attracted my attention was where a woman who was formerly a rape victim and later married a school teacher (Zhou, 2001, pp. 122-123). Her husband was gentle at the beginning of their marriage. But she regarded him as not masculine enough and could not get sexual pleasure from him. Her husband was frustrated and beat and raped her once. To her surprise, she was excited and later indirectly encouraged her husband to be more violent. His violence escalated until she could no longer stand this and decided to divorce him.

Men's worship for virginity has been demonstrated in recent years by the stigma to some women who have lost their virginity before marriage. They are labelled *feichu*—non-virgin. This is a label which has serious consequences. I will cite two cases that have both attracted public attention in China in 2009 to make this point. One involves a young waitress at a hotel who killed one man and injured another in an effort to protect her from rape. Another was a case of men's involvement in underage prostitution.

The woman in the first case was named Deng Yujiao. Her case was listed as second of the top 10 hot topics on Internet in 2009 in China by the English language newspaper *China Daily* (2009). According to the newspaper, Deng was a 21-year-old employee at a foot massage parlor of a hotel in Badong, Hubei province. She allegedly stabbed to death a local official and injured another who forced her to provide 'special service', understood as of sexual nature. The newspaper claims that for most people, Deng is the innocent victim-heroine. Deng was found guilty of intentional injury in excessive self-defense but walked free from the local court due to her mental imbalance.

Deng received good will from the public as a 'victim-heroine' who had fought bravely to protect her virginity. This is significant in the Chinese culture which values women's

chastity highly. In another case, girls younger than 13 were forced to be prostitutes to serve male customers, many of whom government officials. This took place in southwestern China's Guizhou province, where seven men, including four government officials and a school teacher, were tried and sentenced to jail for 7 to 14 years for rape of underage girls. The ring-leader who forced underage girls into prostitution, a 37-year-old unemployed woman, was sentenced life in jail (Cui, 2009).

Currently, it is mainly women's groups, under the ACWF that have represented women to condemn the crimes against women. Individual men have joined in an outcry against these crimes against women and girls. But there have been no men's groups that have been involved in mobilizing men against these crimes. The White Ribbon movement mentioned previously did not actually function as an influential force in men's effort to fight for gender equality as it was originally expected.

The two cases cited above have at least two things in common, which explain the public outrage: the young women and underage girls all come from poor working class or peasant families. The men are mostly government officials who have been related to corruption. In class term, the Chinese public sentiment of *choufu* (resentment towards the rich) and *chouguan* (resentment towards officials) reflect public dissatisfaction with the unequal distribution of power and wealth, and the moral decay of public servants who are supposed to be role models in morality, as the Communist Party has always put itself as representative of the most advanced (*xianjin*) group of Chinese citizens. The intersection between gender, sexuality, class and corruption is a good lens for the analysis of contemporary Chinese society.

Violence against young and even underage girls is also a manifestation of some men's worship of virgin, which is significant in the era of HIV/AIDS. Currently, there has been little theoretical analysis in China of men's violence against women as illustrated by the

cases cited. Questions should be asked as to: why do men use violence against women? Why some groups of men but not other groups of men? What can men do to prevent violence against women? Masculinities studies is critical, in arguing that men who resort to physical and sexual violence against women want to present themselves as real men. Zhou's (2001) Chinese research suggests that men who are prone to violence share some of the following characteristics: strong appetite for power and control (of women); yearning for respect from women; and a sense of insecurity which leads them to use violence against women to prove their manhood. Su (1998) calls attention to what he describes as 'structural violence' that men use against wives that come from other regions. He uses some statistics of men in rural Hebei Province who take wives from the underdeveloped regions of Guizhou and Yunnan in Southwestern China. Su's (1998) study raises the important intersection between gender, class, and region, which is crucial in further research.

# **PART III**

## **THE RESEARCH SITE**



## CHAPTER 7

### XINYUE VILLAGE, ITS REGION AND ITS GENDER REGIME

#### 7.1 A brief account of social changes in rural China

Since the founding of the People's Republic in 1949, rural China has undergone drastic economic, political and cultural changes. The land reform of the early 1950s distributed land to each household. Land was then gradually collectivized through the mutual-aid groups, cooperative societies, and the people's commune (Oi, 1989). During the collective years (from 1958 to 1983), rural economy and communities had been managed under the hierarchal structure of the people's commune (*renmin gongshe*), the production brigade (*shenchan dadui*) and the production team (*shengchan dui*). Economic activities and socio-cultural events were planned and controlled by the state through party politics, with each brigade dominated by the CCP branch and each commune led by the CCP committee. Distribution was in the form of produce rather than cash or wages, based on need rather than merit, and the state took the bulk of the grain production at very low prices. These practices meant low incentives for the labourers, as they were deprived of the right to put their produce on the market. Meanwhile, lack of cash income hindered farmers from investing in technology to enhance productivity.

The economic reform in the late 1970s started from the rural areas. It first sub-divided the production teams into small working groups, granted more flexibility in the variety of crops to be planted (e.g. a shift from mandatory grain growing to allowing more freedom to grow cash crops and in establishment of businesses and enterprises). Finally, under the responsibility system, since 1983 land has been distributed to each household under a 15-year contract. Meanwhile, the people's commune was dismantled. The rural administrative bureaucracy under the county now has only two tiers: the township (*xiang* or *zhen*) and the village (*cun*). These reforms contributed to improvement in productivity by solving the problem of 'eating in a big pot'.

A more recent change in and around the areas in which this study has been conducted is the growing trend towards commercialization, industrialization and urbanization. Since the launch of the Reform and Opening-up policy, the emphasis in the rural economy has shifted from agriculture (predominantly grain production) to industry and commerce. In the first decade (1979-1989), township enterprises grew to become a strong competitor of the state sector. Later, private businesses and enterprises were established (many have been bought from township or village enterprises) and are growing rapidly. The great majority of young rural labourers are now earning wages in factories while the generation in their fifties, sixties and beyond are still working on their small plots of land.

## **7.2 The Region**

### *Geography*

The Huayuan region is part of the Yangtze River Delta in east China. It is part of the lowland plain in a broader region along China's east coast. The favorable geographic and climatic conditions for agriculture have contributed to the region's fame as one of the major grain-producing regions which had historically contributed greatly to feeding China's ever-growing population.

The region belongs to the temperate zone with clear seasonal changes in temperature and rainfall. It is very hot in summer, cold in winter and warm and pleasant in spring and autumn. Temperatures vary from 10°C to 25°C in spring and autumn, 25°C to 40°C in summer, and -5°C to 15°C in winter. There is sufficient precipitation throughout the year and the place rarely experiences severe flood or drought. There is one period in early summer each year (late June and early July) when there is plenty of rainfall. This is known as *huangmei tian* or yellow-plum weather as it coincides with the ripening season

for plums. Humidity is high throughout the year, but during the huangmei season it is extremely humid.

### *Recent economic development*

The official statistics of the Huayuan Municipality Bureau of Statistics [from its official website *Huayuan Tongji Xinxi Wang*, or **Statistical Information of Huayuan**] provide some useful figures for the general trend of economic development in the region. In general, annual growth rates of GDP from 1979 to 2007 reached double digits for 20 of the 29 years.

In 1978, the production values for primary, secondary, and tertiary sectors in the municipality's economy were 663 million, 438 million, and 228 million yuan respectively, while in 2007, the production values for each sector amounted to 9,707 million, 94,975 million, and 53,849 million yuan respectively. These figures are evidence of the changing economic structure, from agriculture to industry and service. In 1978, the non-agricultural population was 355,100 out of 2,894,000, or 12.27 %. In 2007, the non-agricultural population reached 1,203,600 out of the total population of 3,368,100, or 35.74%. And I should add that these statistics only reflect part of the picture of the shift from agriculture to industry and service sectors. The non-agricultural population figure only accounts for the officially registered people. There are a large number of people who are registered as agricultural residents, but are involved full-time or part-time in wage earning jobs in factories or small private businesses or services such as the booming construction industry. In Xinyue village, most household income comes from wages or other non-agricultural sources. Young people under the age of 30 are seldom involved in agricultural labour.

The region maintains both the traditional silk and food processing industries, and has developed other industries such as chemical fibres, woollen garments, and leather

garments. The real estate business has grown since the late 1990s. Services, such as restaurants and supermarkets are booming too as residents' purchasing power rises. Anything related to construction (materials, household appliances, etc) is sold on a large scale. Rural households now can afford formerly luxury items from colour TVs to cars.

Yet the disparity between urban and rural residents still exists. In 2007, per capita income of rural residents was 10,163 yuan, while the per capita income for urban residents was 20,128 yuan, almost double. The challenge for the next stage of economic reform is how to create a welfare network for the rural poor. "Sustainable development" and "harmonious society" are the two phrases that the official media have highlighted in recent years. Residents are now increasingly complaining about rising crimes such as burglary. (In a place which used to be poor, there had been virtually no valuables in peasant households. Therefore residents did not need to worry about theft as much as they do now. )

There are challenges in other areas too: including industrial pollution, instability of the private sector and hence the workers' rights, and gender equity. Though gender equity has not featured as an important factor in government documents, it is an area where this study hopes to make a contribution.

### **7.3 The Village of Xinyue**

#### *Location*

Xinyue is a village from the region of Huayuan in China's east coast, between Shanghai and Hangzhou, capital of Zhejiang Province. Throughout history Xinyue has been under the administration of Songwang County, Zhejiang Province. It is located in the south rim of Songwang and is about 12 kilometres from the county seat. It borders Guangming

County, which is also part of Huayuan region.

Today the village of Xinyue enjoys convenient transportation. One highway that links Shanghai with Zhejiang cuts through the village from east to west. Another highway, which connects Songwang and Guangming, runs from north to south across the village. About three kilometers to the south of the village is a railway that was built in the early 1900s. The nearest train station is a small town called Weiping, which is part of Guangming County.

### *Size and population*

The village covers a land area of about 250 hectares, of which about 200 hectares are arable land. According to the 2006 census, the registered population of Xinyue is 2834 and there are 759 households. These households are scattered around 16 hamlets. In terms of lineage, within each hamlet, most of the families share similar family names. However, the dominant family names are not limited to a single lineage. There may be up to five lineages in a hamlet. For instance, in the hamlet ‘*Yangjia Muqiao*’ most residents have the Yang family name. In ‘*Kongjia Muqiao*’, Wang, Chen, Shen, and Huang are the major clans. Several family names overlap in the hamlets, e.g. Chen, Shen, Zhang, Cao, Zhu, and Xu. Some names are limited to a single hamlet, e.g. Li, Yang, Xie, Ling, and Wang. In all, there are about 20 family names that are common (having at least ten registered households under the same name).

In recent years, with the development and expansion of village factories, migrant workers have been employed. Currently, there are about 200 of them, about 7% of the population. They live in dormitories provided by the factories, but they are not officially registered in the official census as village residents. People who were born in the village and later registered as urban residents are not included in the census data either. With more young

people entering tertiary education and more rich people purchasing urban properties, this group is gaining numbers.

### *Recent history*

Unlike some other villages that have had constant change of administrative boundaries in the recent six decades, the village of Xinyue has been relatively stable as a community at the ‘*cun*’ (village) level. Upon the Liberation or the founding of the PRC in 1949, today’s Xinyue constituted of two villages under the township of Wuyueqiao. Their names were just listed as Villages 3 and 4. At that time, land was redistributed to each household and each family worked independently on their own private plot. In the next few years the two villages went through collectivization like other parts of rural China. In 1953, mutual-aid groups (*huzhu zu*) were organized. In 1954, elementary cooperative societies (*chuji hezuo she*) for agricultural production were established. In 1956, when the township of Wuyueqiao was taken over by Manqiao Township, No. 3 and No. 4 villages merged to become Xinyue Advanced Cooperative Society (*gaoji hezuo she*) for Agricultural Production. In 1958, 3 more hamlets joined Xinyue to become *Xinyue Dadui* (New Moon Production Brigade) when Manqiao became a Commune. This lasted until the early 1980s. In 1983, the Commune was officially dissolved and Xinyue Dadui was renamed Xinyue Village, under the administration of Manqiao Township. In 2004, Manqiao Township was dissolved and Xinyue was taken over by Suiniuwan Township, but the village maintained its structure.

### *Livelihood in the village*

Xinyue is located in a region endowed with favorable conditions for farming. It has fertile land and seldom experiences flood or drought. One of the reasons is that it has a network of small rivers and canals. It is part of the ‘water country’ south of the Yangtze River. The

land is rather flat, with differences in altitude of less than 2 meters. Still, the difference in altitude is significant to local farmers. In the local dialect, two words are used to distinguish between the lower wet rice paddies and higher dry terraces. The lower lands are called *tian* or *shuitian* (water field) and the higher lands are called *di* or *handi* (dry land). The former is wet throughout the year and the latter much drier. Traditionally, rice has been planted in lower wet land and mulberry trees are found on higher dry land. During the past four decades, there have been two major movements of flattening the land to meet mechanization requirements in farming. The first was in the mid-1970s near the end of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). The second started around 2000 and was finished around 2005. The construction of wide concrete paved roads that have replaced the narrow muddy paths in the second period has also contributed to a great change in the landscape.

The waterways connect the village with the outside world. They had been extremely important in the history of the village. The bigger waterways that connect to the outside are called *gang* while the smaller ones and branches are called *bang*. First, they were the sources of irrigation and drinking water, so in the past every house was built next to rivers or canals. Second, they provided cheap and convenient transportation before the time of highways. There are several rivers and canals that connect the village to nearby towns, going all the way to Shanghai and the East China Sea. Third, they provided a fishery, which was another source of protein. Last but not least, the mud in the river bottom was good fertilizer for rice paddies. For thousands of years, the rivers, rice field and higher land have combined to form a good eco-system that has made the local people self-sufficient. The Huayuan region had produced goods for the rest of China, so much so that it had earned itself the honour of '*sichou zhi fu, yumi zhi xiang*' (home of silk, fish and rice).

The introduction of highways and roads has made the rivers less important, but still they

are an important part of the landscape. In the process of industrialization, rivers have been polluted. But recent years have witnessed an increasing awareness among the local residents of the importance of the environment. There have been efforts to clean the rivers and by 2009 most of the waterways have been cleaned. The challenge now is how to protect the waterways from new sources of pollution.

### *The economy*

The last three decades have witnessed a transition of the local economy from a purely agricultural one to a mainly industrial one. This is reflected in the projected GDP of the village for 2008: 180 million Yuan for industry and 25.6 million Yuan for agriculture. Since the start of the village leather-processing factory in 1979, villagers have increasingly depended on wages earned in factories. The average per capita income, according to village statistics, was about 8900 Yuan in 2006. This was more than double the national average rural income per capita of 3524 yuan in that same year.

Most of the people in the age group 20-60 are working in village factories or factories in nearby villages and towns. Some have their own small businesses. Those working in factories still help out with work on the land, particular in busy seasons. However, those who work only on the land are usually men and women in their 50s and 60s.

The main work on the land involves the cultivation of one crop of rice, various kinds of vegetables, and raising silkworms. Traditionally, rice provides the staple food for the population and sales of silk provide cash income for village households. Grain production used to include rice, wheat, yam, soy bean, pumpkin, and broad bean. Vegetables include the *zhacai* or mustard tuber, cucumber, string bean, rutabaga, radish, cabbage, ginger, garlic, onion and other common green vegetables.



*Cansang*, or planting mulberry trees and raising silkworms, has been the traditional production activity that constituted the major source of income. There could be five crops to coincide with the growing seasons of mulberry leaves: spring, summer and autumn (three crops of early, mid, late autumn). The most important one is the spring crop.

Farm animals include pigs, sheep, ducks, chickens, geese and rabbits. There have been no draft animals. The animals provide not only meat and eggs, but also organic fertilizer for the field. With the introduction of chemicals, the second function has become less significant. As a result, pigs are no longer raised by every household. They are left to a few who raise pigs as the main family business. Only a few chickens and ducks can be found roaming the paths near farm houses. However, sheep are still raised by most households as they are easy and cheap to feed, and their waste makes good organic fertilizer.

The economic development in the region is reflected in the buildings that have been constructed by individual households. The housing boom of the villagers started not long after the economic reforms. In the early to mid 1980s, single-storey houses (*pingfang*) of brick and tile were the main form of housing. During that period, most families dismantled the older houses and built more spacious single-storey ones. From the late 1980s and mid-1990s, there was a trend to build two-storey buildings (*loufang*). Since the mid 1990s, new styles of buildings have replaced the old ones, and three-storey buildings have become the norm. Most of the construction of three-storey concrete buildings was completed between 1995 and 2005, during which China experienced a rapid economic boom. These buildings are usually decorated outside with tiles and glass. The interiors of the buildings are fitted up to a modern standard too. Many are equipped with air-conditioners, cable TV (now going digital), and other electronic devices. Fuels for cooking used to be mainly hay and wood, harvested from the fields (hay from rice, wheat, oil seeds, and wood from mulberry or other trees). But now the major sources of power

are liquefied petroleum gas and electricity.

### *Local government*

The village is the lowest administrative level of government. The head of the village has been the secretary of the village branch of the CCP. As the secretary of the CCP, s/he is the most powerful person in the village, although in name the head of the village now is the director of the governing body of the village, which is called ‘*cunmin weiyuanhui*’, or Villagers’ Committee. In Xinyue, there are 3 members in the Villagers’ Committee. They are elected by all villagers to serve 3-year terms. The current party secretary serves as the head of the Villagers Committee. There is another organization in the village which is called the Management Committee of the Society of Economic Cooperation. The committee head of this body is again the party secretary. There are 9 people who serve in the current village level bureaucracies; among them are 6 men and 3 women.

When I first arrived in Xinyue early January 2008, I was told that the village administration had just moved into its new office compound at the northern rim of the village. It is a three-storey brick-concrete building, with air-conditioned office rooms. There is a big auditorium on the third floor, with modern equipment such as a computer and a projector. The party secretary drives a car to work each day. Other village administration staff ride motor bikes. There is a canteen on the first floor. A woman in her mid fifties is employed to make lunch everyday. There are also sports facilities: an indoor room for playing table tennis and an outdoor basketball court.

### *Family and marriage*

The traditional rural family was large, with parents, married children and grandchildren living under the same roof. However, in recent decades, the average family size has been

shrinking. The nuclear family is now more typical, with a couple raising one or two children. Sometimes both or either of the grandparents live with them, so the typical size of a household is three to five people.

Most of the marriages have been arranged by parents. The customs have it that when a young man or woman has come of age, their parents will ask a matchmaker to arrange a marriage. Most marriages are patrilocal, that is, young people live in the birthplace of the husband after getting married. Marriage arrangements usually involve an engagement and wedding. Both the engagement and wedding are major social events for the family and the neighbourhood. Close relatives, most importantly, uncles and aunts of the bride or groom (on both father's and mother's side) are always invited for a feast. They also have the obligation to give some gifts or money as a form of congratulations.

There is a common saying in China that one brings up children to provide against old age (*yang-er-fang-lao*). However, in Xinyue village and the area around it, there is no age for old people registered as rural residents to retire. In fact, those in their 60s and 70s, or even 80s, are the main group of people who are now taking care of agricultural production. Old people who have lost the ability to work have to depend on their children (preferably sons if they have any) in old age. If they have more than one grown son, the old parents may take turns to eat with them. Some grown sons may share the care of old parents in an arrangement in which one parent lives with one son and the other lives with another. Conflicts do occur between generations or siblings, but most families live harmoniously.

Relations between family members are changing as families now have fewer children. Currently, most families with only daughters try to arrange for the son-in-law to live with them after the wedding. This type of uxorilocal marriage arrangement is known as 'calling in a son-in-law (*zhao nǚxu*)'. In case where the son-in-law is an only child, new arrangements have to be made. An emerging phenomenon is called 'opening doors at both

ends' (*liangtou kaimen*). This means that the couple agree to reside in both families and provide one heir for each family name.

It should be added that the region has experienced low fertility in recent years. According to most recent statistics, Songwang County has experienced five consecutive years of negative population growth from 2005 to 2009 in terms of natural population growth rate (i.e. comparing the number of births with the number of deaths). The sex ratio has been in balance (I am not quoting exact source for reason of anonymity).

But if the migrant workers are counted as residents, the picture of population growth would be different. More than 2000 people were added to the population of Songwang in 2009 compared with 2008. There is also a rising phenomenon of local young people marrying migrants. In the past, it has been mainly local men taking migrants as wives. Now there are growing numbers of local women having migrants as 'called-in husbands'.

### *Education*

There are variations in literacy level among the different age groups. For those in their 60s or older, most have not completed primary school in terms of formal education. Those born after 1950s have at least some education, but the boom in education came in early 1970s when there was a nation-wide movement to move schools to the village level. At one time there were four sites in the village where there were classes. Secondary level classes were offered and according to one of the retired teachers, the two groups of junior high graduates contributed a great deal to the work force when in late 1970s the village factory was established.

The village elementary school used to be located at the site where there are four factories to the south of the highway. It was relocated to its new site to the north of the highway in

the late 1980s. The main part of the school is a three-storey building, which used to accommodate most village children. But in recent years, the local children are sent to the Central Elementary School at Manqiao, which is about 2 kilometres away. Only elementary levels 1 to 3 are provided now at the village school. There are five teachers. Children after Grade Four have to go to Manqiao to continue their education. Starting from fall of 2008, the site for Xinyue School is reserved for children of the migrant workers. Only one class of grade 2 is there for the time being. They are soon to move to Manqiao too. The children are taken to and from school by parents or grandparents.

The older children, from grade 4 up, first go to Manqiao to attend school. They generally stay there until the end of junior high. And then they either leave school or go to bigger towns to attend senior high school. The best senior high schools are in the county seat, though there are two other towns where students could go. Some parents who can afford it are having their children sent to schools in the county town of Heshui from elementary school. They need first to buy a house in the town so that they can get their child registered at the town to be eligible to go to school there. Usually at least one parent would have to move his/her registered residency (*hukou*) to the town.

### *Marketplace*

The village centre is located at the south bank of the river that runs from west to east across the village of Xinyue. There are three teahouses, three grocery stores, two butcher shops, two barber shops, a noodle shop, a breakfast shop, one fertilizer store and two entertainment rooms. Early in the morning, from about 5 to 6 a.m., the street businesses start to open, on both sides of the street. There are also peddlers who bring things such as fish, vegetables, and barbecued meat for sale. Along the south-north highways there are 4 more grocery shops which are smaller than the ones in the center.

### *Transport*

Since most people now work in factories and children go to schools, roads and means of transport have been changed greatly in recent years. The narrow, mud roads have been replaced by paved roads. Almost every house in the village can now be reached by car. Since 1999, the village has invested more than 2 million Yuan to construct cement roads totaling 27 kilometres.

Every morning at about 7 am, I could see motorbikes coming from the smaller paths leading to each hamlet and joining the main highway. They are the people going to factories and/or taking children to school. There are also some families who have bought cars. There are still bicycles and tricycles, but these are mainly used by older villagers. In the past, most people depended on shoulder poles to carry heavy goods. Now with better and wider roads, they use carts or tricycles to transport goods and people for short distance. Building materials are also transported by tractor.

### *Medical care*

There is a clinic in the village, with three local doctors and one pharmacist. Villagers go there for minor illnesses. They also go there to receive injections or infusions after they have been treated in a bigger hospital. The clinic also provides drugs and equipment for family planning (contraceptives are free for both village residents and migrant workers). In recent years, medical insurance is offered but it is still insufficient to cover major costs. For households with senior persons, the most fearful event is cancer-related illness that may cost the family tens of thousands of yuan to have the patient treated at big hospitals in Hangzhou or Shanghai.

## *Crime*

The place is generally safe except for complaints about petty thefts, such as break-ins during the nights in households for stealing chickens and ducks. My landlord, Uncle Ah Shun's courtyard was broken into in the summer of 2009. All the 5 chickens and 4 ducks were stolen. Two groups have been the targets of public disapproval, migrants who have no steady jobs and local youngsters who have quit school but have not taken steady jobs. The police sometimes become the target of discontent as they could not detain or charge the young men for petty thefts.

## *Religion and festivals*

There used to be a temple in the village, but it was destroyed during the Cultural Revolution of the late 1960s. Near the old site, an old lady has put a statue of Bodhisattva in her own house. It has attracted many believers nearby to come and worship on special days. Old ladies are the main group that practice Buddhism.

The lives of villagers still mainly follow the Chinese lunar calendar. The New Year starts in the Spring Festival. The old year ends on New Year's Eve. At this time, families would hold ceremonies to thank all the gods and ancestors by providing food and wine on a table. Candles are lit and special foods are served (usually big pieces of pork, whole chicken, fish, and rice cakes). As in most other parts of China, firecrackers are let off. Loud noises can be heard throughout the night of the New Year's Eve.

Other important festivals include *Qingming* (Pure Brightness), *Duanwu* (May 5), *Zhongyuan* (around 15 July, so locals call it *Qiyue ban*, or 'half into July'), *Zhongqiu* (Mid-autumn, also known as *Bayue ban*, for 'half into August'), and *Dongzhi* (Winter Solstice). On almost all these special days, together with birth and/or death anniversaries of important ancestors, ceremonies are held individual households to commemorate the

ancestors. On *Qingming* and *Dongzhi*, family members go to visit the graves of their ancestors to pay respect, which is called *shangfen* or *saomu* (sweeping the tomb).

#### **7.4 The village gender order**

##### *Division of labour*

There used to be labels or terms that refer to different kinds of labour on the basis of gender and/or age, such as men's jobs, women's jobs, and old men's jobs. In the collective years, these labels for different categories of jobs were used as criteria for the different workpoints earned by different people for a day's work. A young person who started to work at about 12 years of age earned the lowest number of workpoints, just the equivalent of an adult sheep (sheep earned workpoints because they provide fertilizer). The child would be jokingly said to earn a '*laomuyang gongfen*'—a 'ewe's workpoint'.

Re-examining the gendered division of labour in the collective years reveals that the gender-equal doctrine at that time did not change the gender order much. It was not until the return to private household farming and development in local industry, paradoxically, that the more rigid traditional gender order was disrupted. As land was contracted to individual households, women from those families that had no male labour had to undertake the tasks traditionally allocated to men: a prominent case was administering pesticides, which used to be strictly a men's job.

There have been changes in gender relations brought about by industry and commerce. There are now at least three women from the village who hold top management positions at the factories. Some women are running shops and restaurants or working as peddlers. These had been exclusively male jobs in the past. Meanwhile, men no longer dominate as factory workers: educational qualifications, skills, seniority, and leadership are more



important than gender.

Despite that, there is still an observable division of labour based on gender, though there is more variety and exception. Some take it for granted that men do not need to do housework such as cleaning the house and washing clothes, while others would like men to share the work. For instance, Xuelian gives one reason for her to have liked her husband before they were married: he was willing to wash his own clothes. The veteran soldier Du Songlin reports that after he returned from military service, he maintained his habit of washing his own clothes. After marriage, both Xuelian's husband and Songlin gave the task of washing clothes to their wives. This is the power of custom. There used to be a saying '*nan zuo nü gong, yue zuo yue qiong*': If a man does 'women's work', the longer he works in it, the poorer he will get.

### *Power*

The fact that there are now women who take up top management position in local business seems to support the official stance that the traditional subordination of women to men no longer stands. But the issue is not as simple as that. In general, the village power structure still reflects gender hierarchy. In village government, the person who holds the most important positions of the party secretary and director of the Villagers' Committee is a man. All but one of the 26 heads of villagers' groups are men. Of the 10 cadres working at the village administration building, there are three women, aged from mid 20s to mid 40s. All three are responsible for the more women-related responsibilities: health care, family planning, mediation (of *inter-* and *intra-* family disputes), and affairs related to women, the disabled, senior peasants, and youth and children. This could be regarded as the extension of the gendered division of labor, but it is more significantly put in the category of power, as the three female cadres do enjoy a privileged position over ordinary villagers.

The village is the local level of patriarchy. Take the Chinese state, and we observe in the dimension of power what Esther Chow calls 'state patriarchy' (Chow, 2003). In Chapter 4 I have argued that the Chinese state is still male dominated. This study does not focus on the national level, but it will look at the marriage arrangement and customs that have put men as head of family. In dealing with relations with women, Jianqiang (chapter 15) was rebellious in his youth (to his mother) and took over as family head (*dangjia*) soon after getting married by urging his parents to divide the household (*fenjia*) between him and his younger brother. He takes control of both his wife and daughter on decisions as trivial as choices of his daughter's toys and clothing. Jianqiang's conduct can be connected to local hegemonic masculinity in that he wants to dominate women as well as other men.

### *Emotional relations*

It is observed that romantic relations between young men and young women are now more likely to be developed spontaneously as they have more opportunities to meet each other in schools, workplaces, entertainment venues, and social gatherings. They may directly express their affection for someone they admire, but the more common form of courtship is to find someone as a matchmaker so that the relationship can receive approval from the community as well as the parents of the concerned young couples. The rituals for a romantic relationship which leads to marriage now consist of a formal engagement and wedding. Pre-marital cohabitation would have been frowned upon before the reform years. But since the mid 1980s it has been common for young couples to cohabit once engaged. Parents, relatives and the community in general have become more tolerant about young people's life style.

Though most spousal relations are stable, there are occasional cases of divorce and extramarital affairs. There have been stories about coercive relations between men in

power and women workers in the factory. One man who runs a factory has a son with his mistress. Regarding extramarital affairs and sexuality, one informant tells me about the double standard that still exists: when an extramarital liaison is disclosed, people tend to regard it as natural if it involves a married man, but if a married woman is involved in an affair, she would receive more disapproval.

Homosocial relations, especially among men of similar age or experience, are highly valued. A young man would socialise with several ‘little friends (*xiao pengyou*)’, who are often former classmates or colleagues. Likewise, a young woman may have some ‘little sisters (*xiao jiemei*)’ with whom she often hang out together. These friends are often considered as close as relatives. They would visit each other during holidays and invite each other to be present at important events. However, homosexual relations are not spoken of in the village.

Public expression of intimate feelings is not common. Men are even ridiculed if they show care for their wives in public. This is why Cuiwa used the notion of being ‘*nankan*’, or attracting unwanted public attention, when she comments on her husband Hongjiang’s taking breakfast to her workplace: ‘He does not care about being “*nankan*”’, which implies that he may risk being ridiculed.

### *Symbolic relations*

As some of the respondents have pointed out, in rural China, there are still many people who maintain an attitude of *zhong-nan-qing-nü*, or valuing males more highly than females. In their relations with family members, such as spouses and children, this ideology is sometimes reasserted but sometimes contradicted. Therefore it is important to realise the complexity of the belief system and the actual practices of the people. This will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 17.

There is still the custom of paying a brideprice by the bridegroom's side to the bride's parents in patrilocal marriage arrangements. The amount of money paid for each marriage has increased from less than 200 yuan in the early 1970s to more than 20,000 yuan by the time I was at the village. This reflects both inflation of the currency and the rising standard of living. Gender is at issue here, because this payment gives men the symbolic power over their wives. It appears that families with daughters can make a profit from receiving brideprice. But in fact, the bride's parents by custom spend the money they receive on dowry for their daughters weddings. They may also use part of the money entertaining guests at the wedding reception (in the local custom, the bride's and the groom's families hold separate wedding ceremonies on the same day, each inviting their own relatives, friends and neighbours as guests). As a result both the bride's and groom's parents have to save money for the wedding. The association of brideprice with mercenary marriage (*maimai hunyin*) was attacked in the Maoist years (together with arranged marriage or *baoban hunyin*) as remnants of feudalism. Mercenary marriage in its literal sense did happen in 1980s and 1990s in Xinyue. For some families that could not find local girls to marry their sons, the parents of these families would pay a professional or amateur human trafficker a few thousand yuan to 'purchase' a wife for their son. Most of these wives were from Yunnan, Sichuan, and Guizhou, the poor regions in southwestern China. In recent years, such cases become rare. There are still marriages between local men and women from other regions, but their marriages now seldom involve monetary transaction as there are more channels for the women to choose partners through the introduction of friends and relatives.

### *Different spaces for men and women*

As far as space is concerned, the women's space in labour, leisure and other social activities used to be segregated from that of men. An obvious difference in space has been

the teahouse and the temple. There have not been formally claimed exclusions, but the teahouse is a place for men's gathering and socialising while the temple has been that of women. At the old lady's house where a statue of Bodhisattva is housed, there was a gathering of celebration for the birthday of Bodhisattva. In July 2008, I saw about 100 women, most of them in their 60s and 70s, many with grandchildren to take care of. Old ladies often get together to chant sutra (*nianfo*) to pray for people recently deceased, for ancestors, or for safety in the case of building a new house. They make a small amount of money if there is a host who hires them to chant sutra.

### **7.5 Conclusion**

The village of Xinyue is a dynamic community. Its industrial production has provided both villagers and migrant workers with jobs, while at the same time most households still maintain the traditional agricultural production of rice, silk, and vegetables. The villagers are hardworking people: many take double shifts in the literal sense. The local factories seem to be always under-staffed. Workdays are long and public holidays are seldom observed except for the Chinese New Year. This might have to do with the rural cycle of work that has put the men and women toiling on the land all year round. Workers do complain, but so far, there has only been increase in wages, not holidays. For some workers, their double shifts mean that they need to tend their crops in the field or silkworms at home before and after their work in the factory. For women, there is still the western feminist sense of a second shift: housework and childcare, though these are often left for older women in the family if three generations live in the same household.

Xinyue people are friendly and supportive to me as a researcher. I was warmly received in the village offices, in the village market street, and in households that I visited. The people are looking forward to better lives with modernised housing, clothing, eating, transportation and education of the younger generation. They still want to keep their relationship with the land and to make the land productive while developing industry and

commerce. People are also more aware of problems such as the environment, health, and crime. The next two parts will present data collected in the ethnography by introducing men and women in various ages and occupations. Through the focus on gender relations, this study hopes to achieve the purpose of contributing to better understanding contemporary China and its people.

# PART IV

## MASCULINITY IN THE EXPERIENCE OF MEN

The main source of data in my fieldwork has been life history interviews, conducted with both men and women. In the next two parts a selection of the life histories are presented as case studies to give a more tangible picture of the construction of masculinity in daily life.

Part Four starts in Chapter 8, with a selection of ethnographic and conversational snapshots. They are taken from nine of the interviews with men, chosen to illustrate important themes of masculinity in village life.

Following this, in Chapters 9-12, four full-scale case studies of men are presented. These cases have been chosen to indicate the diversity of social experiences, and major configurations of masculinity, within the village.

## CHAPTER 8

### MEN AND MASCULINITY IN VILLAGE LIFE

In this chapter, material from a range of interviews with men is presented in the form of ethnographic or conversational snapshots, illustrating issues about masculinity and gender relations in village life. How such issues are woven together biographically will be seen in the extended case studies in chapters 9 to 12.

The nine men in this chapter are:

Ah Geng, 76, veteran PLA soldier, retired director of workshop in township kiln;

Aiguo, 40, accountant in a Taiwanese owned company;

Baisong, 29, worker in the same company as Aiguo;

Hongbing, 21, university student;

Hongfei, 31, computer technician in a big hotel in Heshui;

Songlin, 37, current CCP village branch secretary, veteran PLA soldier;

Weiqiang, 36, school teacher;

Wenjun, 23, recent university graduate;

Dr. Yu, 72, retired pharmacist and doctor.

#### **8.1 On the one-child policy**

One of the common topics that emerged in my life history interviews is the one-child policy and its impact on the respondents. There are different experiences and views among them. Some of the interviewees are only sons themselves. I will start with Wenjun, who is 23 and just graduated from university. When I ask him about child-raising, Wenjun says that he does not care about the gender of his children, but he would like to have two children if possible. As an only child, he has felt lonely for most of his life. He thinks he would have had a happier childhood if he had a sibling to play with. He partly attributes his personality of being an introvert to his loneliness in early life. His happy memories are



times when he was playing with cousins. He gives the following observation about his childhood:

If I had had a brother while growing up, I might have lived a better life and have developed more healthily. I wanted myself to be more active and lively, but without a companion, I could only watch TV.

Here Wenjun uses a rather formal expression ‘to develop healthily’, which means not only being healthy in a physical sense, but also refers to mental well being.

Aiguo himself is one of five siblings. He has a son who has just started high school in 2008. When I asked him if he would have considered having another child had he had a daughter instead of a son, he said that he was happy to have a son, but he did not feel strongly about the gender of the child. Even if he had a daughter, he would not consider having another child. His view on gender equity is interesting. On the one hand he believes that women and men should enjoy equal rights; on the other, their differences in abilities should be recognised too. He uses the typical local example of ‘*tiaodan*’ (carrying weight on the shoulder with a carrying pole): ‘an average woman might be able to carry 100 *jin*, but an average man could carry at least 150 *jin*’. He also cites another case to support his view: in times of emergency, women are more likely to panic while men are more calm (*zhenjing*) and tough (*jianqiang*). If a family member is involved in a traffic accident, women may collapse upon hearing the news and need to be taken care of. Men, on the other hand, would face up to an emergency with calm.

Hongfei received an education in Hangzhou and is now working in the hospitality sector in Heshui, the county town. He was married and had a 2-year-old daughter at the time of the interview in 2008. He talks about different attitudes toward preference of the child’s gender in his family: he preferred a boy, but he loves his daughter anyway. His wife

preferred a girl. Interestingly enough, both of Hongfei's parents preferred a girl, which is unusual among people of that generation.

Baisong has a son already, but he would like to have another child if state policy allows. If he could, he would like to have a daughter, because he thinks that it will be much harder to raise two sons. He is one of rare cases of men who have a twin brother. I will give more of his story later in the chapter.

From the above examples and other cases in Chapters 9-12, it is demonstrated that the population policy has had differential impact on the men from Xinyue village. What these respondents have in common is that the gender of the child no longer matters as critically to them as it once did.

## **8.2 Gender in education**

Gender has shaped relations among students and between teachers and students. The village school is a site where many of the men interviewed have had memories of their childhood. The wooden desks in the classroom were of rectangular shape and two students would share one desk. Students who shared a desk were known as '*tongzhuo*', or 'deskmate', following other names such as classmate, roommate, and workmate. In elementary school, there was almost an unwritten rule that a desk should be shared by one boy and one girl. There was a popular song in the mid 1990s with the name *You Were My Deskmate*, which expressed a young men's memory of the girl who used to be his deskmate. The song is full of affection, which might be interpreted as love repressed. But the men I interviewed in the village talk about their relationship with girls in a different way. First, there was a line cut in the middle of the desk marking the territory. If a deskmate invaded the territory of his/her deskmate, disputes might arise. As Hongbing, a 21-year-old university student, recalls in his account of school play, boys would play with boys in groups. If a boy joined the girls in a girls' game, he was sure to be rejected by

other boys when he wanted to join them in other games. The children's groups or teams at that time were gender specific and exclusive.

The deliberate mixing of gender in seating arrangement at primary school does not continue when students enter secondary school. Now, instead of pairing a boy with a girl at one desk, the school tries to segregate boys from girls. This is the time when boys and girls start to develop romantic feelings for each other. So the teachers are trying to stop them from having too intimate relations by creating some space between them. However, this cannot stop boys and girls from expressing affection and admiration. Baisong's story later in the chapter will illustrate this.

In senior high school, as Wenjun reports, some students start dating. If their teachers find out about the relations, they would have a talk with the students and caution them to put their preparation for the university entrance examination as a priority. But teachers refrain from direct interference in students' private relations. This is different from when I was in high school in the early 1980s when the students could be expelled for dating. According to Wenjun, love and sex are no longer taboos at Chinese universities. Students no longer hide their emotional attachments to each other. They go out together as couples openly. Some universities offer selective courses in sex and gender related areas, treating issues such as homosexuality. Sex and romantic love are hot topics on university BBS (Bulletin Board System within university via the Internet), such as the 'Love' column and 'Singles' column.

As a school teacher, Weiqiang has his view on differences between boys and girls. He observes that girls mature earlier than boys and they generally work harder than boys. He attributes this to gender differences in early family education: for those families that have had a girl first and then a son, the son is often spoiled. He says that girls take homework more seriously than boys. There are more boys who fail to finish doing homework.

Weiqliang's view on gender difference in education resonates with Wenjun's account of his experience as a boy majoring in engineering. In Wenjun's senior high school class which was science-oriented, there were only 8 girls out of 53. But there were occasions when all the eight girls ranked among the top 10 in some exams. The situation did not change much at his university class, which had only 3 girls out of 20 students. The girls again out-performed boys in academic achievements on average. Wenjun also associates female students' 'natural' traits (such as being more conscientious, careful, and self-disciplined) with their success at school. When I point out the contradiction that in both his cases girls were the minority, he reasons that girls may be good at studying, but they may not necessarily out-perform boys in future when they enter society. He is implying here that boys have greater potential that has not been tapped in the current education system. They just have not spent enough time and effort on study. When they mature, they are sure to out-perform their female counterparts. Male students' traits often include absent-mindedness, carelessness, and love for 'play'—whether sporting events or other activities. Still, in his final comment, Wenjun admits that 'what males students can do, female students can do too'.

### **8.3 Encountering military masculinity**

Du Songlin, who had served 4 years in the armed forces and is now the village CCP secretary and chief of the Villagers' Committee, provides vivid descriptions of his first two months at the training camp—*xinbing lian* or the new soldiers company. He gives cinematic narrations of the almost 20-hour train ride from his hometown to the military camp, the first meal at a military service station during the trip (he had to use the handle of the toothbrush as a chopstick), the officers who greeted him, the first dinner at the military camp where the staple food was not rice but noodles (a shock for someone who had lived on rice daily), the first night at the camp (when they were told to eat everything they had brought with them from home as after that night the food and snacks would be

confiscated), the first day of drilling under the sun in a hot March day in coastal southern China (all had their uniform sweat-soaked as if coming out of water; many fainted), the sleep-deprived nights and fear and anxiety of the collection whistles (whenever they hear the whistles blow, they had to get everything ready for marches or drills), and the original tension between soldiers from different regions and the gradual build-up of comradeship among them.

The training mainly took the forms of marches and drills:

There is a term called '*san da bufa*'—three major marches: quick(-time) march, parade step (march), and running (march) (*qibu*, *zhengbu*, and *paobu*). They all look simple. The drills also include turn right, turn left, stand at attention, and stand in army posture. They all look very simple. These are all that we do for more than two months.

What made the new soldiers' life more challenging was that they had to be alert at night for calls to get up and join the marches or drills at short notice. They had to get themselves dressed and have the quilt packed to carry on their backs on marches in 5 minutes. Songlin gives a detailed account of one incident that happened on a march during which one of the soldiers' quilt packs went loose. He had to hold it in his arms while running. He tripped and fell and hurt his knees. Other soldiers took turns to help him carry the quilt and finally they all managed to reach the destination. The commander later criticised the soldier for his sloppy packing of the quilt, but praised his fellow soldiers for helping out. And Songlin added that among the soldiers who had extended a helping hand, there were those from Jiangxi province, whom he had not liked much before the incident.

When I ask about the rationale behind the harshness, Songlin gives this explanation:

Why such harshness? There are four points: one is to obey orders, one is to be in unison, one is discipline, one is emphasis on the organisation, not the individual. The exact slogans at that time were: The whistle is an order. There can be no excuse. Where there is an order, you can only obey.

The military training and services have left a significant impact on Songlin's life. He reflects that

while at home, which is backward, I have no knowledge and experience of the outside. I had never travelled very far. At that time there were few households in the village that had TV sets. Fujian opened up earlier. Serving in the armed forces gave me knowledge and experience, together with a social network of acquaintances. I keep contact with many of my fellow servicemen.

The theme of hardship (*ku*) will be discussed in many life histories in this ethnography. In Songlin's case, his memories of hardship are of two kinds. One was the childhood scarcity of material wealth. (He recalls that at school, every day he was hungry and wishing his mother to bring lunch early. If she came later than other parents, he would be upset.) The other was the physical and mental challenges during the two-month military training.

After Du Songlin returned home from the military, he worked first as a sales person for chrysanthemum tea. He later joined the village administration and worked first as accountant, then party secretary and in 2003 he took the position of CCP branch secretary (*shuji*).

A very interesting description in his account has been about his participation in housework and childcare. When he had just returned home from military service, he was

still used to washing his own clothing. After his daughter started to go to school, he and his wife made a deal: he would take their daughter to school (by car), and she would wash the clothes.

Uncle Ah Geng had 14 years of military service from the early 1950s. I will discuss his experience in a later section in the chapter.

#### **8.4 Changing division of labour**

In chapter 7, a brief account was given about the traditional division of labour in gender perspective and some significant tendencies towards change. Wenjun provides an interesting observation about his parents' history of employment. Both had worked in the village factory for many years. When the factory was under collective ownership, Wenjun's father worked in leather processing, which was dirty and generally reserved for men. (Songlin had experienced it before he joined the air force. He used three words to describe the jobs of men in the factory then: 'heavy, dirty and smelly'.) Wenjun's mother made jackets. After privatisation, they both left the factory at the original site and went to work for other factories. Now Wenjun's mother is in management, as a supervisor for production and quality inspection, while his father works in another factory as a low level warehouse keeper.

Wenjun's grandfather had worked in the factory too, but he just worked as a cook. He is now retired and does cooking for both of his two sons' households. Cooking is an interesting issue. As men get old, the previously feminine responsibility of food preparation gradually shifted to men, as they no longer can or need to take on heavy labour. In my fieldnote of February 2008, there is an old man in his 70s who cooks lunch for his three sons' households one after another. Even a 90 year old man that I met in 2008 helped out with cooking.

Aiguo and his wife Feng have an interesting arrangement: he keeps a wage-earning job while she runs a fashion shop. Both Aiguo and Feng used to work for the village factory. Later, when private ventures were encouraged by the government, they decided that one of them should quit the factory job and start some business venture. Since Aiguo's salary was higher, it was arranged that Feng left the factory to open a shop in Beixiang where there is a large market for the trading of woollen garments. The business was OK at the beginning, but increasing competition made it tougher. Aiguo and Feng decided to change strategy. They looked for brand-name products and succeeded in a bid for the exclusive right to open a shop in Heshui to sell a nationally known brand of women's fashion clothes. The business was a success and Feng's profits from the shop have surpassed Aiguo's income as an accountant.

When I ask Aiguo about the impact of the changing proportions of contribution to the family finance on their spousal relations, he says that since it is a family business, neither of them feels that s/he should take more credit. It is just a practical division of labour between the two of them:

Generally, my wife has been responsible for the routine operation and management of the shop. I went to the fairs organized by the company to place orders. I went to sign contracts with the manufacturer of the brand. Purchasing of stock and transaction of payments are all my responsibility. There is also the image of the shop. Every few years, there is a need to refurbish the shop. I go to the shop from time to time to inspect. For instance to make sure that it meets hygiene standards.

For Baisong, who became a father about 10 months before the interview, his understanding of gendered division of labour has changed with changing circumstances. As a young father, Baisong is learning to be more thoughtful and contribute to domestic work such as bathing the baby and changing nappies. When other members of the family



are busy, he makes breakfast before going to work and cooks dinner after coming back from work.

Similar experiences have been reported by Weiguo (Chapter 12). But it should be noted that in the accounts given by women, from their mid-30s to mid-40s, husbands seldom helped out with baby-care (Chapters 13, 14 and 16).

### **8.5 Changes in dating and marriage arrangements**

The traditional Chinese marriage arrangement followed the eight-character rule of '*fumu zhi ming, meishuo zhi yan*'—order from parents and words from the matchmaker. This is still reflected in the marriage arrangements over generations of men and women in the village. A change has been that parents now tend to ask young people for their opinion; and matchmakers, instead of being professionals, are often friends and relatives who offer to help. A new pattern of marriage arrangement has emerged in which young people first get to know each other by themselves or through some mutual friends. They date each other for a while and when they have decided that they like each other, they would ask parents to get a matchmaker to arrange for the marriage following the traditional rituals.

Both Weiqiang, the school teacher, and Hongfei, a hotel computer engineer, talk about their experience in that way. They call their experience at the stage of courtship autonomous dating '*ziyou lian'ai*', as it is generally known in China after 1949. Both Weiqiang and Hongfei dated colleagues and they encountered no objections from parents. Their style of marriage arrangement is the typical combination of *ziyou lian'ai* and traditional arrangement. Hongfei worked as management staff when his wife was working as receptionist at the hotel. He said, 'at that time, we were rather pure. Because we liked each other, we got together (*xihuan jiu zai yiqi*), without considering family backgrounds or status.' ('*xihuan*' means 'being fond of' in the vernacular, which is used predominantly as a word for romantic affection.)

Other stories, however, are not as trouble-free. Baisong talks about his experience of romantic relations as a junior high school student. He puts one of the reasons for his quitting school at Grade 2 of junior high as having spent too much time and effort dating different girls. He describes one tall and good-looking girl student in particular. In order to send her a message telling her that he cared for her, Baisong first asked to borrow a book from the girl. He then inserted a note in the book when he returned it to her. As for the girl, she was fond of Baisong too. After she had read the message, she did the same thing. She borrowed a book from him and inserted a note. They maintained the relationship in secret. But there was another girl in the same school who was bolder. When she decided that she wanted to date Baisong, she threw a love letter to him one day from the top floor of the school building, shouting out aloud that she loved him. The first girl that Baisong dated must have heard of this. That was the end of his relationship with her. Baisong admits that actually several girls expressed interest in him. But none of the relationships worked out. He finally accepted an arranged uxori-local marriage, as this was economically more viable. (I will discuss a similar experience of innocent love that did not bear fruit in Chapter 10. In the extended case studies, Jiangyang talks about his innocent love with a village girl with whom they had hung out since childhood. They had to end the relationship because parents from neither side approved this.)

### **8.6 Being in a uxori-local marriage—the called-in son-in-law**

Uxori-local marriage arrangements have been around in the region as long as people remember. There used to be stigma attached to the men who were ‘called-in sons-in-law’ (*shangmen nixu*) because they were put in the position of women. For the women’s families, the continuation of the family lineage was more important than their daughter getting a husband that she loved. For the men, often they agreed to live with in-laws and support them in their old age mainly for financial reasons: either they were very poor or they had too many brothers so their parents had difficulty building new houses for them to

get married patrilocally. In my interviews, Hongfei reports that he took his mother's family name because his father was from a poor background and was married to his mother uxorilocally. Aiguo's young brother was married uxorilocally because his parents-in-law sought him out.

I discussed with Baisong at length about the experience of being a '*shangmen nüxu*' or '*zhao nüxu*'. Baisong came from a nearby village. He has a twin brother. It was tragic to him that he had lost both parents by the time of his marriage. He is the younger of the twin brothers and it was arranged by uncles and aunts that he should leave home to live with his wife's family in Xinyue. The underlying economic incentive was obvious. The financial situation of his family made it unviable for both brothers to stay at their ancestral home. As Baisong puts it, 'If I had chosen to stay, we would have to build two houses'. He also reasons that since there are lots of young women about his age with no brothers, he could choose a good partner from a good family. In fact, when he was 'in the market', he was very popular.

When I ask him about his experience of living together with his parents-in-laws, he says that they have treated him well, but still it is different from living with his own parents. He could enjoy more freedom living at home with his own parents.

For instance, if I have to be away and back home late, it is alright when my parents asked about my whereabouts and require me to return as early as possible. But the same thing said from my in-laws would make me angry. ... When they ask me to help out with something, I am not in the position to decline, even if I have already had some other appointment. For instance, to hang out with friends for a card game. I have to take my in-laws' feelings into consideration. It is a dilemma. If it were my own parents, I could just tell the truth.

I was thinking at the time of the interview that Baisong could still be like a child in front of his own parents, but he has to behave like a mature and responsible man before his in-laws. I also ask if other people looked at him differently because of this marriage arrangement. Baisong says that he has never experienced discrimination from neighbours or co-workers.

There is another respondent who had a more complicated experience of marriage arrangement. I will discuss him in the following section—Uncle Ah Geng.

### **8.7 Adaptable masculinity**

Uncle Ah Geng was born in 1933. His life course went through five stages: 1) 1933-1950: In his early life in the village, Uncle Ah Geng was one of 7 siblings (4 boys 3 girls). His family did not own any land. He received no formal education and started to work as a labourer hired by landowners. He had good strength and developed a strong body. 2) 1950-1964: He joined the PLA and served in the military unit whose responsibility it was to protect the city of Shanghai. While serving in the military, he learnt to write letters to his family. He did not return home for ten years. Three years before his demobilisation, he was married to a girl from the same village, a marriage arranged by his parents. 3) 1964-1976: He returned home to work as a commune member in one of the production teams under Xinyue Brigade. Because of his military experience he was given the task of training the militia in the Brigade. He lived with his wife's family. He had modest means to support a large family, with old parents-in-law and 3 young children. 4) 1976-1994: He worked at a kiln established by the Commune as Director of Workshop, supervising more than 100 workers, the majority of whom were young men from different villages in the Commune. 5) Since 1994: He retired from the kiln and returned home, where he is still working on his family's contracted land, growing rice and raising silkworms, together with his wife.

When Uncle Ah Geng was married in the early 1960s, it was an arranged patrilocal marriage. The military at that time allowed wives to visit their husbands for a maximum one month per year. Uncle Ah Geng's wife only visited him once in the three years that he was still in the military. Three years into their marriage and after 14 years of military service, Uncle Ah Geng returned to the village and resumed his life as a peasant. He agreed to stay with his wife's household because his wife's only brother died at an immature age. Uncle Ah Geng's marriage was then turned to '*liangtou kaimen*', which meant that in lineage terms he and his wife were responsible for both families. They lived with his wife's parents as Uncle Ah Geng said:

To me it did not matter (which side to reside in). Our first daughter was born in my parents-in-law's house, so we lived with my in-laws since then. I was willing to take care of my father-in-law and mother-in-law. In my parents' home, I had three brothers anyway.

I decided to interview Uncle Ah Geng after I had had an informal talk with his nephew on his wife's side, Xiangfa. Xiangfa talks with respect of an episode that happened in the late 1970s when Uncle Ah Geng was director of workshop at the kiln. There were often fights between factions of young men at that time. Once some workers at the kiln were beaten by a group of men from another Commune. The workers turned to Uncle Ah Geng for help. His mere presence drove the young men from the other group away. Xiangfa said that Uncle Ah Geng had great admiration and awe from the workers for his masculine power and integrity.

However, Uncle Ah Geng chose to play down his own influence on his subordinates. He just said that when he was director of the workshop at the kiln, he had good relations with workers and that young people then were all hard workers, even though some of the 'lads' (*xiaohuozi*, or unmarried young men) did participate in group fights between factions. His

modesty is demonstrated also in his dealing with his entitlement to a new pension scheme for senior rural citizens.

Beginning from January 1, 2008, all villagers who have reached the age of 70 are entitled to a pension of 50 yuan per month. Until my interview with him in August, Uncle Ah Geng had not received any payment. He inquired about this at the village office in Xinyue why he did not get the pension. The explanation he got was that he was not entitled to it as he was on a pension from the military (which was 450 yuan per month). He knew from veterans in other villages that they had received the new 50 yuan pension in addition to their military one. However, Uncle Ah Geng chose not to demand his entitlement by going to a higher level authority as he was concerned that there might be a possibility that the other veterans would be deprived of their payment if there were provisions that they were indeed not entitled to it either. When I asked why he gave up demanding for his entitlement, he said that he did not want to be the 'bad person', even if he himself had to suffer loss (*chikui*).

### **8.8 Continuity and generational links**

Doctor Yu's life trajectory, comparable to that of Uncle Ah Geng, is one of significant changes. He was born to a family lineage with consecutive generations of medical professionals, which was significant in rural China in the past when public health services were unavailable. His ancestors practised traditional Chinese medicine and were best known in the region for their special knowledge in treating throat ailments. As a young man, Doctor Yu was trained both in medicine and pharmacy. When it was time for him to practise as a pharmacist, the local pharmacies had all been shifted to state ownership. He worked in a pharmacy at a nearby market town for almost a decade before he was sent to his home village to work as a member of the commune in the collective production team from 1962 to 1977. He had to marry a girl from a peasant family at 28. He was able to resume his job as a medical professional after 1977. He later helped both his sons find

jobs in the medical profession.

Dr. Yu has retired now, but he has never given up his family specialty in treating throat ailments. He believes that there are advantages of Chinese medicine over western medicine and both are indispensable. I find perseverance in Dr. Yu in his effort to pass on the heritage of a special knowledge that was passed down through his ancestors. It was such perseverance that has contributed to China's continuous civilization and culture in thousands of years although there had been countless turmoils and disasters in history. The Japanese invasion and occupation, the Great Leap Forward and its aftermaths of famine, and the Cultural Revolution are just examples of the turmoils that the Chinese civilization had recently endured and survived. In an interview that lasted about 90 minutes, there was no bitterness or blaming, there was just very calm narration of what he did and what happened to him and his family.

Uncle Ah Geng, Doctor Yu and Uncle Ah Shun all experienced hardship in their earlier lives. It is significant that none of them are telling their stories in the genre of 'speaking bitterness', a genre that encourages class-conscious expression of bitterness and hatred. They all took the past as history and wanted their children to have a better future.

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## CHAPTER 9

### UNCLE AH SHUN: RURAL MASCULINITY AND SOCIAL CHANGE

#### 9.1 Introduction: Profile of Uncle Ah Shun and his extended family

Uncle Ah Shun is one of the key figures in my fieldwork at Xinyue Village. I was introduced to Uncle Ah Shun and his family through a friend. Uncle Ah Shun and his wife Aunt Li live by themselves in a two-storey house. Their children are all grown and have left home. They let me stay in their son's suite at the east side on the second floor. They themselves live in the room at the west side. During my stay with them, uncle and aunt served me three meals a day. Uncle Ah Shun also offered me his home-made rice wine to drink together with him. We would have long chats over dinner, enjoying wine, cigarettes, and tea.

Uncle Ah Shun is in his early 70s. He is of medium height and weight for a person of his age. He has short grey hair. He rides an old bicycle to the market at the former village centre every morning at about 5. He is always smiling when he talks to me. Uncle Ah Shun is a good story teller. When he talks about something in the past that he finds funny, he would laugh heartily. Every day after I came back from my visit to other places, when we were having dinner and tea after dinner, he would tell me something about his family and the village. He also introduced me to many of the villagers as well as his family members.

This study would not have been possible without the generous help of Uncle Ah Shun and his family. I will acknowledge elsewhere my appreciation of their support. For this chapter I will take uncle Ah Shun as one of the informants who agreed to my recorded interview. The descriptions of him are based on my interaction with him through long hours of conversation, but the quotations are all from the recorded interview.



## **9.2 The interview**

It is July 28, 2009. I have talked about having a formal interview with Uncle Ah Shun for some time and today I take advantage of the rainy weather to do the interview. It happens that this date falls on as the seventh day of the sixth month on the Chinese lunar calendar. It is a special day for Uncle Ah Shun because it is the anniversary of his father's death 64 years ago. When I arrive at his home at about 3 p.m. and he has already finished his memorial service for his father. Uncle Ah Shun starts his story from the day his father died. He tells it at great length, from how his father came home from work in the rice paddies to the persons who were around at that time: the butcher, the doctor, the neighbours who helped out, and the Japanese soldiers who happened to march through the village, as if it were just an event happened quite recently. The father is so important in the construction of masculinity in a man!

We sit at the table in the dining room, having tea and smoking cigarettes. The recording lasted for about 100 minutes. In this chapter, I also use some other sources, such as interviews with Uncle Ah Shun's son and his nephew, as well as what I learnt from his neighbours and other relatives.

## **9.3 Life course of Uncle Ah Shun**

Uncle Ah Shun was born in 1936. His childhood memory starts with the Second World War during which period Zhejiang was under Japanese occupation. His father died from an illness which resulted in a sudden death. That year, Uncle Ah-Shun was only nine years old (10 in the local Chinese way of talking about age). Also surviving were his mother and elder brother. Uncle Ah Shun had to quit school (he had one year of schooling before that) to help his mother work on rented land, growing rice and raising silkworms. His mother was such a strong-willed and skilful woman that she managed to make savings from the harvests and had bought some small pieces of rice paddy by the time of the

Liberation in 1949. In the Land Reform that followed Liberation, they retained their land (both rented and bought) and were hoping for a better life as both brothers had by then grown to be able to work as adult men. Uncle Ah Shun was married at the age of 13 (14 in his accounts). According to Uncle Ah Shun, there were two reasons for his being married at such an early age. First, when his mother learned about the forthcoming Land Reform, she wanted to keep as much land as possible. Adding a new member to the family would make it more likely to happen. Secondly, Uncle Ah Shun was married before his elder brother because they were advised by a blind fortune teller that this was a better arrangement.

The first few years of working on their privately owned field and land (in the local dialect, field refers to rice paddies and land refers to drier land to grow wheat, soybean, and vegetables, in addition to the important mulberry trees) proved to be years of good life. They usually worked independently, but whenever necessary, they joined another seven households of neighbours for mutual help in farm labour. The harvests of both grain and silk were good. Uncle Ah Shun and his brother managed to expand their house with money from the sale of silk first in 1954 and later in about 1957. Unfortunately, all this was disrupted as the collectivisation movement came to Xinyue. Uncle Ah Shun's family was forced to join the Advanced Cooperative Society (*gaojishie*) about 1957. In 1958, he was made leader of the production team and had the opportunity to attend evening schools where he learned to read more Chinese characters. However, his enthusiasm for working for the collective was apparently not high. It fell to the lowest level when in 1959, after the Great Leap Forward, food was rationed. Uncle Ah Shun told me that by that time, all the grain had either been sold to the state grain stations (*liangzhan* or *liangguansuo*, which is a state owned venue for the collection and distribution of grain) or taken over by the village collective canteen (*shitang*). When it was obvious that food was not enough, the rationing for each household to get from the canteen was 2.8 *liang* (about 140 grams) of rice per person per day. Although some households had savings in cash, they were not

allowed to buy food in town to store at home. They could only buy the amount they could eat while they were in town, if they could go there (mobility was under control of local cadres at that time).

It happened that in the spring of 1959, there was a task for the village to find men to transport some bricks from a nearby kiln to the city of Guangyuan, which is about a full day's distance by boat rowed with manpower. As team leader, Uncle Ah Shun got the news first and he volunteered to undertake the task. The village head was happy to get someone to volunteer. (In the interview Uncle Ah Shun narrated at great length this boat trip transporting bricks to Guangyuan, and other trips later that transported preserved vegetables to Shanghai and other cities and towns around the year 1959. Together with other men from the village, Uncle Ah Shun rowed wooden boats through the network of rivers that connect the village with towns and cities. Uncle Ah Shun enjoyed the boat trips for several reasons. First, he could get some cash as wages for the labour. Second, he could have sufficient food in town. Thirdly, he could have some subsidies in grains so that his family could have them. He gave the rice to his mother and wife. He could not stand the food rationing of 2.8 *liang* of rice per day. From the interview, I sense that the trips were exciting and enjoyable for Uncle Ah Shun.

Like most men and women of his generation, Uncle Ah Shun and his wife had many children in a marriage spanning about six decades. From the later 1950s and the earlier 1970s, they raised 5 children: three daughters and two sons. All of them were married and have had their own children now. Ah Shun and his wife have six grandchildren. Their eldest granddaughter has been married and has given birth to a son in 2007—Uncle Ah Shun's first great-grandson. As I stated at the introduction to this chapter, both sons of Uncle Ah Shun and Aunt Li now live in Heshui. The elderly couple now live by themselves in the big house. They grow rice, vegetables, mulberry trees and raise silkworms; they keep 7 sheep, 5 chickens and 5 ducks in 2008. They had about on about 7

*mu* of fields and 5 *mu* of dry land, but they are unable to take care of all the fields. They let Uncle Ah Shun's brother use one big piece of field to grow rice.

#### **9.4 Family tree and marriage arrangements**

There are some distinctive marriage arrangements in Uncle Ah Shun's family and among his relatives. His own marriage was both an arranged marriage and a child marriage. He was 13 and his wife was 12 when they were married (14 and 13 respectively in the local tradition). His elder brother was married much later than him, to one of their maternal uncle's daughters in an uxorilocal arrangement.

Among Uncle Ah Shun's children, his eldest daughter was married to a man in the same village in another hamlet. They have raised two daughters. The elder daughter was married uxorilocally. That is, she and her husband live at her parents' household. She has given birth to a son who has her father's family name. Her younger sister was a third year university student. Uncle Ah Shun's second daughter was married to a man in the town of Heshui. They have just a daughter, who was a fourth-year university student. Uncle's Ah Shun's third daughter was raised by another family in the same village. That family had three sons but no daughters and she was raised to become one of their daughters-in-law. She was married to the eldest of the three sons. They have a son, who was in his second year at university.

Uncle Ah Shun's two sons are younger than all their sisters. Aiguo, the elder, is married and has a son who is in 7th grade. Aiguo works as an accountant in a Taiwanese-owned chemical plant which is located in a nearby village but employs many workers from Xinyue. The younger son is a veteran PLA soldier and has a job in town. He is married uxorilocally to a woman who has her household registration in town. They have a son who was about 8.

Aiguo has bought an apartment in the county seat of Heshui, where he and his wife run a fashion shop. So currently, both sons and one of the daughters of Uncle Ah Shun reside in the county seat of Heshui. The other two daughters still reside in the village.

## **9.5 House-building**

House-building, together with weddings, childbirths, and funerals, constitutes one of the major events for a peasant household in the region. Peasants work hard and save money to prepare for these events. They often run up debts to cover the expenses. In Uncle's story, he started with his father's death, to be a filial son, then a good husband and father of five children. His life as a man has been an accomplished one. He had no regrets.

### *The current house and its surroundings*

The house that Uncle Ah Shun and his wife live in now was constructed in 1993. The main quarter, or the front quarter of the house has four rooms (*jian*) on both the first and second floor. This quarter is first divided into the main front part facing south and a rear part. On the first floor, the front part forms a big hall, with a size of about 100 square metres. The hall is empty most of the time but it is covered with silkworms and silk cocoons every year in the silkworm raising seasons. On the first floor of the rear part of the house, from west to east, are a dining area, a staircase, and two store rooms for harvested grains. A notable feature is the jars of various sizes that Uncle uses for making and storing rice wine. On the second floor, there are two suites, each having two rooms that face south. In the suite that I rented on the east side, the rear part to the left of the entrance is a living room, and the front part to the right first is a guest room. Further east, there is the bathroom at the rear part and the main bedroom at the front part.

Attached to the main quarter of the building, from west to east, are a kitchen, and three rooms where the sheep are raised and the hay and preserved vegetables are stored. There

is only about two meters between the front quarter and the three rooms. Both the kitchen and three-room rear quarter are single-storey.

### *History of Uncle Ah Shun's house*

Through Uncle Ah Shun's lifetime, he has built or extended houses 6 times. This is how he describes his family's housing condition before 1949:

...My grandfather had three sons. My older cousin's father ranked first. Ah Xiong's (his younger cousin, Jiangyang's father) father was named Ah Qi (7th), and my father was called Ah Si (4th). So my grandfather's house was divided into three households. ...

... In times of my father, our house was connected to Ah Xiong's. They had three rooms and we had two rooms plus an extension (*gulu*, at the back of the house), which was divided into two smaller sections. There was even no front gate. The room on the east side had a small door and the room on the west side had a pair of windows and a side door....

▾ ...My mother used to sleep at the front part of the east side room. The rear half of the room had no back doors. We (my wife and I) had our bed there. It used to be my mother's bed. But she later had to have a *pu* (a smaller bed). In the extension, the southern half was the kitchen and the northern half was for toilet and sheep shed....

Uncle Ah Shun's father had two brothers, which meant that the three of them would evenly share the ancestral house and divide it. What uncle Ah Shun inherited from his father was only two rooms and an extension. After he got married, he and his wife shared a small separate part at the back of the east room. His mother had the front part. The west

room was reserved for raising silkworms. His brother had no separate living space of his own. He had to sleep in front of their mother's bed, as Uncle Ah Shun later explained to me.

Uncle Ah Shun's first house building was in 1954. By then his mother had saved silk for some years and in that year they sold the silk and bought some wood for house building. Without changing the existing rooms and extension, they added three rooms at the back of the original house, adjacent to the extension.

About three years later, at the beginning of collectivization (uncle does not remember the exact year, he uses the time of important events; but it was around 1957), Uncle Ah Shun had his second house building. This time, the extension was demolished and the three rooms were shifted backward and two rooms were added, one at each side of the original rooms.

For the third time the five rooms were again demolished and a new house with 6 rooms was built. This new house used big beams, to make the rooms more spacious. He said that this happened in the same year as the second house-building. The original two rooms in the front were then used for storage purposes after the six rooms were built. [I admit the accuracy of the time is an issue. But it still indicates that the times between Land Reform and the Great Leap Forward were good at least for Uncle Ah Shun and his family. ]

The fourth house-building did not come until 1983 when four smaller rooms were added to the back of the 6-room house, for raising pigs and sheep and for building a latrine (the toilet). The two old rooms were demolished by then to make room for his cousin Ah Xiong to build a two-storey house on the original site. The fifth time of house building happened in the following year, when the rear quarter of the house was expanded again.

In 1993, the six room house was demolished and a new two-storey brick and concrete house with four rooms on each floor was built. By then, Uncle Ah Shun's sons had grown up and he was thinking about building a decent house so that their marriages could be secured. This was his sixth time of house building. Uncle Ah Shun talks about his concern about finance before the construction work started. One of his cousins was the director of the village factory then. He offered to lend Uncle Ah Shun 5,000 yuan.

Uncle Ah Shun might have built a house for the seventh time in his life had his circumstances been similar to other villagers. His elder son later bought an apartment in downtown Heshui and moved his own family of three there in 2000. His younger son was married uxorilocally and now lives in Heshui too. All these had made it not an urgent agenda for him to build a three-storey house, although from my other conversations with him, I had the impression that he would like it if a three-storey house could be built.

There is naturally a question as to how Uncle Ah Shun had accumulated the money for all these house building events? The next section will introduce his productive activities to demonstrate how he had managed to support a big family and create wealth and property.

### **9.6 Supporting a large family, childrearing, gender**

Uncle Ah Shun has been a peasant throughout his life, working on land, or 'working in the field' (*zuo tianfan li*), as he puts it. There were only three years when he worked in the village factory: between the years when he was 68 to 71. During that period, his younger son was in the army. This was some kind of award or compensation for his sending his son to the army.

The main source of his income, though, has come from growing, processing and selling preserved vegetables. Here is how he accounts for his trips to towns selling vegetables.



In those years, I made good quality preserved vegetables. Early in times of private ownership (*dangan huo*), I had made good vegetables. In collective years, I grew vegetables on the private plot (*ziliu di*). In one of the years, I was away for 60 days in a row to sell vegetables. Continuous, 60 days. I made three trips without staying home even for one night. After the first trip, I rowed the boat back home at almost sunset. I took the empty jars from the boat and carried the full jars to the boat. After dinner, I started the boat and went on my way again to be in time for the early morning market the next day.

There were always conflicts of interest between working for the collective production team and working for one's own household. The incentive for Uncle Ah Shun's practices has been purely economic. He could not get any cash reward at all from the collective. Instead, because he had lots of dependents, he owed money to the collective every year.

In the collective years, the production team was the basic unit of accounting. Usually people of one hamlet formed a team, called *xiaodui*—the 'small team', in contrast to the production brigade *dadui*—the 'big team'. There were times when a few teams were combined to form what was then called *da xiaodui*—the *big* 'small team'.

The distribution of wages and benefits by the production team to each household was both in goods and in cash, based on the aggregated workpoints members in a household earned. There was also a 'base point' (*difen*) for each person which was evaluated by the collective and finalized by the leadership: gender and age were the main bases, though a person's skill and knowledge as well as performance were among the criteria. The differences between men and women could have been 10:8 or even 12:8 for a day's work, which means a woman got between four-fifths and two-thirds of a man's workpoints for the same working day. A household with more people having *difen* was in an advantageous position: they got more when goods and cash were distributed. The goods

were translated into cash and by the end of the year, the accounting was done. If a household's gross workpoints was worth more than the cash equivalent of the goods they had received during the year, they could receive cash distribution. Otherwise, they owed money to the collective. The accounting was issued at the end of the year. For many households, the little amount of cash they had saved would have to be kept for the ritual expenses for the Spring Festival.

In the case of Uncle Ah-Shun, he said he had the young (children) and the old (mother) to support. After his brother was married, there were only two people who were full laborers—his wife and himself. Every year his household owed 30-40 yuan to the collective. He always paid it off with cash. For the households that were better-off, those having more workpoint earners and fewer dependents, the highest distribution in cash might have been as much as 100 yuan.

### *The children and their education*

Of the four children of Uncle Ah Shun's that were raised at home, the two daughters were taken care of by their grandma when Uncle and Aunt worked for the production team. When Aiguo, the first son, was born in 1969, grandma was already very weak. His sisters had to stay home to take care of him and later his younger brother. Uncle Ah Shun admits that for all his children, he had almost never held any of them in his arms. (He used the word *bao*, meaning to carry or hold in arms against one's chest, which is both a word for the act of carrying a little baby, but also a local term for taking care of a baby.)

As for the children's education, the eldest daughter managed to complete junior high school, but their second daughter had to stay home to take care of the brothers. She did not have a day's schooling! Uncle Ah Shun feels sorry for his second daughter. He says that this has put her at a disadvantage (*chikui*). So for his two sons, he made up his mind

that they should receive education. He himself regrets having too little education. Both his sons finished high school. Aiguo, the elder son, graduate from a vocational school majoring in mechanics. The younger son studied in a 'grain school' and got a job at the local grains management station (*liangguansuo*). This was a 'state job', meaning he was registered as a resident of city or town and no longer needed to be a peasant.

### **9.7 Masculinity and men's labour: Boldness, strength, and judgment**

While telling his life story, Uncle Ah Shun sometimes used evaluative terms to summarise or comment on his qualities. I could use three English words to translate his Chinese expressions: boldness, strength, and judgement. The original expressions in Chinese were: *danzi da*, *qili hao*, and *yanjing jian*. Literally, *daizi da* refers to having a big gallbladder; *qili hao* refers to having good strength; and *yanjing jian* refers to having sharp eyesight.

Uncle Ah Shun demonstrates his boldness through his accounts of boat trips to Shanghai and other towns.

I went as far as *Shanghai, Changping, Ningxiang, Guangyuan*, everywhere....I was very bold (*danzi da*)! I had more than ten trips to Shanghai. Steering the boat in Huangpu River (*Huangpujiang*), some men would be too scared to move. In my case, I still walked from one end of the boat to the other without any feeling of scare. (There was) nothing to worry about. *Danzi da!* I had this in mind: I can swim. Even if I dropped into the river, I would not be drowning. That's why I was bold! If you cannot swim, you cannot be as bold. One should be careful when on boat.

He explains clearly that his boldness was sensible, not recklessness. The stereotypical peasant man in some Chinese representations has been one who is timid (*danxiao pashi*), simple-minded (*tounao jian*), even cowardly (*laoshi*). In fact Uncle Ah Shun was shrewd in both the sense of business bargaining and dealing with authority.

One of the criteria for measuring a man's strength has been the ability to carry a heavy load on one's shoulders (*tiaodan*). In his own accounts, Uncle Ah Shun gave an example of this activity to demonstrate that he used to be very strong. In his generation (maybe throughout the generations), the strength of a local man was the amount of weight he could carry and the distance that he could walk while carrying the weight (a measure of stamina).

I have good strength. For instance, when I carry fresh vegetables to get preserved at Fulin's (his eldest son-in-law) house, I carried loads for more than 260 *jin*. I did not need to pause to have a rest.

He was talking about a distance of about 500 metres.

Having a good appetite is an indication of strength for men. To show me how big his appetite for rice and alcohol had been when he was young. He told me a funny story that happened in 1959.

There was even a funny story about eating in Shanghai. I went with Jinlong to a restaurant one day. ... They used bowls with a capacity to carry 4 *liang* of rice each. It was steamed rice. A bowl of rice cost 4 *fen*. We bought a big plate of assorted fishes (which were small fishes of various kinds from the sea, each the size of two fingers). The price was 60 *fen*. When the plate was served on our table, I was thrilled. I told Jinlong that we should have some alcohol. So we ordered one *jin* of spirit each. After the spirit, we were first served two bowls of rice each. That was far from enough. We finished the rice in a few mouthfuls and ordered another four bowls of rice. We ate them and order "four more bowls". We ate them. "Four more bowls." We ate them. After the rice was eaten, the bowls were stacked on the table.

The assistants were astonished to see the stack. Finally, 31 bowls of rice were consumed. I ate 15 and Jinlong had 16. Why I ate one bowl less? There was a beggar from North of Yangtze River, who was kneeling on the floor, begging for some food. I gave him one bowl of rice.

Uncle Ah Shun talks about his having ‘sharp eyes’ in his story about buying wood for the first time to build the three-room house. He was only about 18 then. He first consulted a carpenter about the kind of wood needed for building the house. He then went with his maternal uncle to Zhangjiaqiao to sell silk and buy wood. At that time he was not allowed to pick each individual piece of wood from the piles. But he examined the piles and chose the best pile while getting a cheap price.

His shrewdness was also demonstrated in his skills in selling vegetables in town. He tells of one experience with one of his cousins.

I went with my cousin to sell vegetables in Shanghai once. I had taken more than 20 jars. When I had sold them out, my cousin had not sold out his 7 jars yet, with one full jar and some more left. We went back. On our way back, we stopped over at Liuzhuang near Huayuan. I suggested that we try selling the remaining vegetables there. I helped him to sell a major portion of his vegetables. After I have sold out, he had not earned a penny yet. I then told him, ‘Let me sell it all by myself. You just stay next to me’. I managed to sell the vegetables in the jar!

If you just sat there without calling for people’s attention, the city people walking past would not come to you. If you keep having eye contact and saying hello to them, they will turn to you and find your vegetables good and buy them. One needed to be talkative when selling vegetables. If you were not talkative, sitting over there without a word, you couldn’t do it.

This section demonstrates the construction of masculinity through Uncle Ah Shun's account of his mature years as a man: embodiment, as illustrated in his reflection on his strength, appetite for food and wine, and skills in physical activities such as swimming and rowing the boat; sociability as in relations with other men from the village; and wits in business transactions of purchasing building materials and selling preserved vegetables.

His bravery and calmness in time of possible danger and crisis are reflected in the following anecdote of swimming in a river in a town when he was on one of his boat trips selling preserved vegetables there. He was with Guanping, his next door neighbour, a man of the same age as him. After the market hours were over, the two of them went for a swim in the river. It was a wide river and Guanping said he felt very tired in the middle of the swim. Uncle Ah Shun did not panic. He offered suggestions for Guanping to save energy and promised that he would support him whenever necessary.

When we had covered a bit more than half the distance, Guanping said that he felt very tired. I said to him, 'If you feel tired, you should think about doing something. Can you swim on your back (to save energy)?' 'I can't.' 'If you can't,' I told him, 'I will stay next to you protecting you. You take it easy. Do not rush. If you keep your mouth at level with the water and swim slowly, it will save your energy.' I also told him, 'If you really could not do it, I can push you somewhat'. So I kept an eye on him and the two of us continued to swim to the other side.

They reach the other side of the river safely. But that gave him a lesson and he said he never swam while away on such trips.

### **9.8 Role as a family man**

From his account so far, I have presented Uncle Ah Shun as a peasant man who is strong in body and will power, who has skills in farm work and shrewdness in small business

transactions of selling homemade preserved vegetables. In this section I will discuss in more detail his family life, his roles as son, husband, father and grandfather.

Uncle Ah Shun started his narrative with the day his father died. He told it as if it were a recent event. After more than six decades, that day is still important to Uncle Ah Shun and he holds a ceremony for his father every year on this day. His account of his mother has been of affection and admiration, of her capability as a widow in raising two sons, arranging for their marriages and managing to expand the house for a larger family.

Uncle Ah Shun is so amicable to me that I was surprised to learn one day from his daughter-in-law that he does not get along well with his next door neighbor. She told me because she wanted me not to embarrass Uncle by raising questions about their neighbor. It is common in the village that households may have disputes over land for house building, the so called '*zhaijidi*'. I did not ask Uncle about the neighbor, but one day Uncle touched the issue when was talking about his family history of house building. He said that his neighbor actually was building his wall on uncle Ah Shun's plot. There was also a quarrel over trees planted by the neighbor.

The relationship between the siblings of Aiguo has been harmonious. But emotionally, uncle and aunt have to live by themselves. Aiguo and his wife make a good living from his job and her store. Their most important concern is that their parents live a healthy and happy life. There is an incident that happened in the summer of 2008. When uncle Ah Shun was not feeling well the year before, Aiguo bought him some drug in oral tablets that were supposed to be good for him. The price was actually 100 yuan per box, but to make uncle not worry too much about the cost of the drug, Aiguo told him that it was just 50 yuan a box. Then some time in the summer of 2008, there was a villager who had some similar ailment to Uncle Ah Shun's. Uncle recommended that she take the drug and sold her one box that he had not taken himself for 50 yuan before he called Aiguo to buy more

for the villager. Aiguo had to tell him the truth then that the price was actually 100 yuan a box.

The misunderstanding reveals that Aiguo knew his father was used to living on moderate means and did not want Aiguo to spend too much on him, even for medical reasons. It also demonstrates that uncle is warm-hearted: he enjoys helping other villagers if he can.

Aiguo tells me in my interview with him, ‘since we live separately from my parents, they are happy and upbeat when we go back’ (*jindao hen zu*, which literally means ‘full of energy’). The region is different from some other parts of China where there are the so-called ‘old people living in empty nest’ when their grown children have gone to faraway places to seek employment (*dagong*). In the case of uncle, his children live within a distance of about 10 kilometers, and two of his daughters live only a few minutes’ walk away. But still I could sense their loneliness when there are only two of them, and their happiness to have children and grandchildren visiting.

### **9.9 State power and coercion**

I could conclude from the interview that Uncle Ah Shun’s experiences with collectivization had not been pleasant ones. This does mean that he was resentful of Communist rule. Indeed he expresses his gratitude when he commented that it was thanks to Chairman Mao that he had the opportunity to attend night school where he learned to recognize more Chinese characters, even though he could not write them well.

His account of the process of collectivization agreed with other accounts in the literature (e.g. Hinton, 1966; Myrdal, 1965) about the history of rural China during the years of transformation after the founding of the PRC. Life was getting better immediately after Liberation. Land was officially owned by each individual household. Led by his widowed mother, with the help of his maternal uncle, and from the hard work of the four family



members then, they had saved enough money to build three new rooms in 1954. This was followed by an expansion within the next four years. However, the Great Leap Forward of 1958 proved to be disastrous. The haste for collectivisation and the ‘fad for communism’ (*gongchan feng*) had its hint in the movement to form ‘advanced societies’ in 1956.

From Uncle Ah Shun’s account, the beginning of collectivisation was moderate and households joined the mutual-aid teams on a voluntary basis. However, things changed dramatically in late 1956. Prior to that, his household was among eight in the hamlet who chose not to join the collective as they had been doing well in both grain harvests and silk production. Here is how Uncle Ah Shun accounts for the moment of change in 1956:

This lasted until the winter of 1956. It was still the tenth month. The rice was not harvested yet. Then, Qingsheng, who was a cadre at the production brigade, summoned us to attend a meeting at *Yuewangmiao*. At that time the mutual-aid teams are to be combined to form an Advanced Society (*gaoji she*). Xinyue village was named to replace the 3rd Village and 4th Village. The eight households were then forced to join the Society. Hankun’s father and I were summoned to the meeting at *Yuewangmiao*. While we were at the meeting, Qingsheng ordered people to cast flower-grass seeds at our rice fields. In this way, they claimed the land! (He laughs.) It was theirs.

In doing the transcription, I realised that Uncle Ah Shun’s laugh is very significant. He was talking about something that happened fifty years ago. His memory of private ownership and the private household mode of production has been more positive than the later collective mode of production. This was supported by his account of the famine in 1959. His laugh demonstrated his helplessness at the time and his feeling of forgiveness now that it had passed and life has been changing for the better.

I would argue that this vignette provides a case for an analysis of power: how the state exerted its power through its agents (in this case the village cadres) on the individual household. Both coercion and deception were involved. First, there was political campaigning in the way of inviting representatives to a meeting. Then, there was action: one's private land was claimed by the collective without consent. One was not left with any room to decide whether to agree or disagree. There was no choice. Uncle Ah Shun did not elaborate on his reaction then. Facing the coercive state, one had to give in. His masculinity has been demonstrated in his practices of finding other channels for money-making and supporting the family. Women at that time did not have that option.

Women were stuck to the household and the land all year round, while men like Uncle Ah Shun could leave home to do something adventurous for making a living. As a child and young man, I witnessed men (and exclusively men) in the region who had the skills of *yaochuan*—rocking or rowing (steering) the boat. Before the reform and opening, rivers and boats had been the only channel for village men to have contact with the outside world. That is why water holds a very important symbolic position: the region has been known in literary works as '*shuixiang*'—place of water (rivers, ponds, and lakes).

Boats are used to carry grains, building materials, fertilisers, and most importantly, preserved vegetables. In the narrative of Uncle Ah Shun, the boat provided him with the important source of income in most of the collective years and first few years of the reform era. For a boat trip he either made money as a labourer if it was to transport goods for others. He obtained cash income by selling his home made preserved vegetables. The boat was not only a means of transport, but the place where he spent the nights and had most of his meals as eating at restaurants were so expensive for him. Boat rowing (*yaochuan*), a masculinised local technology, was thus a means by which Uncle Ah Shun's gender practice as husband-father-provider could continue when state power blocked his ownership of land.

## CHAPTER 10

### JIANGYANG: SEEKING AUTONOMY AND PROSPERITY

This chapter presents the life history of Jiangyang, a man in his mid 40s. The interview covers his main stages of life, in particular his pursuit of different means of making money and his relationship with his relatives and friends. Through Jiangyang's life story, a man who is closely tied to the land, the water, the people and the economic development of the village emerged. He demonstrates both continuity and change if we compare this to the life trajectory of his father's generation (the same as Uncle Ah Shun's).

#### 10.1 The interview

In Chapter 9 when Uncle Ah Shun was talking about his family lineage, he said that his father had an elder brother and a younger brother. This younger brother was Jiangyang's grandfather. That is why Uncle Ah Shun introduced Jiangyang to me as his nephew. Jiangyang lives with his parents, his wife and daughter in a three-storey building about 15 meters in front of Uncle Ah Shun's. Jiangyang has a tractor for transporting goods and materials for local firms and households. Jiangyang as a tractor driver left me a deep impression because he helped with his tractor to pull my car out of a ditch on a snowy night in late January 2008 when my car slipped into the ditch near Uncle Ah Shun's house.

As they are close relatives, Jiangyang's name is often around in my conversations with Uncle Ah Shun. I sensed there was something special in Jiangyang that might be interesting to my study. I got Jiangyang's phone number from Aiguo and called him in July 2009. Jiangyang agreed to an interview and I came to Jiangyang's home on a summer morning. It was a humid day, and looked as if it was going to rain. I was seated at his kitchen table and offered tea. We had a small chat before I told Jiangyang about the purpose and content of the interview. After agreeing to my recording the interview, he

suggested we move to his bedroom suite upstairs. The suite consists of two rooms, one as the bedroom and the other as a private living quarter. We sat in the living room to have the interview which lasted for about 100 minutes.

Our interview was interrupted by a phone call. I would have asked more about his relations with his wife, daughter and sisters. The emotional side of him has not been explored enough. However, the case of Jiangyang is rich in other respects, revealing the construction of masculinity in work and leisure, male bonding, and generational tension.

## **10.2 The life course**

### *Pre-school years*

Jiangyang was born in 1965. His mother was from the county of Renhe, under the administration of Shanghai Municipality then. In the early to mid 1960s, many rural parts of China had not recovered from the famine of 1959-1961. Jiangyang said that there was not enough food in his mother's village then. When they heard that people in the Huayuan region were faring a little better, groups of young women migrated to the region and many ended up marrying local men. Jiangyang's mother was among those migrants.

Jiangyang is the oldest of three children and the only son. He had two sisters, one 3 years and another 6 years junior to him. (Tragically, the elder of the sisters had already passed away.) Life got better for both Jiangyang's family and his mother's natal family as time went by. For Jiangyang, the happiest moments in childhood were all related to visits to his maternal grandma's. He said he had few relatives from his father's side, while on his mother's side there were lots of relatives. He had only one aunt on his father's side, who was married to a family seven *li* (one *li* is 500 metres) away. His father later got to know more local men from nearby villages who had taken migrant wives. They became friends and got along just like relatives.

Jiangyang loved going to his maternal grandma's. He spent so much time there that he developed friendship with young playmates there. He remembers his adventures in the city of Shanghai, watching the national day parade one year, especially the huge drum. He said that it was the first time he had seen such a large drum. 'It was as large as a *bian*' [a big round and shallow bamboo basket about 1.8 metres in diameter, used for raising silkworms], he said. He was so engrossed in the drum that he did not follow his grandma and grand-uncle who took him there. He also remembers the tide near the river bank that made him soaked all over and he had to borrow clothing from one of his playmates.

### *School years*

Jiangyang started school at 6, a year earlier than most of the children of his generation. But he said he did not care for school then and had to repeat Year One and Year Two. As a young boy, he was very fond of water. At that time there were no big roads in the village. On his way to school, he used to walk past narrow ridges in rice fields. There were small fish in nearby ditches. Jiangyang would try to catch fish and as a result often missed school days. His mother was upset when she found out, and she would sometimes beat him. Jiangyang's schoolwork started to get better from Year Three on. After finishing primary school at Year Five in Xinyue, he had two more years of junior high at Manqiao.

Of the teachers in junior high school, the head teacher of his class was a man who left Jiangyang with a deep impression. The teacher did not appear harsh or fearful, but students were obedient if he asked them to return to order after a noisy recess. Some other teachers (for example, the geography teacher and English teacher) found it hard to maintain order in class and they had to turn to the head teacher for help.

Jiangyang said that since elementary school, he started to develop friendship with

playmates in his own village. They are mostly boys from the village school. He liked to hang out with boys who were a little older than him. One of them was particularly close and they got along like sworn brothers. He does not talk about girls at school but he does mention a girl in his own hamlet with whom he had some good time together. I will cover this in a later section.

*Labour, work, business—making a living*

Jiangyang started to work in the collective production team immediately on leaving school at the age of 16, but he earned only a small portion of workpoints compared with adult men in the team. The first money-making venture he engaged in was fishing. Jiangyang and one of his best friends invested a little amount of money (about 20 yuan) in buying some threads. With the threads they spent one month in the winter of that year weaving a huge net (a square net with each side about 10 metres long). They put the net into the river to catch fish during the night and built a shelter at the river bank for the two to stay in. He had the experience of staying up for seven nights in a row. They sold their catch of fish in the markets the next morning. Each day they made amounts ranging from a few score cents to 3 yuan each. This lasted for more than a year. After that, two more friends joined them. They invested 53 yuan each and pooled the money to buy trawl nets and went fishing from a rowing boat. This lasted for two more years.

During the day's work for the collective production team, Jiangyang was doing men's work, the most typical of which was carrying heavy loads on shoulders. There were many things to carry on shoulders at that time. One of the tools was the wooden barrels for carrying human and animal waste for fertilizer. Each household had its own barrels and they were of different sizes. Jiangyang said that his family's barrels were so large that they could hold as much as twice the capacity of the barrels of some other families'. From about ages 16 to 18 Jiangyang worked for the collective as a grown man.

In 1984, land was contracted to each household in Jiangyang's hamlet (which was a year later than other hamlets). Since then, peasants have had more freedom to choose what to do to make a living. Jiangyang had worked for about nine months transporting clay for one of the brick kilns formerly run by the Commune. This was an extremely tough job. The process goes roughly like this: first, Jiangyang needed to row an empty boat to the site where clay near the river was to be carried to the kiln. He had to dig clay, put it in baskets and carry the two full baskets on shoulder to the boat. When he had filled the boat with clay, he would row the boat to the kiln. There, he had to load the clay in baskets again and carry it from the boat to the storage site on the bank. It was Jiangyang's father who finally dissuaded him from continuing the job as it was too hard.

After he was engaged at 20, he joined his father-in-law in the business of making and trading preserved vegetables. First, he would buy tons of fresh vegetables in the harvest season. He would then preserve them and ship them to Shanghai. The pickled vegetables were put in earthen jars each holding as much as 40 kilograms of pickled vegetables. One shipment took as much as 1,000 jars. It was around 1985. His annual income reached about 10,000 yuan, which was very good at that time when the government was praising peasant households for getting rich through hard work (the term *wanyuanhu*, or 'ten thousand yuan household', was the object of jealousy from city people who were on average making only a few hundred yuan annually). In a few years' time, Jiangyang's family had accumulated enough to build a new house of two storeys (from the hard work of his parents, two younger sisters, and himself). That was in 1989. They spent about 30,000 yuan and built 4 rooms on each level. At that time his father was working as a warehouse watchman earning about 500 yuan a month in addition to working on contracted land.

Jiangyang was always thinking about new means of making money. In 1991, he bought a

ship, with the capacity of carrying up to 30 tons of goods. This was a risky business in two senses, so his father was at first against it and dissuaded relatives from providing personal loans to Jiangyang. First, Jiangyang himself had not enough money for the purchase of the ship. Second, he had no experience steering such a large motor ship. But Jiangyang was resolute and went ahead with the venture with a loan of 5000 yuan from his father-in-law. He had seized the moment when the village factory was in its expansion period and lots of new buildings were under construction. He received on average 10 job orders a month, each securing about 200 yuan of fees for using the boat. He was grossing more than 2,000 yuan a month then. His venture with the ship ended abruptly in 1995 when it was sunk in a storm. After that he went to work in the village factory at the canteen. During the three years that he worked in the canteen, he was also making money as a broker for building materials. He said actually this earned him more than he earned when he had his own ship.

By 1997 he had accumulated enough to add a level to his house. It cost him 180,000 yuan. That seemed to be the highlight of his life. His luck seemed to have been exhausted when he quit his job at the leather factory and invested in a new business of selling woollen sweaters in Qianxi. Around 1998 and 1999, the woollen sweaters market in Nanxiang became the largest in China for trading woollen sweaters. Many villagers made money there. But Jiangyang had known nothing of the trade and lost money in the venture in the three years when both he and his wife were involved. He was then invited by one of his cousins in Shanghai to work in a vegetable processing plant that he owned. He worked there for about 10 months and quit in 2000.

His next venture was purchasing a second-hand mini-truck to enter the more familiar transport business. This was not a very good experience as the truck was in such a poor condition that the cost of maintaining it and keeping it legal was so high that he finally chose to operate it illegally (evading fees, taxes and insurance). He was caught ultimately



by the police and had to discard the truck instead of paying a fine as penalty.

After that, Jiangyang bought a tractor, which cost him about 30,000 yuan, of which 20,000 yuan was from a personal loan. He was taking up the opportunity of a new movement then in the county to flatten farm land. As an integral part of the project, new ditches needed to be dug. The ditches were consolidated by covering them with pre-constructed concrete. They were made in one place and needed to be transported to the field. So tractors were needed for the transportation. However, the business was not so good for Jiangyang. In 2008, Jiangyang also tried to raise rabbits, but it did not provide much income as the price of grown rabbits went down drastically. His current main occupation is still driving the tractor to offer transportation service.

### **10.3 Memories of hard labour in farming**

Both Jiangyang and his father were strong workers in the collective era. I have mentioned his carrying barrels that doubled the capacity of some other men's. His account of his father's hard work to earn workpoints in the production team and on the private plot is very impressive. Jiangyang's father is one of the men in the village who works hardest. In the collective years, he was the top workpoint earner. His way of earning more workpoints than others was through working extra hours in a form of labour that is toughest and exclusively men's: collecting river-bed mud (used as a good source of organic fertilizer for rice paddies). He would get up as early as three in the morning to start work on the boat. Before others got ready to start work, he had already collected 2 or 3 boats of watery mud (one boatful might carry up to five tons). He would then join the others for the day's work. After finishing the collective work, he would work on his private plot to tend the vegetables. He would then harvest and preserve the vegetables before taking them to nearby market-towns. He usually spent at least a month away from home, like Uncle Ah Shun (Chapter 9). Jiangyang's father's cash income came from the sales of the vegetables. The hard labour earned him very little cash from the production team. (Jiangyang recalls

that in one year, he went with his father who carried his personal seal to collect *yuzhi*—cash distributed to households by the production team. They got one cent! This was different from his maternal grandparents' household where for some years, they got about 1000 *yuan*.)

Jinagyang's own experience of working in one of the busiest seasons of the year during the earliest years of privatisation reveals a great deal about division of labour in the family regarding gender and age. The follow account at length is a description of the early-rice transplanting season in May:

At the time of the 'division', I was 19; one sister was 16; the other was 13. Both of them were young and were not capable enough. The big sister was better, but the little sister was barely good enough for the works. We were distributed 7 *mu* and 8 *fen* of paddies. So we work very hard (*ku*). We had to get up at 4 (a.m.) to pull up seedlings (*ba yang*). Nobody in our house was fast in 'pulling seedlings' except me. And I was not among the fastest in the village. As a young man (*xiao huozǐ*), my main tasks in the production team had been '*tiaodan*' (carrying weight) and so I had little experience in pulling seedlings. So our household was all slow in pulling seedlings. Our division of tasks was like this: father was flattening the paddies. The three of us was pulling seedling, from 4 in the morning to 2-3 in the afternoon. Upon this, my sisters would go home to have a break and some food. I had to carry the seedlings to the paddies. After all seedlings had been carried to the paddies, I went home for a while. Then we would go to transplant the seedlings. We did not stop planting until 8.30 (p.m.) when it was completely dark, sometimes after 9. Even so, we were often lagging behind. In that season (around May), wheat and rape seeds were first to be harvested and silkworms needed to be fed. There was so much work to do! And as for my mother, she was slow and could not work outdoor for long in the day. She had to prepare the meals. She was not able to go to the fields until 1 or 2 in the afternoon.

Jiangyang later added that after he was engaged to his wife, the particular task of '*bayang*' was no longer a problem as she was very fast in it. As the grain shortage in China was not a concern in recent years, peasants in the region have returned from double-crop to single-crop rice growing and the transplantation of rice seedlings has become history.

For Jiangyang's household, his father is now the only one to tend the land. Jiangyang seldom helps out. He is either occupied by his work as a tractor driver or by socialising with friends in restaurants, board game rooms, or teahouses. This is another difference between Jiangyang and his father, who, in his mid 60s, is still taking odd jobs at construction sites and factories, in addition to taking care of the contracted land.

#### **10.4 Dating and marriage**

Jiangyang wife comes from a nearby village. They were engaged when he was 20. In Jiangyang's account, he had had an innocent romantic relationship with a girl in the same hamlet before his engagement to his wife. As a young man, he used to have good relations with that girl. They liked each other and people around them had joked about them. Unfortunately, the parents (on both sides) did not think they were a good match. When they knew that it was impossible for them to develop a serious relationship, they restrained themselves and stopped talking to each other for about a year. They would blush upon seeing each other. (I infer that the vague feeling of love was suppressed and they gave in to pressure from parents.)

Jiangyang's second relationship, the one that ended up with his marrying his wife, required a combination of help from peers and the job of a match-maker. Jiangyang met his future wife through socialising with his mates (going to movies together). He remembers an occasion that brought him into more intimate contact with the girl: at that time, Wenxian (now his wife), was working in Manqiao. One day, Jiangyang's bike broke

down when he was in Manqiao. He had it repaired at a bike stand but found that he did not have enough cash with him for the fees. He knew a girl from his village who worked together with Wenxian. So he went to ask that girl if he could borrow five yuan from her. It happened that she did not have five yuan either. But Wenxian had money with her and she offered to lend him. They started to go out together and later asked a matchmaker who was well known at Wenxian's village to initiate the ritual of engagement.

His wife is one of five daughters, so now Jiangyang has lots of relatives on his wife's side. They were married in 1988. They had two daughters, but one of them was drowned. Jiangyang doesn't talk about his wife much. He leads a very independent life, going away either for work or entertainment. As I wrote at the beginning, the interview was interrupted before I could ask him to reflect on his spousal relations.

### **10.5 Hobbies and consumptions**

The three male-oriented activities that Jingyang is involved in are smoking, drinking and gambling. This is revealed when I ask him why he does not seem to be keen on working in the factory, as most of the village men take it as their main source of income:

I did not like staying in the factory because first I dislike the lack of freedom. And after I had worked there for a while, (I discovered that) the money I made there was not enough for my expenditure. When I was working in the canteen, my salary was just some hundreds of yuan, less than 1000. And we often ate out and play cards. At that time my fortune was good. I won more often than I lost. And the money that I won was more than enough for my expenses at the time. ...I was making, I recall between 800 to 1000 yuan a month, but sometimes when I ate out with people that I used to hang out and play cards with, a meal could cost us 1000 yuan. ...Each of us could consume as many as 20 cans of beer.... So the consumption was so high that the wage earned in the factory job was no good. Besides, I used to smoke 3 packs of

cigarettes a day. ...

He started smoking at the age of 16 when he had to stay up late attending to the net catching fishing. He rationalised that smoking kept him awake. His consumption of cigarettes grew from one pack a day to three packs a day. About 40-50 yuan a day has been spent on his smoking. Lately, he said, he has been cutting down on smoking because he noticed change in his body: he would feel nausea if smoking too heavily. Drinking and dining is more of a social occasion. He does not drink much at home. It is only with friends that he went to restaurants to have drinks together.

As the above excerpt shows, Jiangyang's working at the factory was a time when he had good luck in gambling. He said that at that time he gave all his wages to his wife. He always won money in card games and after his house was built in 1997, he not only did not owe money to others, but was lending 50,000 yuan to someone else. His luck changed afterwards. He has been complaining about the difficulty in making money. He lost money both in the business of selling woollen sweaters and in gambling while in Qianxi.

When I ask if his wife has ever complained about his smoking, drinking, and gambling, Jiangyang says that she does not, because she knew him as having these habits before they got married.

### **10.6 Relations with parents**

Though Jiangyang appears to have inherited his father's hardworking spirit, as illustrate in the section about farm labour, he has many differences with his father regarding lifestyle and values.

As to the characters, I have been in agreement with neither of them. As far as following advice (*'ting'*, listen to) is concerned, I sometimes listen to him. But

whenever I wanted to do something, my dad would dissuade me. When I wanted to buy a boat after the construction of the house and after I have returned from the (factory) canteen, I was not doing anything. I had nothing to do. My father would like me to work as helper at construction sites. (At that time, the daily wage was only about 10 yuan.) He thought at least you would not lose money. He does not smoke. He said that you just work to make some money and save it and that would be OK. He likes it best to be secure (*taitaipinging*, or peaceful, uneventful), while to me it is alright to work hard, but I want to make more money.

One of the differences lies in views of making money. As in Xuewu's case (Chapter 11), Jiangyang's father discourages his son from taking adventures. Jiangyang gives a detailed narration of the effort of his father asking their relatives not to lend money to Jiangyang when he was planning to buy a ship. His father was concerned about risks both in the investment of money and Jiangyang's own safety as he had not had any previous experience with motor-driven ships. But Jiangyang was very unhappy:

When I got home I was very upset. In my heart I had *yijian* (disagreement, bitterness) toward my dad. I thought: 'I am a (grown) man now. I just want to make more money. Why did you try to block me (from going ahead)?' ...He has been this way whatever I do, even up to now. ...He only knows about working in the fields and being frugal. We got along OK and I sometimes help him with work. But whenever I think of doing something, he would have different opinions. ...

Jiangyang talks about his mother in two aspects that makes her special or different from other local women of her age. First, she has some physical conditions which made her work on the land not as fast as other women. (It might also have something to do with her upbringing in a different region.) Second, she is devoted to religious practices. She went on pilgrimages in other parts of Zhejiang and nearby regions.

Jiangyang sometimes has tension with his mother. He talks about his mother being too superstitious. She has good relations with the lady who claims to have inherited the Buddhist temple in the village (described in Chapter 7). Jiangyang's mother is one of the most faithful followers of the '*baniang*', as she is known in the village. The term *baniang* is a local way of addressing an adoptive mother. The lady converted her two-storey house into a temple and attracted elderly ladies from Xinyue and other nearby villages for religious ceremonies. They hold regular services on the first and fifteenth days of each month on the lunar calendar.

Jiangyang's mother goes to the temple almost daily and seldom stays home during the day. Jiangyang does not mind his mother going there and expresses no disapproval of her activity. What annoys him has been her repeatedly asking Jiangyang and other members of the family to go to the temple with her. It was OK for Jiangyang to go occasionally such as on New Year's Day, but she had tried to make him go more regularly, on the first day of every month, or even on the first and the fifteenth of each month. When his mother noticed some unusual phenomenon in the house, she would consult a fortune teller or the *banaing*. She would then ask Jiangyang to take advice from them to avoid bad luck. Jiangyang was so angry that he once said that he would rather risk death than follow the advice! He said that his mother would have liked it if all her children followed her practices in religion, and she, in turn, was pressured by the *baniang*, who would like to have more people followed her. This has been the main source of tension between mother and son, particularly since last year when Jiangyang chose not to go to the temple any more.

### **10.7 Reflection**

By 1997 (when he was 32), Jiangyang had married, raised two daughters, built a three-storey house, and had saved some more money. Jiangyang himself contributed most of the

money for all these. This had been a good time as he recalls. But his luck seemed to have changed, as Jiangyang puts it, 'it might have been that my fortune luck turned bad after the construction of the house'. He adds:

It was not smooth in doing business, and I lost while playing cards. At the end of the first year, in addition to losing all the capital invested in the business, we lost about 50,000 yuan in the first year. In the second year, I was in debt of about 40,000 yuan. Since then, I have been always unlucky in making money....

From Jiangyang's accounts of his father, I conclude that despite the differences in attitudes and opinions, Jiangyang seems to understand and admire his father. He and his father are of two generations that grew up in sharply different times. His father's being hardworking, frugal and wary of adventure was partly the result of the impact of the times that he had lived. Jiangyang grew up to meet more opportunity to seek adventure and personal consumption. What they do share is that both have been hard workers; there is some similarity of character.



## CHAPTER 11

### XUEWU: AN ENTREPRENEUR IN THE MAKING

#### 11.1 Introduction

I got to know Dong Xuewu through a mutual friend. Xuewu was launching a new business in 2009 and this friend of mine was consulted by him. After I had learned briefly about his experience in various parts of the country, I asked Xuewu if I could do an interview with him. He agreed without any reservation and gave me his mobile phone number.

Two days later, I called Xuewu for a visit. He greeted me at the turn of the small road leading to his home and guided me to the two properties (houses) of his family. In his older home, there was some construction work going on. This was going to be the workshop of his new factory for silk quilts. He planned to employ some local women in their 50s with experience in making quilts with silk padding. Xuewu had engaged himself in silk-related business in the last four years and is confident that he would succeed in this new venture.

Xuewu invited me to his newer home, a brick and concrete building of three stories. We sat at a table at the centre of the spacious hall on the first floor. He offered me tea that he had brought from Yunnan. His mother, who was in her later fifties, came out from the kitchen at the back of the hall and greeted me. She soon retired to the kitchen.

I gave him more details about my research and got permission to record. The interview lasted for almost three hours, the first part before lunch and the second half after lunch. During the interview, he received phone calls and visitors. There is some difference in style between the first half and second half of the interview. In the first half of the

interview before the lunch break, I guided him to give his life course. During lunch Xuewu offered me some wine that he brought from Yunnan. We had a very cordial conversation with the presence of his mother and wife. In the latter half of the interview, as we had built up a bit more rapport, Xuewu was more reflective on his life and I managed to touch some of the more sensitive topics that he at first tried to avoid.

## 11.2 Life course

### *Background and early life*

I start by asking Xuewu to tell me about his childhood. His memory goes back to a big household. When he was born in 1974, there were about 16 people in a household of three generations. His grandparents had three sons: Xuewu's father, his *dabo* uncle (his father's elder brother), and his *xiaobo* uncle (his father's younger brother). Xuewu's *dabo* had six children. Xuewu has a younger brother who is just one and half years junior to him. Xuewu recalls that his grandma and *dama* aunt (*dabo*'s wife) used to make meals for two tablefuls of family members. (The typical dining table of the villagers has been traditionally known as *baxian zhuo*—eight immortals table, which is a square table for eight persons.)

When Xuewu was born, villagers were still working for the collective production team. He did not recall particularly harsh living conditions as his family members were mostly in their productive years (his cousins were much older than him and were earning workpoints too). He stresses not remembering times of hardship in childhood, as he is aware that most other people of his age have endured hardship. (See Chapters 9, 10, 14-16. In these interviews, a common theme about the past is the word '*ku*' or bitterness. )

This big household was split when Xuewu was about 6 or 7 years old as his *xiaobo* uncle

got married. He remembered that the big extended family used to live in a one-story, three-roomed house with an extension and back yard. There were some smaller rooms down the backyard where pigs and sheep were raised and goods stored. But the split left their nuclear family of four with little property or wealth except for a few benches as his mother later told him.

Xuewu remembers going to school on snowy days and the hard work his parents had done. They exerted all their efforts to labour, trying to earn enough for the household. His father was involved in small businesses in addition to working in the village. An important source of cash income came from processing preserved vegetables and selling them in towns (like Uncle Ah Shun, Chapter 9, and Jiangyang's father, Chapter 10). Xuewu's parents were caring towards him and his brother. (In fact he used a rather formal word *hehuo* which literally means 'taking good care of' or 'being protective with love and care'. It was a bit of a surprise to me so I did not catch the word when I first heard it. ) 'All the heavy loads were shouldered by my parents', he says, using the metaphor of carrying a heavy load on the shoulder (*tiaodan*)—the most strenuous task for men at the time.

When I ask about his parents' style of disciplining, Xuewu says that they did not particularly push him to work hard at schoolwork. After school he was asked to do nothing more than collect weeds for sheep. But he does remember being told to be '*laolaoshishi* and *qinqinkenken*', which means 'to be honest and hard-working'. His parents were too busy to have time to educate their two sons or attend to them. They only emphasized to him that one needs to work to earn what he deserves.

When Xuewu was 9, land was redistributed to each household under the production responsibility system (*shengchan zerenzhi* or *lianchan chengbao*). Boys usually started to work in the production team at about 12. Xuewu was too young to work in the production team, so he had no experience of collective farming. He was at school until the age of 15

when he finished junior high. At that time the village factory was doing very well. Xuewu quit school to work in the factory.

Xuewu did not do particularly well at school and is not too keen to talk about his experience at school. At school the most memorable gender division was the line cut in the middle of the desk between the boy and girl who usually shared a desk. He also mentions two teachers that had some influence on him. One of them was a male chemistry teacher whose lessons he enjoyed, and even now they are like friends. The other was a young female teacher who taught the subject of 'physiology and hygiene'. This was the early attempt in the high school curriculum in China to include sex education by teaching students knowledge of the human body and its functioning. Though students were told to read the textbook by themselves, the presence of a good-looking young woman teacher and the subject or the knowledge about the gendered bodies gave him 'a vague idea about sex'.

### *In the workforce*

Xuewu's life between 16-31 was that of rebellious youth, but one who has constantly been 'floating', as he himself puts it. The word floating is also from his parents worrying over his restless lifestyle. He hated staying home, and was unsatisfied with a steady life of earning a wage and maintaining a family, as most of the local men of his age would lead their lives. After leaving school, he worked in the village leather factory, where he learned all the skills needed in the trade, and was finally promoted to the lower-management level of a team leader. At that time, the team leader did not need to work regular shifts as the workers did. His task was to inspect and supervise. He did not need to meet any quotas.

The ordinary workers were mainly paid piecework wages. During the period, Xuewu's monthly salary was first 400 to 500 yuan and later reached 700 yuan, which was very

good for that time. But he kept most of the money for his own consumption, such as having dinner together with colleagues, and buying clothing. There were few holidays. In busy years, there were only two days of breaks for the whole year, at the Chinese New Year. But he said that the workload for each day wasn't too heavy for him. Sometimes he could finish the given tasks in five hours and stayed home for the rest of the day.

After six years of work, Xuewu left the village factory to work in another factory far away from home. He was the youngest of a group of seven workers including one woman. These were all skilled workers, who were lured by higher wages to the new factory. Some of the senior members were employed as masters (*shifu*) in the trade. A year and a half later, this same group went to work in the province of Gansu (this time without the woman). In Gansu, Xuewu worked in a leather factory owned by a man from Songwang. In 2000 Xuewu quit the Gansu job and returned to work for another leather factory for a while. In 2001 he started to do business in xingjiang, trading sheep skins.

Xuewu's impression of his life in Gansu is the loneliness and remoteness of the region. His salary had by then risen to 1000 yuan per month, but there were no shops in the place where they were stationed. He had to eat simple food and there was not much opportunity to meet with the local people, especially women, who wore veils and were not allowed to go outside of home.

### *Two marriages*

When Xuewu was 19, his parents started to arrange a marriage partner for him (as in local custom he was already 20). The engagement and wedding were all taken care of by his parents. Throughout the interview, Xuewu tries to avoid talking about his first wife. I return to the first marriage several times in the interview and got a brief narrative of it. His first wife was from the local area. After they were engaged, Xuewu went to other places to

work, so they did not spend much time together before the wedding. They were married when Xuewu was 23 and their son was born the next year. His wife went to visit him in Gansu for about half a year when their son was a baby. After that, they were often apart again. Seven years ago, when their son was 3, they divorced. Xuewu attributes the divorce to two causes. One was the quarrels between them over his not bringing home any money. The other was his being away from home for too long.

### *Going entrepreneurial—a family endeavour*

Up until his years in Xinjiang, Xuewu had been employee to someone else. He had been a wage earner or *dagongzhe* (someone working for an employer). Xuewu wanted to be his own boss, and Xinjiang finally brought him an opportunity to make some money. He calls it his ‘first barrel of gold’. The process through which Dong made that fortune was a result of his experience in the leather trade and his collaboration with other people. He said that he had known the trade since the age of 16 and the few years in the northwest had given him valuable knowledge and information. When they found the time was ripe, his group managed to buy some goat skins in Xinjiang and transported them back to Xinyue, paying the local factory fees for processing the raw skins, and then selling them at a good price. In this way they each made a small fortune.

But the turning point in Xuewu’s life came when in late 2005 he joined his brother and father in Yunnan to be involved in developing the silkworm-related industry. His younger brother used to work for a company in Guangming that was in the silk-related business. He was sent by the company to the Keli region in Yunnan to develop the silk industry. Keli is an economically underdeveloped region and the local government has been trying to attract investment from the relatively well-developed regions of Zhejiang. The project in which Xuewu’s brother’s company had invested involved training the local peasants to plant mulberry trees and raise silkworms. Xuewu’s brother thought that there were

business opportunities in the venture and invited his father and brother to join him to start a family business there. Their father, together with a neighbour, went to Yunnan in 2004. Xuewu joined them in late 2005. In addition to training local peasants in raising silkworms, the father and sons also contracted land to grow mulberry trees and build venues for raising silkworms. Their next venture was to develop silk products and put them on the market. This was why Xuewu came home four years later to launch his family factory for manufacturing silk quilts. Silk produced in Yunnan is of better quality than silk produced in Heshui because in Yunnan silkworms are raised in a pollution-free environment.

As I will later present in more detail, the experience in Yunnan was a turning point in Xuewu's life. The working conditions in Yunnan were harsh. But he seemed to have discovered the meaning of life from the hardship. From this experience he also learned about the challenges in starting from scratch, and learned the importance of family.

In the first half of our interview, Xuewu stressed the carefree nature of his earlier life. His parents took care of everything in the household. He did not need to bear any responsibility regarding family. He did not seem to get along very well with his parents. He said that he seldom communicated with them and even did not care to live with them when he came back from his business trips in Xinjiang. He instead rented an apartment in town. Before he was 31, he had made some money, but spent all of it without contributing to the family. He regarded his experience as useful accumulation for his later career. He talks about the difference in opinion between him and his parents towards life.

### **11.3 Analysis of key themes in Xuewu's life**

### *Relations and different viewpoints with parents*

As the previous section narrates, Xuewu's relationship with his parents used to be tense. He did not even care to go home when he returned from business trips. After he was married and had become a father, the load for the household was still shouldered by his parents. Xuewu said he was rather 'wild' (*ye*) as a young man. [In the local vernacular, being 'wild' has negative overtones of not caring for the family, though it was regarded as normal for young men.] Xuewu was being self-critical for not having cared enough about family matters or his duty to take care of his parents.

However, he also rationalised his being wild as having different views from his parents on making money for the family. His parents, being more conservative, tended to believe in what was easier for them to control, earning a salary and working on the field as most other families in the village did. Xuewu is not that traditional. He is more concerned with effectiveness and the possibility of making a fortune. This was from his own experience. He said that while in Xinjiang, he started to do trading on his own behalf and made a fortune from it. This experience made him believe that his parents had been too rigid and their way of making money was not efficient.

Before he joined his father and brother in Yunnan, Xuewu's differences from his parents was centred on his attitudes towards home. His mother complained of his drifting nature. She would have liked it if he could have had a job in a local factory and brought home his wage, just like many other young people in the village. But Xuewu did not like staying at home. Up until recently, he was away from home most of the year. He told me that he was home only about one month out of twelve in a year. Xuewu expresses a view on making money that is in contrast to his parents' views:

I find working in the field is not efficient (in making money). For instance, I could make a profit of 10,000 yuan in a month, which might take them a whole year. On



the other hand, I spent all my money. So at the end of the year, to my parents, I was still not making any money.

I think there is a broader issue here about China's process of modernization. The mentality of 'getting rich quick' has been stronger in the younger generation than among their parents, who tend to be more content with their current way of life. They prefer stability and predictability to adventure and big fortune. As for Xuewu, he admits that he wanted to get rich quick. In his own words, he wants 'things to come faster economically'. But it was not easy. He had made some money—indeed quite a lot, by local standards. But he spent a lot too. Much of his expenditure goes to *yingchou*, or give-and-take among friends, business partners and government officials. This is part of the culture in China's business circles now. Xuewu later talks about entertaining local officials in Yunnan, together with his brother. But his father never joins them.

Despite the differences and tensions, Xuewu said that he now gradually understands his parents. They start their day's work at sunrise and end the day to rest at sunset (*ri-chu-er-zuo, ri-luo-er-xi*). They maintain the tradition of rural life. It is natural for them to want their elder son to keep the family tradition and taking good care of his wife and son as well as his parents when they get older.

To qualify the picture of difference, we should note change in Xuewu's father's life. His father had been working in the farm plot for most of his life. His only business was the local trade of preserved vegetables. But when his younger son asked him to go to Yunnan, he decided to go. His staying there for almost five years has made him change his way of doing things. Xuewu observes in his father that 'his understanding or idea about rural life has been changing'. 'What has not changed is that he has to work. It is unrealistic to think about not working.' Though Xuewu does not specify his father's change, from the context, he is referring to his father's not agreeing to return to Xinyue although Xuewu's mother

had asked him to. She was the only family member who remained at home. When the local Yunnan peasants ask Xuewu's father why he chose to go there instead of staying home enjoying himself, he gave two reasons: 1) He was there to support his two sons. He felt obliged. 2) He has experience in this trade. He is a capable hand in labouring. In fact, Xuewu did not know how to do farm work. That is why an old man in his late 60s that I had a chat with in July 2008 commented worryingly that when his generation are no longer able to till the land, the younger generation will not be capable to take care of it.

I also ask Xuewu to tell me about his first wife's reaction to his always being away from home and his lavish spending. Xuewu does not seem to be willing to say much about her, but he admits that

she complained. There were even conflicts. Economically, I was away all year long without bringing home a cent. We quarrelled over this sometimes.

His first wife joined him in Gansu for about half a year when their son was only a few months old. He comments that in the countryside, disputes between husband and wife often arise from economic affairs. His divorce might have to do with the unhappy experiences his wife had with him when he did not care enough for family.

### *Chiku – experiences of hardship*

The change I highlighted earlier in the chapter took place when Xuewu joined his brother and father in Yunnan. The lesson, it appears, comes from the hardship they had to endure there. This again alludes to the theme of *chiku* (eating bitterness) or enduring hardship. Unlike other people's versions of *chiku* as denoting both abject poverty and hard labour, Xuewu's version focuses less on lack of money and more on the physical and emotional experience of hardship. Most people refer to the years of scarcity before the reform as

times of ‘eating bitterness’, but Xuewu is referring to his experiences in Xinjiang and Yunnan in the 2000s as times when he had to endure hardship to make money.

Xuewu’s sense of hardship (*ku*) is similar to people who have experiences of migrating to another country to make a living. Even though he had money, he just could not find a place to go to for food or have family to prepare food for him. This is illustrated his experience of hardship during his stay in Xinjiang:

For more than a week I had to live on instant noodles. There was no restaurants in the spot where I was collecting sheep skin. (He was then alone in the job.) ...It was a place where the locals were so poor that they lived on carrots.

Another example of ‘*chiku*’ was his weight loss in Yunnan. In order to establish a venture (*chuangye*), Xuewu was prepared to face the challenge of the harsh environment. But one has to experience it to appreciate the meaning of hardship. And it was through hardworking experience with his father and brother in such a harsh environment that Xuewu said he indeed matured.

The interview was interrupted at that point when Xuewu’s mother came to ask us for lunch. So I could only pick some fragments in the interview in which he talks about the harshness he endured.

For me to take the family seriously, it was not until I joined my brother and father (in Yunnan). ...

I went there in the second half of 2005. Talking of the story there, it was so hard; only heaven knows (*ku delai, tian xiaode*, his voice rose).

For me, I have never experienced hardship before. Everything was handled by my

parents. I had been carefree all my life. At the age of 31 or 32, I had no worries or concerns. At home, there were my parents who took care of everything. I did not feel it necessary and made no accumulation. After I have made a fortune in Xinjiang and witnessed the hardship in Yunnan, I started to feel that I actually needed to change. Life needed to change. It appeared that Yunnan tested my will power (*molian le wode yizhi*). Some (experiences) could not be described in language. ... So for me it was not until the Yunnan experience that I began to appreciate matters (*dongshi*, to be thoughtful, considerate, and mature).

...It was hard to imagine for others there is still such a place of hardship now.

...It was not until after that experience that I became mature and taking things seriously.

...When I was carefree, I had a body weight of 99 kilos.

... I was too fat. Before Yunnan, I was actually carefree. After that, I lost weight from 99 kilos to 79 kilos, 158 *jin* in 2007. That experience, looking back now, was hard indeed. Walking in the mountain roads, sometimes 3 or 4 mountains in a row, made my feet blistered. I almost fainted....

There is lots of repetition even in my abridged version of Xuewu's memories of his hardship. This demonstrates that to him, the experience of hardship and joint effort with father and brother in a harsh environment for a clear objective have contributed to his transition in life, from carefree youth to mature manhood. I will discuss this more extensively using the notion of 'body reflexivity'.

### *Body as arena*

I have just mentioned Xuewu's weight loss in Yunnan. When Xuewu was carefree, he was fat, as he admits. There was a saying in Chinese, '*xin kuan ti pang*'—if one's mind is

stress-free, one's body gets fat. Xuewu had enjoyed the good life before his Yunnan experience. But now he assesses this period of life as unworthy, though his ambition for making big money persists. What has changed is the means to make money. He thinks that trading (business) is not as good as industry (production). That is why he now has been working on launching a factory to make silk quilts. Xuewu explicitly regards his decision to go to Yunnan as a turning point in his life.

For Dong Xuewu, his body was also highlighted in his account of his first job at the village factory. It was in his formative years of adolescence after leaving school at the age of 15. His father arranged for him to work in the village leather factory. But he was dismissed in the first week. He told me that the manager of the factory saw him one day and ordered him to leave.

There was a funny story then. When I was 16 I was still slim and short. After a couple of days at the factory, the manager spotted me and he told the personnel staff, 'that person is so slim and short. He is not ready for work yet. Let him go.' Thus I was sent home. Just a couple of days, and I came back home. ...It was funny. The manager was tall and big. ...I just came out of school and was very thin.

Though Xuewu takes this anecdote as a funny story, he might have not felt the same way at the time. He had to stay at home doing what women and children usually did at the time, cooking rice, boiling water (for making tea) and collecting grass for sheep.

### *Relations with women*

When asked about the people he met away from home and relations with them, Xuewu admits that while being away from home, he felt the need for emotional care. He gives one example of a young woman he met in Xinjiang. It was after he had got married and

his son was about a year and a half. At that time he was already having problems with his first wife. Xuewu admits that he had developed ‘a sense of attachment (*yituo gan*)’ to the girl. He says that while away from home, he did not restrain himself too much in the aspect of private (he does not make it explicit, but I would take it to mean emotional relations and sexuality). After all, he needed care. But he says that after he had left Xinjiang, he stopped contacting that girl.

Xuewu says frankly that if he chose to, he could take a young girl back home from Yunnan, as the gap in income makes it attractive for Yunnan women to leave their hometown in order to seek better lives elsewhere. And even if they know that a man has already had a wife at home, they would still agree to live with him. Even parents of the girls would not care as long as he provides them with financial rewards.

Xuewu observes that women in Xinyue participate more in the decision-making process, while women in other places that he has been to participate equally in labour but less in decision-making than men. However, when I ask about his own family, he concedes that the ones who make the final decisions are the men. He cites a recent example:

My mother has strong opinions of her own. She would interfere in everything. She  
• latterly argued with me about the construction of the workshop. I said to her, ‘you should now stop bossing around. Don’t behave like *Cixi Taihou* (the late Qing Dynasty empress). You are old now; you should leave things to us’.

He comments that the right to have the final say (*fayan quan*) has always been on the side of men. Even though his mother often complains, he could always have his own way.

### *More on division of labour*

His father, on the other hand, was always working hard, at home in the fields or away in town selling preserved vegetables. When I ask Xuewu about his father and mother's division of labour, he says that there is the division of work inside the home (interior) and work outside (exterior).

His mother has always been working at home. This was not only inside the house. It was both housework and work in the fields. Her works in the fields include collecting weeds for sheep, picking mulberry leaves for silkworms, planting rice seedlings, planting vegetables, harvesting rice and vegetables, weeding, etc. Her works at home are cooking meals, cleaning the house, washing clothes, and feeding livestock.

Xuewu's father, on the other hand, was more often away from home. He would go to the local marketplace to shop for simple groceries, or take the preserved vegetables to town. This task would require him to be away from home for days or weeks on end.

In the factory, there was both division and mixing in work and wages. Most manufacturing jobs were paid on a piecework basis, so some women might make more than men doing the same job. But there were still differences in power and labour. The majority of management, accounting and almost the entire sales department are made up of men, while all of the secretarial positions are filled by women. Women proved to be as capable as men in skills. A case in point was one of the seven workers who left for another factory together with Xuewu. They were all 'masters'.

### *Reflexivity and contradiction*

In 2005, as Xuewu turned 31, he joined his father and brother in Yunnan to develop the silk industry there. Before that, he had always been one who did not care much about

family. But his experience in Yunnan changed his worldview somehow. He used the phrase ‘like fallen leaves returning to the roots’ (*luo-ye-gui-gen*), an expression in Chinese that often invokes a feeling for home among people in old age who have been away for too long. He wanted to stop ‘floating’ and settle down. He wanted to spend more time with his mother, wife and son. His first marriage failed and he was self-critical for not caring enough about home. This change seems to be going back to what his parents would like him to be: less risk-taking and more responsible for family.

At the same time, Xuewu still holds on to his dream of making big money. The difference is that this time he turns from the business of trading to the business of an enterprise. His generation has surpassed his parents’ generation who would be content with a stable life in which the whole family are well-fed, ideally having a little savings for big events, and above all securing marriages for children. Xuewu has experienced some personal achievements, like the first ‘barrel of gold’ he had dug. As time goes by, the less exciting but more predictable and rewarding family life is getting more important to him. He took his current wife with him to Yunnan. His son (from the first marriage) was first sent to a boarding school in Heshui, but Xuewu took him to Yunnan later, where he had been in school for two years. Now the three of them have all returned home. Xuewu and his wife are already working in the business of silk quilts in preparation for the establishment of a factory manufacturing silk quilts bearing their own brand name. His son now goes to the local school at Manqiao.

#### **11.4 Discussion**

In the interview Xuewu gives some other anecdotes that are significant to this study. As far as gender is concerned, there was some difference between the school environment and the village setting. Xuewu remembers that at school, there were unwritten rules that boys and girls should not be too intimate. Though they were arranged to sit next to each other by sharing a rectangular desk, there was always a line carved in the middle of the



desk demarcating the territory. (In Chapter 13 Xuelian recalls being hit by her deskmate and retaliating that resulted in a fight.) However, back at the village, boys and girls of similar age played together as they grew up. There was one childhood anecdote that is worth recording in the interview. At that time, most of the families in the hamlet that had houses on the two banks of the river in front of Xuewu's home had two sons. Among all children of his own age, there was only one little girl. She used to play with the other children, who were all boys, and did everything they were doing, such as swimming in the river. Her body was always covered with dirt. Xuewu says that just very recently when he met her, she was talking about her being bullied by him then. She remembered that once he grabbed some dirty mud in the river and put it on her head. Xuewu added that maybe the girl played just like the boys because there were no other girls nearby of her similar age.

There were also contradictions in his interview. He told me that he was not ambitious. As a commoner (*laobaixing*), he does not even dare to think about achieving something big. However, he also wanted to have his own business, and business in the exact sense of industry, not merely trading. He used the exact word *shiye* (business in the sense of being an entrepreneur, with a factory or shop of one's own) not *shengyi* (business in the specific sense of being a trader, or broker, usually having no shop or factory of one's own).

While doing transcription, I also took a break and thought about other interviews that I did with men and women of his age. I could recall the similarities but mainly they all differ as they have different life trajectories. They have had better education: one entered college and is now working as a school teacher; another who had college education is working as a computer technician in a big hotel in town; a third is working as a member of the village committee. Unlike their parents' generation who tend to share similar life trajectories, this generation have started to diversify.

## CHAPTER 12

### WEIGUO: AN ORGANIC INTELLECTUAL

The life history of Weiguo, who was 31 when interviewed, is of interest to me for several reasons. First, Weiguo represents a generation of rural men who were born in the wake of the Cultural Revolution and dawn of the reform and opening up in China in the late 1970s. Both continuity and differences are found between his generation and other generations such as that of Uncle Ah Shun's. He is also different from the generation of Jiangyang who had experienced the transition from collective to decollectivised eras. Second, Weiguo provides useful information about village government and village economy from his decade-long service as a village cadre. Third, his personal life history and his views on issues like gender and family are themselves valuable sources for understanding the construction of masculinity in the particular rural area. There is also a unique style of his talk that is significant in studies of the relationship between social practice, identity and gender.

#### 12.1 The interview

This interview was recorded in July 2008, when I first started to do interviews. As I was at the stage of developing interviewing skills then, there are some limits to the interview data. I should point out a factor that may have affected the interview and hence the focus of this chapter. He was talking as if it were for a journalistic genre, which is shown from some passages in the interview. This is understandable, and the tendency is reflected in a book based on interviews with 50 village cadres (Guo & Han, 2007) where the novice college students have presented their profiles of village officials as if they were reporting on the achievements of model workers or heroes. I should have asked Weiguo to present more of his personal experiences in detail. I had more encounters with Weiguo in my 2009 stay and there is a bit of this observation reflected later in the chapter.

Weiguo serves many roles in the village administration, the most prominent position being his role as the village accountant. I came to know Weiguo on my first day to the village. In fact, Weiguo was the person who took me to my landlord's place. He rides a motorcycle to work every day. On my first day in the village, after I was introduced to the village cadres, I rode on the back of Weiguo's motorcycle to meet Uncle Ah Shun.

I came to the village office building often and when I wanted to start doing formal recorded interviews, I thought of Weiguo. I asked for his opinion. He agreed to a formal interview and I came to his office late one afternoon when most other cadres had already left for home. The whole building was quiet and it was perfect for doing the interview, which lasted for about 75 minutes.

The interview covers a wide range of topics, not just a person's private life (dating, childcare, spousal and generational relations, leisure, etc). They range from local economic production, relations between cadres and masses, promotion, and reflexivity. As a village official with ten years of experience, Weiguo's case may be useful to those recent university graduates who respond to the calls of the central government of China to serve in positions at the village level.

## **12.2 Life course**

Weiguo was born in 1978, the year when China's 'reform and opening up' policy was launched. It was also the year when the one-child-per-couple policy was launched. Weiguo is among the first generation of Chinese only children (*dusheng ziniu*). In his memory, only some of his female school mates had either a younger brother or younger sister.

When Weiguo was born, his parents lived with his grandparents in a one-storey building (*pingfang*). At that time his grandparents and mother worked in agriculture, while his

father worked as a bricklayer. (It is interesting that Weiguo refers to his father as ‘working in construction’, which is rather formal.) He remembers the year 1983 when land was contracted to individual households because that was the time when he started to remember things. The villagers still called it ‘*dangan huo*’ (private production household) to distinguish it from the collective production team as the basic unit of collective production, though officially the new system was called *shengchan zeren zhi* (production responsibility system) or *lianchan chengbao* (contracting land according to production) in order to avoid the negative political connotation of the word ‘*dangan*’, or ‘work individually’. Up to now, China still insists on its socialist status. There is a gap in Xinyue (and elsewhere) between the official and the local vernacular languages in talking about politically sensitive terms. In the interview, Weiguo shifts between talking about the general situation and talking about his own experiences and situations associated with his own family, although my lead questions are mostly about the latter. He said that when he was young, ‘the conditions for living and production were not so good’ without specifying whether he was referring to his own family or the general situation of the village. Most probably, he was referring to both.

Weiguo went to the village school, entering kindergarten at six and finishing elementary school there. The school building at that time was at the site of today’s leather factories. It was a one-storey building made up of some shabby rooms, with an earth floor. There were few toys for the kids to play with. When the old site of the school was taken over by the village factory around 1988, a new site was found for the school and a new three-storey building was constructed. This is the village school as I see it in my fieldwork. There are three classrooms and two teachers’ offices on each level of the building. There is also a playground a little bigger than a basketball court in front of the building. Weiguo says that when the construction was completed, it was physically a good school according to the standard of that time.

After leaving the village school, Weiguo went to junior high school in Manqiao for three years. There was a competitive test for selection to enter senior high school. Weiguo went to a middle school in the town of Baodi. He entered a class for vocational training instead of the regular classes in which students were preparing for university. At the vocational school, Weiguo majored in computer science. He said that his vocational training at senior high made him a person with a special technology. He was aspiring to become a professional.

But his life trajectory after leaving school has been an assembly worker in electronics, an apprentice carpenter, and a village cadre. The training in computer science did not secure him a job after his graduation in 1996. There was a time when it was expected that one's training in a speciality should lead to jobs that match it. This was called '*zhuan ye duikou*', i.e. the speciality matching the position. Often, this phrase was associated with people having university degrees. For a person with rural residency, having tertiary level education qualifies him/her for access to job opportunities on an equal footing with urban residents. Secondary level vocational training does not generally achieve that. In Weiguo's case, his vocational training in computer science at secondary level did not contribute to his getting an immediate job which required his knowledge and skills.

His first job was at a factory in Sanliqiao, the township seat which is about five kilometres from Xinyue. At the factory, loudspeakers were manufactured for export. Weiguo had to travel to work by bike. He did not like the job very much and quit after working there for three months. He then followed his maternal uncle to work as an apprentice in carpentry for a bit more than a year. He was keen on neither of the two first jobs, as his motivation for doing them was just to reduce the economic burden for his family.

An opportunity came for Weiguo in 1998 when the Manqiao Township (Xinyue village was under its administration at that time) was recruiting staff members for a range of

positions at the village level. The selection involved applicants' sitting in a test to compete with others. Weiguo was successfully selected and has, by the time of the interview, worked as a village cadre for 10 years. He first served as cashier, then as accountant. Along the way, he has also taken other positions and responsibilities such as liaison person for some of the villagers' groups and as director of public security.

When he was 24, Weiguo married a woman from the same village who comes from another hamlet. He and his wife have a daughter who was 4 in 2008. They used to live with Weiguo's parents whose house is about ten minutes' walk from the village office. His wife has been working in a factory in Heshui. They had bought an apartment in Manqiao and the three of them live there most days of the week. Manqiao lies about 10 kilometres to the south of Heshui and about 3 kilometres to the North of Xinyue. Both Weiguo and his wife commute to work by motorcycles every day.

### **12.3 Weiguo's work as a village cadre**

In answer to my question about his job at the Villagers' Committee, Weiguo first gave some details of the tasks involved in his position.

**Xingkui:** Could you tell me about the experience and your reflections on it?

- **Weiguo:** At the beginning, I worked with accounting and statistics. ... The former accountant was promoted to deputy director of the Villagers' Committee. So I took over some of his duties. At that time, the township was not merged yet. At the village level, there was an accountant and cashier, to separate the jobs. Later, accounting was taken over by the township. A centre for accounting was established at the township, which was responsible for accounting of all villages under its jurisdiction. In a strict sense, my position after that was not an accountant, just a cashier (*jingji baoguan*). The other task, statistics, has been about agricultural production. ...*(He introduces the local agricultural production, silkworm raising in*

*particular*.)... I need to provide statistics of the details of village production in the amount of silkworms raised, production of silkworm cocoons, the earnings from selling silkworm cocoons, and the exact amount of land on which mulberry bushes were planted. There are also sideline crops, such as chrysanthemums, cucumbers, and other vegetables, ...

There are other tasks that all village cadres share. For instance, there are 26 villagers' groups. Each group is designated to a village level cadre as his/her responsibility to maintain correspondence.

In 2000, there was a movement to flatten the land in the region. As a result, measurements were needed to record the sizes of land changed due to the process and redistribute the flattened land afterwards.

After the flattening of the contracted land, my task was to measure and redistribute the field and land to each household for contracting. The jobs first involved measuring the original area of land each household had contracted. This was the preparation period. After the land was flattened, it was our task for redistribution. One of the methods was 'drawing lots'. This is time-consuming work.

Weiguo's knowledge of village affairs, shown in this extract, was very helpful to me in building up information for the ethnography of the village.

Also significant is that near the end of the interview he reflects on his career as a village cadre as serving the villagers and leading them to a wealthier and happier future.

#### **12.4 Analysis of Weiguo's gender practice and experience**

*Power relations: direct and discursive*

According to Weiguo, the village cadres and the villagers have few disputes. One reason is that the success of the village enterprises has provided the local authorities with enough funds to give benefits to the village households. For instance, the cost of villagers' use of electricity in agricultural production, such as irrigation, is covered by the village. Therefore, Weiguo says that there have been no such incidents as '*shangfang*' (complaining to superior authorities) or '*quntixing shijian*' (group incidents). The expressions '*shangfang*' and '*quntixing shijian*' are both official labels for the activities of the powerless masses who turn to authorities at higher levels (as far as Beijing) to complain about the mistreatment they suffer from local authorities.

Power at village level has seen a significant change from leadership to service provider. Weiguo's concluding reflections on his position as village cadres give some expression of this when asked about his identity as a CCP member:

As a party member, first you need self-discipline. You should have better performance in your job to win the respect from the masses, so that they will trust you and trust party members. Only then could you lead the masses to have better lives. The image and identity of a party member makes me behave and think like a party member. (I shall) lead the masses by setting a good example.

There is also an interesting observation in Weiguo's account of his family. In Xinyue and the region around it, being 'head of a household' (*dangjia*) has symbolic power in the family. It used to be the patriarch, the oldest man in the household who served as head of a household. But there have been changes in recent years. Some young men take over the position soon after they get married, whether they live together with or separately from their parents (see also Chapter 15 on Guiying's father Jianqiang). In Weiguo's household, four generations live under the same roof. Weiguo's grandfather is officially listed as the



head of the household. So symbolically, it is a traditional family. But financially, Weiguo's father takes charge of the household earnings from the land and covers the expenses of daily grocery and materials for agricultural production (fertilizers, pesticides, seeds, etc.). Weiguo and his wife keep their wages to themselves but Weiguo pays the bills for water, electricity, cable TV, and the telephone, or roughly everything that comes from outside departments.

This is interesting in that the father and grandfather are taking up a traditional sense of power and responsibilities while Weiguo is responsible for the contemporary forms of expense. Despite this shift, these responsibilities are all men's. Exercising power is still a masculine practice.

#### *Production, consumption and gendered accumulation*

When I ask Weiguo about his family's source of income in his childhood, he answers that his father was a bricklayer and his mother raised silkworms and worked in agriculture. Both his parents participated in production, albeit in different spaces. Later, when I ask about Weiguo's understanding of gender, he finds it hard to talk about his exact experience in gender terms. His primary point of reference seems to be the gender division of labour. He refers to a binary space involving men and women: *nanzhuwai, nuzhunei*—or 'males are mainly responsible for the exterior, while females are responsible for the interior', meaning women's tasks are to take good care of the family.

Notions of *nei* (inner, inside, interior) and *wai* (outer, outside, exterior) vary over time and place. For instance, the traditional conception of the interior was within or around the house. A case in point was the time before 1949 when the gendered division of labour in the region was the well-known '*nan-geng-nü-zhi*'—men till and women weave. In the collective era, both men and women worked as tillers outside the boundary of the house.

Women returned home after work in the fields to tend the children, cook, and wash, while men worked in their little private plot tending the vegetables. The division was not very strict, with women often helping out in planting and harvesting seasons for vegetables, but the more skills-demanding jobs of cultivating the seedlings, watering, administering fertilizers and pesticides, and the process of pickling and finally selling preserved vegetables, were generally done by men. After decollectivisation, men and women within the households often have to work together for most production-related tasks, though the traditional ‘women’s works’ of babysitting, washing and cooking are more often done by women.

Bricklayers and carpenters are still almost exclusively men. That is why Weiguo puts his father as fitting the traditional ‘exterior’ role, why other men who work on their contracted land are all limited to the ‘interior’ as in those households both men and women work in the field. But there is still a division. When I ask about housework, Weiguo says that it is more often done by women.

Talking about childcare, Weiguo uses a combination of local expressions and more formal expressions. For instance, Weiguo’s mother takes care of (*daiguan*) his daughter during the daytime. The word ‘*daiguan*’ is typical of the local dialect. On the other hand, Weiguo says that his daughter is still a ‘pre-schooler’ (*xuelinqian ertong*), which is a term used more often in the education sector and official documents.

The sharp gender distinction of labour suggested by some of this language is contrasted by Weiguo’s own participation in childcare. Though Weiguo and his wife leave the baby to their mother during the day when both have to work, they take care of their daughter by themselves during the night. Weiguo reports that he helps with preparing the milk powder, changing nappies, and holding the baby in his arms when she cries. (Different practices of men are observed in the interviews with others, especially women, who report that their

husbands contributed little in childcare at early days. See Part V for more discussion.)

Weiguo also thinks that it is now almost time to teach his daughter knowledge, by which he means teaching her through children's rhymes, recognizing characters, Arabic numbers, singing, etc. Both Weiguo and his wife share in teaching the child, mainly in the evening. When I visited the village office in 2009, I observed that for two consecutive days, Weiguo took his daughter to his office. He explained to me that she was suspected to have contracted chicken pox and was asked not to be sent to the kindergarten. At the office, Weiguo gave her toys to play with and let her watch cartoons on his computer when he was not using it. Weiguo's own report and my observation of his looking after his daughter at the office are evidences that men's participation in childcare has become an accepted practice in the village with the new generation of parents.

When I ask Weiguo to talk about his relatives, he gives some useful information about the importance of ritual spending in the village. In the countryside, there is still importance attached to frugality. In ordinary times, one may be very careful with money and try to save as much as they can. But in times of important events, one may turn out to be very wasteful.

- We have lots of relatives and the expenses in ritual and gifts have been high. In the country now, there are so many happy and unfortunate events: Happy events include weddings, which are the more traditional ones. There are also new occasions: admission to university, being recruited to the armed forces, etc. The host family will organise banquets and guests (relatives and friends) are expected to show up. It is unavoidable that they have to present gifts in monetary forms.

Furthermore, both the funerals and weddings are more conspicuous now, unlike in the past times of scarcity. The material conditions are better now, and households

have a psychology of competition: If one household supplies good food (such as whole chickens, ducks, and pig hams), another, even if a less affluent household, would strive to supply banquets of the same standard. These are rare and important events for a person's life. It is a matter of face. One does not want to risk losing face. They'd rather go in debt. They can often turn to relatives for help financially. The priority is to make the feasts appear in style (*fengguang*) and grand (*longzhong*). That means nobody wants to lose face. I should say, in the countryside, rituals have been attached great importance to.

Gender is not made explicit in the above excerpt, but if we bear in mind that most heads of households are still men, the 'face' that families earn from the grand and extravagant ceremonies is predominantly attributed to men.

### *Emotional relations*

The following discussion of emotional relations covers dating, spousal relations, and parenting. I will start with a conversation about Weiguo's experience of courtship.

**Xingkui:** Could you tell me about how you and your wife got to know each other, from engagement to marriage?

**Weiguo:** There are people who experience free courtship (*ziyou lian'ai*). But in my case, it was through *xiangqin* (arranged meeting of prospective mates through the introduction of a go-between), which means that someone introduced my fiancée to me. It was my cousin (*tangjie*) who introduced my fiancée to me. She was our matchmaker. My wife was from the same village, but we did not know each other before having been introduced by my cousin. After we met through this introduction, we found that we could talk to each other well .

The local term for dating is ‘*zhao duixiang*’ (seek mates) and ‘*tan lian’ai*’ (talk romance). Both have been adopted from the official sanctioning of gender relations by the Chinese Communist Party. It puts the man and woman in a courting relationship on equal terms. However, the more colloquial term for dating after gaining parental approval and arranging through a matchmaker is for the young man and woman to *laiqu* (come and go, meaning having interaction as relatives, visiting each other’s household, being entertained, helping each other out, meeting other relatives). These interactions involve exchange of gifts and labour. Jiangyang (Chapter 10) told me that since his wife was fast in pulling up rice seedlings, she greatly helped Jiangyang’s household in rice transplanting seasons after they were engaged.

Weiguo turned from his own experience to the general practice of local customs. For young people, when it was time for them to think about dating or courtship, there are usually two ways of knowing each other. First is ‘*ziyou lian’ai*’, in which the two get to know each other themselves, and date each other without having a match-maker to begin with. They will later turn to someone as a match-maker when marriage is in view—known as a sitting match-maker, as it is not through his or her effort that the marriage has been created. People are considered lucky to perform the role of match-makers. This is an honour, therefore the role is often given to close friends or relatives. The second pattern is more traditional. In this pattern, the potential spouses are introduced to each other either through a professional match-maker or someone who would like to help. This was the case with Weiguo’s marriage.

I then turn to the impact that marriage and childbearing have had on him:

**Xingkui:** How do you find your change after you were married? And after your daughter was born?

**Weiguo:** Before marriage, when I was a bachelor, my sense of family (*jiating guannian*) was a bit vague. I used to believe that things are going to be all right as

time goes by. They will come naturally. After marriage, especially after the child was born, this (the sense of family) gets stronger. As a parent, whether mother or father, you feel your responsibility gets heavier. What you do now does not only represent yourself as an individual. ... You should think more about others (in the family). As child of your own parents, you feel you have grown up. So the sense of family is getting stronger.

The above is given to my question about Weihuo's reflection on the important impact that marriage and childrearing have on him. He is being reflexive.

Weiguo's comments on spousal relations are interesting in that he was talking as if both himself and the general situation were meant:

For the part of the man, he may no longer be as sensitive as he used to be in pleasing his partner. For the part of the woman, she may still yearn for the tender care she has enjoyed during courtship, the romance and warmth. She is very nostalgic of the romantic and warm feelings she got from the suitor. BUT the man may no longer have the passion or efforts. Now that they are married, the focus has turned to the child. The relationship between man and woman is now that of old couples. ...

Though Weiguo does not give specific examples or incidents of disagreement or unhappy episode in his relationship with his wife or mother, he does admit there are sometimes disputes or quarrels over trivial matters. He has been reflexive in his comments on this when I raise the question about times when he finds it challenging in dealing with emotional relations.

The closest persons in family are my wife, parents, and children. First, from the aspect of communication, there are occasions of dissatisfaction with my own or

someone else way of doing things. Conflicts at home are everywhere to be found. It is unrealistic to deny the existence of conflicts. Quarrels sometimes occur. And quarrels in the family are something that bothered me. It is something that upsets me. But once it occurs, you have to face it and resolve it in an appropriate manner. It is also a responsibility for both sides. As adults, both should have the attitudes (*xintai*) to resolve conflicts.

This passage gives me an impression that Weiguo is depicting himself as rational as well as emotional. He is prone to unhappiness or even anger, but he deals with it calmly, and he wishes his parents and wife will be as rational. Peasants, women and children have the stereotype of being irrational.

When I ask Weiguo to give specific causes of disputes, Weiguo presents them as trivial.

**Xingkui:** What were the usual causes of disputes?

**Weiguo:** Most of them minor things in life (*shenghuo suosui*), those things that are trivial matters. They might be brought from work. For instance, after a day's work, one is tired. Or one encounters something unhappy, and it is brought home. These will lead to quarrels. In a quarrel, if neither side can throw off one's airs, then things will get more serious. They may not affect the overall relationship. But just because they exist, sometimes a disharmonious situation is created. So it is a goal and direction that requires all members of the family to try to resolve disputes. It is an ideal situation to make all happy in the family.

At first it appears hollow, Weiguo talks like a scholar advising an unknowing audience. But upon rethinking, I find this reflects the construction of the discourse or manner of talking that cadres are trained for. I am also amazed that for one with no college education, Weiguo's skill of persuasion gets so philosophical and reflexive.

Weiguo's ambition and constraints:

I had dreamed of buying a car. Right now, prices of cars have dropped, but meanwhile prices for gas have risen. I cannot afford keeping a car. So although I wanted to buy a car, I find it not worthwhile, considering my income. Look at others: Those achievers have bought cars, houses, and do not need to worry about food and clothing. Now we are not talking about food and clothing for bare subsistence. The eating problem has been solved. The issue now is how to lead a better life.

*Symbolism, culture and discourse*

Weiguo's account of his marriage arrangement gives some description about the continuity of the local culture. When I asked about the amount paid by his family as brideprice, Weiguo says,

About 20,000 yuan. To be frank, I cannot remember the exact figure because it was my parents who were in charge. In the country, for a son to get married, it was as if the whole thing was their responsibility, not the son's. First, parents should have the house built. For the female's side, the condition of the male's family mainly depends on the house. The housing environment demonstrates the power of the family.

Almost all respondents report the same pattern of house-building in their life time. The former director of the village Women's Committee reports building 5 or 6 times. Both Uncle Ah Shun (Chapter 9) and Jiangyang (Chapter 10) give similar accounts. The house is both material and symbolic. As Weiguo observes in this passage, it reflects 'the power of the family'.



When asked about the future schooling of his daughter, Weiguo says that in order to ensure their children good educational opportunities, villagers send their children to schools in Heshui. They believe that in those schools their children are more likely to achieve success in future (*'chushan'*—to amount to something, or literally 'going out of the mount', which demonstrates rural parents' expectation for their children in getting good education and hence good jobs outside the village.) But to do that, the rural parents have to buy apartments in town, because one has to have urban household registration to make a child eligible for school admission in town.

However, in Weiguo's opinion, it is OK if his daughter attends a country school first and goes to higher level schools in town later. (The current system is that rural children with good results in exams can be admitted by urban schools in town after they finish elementary or early secondary school.) Weiguo has not saved enough money to purchase an apartment in Heshui. Further, he believes that a person's achievement in education depends on oneself, not just a good school. He says that he prefers 'a natural approach' in child education. He thinks that

The competition in town is fiercer. So the psychological burden of both child and parents are heavier. Such an environment of competition may not be good to her 'growing up. I wish her to grow without pressure, to reach her potential without constraints (*ziyou fahui*). We are happy if she does well. If she does not do well, it is due to her attitude. Just let nature take care of it (*shunqi ziran*). It was up to her.

In this discussion, Weiguo's use of both typical local vernacular terms and more formal official or formal terms reflects his education, current career, and social change in the aspect of discourse in China. The term *'chushan'* in the local dialect has an equivalent in Mandarin *'chengcai'*—to become a talent, which is the aspiration of all parents for their children. Terms like *'ziyou fahui'* and *'shunqi ziran'* are more formal ones.

As a village cadre, Weiguo—whether consciously or habitually—adopts a style of talk that is quasi-official. He introduces the year of his birth, 1978, as a significant time in contemporary Chinese history: it was ‘the year of reform and opening up (*gaige kaifang*), also the year of planned birth (*jihua shengyu*)’.

There are many occasions in the interview on which Weiguo invokes formal vocabulary: his description of the local children as ‘*chunpu*’ (pure or innocent, similar to the local word ‘*laoshi*’); his reference to school dating as ‘*zaolian*’ (early love, a disapproving term; the local term *zhao duixiang* has no age reference); his talk of ‘*langman yu wenxin*’ (romance and warmth) in courtship and the ‘*liulia*’ (nostalgia) of the romantic courtship; his association of women’s domestic responsibilities as in areas of ‘*shenghuo* (living)’, ‘*qiju* (daily life), and ‘*yinshi* (food and drink)’; his mention of ‘*shangfang*’ and ‘*quntixing shijian*’ (which is more closely associated with politics); his use of ‘*di’er chanye* (secondary industry)’ and ‘*disan chanye* (tertiary industry)’, which are official terminology adopted from economics.

Weiguo’s style is significant in that he is well aware of the nomenclature used in official or academic language regarding issues such gender equity, bias and the patriarchal family ideology of China. There are two excerpts that are worth quoting at length to illustrate this. First, Weiguo uses Mandarin when he introduces the notion of ‘*hou-ji-you-ren*’—to have descendents (to continue the family lineage). What he says about the old generation seems to confirm Li Yinhe’s (2009) observation about the anxiety of peasants in a north China village for ‘*juehu*’—having no descendents; but his own view departs from this. Commenting on the traditional Chinese notion of ‘passing on the lineage and generations (*chuan-zong-jie-dai*)’ as one of the main purposes of child raising, Weiguo observes the different views between generations. Those of the older generations still believe that their patrilineal family names must be continued, but

for the younger generation of parents who are better educated than their own parents, even though they still wish their sons to take daughter-in-law (*tao xifu*), just as tradition has it, the reality in future might well be that there may have to be a merger of two families into one household, and there will be no distinction between calling in a son-in-law (*zhao nüxu*) and taking a daughter-in-law (*tao xifu*) in the sense of today. It will be just young people getting married and establishing a family. This will be inevitable in future. As for me, I will respect the views and opinions of children.

Second, he has a clear appreciation of the official gender equality policy. When I ask him about pension for old people, he relates the question to gender:

**Xingkui:** Have you been covered in pension?

**Weiguo:** Yes. The issue of old-age pension will be tackled. It does not mean that when (we get) old (we) have to depend on (our) children to support. (I) don't have concerns of this. In the past in the countryside, there was a saying called *yang-er-fang-lao* (raising sons for one's old age). Even if one has had two daughters, they still wanted a son. This kind of views, from today's perspective, was backward. We should not talk about raising sons for old age. It should be said that having daughters are the same. Gender discrimination (*xingbie qishi*) and bias (*zhong-nan qing-nü*) should not be existing. Gender equality (*nannü pingdeng*) should be realised. It should not only be a slogan. It should be the same in living (practice). Nowadays, some women are more capable and excellent than men; they make more money than men.

These comments by Weiguo are encouraging to me, suggesting my ethnography will have relevance. I think it makes a nice point for me to end this chapter.

# PART V

## MASCULINITY IN WOMEN'S EYES

## CHAPTER 13

### WOMEN AND MASCULINITIES

Since the 1990s, there has been growing research on the lives of Chinese women. A very recent study on the lives of rural Chinese women has been written by Li Yinhe (2009). Li's book is based on ethnographic data and semi-structured interviews with 100 women in a northern China village. Her findings defy the Chinese official discourse on women's conditions in the 21st century, which portrays Chinese women as being liberated, equally treated, and even dominating some realms such as family financing. Li's book argues that there is still a long way to go before gender equity is achieved in rural China. For instance, it is observed that village women are not allowed to be present at the dinner table when guests are entertained. Instead, these women prepare and serve their men and the guests. Women experience domestic violence and various forms of gender discrimination. A significant example is a women entrepreneur who is very successful in managing her privately-owned firm. She is by far more capable in business management than her husband. Yet when it comes to the 'public space' of receiving guests and entertaining business associates for dinner, her husband takes the leading position as the host. This is an example of the dilemma between modern economic development and lack of change in social customs regarding gender order of society.

#### **13.1 Life history interviews and focus group discussions with women**

In this chapter, I provide some narratives from my life history interviews and group discussions with women to present their perspective on men, masculinities and men's relations with women. As a man myself, interviewing women proved to be a challenging task. In this respect, the women cadres at the village office and relatives of Uncle Ah Shun provided me with help. I used the technique of snowballing in getting to know more women through men and women that I have already met. From the interviews with women who tell me about their life histories, I learned about their relations with men and

other women. There are affection, love, and tension, even hatred, with both bitter and sweet memories. What is valuable and revealing for the study of masculinities is that women are indispensable in the construction of masculinities, be it male or female. We find different manifestations in different relations. For instance, as seen in Chapter 15, Guiying's father Jianqiang shows different behaviour and attitude in different relationships as father, husband and son.

This chapter serves as a general presentation of my discussion and interviews with women. I select key points that are useful for masculinity studies from the perspectives of women. Three more detailed case studies will follow this chapter in discussion of women's role in the construction of masculinities.

The women that appeared in the two group discussions and three individual life history interviews conducted in my fieldwork are listed below:

a. women in life history interviews

1. Yulan (58), the former director of women's committee
2. Xuelian, (27), factory worker, mother of a 4 year old
3. Huilin, (22), factory worker who just quitted her job, thinking about doing business;

b. women in discussion

Group 1 (village women cadres): Wenxian (mid 40s), and Jiazhen (early 30s)

Group 2 (university students): Linlin, Fangfang, and Xiuxiu (all born in 1987).

### **13.2 Local customs: patterns of marriage**

My life history interviews and discussions with groups of women provide some useful information about local customs and culture. Wenxian and Jiazhen tell me about the

gender pattern in transformation of marriage arrangements. The traditional pattern of marriage arrangement as decided by parents (*fumu zhi ming*) and matchmakers (*meishuo zhi yan*) has been changed. More young people now date without the interference of parents. This is known as finding partners by themselves (*zizao duixiang*), which means that young people are having more autonomy in choosing marriage partners. This autonomy, though, is not complete, as the cases of Baisong (Chapter 8) and Jiangyang (Chapter 10) have already indicated. Parents' roles are still crucial. The constraints lie in the choice of marriage partners, given the rising number of one-child or son-less (daughters-only) households who want to keep their children at home after their marriages. This, as Wenxian and Jiazhen acknowledge, is partly to do with three decades of the family planning policy.

The new pattern has also something to do with uneven economic development in different regions of the country. Men known to the locals as *kaitouren* (outsiders) have become potential partners for local young women whose parents want to keep them home. These men from outside agree to uxori-local marriage arrangements because they come from economically underdeveloped regions. As the number of local women marrying outside men rises, it is in the meantime difficult for some local men to find local marriage partners. This has led to a growing number of local men taking women from outside as wives. These women usually come from China's south-western provinces such as Yunnan and Sichuan. As a result, there is a trend that the marriage circle (*hunyin quan*) is getting much wider. Another factor that has contributed to the expansion of the marriage circle is the rising number of university students among the younger generation.

There have been cases of women from other regions of China who were sold to local men as wives by human traffickers, but this mainly happened 15-20 years ago. Today most outsiders first come as migrant workers. They marry local residents through knowing each other in the workplace or through introduction by relatives.

The marriage arrangements between local men and local women have not changed much in recent years: the involvement of matchmakers, engagement, and wedding. But two points should be made in addition to the earlier point of finding marriage partners independently by young people (*zizhao duixiang*): the rising brideprice and the pattern of pre-marriage cohabitation.

Since about 20 years ago, after the dissolution of the collective production teams, it has become common and acceptable for young couples who have been engaged to cohabit just as married couples do. This has put some pressure on the personnel working for family planning. As the base level cadres, they need to go to each household with women above the age of 18. If a woman is found to be sexually active (e.g. cohabiting with a boyfriend), she is advised by the family planning cadres to take measures of contraception. (This indicates the role of the state in intimacy.) The drugs needed for family planning have always been free of charge for local residents. Recently migrants enjoy free service as well. Wenxian and Jiazhen say that the role of family planning cadres has now been that of service.

It has not always been tension free, as I learnt from Yulan, the former chief of women's affairs (*funü zhuren*) – the story will be told in the next section. Yulan also talks about the changes in the amount of bride money. The custom does not change much, but the amount of money has. In the early 1970s, the brideprice for engagement was only around 80 yuan, plus a second payment when the date for wedding was chosen, which was another 100 to 160 yuan. About forty years later, the combined brideprice can reach about 50,000 yuan's worth of cash and other goods (jewellery, motorcycles, etc.). The traditional dowry was made up mainly of daily necessities such as quilts and wooden devices—various kinds of buckets, or carriers for water, food, among which the *matong* (nightstool), which is also known 'zìsun tong' (bucket for offspring) is of great significance. This is symbolically



important. It leaves traces of worship of fertility. Today, the dowry consists of late models of electrical and electronic devices and vehicles, amounting to a few tens of thousands of Yuan.

Xuelian tells me about attitudes towards the gender of children in her family. She comes from a family with two children, the other being her elder brother, which is unusual in her generation. She has no maternal uncles, so her father married her mother uxorilocally. On her husband's side, however, there are five paternal uncles. She herself prefers having a daughter. Her parents-in-law wanted a grandson. They said if the first was a girl, Xuelian should try to have another. Her husband just wanted one child, no matter which gender.

Of the three female college students, who were all born in 1987, one has two sisters; the other two have one younger brother each. Xiuxiu says that her grandmother had put pressure on her mother to have a son. When her mother gave birth to a second daughter, it was arranged by a relative that she be adopted immediately by a childless couple in Jiangsu Province. They had Xiuxiu later, but had to live with it. In Xiuxiu's memory, she did not experience discrimination as a girl. For Fangfang, both her parents and grandfather treat her nicely, but she could sense that her grandmother favours her younger brother. For Linlin, she felt no difference in her treatment by either her parents or grandparents. The experiences of the girls confirm the statistics provided by the village census record that sex ratio at birth has been in balance. But there are some impacts on marriage arrangements after 30 years of the one-child policy.

In my discussion with the university students, one of the questions was new marriage patterns. Locally, as there are growing numbers of only sons and only daughters, the traditional patrilocal residence is under challenge. For instance, the three young women, who are at universities now and do not need to think about marriage as an urgent concern themselves, have a lot to say about their peers and relatives back at the village. It is very

hard to arrange for uxorilocally marriages like that of Baisong in Chapter 8, because very few young men under the age of 30 have brothers. When these young men and their parents negotiate marriage arrangements with young women who have no brothers, there is now a major conflict regarding residence after the weddings and the family name of their children.

Linlin gives an example of a male cousin of hers who has married a woman with no brother. Their marriage arrangement is the so-called '*liangtou kaimen*' (opening doors on both sides). It was arranged that the couple take turns living in the household of the bride's and groom's parents. After their son was born a year ago, the wife's parents would always try to keep the three at their place. This has caused tension with the parents of their son-in-law. The new arrangement is getting more common and such conflicts are sure to happen repeatedly.

The respondents gave other examples in which parents would not agree to their sons or daughters choice of partners because they want their children to reside in their own household after they get married. Some young people used the technique of elopement to force their parents to yield. The family planning policy has not been implemented as rigidly in other regions of China. Therefore, there are growing numbers of households with only girl children who seek young men from other regions, as previously discussed.

### **13.3 Discourse of care and the ideal man**

It may not be an exemplary trait but in most Chinese literature, rural men are portrayed as masculine in their attitudes to women and children: they lack the quality of empathy, or care. They are excused for having a 'coarse heart' (*cuxin*), being insensitive to women's emotional needs, unable to express their love and desire for women. This sometimes is presented as positive, otherwise they might be ridiculed for being effeminate: *popo mama* (literally mother-in-law and mother), which is a negative term describing men as paying

too much attention to trivial matters and being indecisive.

However, the women in the interview convey their yearning for having husbands who are more sensitive and caring for their emotional needs, and they report that men do embody these qualities. It appears that men are under pressure from women to be more sensitive and caring. But at the same time men are under pressure from male peers to be more distant from and tough towards women.

There is a custom that men do not involve themselves in housework chores. For instance, Xuelian reports that men like her father (mid-50s) and brother (30) have almost never washed clothing or bowls. Boys in early childhood may share similar jobs with girls and women, such as collecting grass for sheep. It is not that men who shun housework have been regarded as specifically manly and hence praiseworthy. It is just that the local culture takes it as normal if men refuse to do housework, because it is believed they are born with a careless heart.

The difference between ‘*cuxin*’ and ‘*xixin*’ is significant. In fact, women like men who are ‘*xixin*’, meaning with a sensitive heart or being conscientious. They are men who are willing to abandon their masculine vanity. There are two cases in point here. Cuiwa’s (Chapter 14) husband Hongjiang demonstrates his care for his wife by taking breakfast to Cuiwa to her factory and picking her up after work in his motorcycle. This has won her the fame of being the ‘luckiest wife’. Xuelian’s husband won her heart because she found in him a favourable quality of being caring from his taking part in doing housework chores, like washing his own clothing. There seem to be some unwritten codes. When Cuiwa talks about Hongjiang’s care to her, she mentions that he is not afraid of looking ridiculous (*buxian nankan*). This implies that in the local culture, for men to openly show their care or intimacy to their wives is something that could be ridiculed (in public). But it is also something that is cherished and welcomed by women! Of course, not all women

like men to be '*xixin*'.

The above has touched the issue of division of labour, or more specifically, domestic labour. I will turn now to consumption in gender terms. For the generation like Uncle Ah Shun, the limited cash in the household budget was in the control of men. Men talk about *chushi*, or going out to the market. While men are doing their daily grocery shopping and occasionally shopping for farming tools or fertilizer, pesticides, etc, women spend the early morning taking care of the children, cooking breakfast, washing clothes, etc.

Men consume more cigarettes and alcohol, and men only chat in the traditional teahouse which serves early in the morning but also in the afternoon in time of *nongxian*. Cuiwa (Chapter 14) and Daixia (Chapter 16) talk about their husbands' consumption of cigarettes and fuel for motorcycles. Girls of the younger generation like Huilin socialise in a mixed gender group. She talks about the experiences of riding a friend's private car to steal sugar cane in fields, of eating late night snacks in restaurants, or even drinking together with young men.

### **13.4 Gender and power**

In gendered power, the picture is more complicated. On the one hand, at the domestic level, women are contributing an increasing portion of the family income, and their status in the family, especially the nuclear family, has increased. On the other hand, at the public level, the Villagers' Committee and party branch are both headed by men. The three women who have served or are serving as village cadres take positions and responsibilities that are mainly limited to supporting roles, or work in the areas of women, children, disabled people, mediation, and other traditionally feminine positions or tasks.

Complicating the picture though has been the fact that in recent years, some female entrepreneurs have emerged to be more successful than their male counterparts. At the

family level, the previous discussions on uxorilocal marriage and *liangtou kaimen* reveal the the complication of changing marriage arrangements that may affect power relations at family and generational level.

There is another story about '*kaitou ren*' that is a bitter memory to one of the respondents. In my interview with Yulan, the former director of women's affairs, I heard the story of the younger of her two sons. There is one significant turn for this interview. When I asked Yulan to tell me about her family conditions, she started by saying it was a mess, but what she tells me next was just some plain facts about the number of people in the household, their ages, careers and marriage statuses. It was not until the next day, when I was stopped by her on my way from an appointment with another informant in the factory where Yulan works as a cleaner, that she explained what she meant by 'a mess'.

She has two sons, both in their late 30s. Her older son was married and is managing a pawn shop at the County seat of Heshui. He has purchased an apartment there. His wife worked in a woollen garment factory. The second son is helping his elder bother as an employer. He is divorced and lives tother with his son from his marriage. It is this second son's life that Yulan wants to talk about with me. When I asked her about the impact of her position as the director of women's committee on her family life, she did not respond to the question. But when she came home, she could not help thinking about the story of her second son. It was in the early 1990s and the implementation of the one-child policy was very strict. Once after a village woman had had a forced abortion, the husband of that woman and her other relatives were so angry that they retaliated by smashing the front windows and doors of three village cadres' houses, those of the party secretary, the director of the Villagers' Committee and Yulan's, who was the director of women's affairs then. In the locality, smashing front doors and windows is a serious insult. At that time, Yulan's second son was engaged to a local girl but was not married yet. When his fiancée's family heard about the incident, they decided to dissolve the engagement as they

did not want their daughter to risk similar incidents in future. I could sense that this has left Yulan a scar forever. She said because her younger son could not marry a local girl, he had to marry an outsider (*kaitou ren*). The marriage was an unfortunate one and ended in divorce.

### **13.5 Gender interactions**

There is an anecdote told by Huilin which has some implications for the notion of gendered play. Once when Huilin was eating out at a restaurant with some young men and women, she joined the young men in drinking beer and said that she could open beer bottles with her teeth. One of the young men thought she was just boasting. He challenged Huilin that if she could open a bottle of beer with her teeth, he would drink it. She opened a few bottles of beer with her teeth and the man had to drink them until he got very drunk. On a similar occasion, one young man told her that he would drink half a bottle of beer at a time if she drank a whole bottle. Huilin said, 'if you will admit that you are a woman and I am a man, I will do that.' It was obvious that, the expectation for drinking is that a man should never drink less than a woman! In this episode, the notion of gender play or performance (Thorne, 1993; Butler, 1990) appears to apply.

Almost all female informants agree that there is a growing phenomenon of men and women having multiple sexual partners. Some of the informants have family members who are involved in extramarital relations. Daixia's experience with her husband (who has had repeatedly cheated her) will be presented in Chapter 16. Fangfang, one of the three university students in my focus group discussion, talks about her father's practices and her mother's reactions. Both her father and mother are workers in privately owned factories. For the last ten years Fangfang's father has had extramarital relations with several women. This has led to frequent quarrels between Fangfang's parents. Fangfang was angry too, but she could not do anything except telling her father not to let her mother know about the affairs. But her mother would always find out. Once she went to the phone company,

recharged some money to her father's account and got the phone numbers of the women that her husband had frequently contacted. She asked her brother to call the numbers to find out the identities of the women. Another trick she used was to ask the phone company to direct her husband's calls to her number, to monitor his correspondence. Fangfang's father has his strategy in dealing with his tension with his mother or wife: saying nice things to them so that they would forgive him. In quarrels he would label them as 'the most unreasonable mother/wife in the world'. To make them happy, he would say that they are 'the kindest women in the world'. Apparently he is taking advantage of both his mother's and his wife's love for him. Fangfang's mother has very good relations with her paternal grandmother. Fangfang's mother has to come to terms with her husband's behaviour though she is by no means completely passive.

When I ask about the reactions from public opinion to such phenomena as extramarital relations, Fangfang and the other two students say that these phenomena are now regarded as normal.

During the talk about dating, Xiuxiu and Linlin say that they think they will date men a bit older than them, which seems to be the conventional wisdom in China. Fangfang, on the other hand, says that she could accept a man who is younger than her. In fact, her current boyfriend is two years younger than her.

Another interesting fact is that Fangfang got to know her boyfriend through the internet. He is student in another university in the same city where her university is located. She does not seem to take the relationship very seriously, as she says that her boyfriend is too ugly. But in general, Fangfang thinks that net love or dating (*wanglian*) is good. Linlin agrees, saying that it is fun and romantic. She tells of people she knows who are genuinely in love through the internet. Xiuxiu tells of a couple who have got married who first met each other on the Internet. But Fangfang adds that net love won't last. She just takes it as

play. She does not care right now what happens in future.

I ask about the difference between mere net love in the virtual world and the feeling after she meets her boyfriend in the real world. Fangfang says that there is huge difference in her experience. Before seeing her 'boyfriend' (she says that they took each other as boyfriend and girlfriend before seeing each other in person), her impression of the young man was that he has good character and literary talents (*wencai*). This might be significant. Girls admire men who embody *wen* talent, see Louie, 2002). But when she actually met him, she found him so ugly that her immediate reaction upon seeing him was to leave. She did not have any appetite for the meal that she was having with him. Their campuses are in different parts of the city, so they do not see each other often. Fangfang says she feels better when she is not seeing her boyfriend, but when she sees him, her mood changes. 'Maybe that's because I have forgotten his ugly look,' Fangfang says. It is very interesting that Fangfang's love for her boyfriend is not the person or the body that she sees, but the man in the virtual world of the net who chats with her. But she feels bad each time they see each other. She claims that she would not talk to her boyfriend for three days after seeing each other in person. Fangfang laments that the gap between reality and the virtual world is too big. I ask Fangfang to give the specific reason for her to think that her boyfriend is ugly. She first says he is rather short, only about 172 centimetres. She herself is about 170. Further, she does not think her current boyfriend will amount to anything (*you qiantu*). She says that they may part in the following year. Her Mr. Right (*zhenming tianzi*) has not appeared yet. If you cannot find true love, get someone who is rich.

### 13.6 Conclusion

Cuiwa (in Chapter 15) actually uses the word '*liangxin*' (conscience) to distinguish between men and women. She says that men's *liangxin* is not as good as that of women. This could be interpreted in at least two ways. The first one is that men do not show enough care for women. There is evidence for this view in the accounts of the women in



my interviews and discussions. The second one implies infidelity. Men are more likely to betray their partners, in women's accounts. Fangfang's father and Daixia's husband are examples. Women have to tolerate husbands' infidelity and endure hard work, both housework and waged work (in both production and reproduction).

There are different emphases in the accounts by women of different age groups. Yulan's account tells of the importance of family reputation. She seems to have some bias against women coming from other regions. The two current village cadres compare men from the outside with local men by invoking the formal word '*suzhi*' or quality. In their view, the outsiders who have lots of children are of low quality. (A similar view that is held commonly by city residents is that people from rural backgrounds are of low quality.)

There has been change in women's power within the household. In the older generation's accounts they do not have much impact on their men (mainly husbands). In the younger generation, as women's agency has been taken into account in marriage arrangements, women have more influence on men's practices. Their views on men seem to be changing among the younger women, who are more autonomous themselves, but they still face a world that favours men and boys. Their ways of judging men still centre on talent and appearance, as Fangfang's story with her boyfriend illustrates. But it is also revealing that as the whole society turns more money-oriented, the amount of wealth that a man owns is getting to be an important measure of his masculinity.

## CHAPTER 14

### CUIWA: THE LUCKIEST WIFE

#### 14.1 The interview

In the seventh month of the Chinese lunar calendar, there is a traditional festival in the region during which relatives and friends visit each other for feasts. The special festival falls on the fifteenth day of July, so the locals call the season Half-July (*qiyue ban*). It is also known as *guijie*—the festival for ghosts, or *zhongyuan jie*. During the festival, sacrifices are offered to the dead ancestors. The most important food of the feast is wonton. It is therefore also known as the ‘wonton season’. The season also happens to be a slack season when the first rice crop has been harvested and the second rice crop has been planted. Peasants then take advantage of the slack season to visit relatives and memorialise their ancestors. The exact date is rather flexible since religious ceremony has lost its legitimacy under the Communist ideology. But as long as there is no official intervention, families would generally hold memorial ceremonies on the 14<sup>th</sup> or 15<sup>th</sup> and invite relatives and friends around the time. With changes in the economic structure and the rising living standard, wonton is no longer a delicacy or luxury. The season is not as important as before, but very close relatives still choose this time to hold a ritual service for ancestors and have a small wonton party.

It was on such an occasion that I visited my friend Hongjiang at his parents-in-law’s place, where I was introduced to his wife and son. Her name was Cuiwa. I told her about my project and she agreed to an interview. It was a hot day. We went to the living room of her brother’s house, upstairs, to get a quiet place, with her son playing downstairs with his cousin. My questions focused on her life and her view on relations between men and women in the village. The interview lasted for about one hour.

## 14.2 The life course

Cuiwa was born in 1973. Like many of the people I interviewed, her memory of early childhood is that of hardship. She was the second of three children, with an elder sister and a younger brother. Her sister was 3 years older and her brother was 6 years junior to her. Cuiwa started school one year later than most other children of her age as she had to stay home taking care of her brother. Her father is the oldest of six brothers. When Cuiwa was born, her parents had been living in a household separate from her grandparents and uncles. Her grandmother did not take care of her and her brother. Both her mother and father worked in the field for the collective production team during the day. As a young girl she also helped out collecting grass to feed the sheep, washing and cooking. In fact, her mother gave birth to two other baby girls after Cuiwa. Both were killed immediately after their birth. That was why her younger brother was 6 years junior to her.

Cuiwa went to primary school at the age of 8. The classroom was first in a private home as the village school did not have enough classrooms then. Of the two teachers who taught them, one was a kindergarten teacher and another was a substitute teacher. The class moved to the primary school when Cuiwa was in Year Three. After completing primary school education at Year Five, Cuiwa went on attend junior high in the township seat Manqiao for three years.

After leaving school, Cuiwa first stayed at home for about six months and then was recruited to work at the village factory. One reason she was offered the job was that her home was close to the factory and the land contracted to her family was used by the factory. When Cuiwa started her job at the factory, she was among the youngest workers. Most other workers were in their 20s. Many had only primary school education. She had longer years of schooling than many other women, so she got a job at the laboratory.

When Cuiwa was 19, her parents were approached by a matchmaker and the next year she

was formally engaged to Hongjiang, who at the time was a young bricklayer from a nearby village. They were married 4 years later. Their son was born the next year.

In 1998, the factory was restructured and changed from collective ownership to private ownership. The restructure was called '*zhuanzhi*' in Chinese, which is short for 'change of ownership system'. Prior to the restructure, the factory was collectively owned by Xinyue village. Cuiwa worked for a few more months in the factory before she and her husband started their own business of trading in leather jackets. They rented a shop in a city in Jiangsu province and sold leather jackets made in Zhejiang. Business was good at the beginning, but it got harder later. In 2002 they returned to the village and Cuiwa found a job at the Taiwanese owned factory, where she still works in the lab.

After they ended the business, Hongjiang worked occasionally as a bricklayer again. More recently, he invested in a small household workshop weaving collars and sleeves for woollen sweaters for nearby factories. The investment was jointly made by Hongjiang and Cuiwa's younger brother. They have now about ten knitting machines and the two of them are the only ones working, from production and management to sales.

For Cuiwa and Hongjiang, their concern now is to save money to build a new house and to provide their son with a good education. Hongjiang only had primary school education. Cuiwa finished junior high school but she too regrets having little education. Her wish for the future is that her son could have a good education. She would like her son to go to high school in the county seat, but she said she had no means, because one has to purchase an apartment there, which they cannot afford right now.

### **14.3 Gender divisions in village life**

Cuiwa's experiences demonstrate clear distinctions in ways males and female are treated.

In her childhood, both Cuiwa and her sister sacrificed educational opportunities to take care of their younger brother. Cuiwa delayed going to school for one year. Her elder sister quit school at third grade. More shocking to an outsider, but less to the locals at that time, was that her two younger sisters were killed immediately upon birth. I knew of cases around that period of time when new-born girls were abandoned by parents who wanted to have a son instead. Their parents' joy at eventually having a son was reported by Cuiwa:

Since the first two were girls, my parents used to be kinder to my brother, they treated him more favourably.

When she became a mother, Cuiwa was the prime carer of her son. In raising her son, it was again mainly her responsibility. She got very little help from her mother-in-law and Hongjiang cared little for the job of taking care of the baby. Here is how Cuiwa recalls her time taking care of her baby son,

... [I] could not get any sleep all night long. ... When he got a cold, [I] had to carry him in arms to get him at rest. ...for whole nights. ...Hongjiang was fast asleep. I had to tend the baby all by myself. He would be snoring and couldn't be awakened.

When I ask Cuiwa about the division of labour and power in her experience, she says that men are more likely to be head of household and less likely to do housework.

**Xingkui:** At home, in your own parents' side, who takes charge more, your father or mother?

**Cuiwa:** Mother takes charge of minor affairs. Father takes charge of major affairs.

**Xingkui:** Is your father head of the household?

**Cuiwa:** Yes. Major affairs are generally decided by men.

**Xingkui:** What about your own household?

**Cuiwa:** Our household? In our household, Hongjiang takes charge too. He just asks me for my opinion. For minor affairs, it does not matter whether I am informed. For major affairs, we discuss over (them). He asks for my opinion over major affairs.

In both her mother's generation and her own household, Cuiwa experiences an arrangement of power relations in which the man is the head who has the final say on major decisions.

There are divisions in the workplace based on gender. When I ask if there are gaps between male and female workers in pay or any division of labour based on gender, Cuiwa says that most work is shared by men and women except for the heavy and hard work. In clarifying 'heavy' works, she explains,

Those heavy objects that only men can carry, tasks that women cannot handle due to (lack of) physical strength. There aren't any other differences. The salaries are also not much of a difference. Even if the salaries do differ, they are due to the fact that some tasks require techniques while others only require physical strength. The former pays higher.

From almost all my formal interviews and informal talks, I find that the discourse of equality between the sexes is prevalent. There is a tendency for people to stress that there has been no discrimination against women. If there are differences, they provide reasons to rationalise it. For instance, it is believed that men are better at dealing with technology or techniques (which is the same word '*jishu*' in Chinese) involving machines and complicated designs; and this belief is reflected in social practice. Here, Cuiwa seems to minimize gender divisions.

But when I ask for her overall view on men, such as their virtues and shortcomings,

another picture is revealed. Cuiwa highlights the importance of conscience (*liangxin*, or ‘a kind heart’), and she finds men not as kind-hearted as women. I then ask her which aspects of conscience she is referring to. She says:

Above all, women work very hard (*xinku*). Men care more about their ‘face’. They don’t have in mind how miserable (*ku*) their women are. When men are away, they do not have in mind things at home, be it their children or elders. Once they are outside, they behave as if they had nothing to do with it. On the contrary, if women have to be away, they will give an account of where they go and what they go for. Men usually do not give an account. Some might be small matters, such as not being able to come home for dinner. They usually fail to tell their family. If they do not come back, they do not. That is what I mean by saying that men’s conscience is not as good as women.

Women care for others, while men do not care for others. (For instance,) he is very tired from a day’s work, and does not feel like doing things at home. For women, even if they have had a very hard day’s work, they have to do housework, such as taking care of the children. (It is) as if everything is women’s duty—cooking, washing clothes, taking care of children. After a day’s work, women get home, only to be faced with housework. When men get home, they do not need to do these. They are women’s work.

In this passage, it becomes clear that for women like Cuiwa there is a ‘second shift’ after their work in the factory. From Cuiwa’s experience, women take most of the household chores even though they now have full-time jobs at factories. The participation in production by women does not automatically liberate women from their responsibilities and roles as domestic workers. It was taken for granted that women are natural care-givers.

Cuiwa's complaints about men in general and to some extent her husband's not helping out with housework are supported by my knowledge of Hongjiang. He is a man who does things that an average man would do: he works hard to bring an income to the family, but his income is not as regular as someone who works in a factory. In our casual conversations, he tells me that he used to spend a lot (on smoking, dining and drinking, gambling, etc.). He spends a large amount of time outside the home. He is skilful in socializing, which brings lots of orders now that he is operating a small-scale workshop together with his brother-in-law. Every day he rides his motor bike to the township seat of Sanliqiao (about 5 kilometres from the workshop in his wife's natal family), delivering the finished products of collars and sleeves and bringing in materials for new orders. His brother-in-law stays home most of the time, attending to the machines, fixing problems whenever work is interrupted or a machine breaks down.

#### **14.4 Generational conflicts—Cuiwa's relations with her in-laws**

Hongjiang is the youngest of four children in his family. His two sisters and one brother had all been married before him. After they got married, there was a division of the household with Hongjiang's elder brother. The division left the young couple with a house but no cash. Instead, they inherited debts from Hongjiang's parents that had been accumulated as a result of house-building and the wedding held for Hongjiang and Cuiwa. Hongjiang's village does not have any industrial firms as profitable as Xinyue's. The economic situation of Hongjiang's household was not as good as Cuiwa's. Cuiwa does not seem to get along very well with her in-laws. She was unhappy because her parents-in-law did not help out with either childcare or tending to their contracted land. The reason her parents-in-law give for not helping out is that they would be complained of even if they did help out. In the region, there have been numerous cases of sons and daughters-in-law complaining about their parents' favouritism when there are more than one grown sons who have had their own separate households.



### *Dealing with renqing*

Since Cuiwa has raised the issue of debts, I ask her for how many years Cuiwa and Hongjiang have been in debt. She tells me that they were in debt for five to six years after the division of the household. She again expresses her dissatisfaction with her parents-in-laws as they have left her husband and her the obligations to spend money on *renqing* (ritual expenses).

It was our responsibility to cover the expenses (*chuzhang*) involving relatives on special occasions. When their nephews, I mean his father's nephews, got various events, we needed to send *li* (gift). In those years, our income was low. Each year we made a few thousands of yuan.

What Cuiwa is complaining about in the above passage is the financial burden a household is faced with when they are obliged to present gifts (often in the form of cash) to relatives and friends on special occasions. This is part of the ritual economy, as Mayfair Yang (1994) and Yan Yunxiang (1996) have put it. There is continuity in the customs of gift giving in rural China from north to south. The practice might be different in details, but the ideas are similar: close relatives and friends are obliged to give cash or other ritual commodities on occasions of important events: weddings, funerals, birthdays, engagements, construction of houses, and start of schooling or university.

A key word here is *renqing*, or literally human feelings. It could also mean 'gift' in different forms. Gift exchange is an important part of social interaction through which village society keeps up kinship relations and social networks. The closer the relationship, the more intense the feeling of obligation one gets to present gifts of required forms or amounts of money. Small token gifts are presented when relatives visit each other during the spring festival, called *bainian*, to wish people good luck for the New Year. For some relatives, this is the only way to maintain relationships when they live at some distance

away from each other. For other relatives, the obligation is only at weddings and funerals when sometimes hundreds of guests are invited. Particularly for weddings, the number of guests indicates how well connected a family or an individual is in the community.

Good feelings are maintained by the exchange of the host throwing the party being generous in offering good food and drinks to entertain the guests, and the guests being generous in the gifts they present. Reciprocity and balance are key: there is a tradition of having every item of gift and amount of money recorded and bookkeeping done by someone who knows how to read and write. The next time when one's relatives are having an event, you refer to the book to decide how much to give. It is appropriate to give at least as much as one has received. Often one would give a bit more. So the trend is that the cost of *renqing* has been inflated as time goes by. The rising incomes of individuals and households give a further push. Gifts of a few yuan thirty years ago would be a few hundreds of yuan now.

#### 14.5 The luckiest wife

Complaining about the second shift and her parent-in-law only reveals one aspect of Cuiwa's relationship with Hongjiang. There are other respects in which Cuiwa is proud of him.

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There are two occasions on which I ask her about her relation with Hongjiang. The first is why she agreed to marry him, in view of the relatively undesirable economic status Hongjiang's family had when they were engaged. I ask specifically what in Hongjiang actually attracts Cuiwa. She says:

He is honest (*laoshi*) as a person. He treats people with dignity. He is not treacherous (*qiu*, the local equivalent of *huai*—bad). A very good person. This was fate. Mother said to me, 'It was predestined. Predestined in your fate.' ... 'Just agree to be given

to them’.

There is something in her mother’s words which reveals the common belief in many Chinese folk stories that the marriage bond of two persons is their destiny or fate. A woman is born for a particular man, and vice versa. The stability of traditional marriages partly should be attributed to this belief. Also contributing are the ideas of chastity and faithfulness. It might be argued that there is asymmetry between the two genders: a woman should stick to one man or *cong-yi-er-zhong*; a man can have more relations simultaneously.

Also significant from the account of Cuiwa’s mother is the language used in the local dialect to talk about marriage. For a girl or her family, to marry her to a man is to give her away, in view of the predominant patrilocal arrangement. On the other hand, for a man and his family, the word for marriage is to ‘*tao*’ or ‘beg for’ a wife, which is different from the more formal word ‘*qu*’, which derives from and has the same pronunciation as ‘take’.

A second occasion on which men and masculinity are discussed comes when I ask about the notion of ‘a good man’ from Cuiwa or other women’s point of view. She says,

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If a man cares for his wife with action (*guanxin*), others will say to the women: “your hubby is so kind, caring for his wife”. Appearance no longer matters after marriage. We are now in mid-life. Unlike young people in time of dating, a man’s appearance does not matter. We just talk about being kind to one’s wife. He should be caring (*titie*) and kind (*hao*).

When I ask her to give an example of a man who has generally been regarded by her colleagues as a good man, Cuiwa reports that she has been envied by other women who

say that she is the luckiest wife, having a good husband. She gives several reasons:

Hongjiang does not care about being ridiculed for what he does (for his wife). He would bring me breakfast to where I am working. After work, he would ride his motorbike to take me home. Other people's husbands do not do that. Hongjiang does that. So others tell me that I am the happiest (*zui xingfu*). [He] takes breakfast to me, [and] takes me to and from work. Other men, even if they have time, would not do that. Hongjiang is one of the men who show his caring.

Here the implication is that openly showing intimacy or caring has been regarded as not a manly thing to do. Hongjiang has been breaching the taboo, so he is regarded as courageous and has won praise from the women. An unspoken code of behaviour among men seems to be: a man loses face if he lowers himself to openly show intimacy to women. What I translate as 'being ridiculed' is literally, in Cuiwa's words, 'he is not afraid of being a spectacle' (*ta bu xian nankan*). This in the local culture would mean he is doing something unusual. Even if it is a good thing, the person who does it is under pressure, as others might regard him as unmanly. The social construction of masculinity prevents most men from doing things that women regard as desirable such as being caring.

Cuiwa also gives an example of men who are jealous and abusive:

In our factory, there are men who beat their wives. For those of us who work in the lab, there are occasions when we eat out together, men and women. Some women's husbands would repeatedly call their wives whether the dinner party has ended. If we have finished eating, they would immediately come to fetch their wives. When they go to town, they would date other women in KTVs (karaoke bars), but if they find their wives going out with other men, they would beat them.

This is an example of some men's double standards with women. On the other hand, it also demonstrates that women like Cuiwa are well aware of the double standards and are critical of such hypocrisy. Commenting on her colleagues' husbands' reactions when the women were eating out, Cuiwa gives the example of a particular man, though the name is not revealed:

**Cuiwa:** There is at least one who would always come to fetch his wife immediately at the end of our dinner.

**Xingkui:** Which age groups do this couple belong to?

**Cuiwa:** They are rather young. Their child is only 4. He has a bad temper. He himself does not go home until one or two in the morning, but if he found his wife chatting online and there appeared to be a man's name, he would delete that person, not allowing his wife to chat with him.

#### **14.6 Cuiwa's view on child — raising and gender**

On the difference between raising boys and girls, Cuiwa admits that this is something she learns from others: it is easier to raise boys than raise girls. Girls cry more. It seems that Cuiwa has some preference for boys. When she was asked about her expectations for the future of her son, such as his marriage arrangement, Cuiwa says she does not care whether her son will live with Hongjiang and her after marriage,

If you insist that you pull your child close to you, it is meaningless if he amounts to nothing. For the well being of his future family, I am ready to give up. Suppose the girl's side is a good family and the two (young people) love each other, he could well be married to them (uxorilocally). It is not wise separating them (by insisting they live with us). What if he could not find another girl who is as good?

There are some points in this quotation: Firstly, Cuiwa thinks it more important for her

son to find a good match than to stay with his parents. It indicates that the generation growing up in the reform era are more pragmatic than their parents' generation in sticking to tradition. Secondly, the state policy of family planning has contributed to a change in reality. As Guiying's father Jiangyang's case in Chapter 15 illustrates, sometimes one has to come to terms with the fact that he has only a daughter. Thirdly, it seems to be a trend in the local culture that it is acceptable for sons and daughters to live independently from their parents. For Cuiwa, this is an acceptable arrangement. She simply concludes it is more important that her son amounts to something (*you chuxi*) than his staying with them.

### 14.7 Work and leisure

One of the common themes of this study is the work ethic of the generations older than 30. In both my observations and interviews there is evidence that these people work extremely hard to make a better life for themselves and their children. The villagers would use the discourse of *ku*, which means both 'hard work' and 'bitterness'. In the local dialect, as well as in most Chinese contexts, the literal meaning of the word *ku* is the sense of taste when one's tongue feels bitterness. It therefore often occurs in the collocation of '*chiku*', or 'eat bitterness'.

During the Maoist years, especially the period of the Cultural Revolution, there was a genre of writing and public campaigning known as '*yi-ku-si-tian*', or 'recalling the memory of bitterness and thinking of sweetness'. The bitterness was about the old society (prior to 1949) and the sweetness was of the new society. Cuiwa talks about her childhood as material hardship and her grown years as hardworking.

In the past, there was a class issue for leisure. There is a key word for leisure in the local dialect which is the same as the one in Shanghai dialect and hence the written form of that word is known to most Chinese readers. In the local context, the opposite of work (*zuo or zuo shenghuo*) is *baixiang*, or to idle around, to kill time. Traditionally only the very rich

and ne'er-do-well bachelors could have the luxury of leisure all year round. The average peasant family members, from small children to elderly people, either women or men, were all engaged in work all year round except for the Chinese New Year. The leisure activities include going shopping and sightseeing in nearby market towns, chatting with friends and relatives, going to performances of traditional drama, and more recently watching TV, and playing various card games.

I have discussed Cuiwa's second shift after her full-time job in the factory. In the interview, I also ask Cuiwa what she normally does for leisure if there is any.

**Xingkui:** Apart from job and housework, do you have time for leisure? What do you do when you are free?

**Cuiwa:** Just watch TV.

**Xingkui:** What are your favourite programs?

**Cuiwa:** I like TV dramas with romance. I find the women are so unfortunate. In addition, things about the countryside, ... mainland.

Cuiwa's answer not only tells about how she spends her leisure, but also reveals her preference for programs from which she can find characters or contexts that she identifies herself with. Another significance of her account is that her activities are limited to the domestic space of the home, while men's leisure activities are mainly away from the home. Her activity of watching TV is solitary, while her husband Hongjiang more often hangs around with other men in his leisure, chatting with each other, smoking, drinking, and playing cards.

Which naturally follows, that men's expenditures, to Cuiwa, are much larger than women's. She says that Hongjiang spends a lot daily on cigarettes, food, and gas (for his motorcycle, as he often goes out), and occasionally on gambling. The 'women-inner-men-

outer' phenomenon applies to Cuiwa and Hongjiang's leisure and consumption patterns, which I find common from reports of other respondents.

#### **14.8 Conclusion**

Cuiwa's case represents some patterns in rural gender relations that are commonly found in traditional couple relationship and generational tension between daughters-in-law (*xifu*) and parents-in-law (*gongpo*). She provides a useful account of gender relations from a woman's perspective of the generation growing up during the transition from collective to privatised farming and from agriculture to industry. Although there are changes in some aspects, such as her husband Hongjiang's boldness in expressing care, which challenges the local norms, the overall gender hierarchy proves to be intact. Cuiwa's generation replicates to some extent patterns of femininity and masculinity of her parents, but she is predicting changes for her sons' generation, which are already taking place among the generation 10 years younger than her.



## CHAPTER 15

### GUIYING: MASCULINITY AND FATHERHOOD FROM A DAUGHTER'S ACCOUNT

#### 15.1 Introduction

*He takes full control of all things related to me. From when I was small to a grown up, my father has bought all my clothing. ...He would take me to town to buy clothes for me. ... This is known to all villagers. ... From buying me clothing, attending parents meetings at school, choosing schools to taking me to a new school, father took charge of all these instead of mother.*

(Guiying, 22 years old, July 2009)

The topic of family and fatherhood has been addressed by social scientists in recent decades. Fatherhood is intertwined with masculinities, but research between the two has been sparse (Marsiglio and Pleck, 2005). Most research on gender and fatherhood tends to investigate fatherhood and childhood, without paying enough attention to the formative years of adolescence and early adulthood. Another problem is that most studies tend to focus on fathers or on father-son relations. Relatively few studies take the perspective of daughters or focus on the father-daughter relationship.

In rural China, as a growing proportion of households are having either 'only-daughters' (*dushengnü*, with neither sisters nor brothers) or daughters only (with sisters but no brothers), the father-daughter relationship merits special scrutiny from the perspective of gender.

The traditional Chinese family as an institution is characterised by patrilocal marriage and a patrilineal inheritance system. This remains true in rural China decades after the 1949

Liberation and it has been attributed by feminist scholars to gender biases and preference for sons in rural China (Croll, 1981; Parish & Whyte, 1978; Stacey, 1983). Significant changes have taken place in China during the three decades of economic reform. The one-child policy has exerted a great impact on family life as well as the demographic picture of China. Social scientists are concerned with the unexpected speed of aging and the rising imbalance in sex ratio at birth (SRB) (See Li et al., 2006).

Parenting has always been gendered. The father (in Anglophone literature on gender) has often been associated with the role of a decision-maker or breadwinner (Connell, 2009:3). Talks about ‘father absence’ and ‘father involvement’ are common themes in works on the family as a contemporary institution. Recent research reports change from the ‘absent’ or ‘distant’ father to the ‘new father’ who is more involved in childcare and provides a source of emotional support in addition to being ‘breadwinner’ (Lamb, 1997).

Family, marriage and fatherhood have all undergone significant changes in China. In family structure, there has been a trend from extended family to nuclear family (Tang, 2008). In marriage arrangements, the continued reduction in fertility means that many households with only one child have to be more flexible in deciding where the newly-wed couple should reside in. This means there is going to be a diversity of residency: virilocal, uxòrilocal, and bi-local (*liangtou dun*, see Jin, 2000). The local term for bi-local residency in Xinyue is called *liangtou kaimen*, as discussed in Chapter 13.

While there have been positive changes in family and gender, there are bad news at the same time. The ‘masculine domination’ (Bourdieu, 2001) is still prevalent in both public and domestic spheres. Gender bias in the form of preference of sons is a case in point. Croll (1994) observes that in rural China, having sons means continuity while having daughters but no sons means discontinuity (of the family lineage). Before the implementation of the family planning policy (*jihua shengyu*, or literally, ‘Planned Birth’),

most rural parents would not cease having children until they have a son. Under the one-child policy, parents who have had a daughter as their first child would use both the policy and modern technology to have a son (in most rural areas, couples with a daughter are allowed to have another birth). Research has shown that sex ratio of first births has been in balance in most provinces in China, but as for sex ratio for second births, there is a sharp increase in imbalance between baby boys and baby girls (see Li et al., 2006, Bossen 2003). Xinhua (Lü & Gui, 2007) reported that in 2005, the average SRB (sex ratio at birth) in rural China was 122.85, higher than the national average of 119.86. In some provinces, SRB reached as high as 130.

Based on my interview with Guiying, a 22-year-old college student, this chapter discusses the questions of masculinity, fatherhood and gender bias through an analysis of a man's life course as told by his daughter. How has masculinity been constructed for a man in different stages of his life and in his different roles, as son, husband and father? What might be the causes of his male chauvinist views on gender—or is he a chauvinist in the first place? What is the significance of involving women as informants in masculinities studies?

## **15.2 The Interview: Guiying's account of her father**

I got to know Guiying through Xiuxiu, who went to school with her. It is in Xiuxiu's study on a hot July afternoon that I interview Guiying. There is no air-conditioning in the room, but there is an electric fan. Before we start the formal interview, I have already had about an hour of small talk with Guiying telling her about my research topic and my field work in the village. She seems to be very keen on the subject. This is in the presence of her friend and her friend's family.

After we are left alone to start the formal interview, I show Guiying my project information sheet and participant consent sheet. She listens attentively and reads the

information sheet carefully. Instead of answering my first question for her to give me a brief introduction of her life course, she starts by commenting on my main subject for the project as she understands it: the issue of gender bias, or in the Chinese expression ‘*zhong nan qing nü*’ (valuing males and belittling females). She says that she has been a victim of gender bias. The main target of her accusation is her father, Jianqiang. Guiying’s narrative in the interview which lasts about 100 minutes presents a vivid portrait of her father, which makes good material for analysing masculinity and fatherhood.

### 15.3 Jianqiang’s life-history as told by his daughter Guiying

#### *The life course*

Born in 1963, Jianqiang is the eldest of three children. He has a younger brother and a younger sister. He attended school until the first year in senior high. Amongst people of his generation, he can be regarded as a well-educated man. His younger brother just has primary school education and his brother-in-law (sister’s husband) is illiterate. After leaving high school, Jianqiang first worked in the collective production team and later worked in the village factory. Not long after he got married and had Guiying, Jianqiang demanded a division of the household (*fenjia*) and he became head (*dangjiaren*) of a family of three.

An important source of Guiying’s knowledge about her father’s childhood and his life course has been her aunt. She was married to a man in the same village (but not the same hamlet) and she has the keys to her brother’s house. Guiying is very close to her auntie and she heard a lot about her father from auntie. These accounts build a portrait of her father as a boy and young man.

Like most men of his generation, villagers led a life of hardship (*ku*) in both sense of the

word: poverty and backbreaking heavy labour. Because his father was suffering from some medical conditions which prohibited him from heavy labour, Jianqiang had to take up a man's role when he was rather young. That was in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the initial stage of rural reform during which peasants still worked in the collective but many tasks were contracted to ensure that 'one who works more be rewarded with higher income (*duo-lao-duo-de*, more labor, more reward)'.

As a boy, Jianqiang was independent and rebellious towards his mother. His independence and tension with his parents are demonstrated in some other stories Guiying heard from her auntie:

1) When Jianqiang was only about 7, on a cold snowy day he stripped himself of all his clothes but his underwear after a quarrel with his mother. He kept the underwear because he claimed it was a gift from his maternal grandma.

2) Jianqiang's younger brother was weaker than Jianqiang as a young man. He thus had the excuse of not working as hard as his elder brother. To Jianqiang, this was unfair. He felt his parents favoured the younger brother. He told his parents that he didn't want to live with them, which meant he wanted to split the household and live independently from his parents. This he did soon after Guiying was born.

### *Zhong nan qing nü (gender bias)*

According to Guiying and her auntie, Jianqiang's view on gender has always been biased. The term *zhong nan qing nü* was repeated numerous times in Guiying's comments on her father. Sometimes she heard it from other people who told her that her father yearned for a son.

That a man wants to have a son is closely associated with masculinity. As Levant (1992) suggests, many men feel that their lives will be incomplete without having a son. Hence, Guiying uses her father's tone in reporting his dismay upon news of the birth of his daughter: '*wo hai yao yang de*' – I will have another baby. He is resolute and stubborn in his determination. And he had the right to make such an assertion as he and his wife were entitled to have another child a few years later. Unfortunately, he was later diagnosed with a heart problem and had to make the painful decision of not attempting to have another child. He had to settle for having Guiying as his only child. His younger brother had a son. His sister first had a daughter and then had a son. Guiying says that when she was young, she did not have any feeling that she was discriminated against as a girl. It was therefore strange for her to hear other people, including her auntie, telling her about her father's gender bias.

#### *How Jianqiang belittles women*

Guiying cites one story from her auntie and another observation from her own experience in supporting her argument that her father has gender bias.

According to Guiying's auntie, Jianqiang had already developed an understanding that women are not as good as men (even worse, women are useless) when he was a young man. This had to do with his being the eldest child and participated in manual labor at an early age. Here is how Guiying retold her auntie's story about Jianqiang's view on women:

At that time, going to movies was the only entertainment. In the village there was a movie once in a few weeks. The movies were shown outdoors. One night when father and auntie were at a movie, it suddenly rained heavily. They had brought no umbrella with them, so they ran home in the rain, taking the short cut through the rice paddies. (It was muddy and slippery.) Auntie fell down repeatedly. Father was holding her

hand and shouting, 'Hurry up! Hurry up'. But she kept falling and tripping. On this my father complained: 'Females are so useless. You even don't know how to run! Always falling.'

By telling this anecdote, Guiying is trying to make sense of the cause of her father's negative view on women. To Jianqiang, girls and women are useless. In contrast, he himself is very tough and strong-willed. Guiying uses the expression '*yaoqiang*', which literally means 'wanting to be strong'. Though the word itself applies to both men and women, it is more a more favourable quality for men to acquire, in a sense that as a man, one needs to be strong and unyielding. It also denotes the spirit of competition: a man should also be strong enough to overpower others. Finally, Guiying says that it is understandable that when her father was married, he wanted to have a son.

A somewhat surprising gender bias that Jianqiang holds concerns his attitudes to his wife with regard to childbearing. On the one hand, he is a caring father for Guiying. On the other, he is overpowering, controlling, and he belittles Guiying's mother. The opening quote from Guiying is taken out of context. It just shows one side of the story. If we look at the whole narrative from Guiying, the complexity is revealed.

'He takes full control of my affairs. From when I was small child to a grown up, my father has bought all my clothing. My father does not like my mother's taste for clothing. He regards the clothes mother bought me as ugly, and of low quality. He would take me to town to buy clothes for me. Though not the world-famous brand products, he would go to the franchises of nationally-known brands to buy me clothing. Alternatively, he would take me to big department stores to buy good-quality clothes. ... From buying my clothing, attending parents meetings at school and choosing schools to taking me to a new school, father took charge of all these instead of mother. Basically mother plays no part in it as my father felt that mother was

incapable of dealing with them successfully as, according to him, mother knows nothing. Mother only had junior high school education. Father thinks she does not know enough.

Guiying adds that her mother was even not allowed to go together with her father to see Guiying in town while she was in senior high school. “What use would your going be?” he would say to his wife.

#### **15.4 Jianqiang’s masculine qualities**

##### *Keeping bad things to himself*

Jianqiang had to give up his dream of having a son because he was diagnosed with a heart condition. This must have been a great shock to himself, but he decided to keep the misfortune to himself, not revealing it to his family members. The following is how Guiying reports her auntie,

When he was first diagnosed with heart problem and hospitalized, he did not tell anybody in the family. When my grandma and auntie went to the hospitals to visit him, he scolded them. “Why did you come? What’s the use for you to come? It is nothing to worry about.” My auntie said that she would always remember the scene, which highlighted father’s stubbornness (*jiang*). Even now, he would keep the result of his medical check-up to himself, not revealing to mother, saying that it is alright and he knows how to deal with it.

The concealing of emotions and vulnerabilities is a common feature among Chinese masculinities. I will discuss it in the section on emotional relations.



### *Competence in diverse situations*

Another story demonstrates Jianqiang's character of being calm, reliable, and competent in handling crises. Guiying's auntie had her hands cut by a machine in an accident at work in the village factory. She counted on Jianqiang's help and he did not let her down: it was through his steadfast effort and his skills in social networking that he saved one of her hands from being amputated. She lost a thumb and 4 fingers in the end. The story may be worth telling in Guiying's own words:

On the (way to hospital), my auntie said only one sentence: 'Get my big brother', because my father has always been tough. At that time, my uncle (father's brother) was also working in the same factory. ...My uncle happened to be nearby, but he did not even dare to carry auntie onto the vehicle. He had already collapsed himself, too horrified to move. Other workers helped to carry my auntie onto the vehicle and off it went to the hospital. My father was not notified of the accident until someone went to his workshop and told him that his sister had an accident and was on the way to the hospital. My father hurried to the hospital. It was not a good one. The doctors there wanted to amputate my auntie's hand. At that time my father had an acquaintance who worked in that hospital. It happened that they came across each other and the doctor asked father why he was there. My father told the doctor about my auntie's accident and the prospect of her hand being amputated. The doctor suggested that she be transferred to a military hospital. My father didn't agree to amputating auntie's hand in the first place. So he decided that they transfer her to the military hospital. There she was treated and managed to save her palm and thumb. ...

When my auntie tells me about the ordeal, she would say that my (*xiaobo*) uncle was useless, too soft, horrified and collapsed. On the way to the hospital, she did not ask for seeing my *gufu* (uncle, her husband) either because he is illiterate and could be of little help. The only person she asked for was my father: 'Get my big brother, quick.'

It turned out that my father did not let her down. He managed everything at the hospital, including receiving people who came to visit and providing them with meals. So my auntie and my father are particularly close and my auntie tells me a lot about my father.

This is a good story about a man being resourceful and competent in dealing with crises. It also provides the contrast with another man who panicked under the same circumstance. Though the narrator may be unconsciously giving evaluative comments on who is manly and who is not, this instance supports the theory that masculinity is diverse if we take it as configurations of practice. I will elaborate more in the discussion.

### **15.5 Masculinity in relations**

#### *Change in mother-son relationship*

It was reported by Guiying's aunt that her father had quarrels with her grandmother ever since he was seven. Guiying knew about the tension between them too. However, the relationship started to change 7 or 8 years ago. Guiying could not figure out the reason or cause for the childhood dispute, but explains that part of the tension was caused by the different treatment of brothers (her father and uncle). In the local custom, new-born babies are usually taken care of by grandmothers until they are old enough to go to school. In recent years, grandparents escort children to school as the increasing vehicular traffic has made it unsafe for children to travel alone. In Guiying's case, however, grandma did not spend much time taking care of her. This made Guiying's mother very upset. Guiying's uncle has a son, and grandma has looked after him. Guiying herself now has forgiven grandma. She reckons that grandma has been sorry for that and has tried to compensate by being kind to her. Jianqiang has also reconciled with his mother. According to Guiying's

auntie, he would often visit grandma at her little shop and take food to her when he has got things like fruits from the factory.

### *Tension in father-daughter relationship*

The previous section shows a positive picture of Jianqiang from Guiying's narration. In the next two incidents that Guiying tells, though, she is more critical of her father. They are both recent events and are more revealing of the gendered nature of conflicts between father and daughter. The first involves a dead rat.

During the last summer holiday after I returned from college, once I woke up from my nap to see a rat under my body. (It was) a baby rat, which was dead. I was scared. It happened that day father was at home. I went to him and said, 'papa, I pressed a rat in bed. It was dead.' Father responded coldly, 'Don't make a fuss. Just throw it away.' I was so angry that tears dropped at the moment. I was so mad at father that I shut the door behind myself without telling him where I was going.

Guiying later went to her grandma's shop and told her about the rat when grandma noticed that there was something wrong. Guiying's use of this anecdote is to tell me how her grandma cared about her. However, her father and grandma's different reactions to Guiying's rat story also reveal something about gender. As a man of tough mind, Jianqiang was calm and showed no fear about the dead rat. In contrast, Grandma not only cared about Guiying's shock at that moment, but was concerned about the implications of the incident: Could it be some bad omen? How could she protect her granddaughter from misfortune? Grandma's first thought was to consult a fortune teller. But she knew that neither Jianqiang nor Guiying believed in it. So she used the traditional form of religious observance at home by providing good food in a ceremony for the Buddhist gods. Guiying was deeply moved after she heard from auntie what grandma had done for her,

even though she does not believe that the religious ceremonies could have helped her.

There seems to be some emotional difference between men and women this family in expressing concerns over the misfortunes of a family member. The railway scene is another example.

Once I went home and took a train from Nanchang and got off at Gucheng station (about 15 kilometers from home). On the compartment that I was in, there were many migrant workers with big bags who blocked my way to the exit. When the train stopped at Gucheng, I could not get off. I was so anxious. The train would stop for only 2 or 3 minutes, with people standing and all the bags, I could not move quickly enough. The conductor knew that I was getting off and urged me to move more quickly, other passengers on the train helped me by pushing me off the train. The train started to move when I had only one foot touching the ground. After that, I was feeling very upset. Tears dropped from my eyes when I saw father meeting me at the station. It was so scary, I almost missed the stop. It was night time. At first, father seemed concerned and asked me what was wrong. I told him I almost missed the stop. Could you imagine what my father's reaction was? He said, 'what big deal?!', with the words he turned his back and started to walk away. I was so angry! My shock (from the train trip) was turn to anger. All the way home I had a long face. He could not understand why I was so angry. He thought I was still angry about my adventure on the train, not realizing that I was mad at him. I learned from auntie that later that night he complained to her that I lost my temper again. He was complaining about my bad temper, not realizing that his words had hurt me.

This incident shows that Jianqiang is still using his masculine norm on his daughter. This, however, does not mean that he is cruel to Guiying, or very hard on her. Jianqiang fits in neither the abusive father nor the 'good father' image in Lynn Segal's *Slow Motion* (2007,

Chapter 2). But there are some elements of both in Guiying's narrative about her father. I will discuss the complexity of Jianqiang's masculinity in the next section.

### 15.6 Analysis

In the following analysis, I will allude to the local gender order in discussing the construction of masculinity and fatherhood in the life history of Jianqiang as told by Guiying.

#### *On the structure of power relations: direct and discursive*

In dealing with relations with women, Jianqiang was rebellious in his youth (to her mother) and took over as family head (*dangjia*) soon after getting married by dividing household with his younger brother (*fenjia*). He takes control of both his wife and daughter on decisions as trivial as choices of his daughter's toys and clothing. Jianqiang's masculine character can be connected to hegemonic masculinity that he wants to dominate women as well as other men.

According to Yan (2003) and other studies, in terms of generational power, the older generation are the losers, whether they be the patriarch 'head of family' or the '*popo*' (mother-in-law). There are similar trends of the rising power of the younger generation in Xinyue. Jianqiang's early independence from his parents is a case in point. But the issue of private patriarchy should be handled with caution, as it is intertwined with the dimension of emotional relations. For instance, after years of tension with his mother, Jianqiang started to repair his relationship with his mother, to the bewilderment of his sister.

One issue that is closely related to spousal and generational relations of power is the decision on childrearing: whose decision should be final as to whether and when to have a

child? The state power is overwhelming as China declares the Planned Birth policy as its fundamental state policy. However, within the scope of choices that the state permits, who has the power in making decisions about procreation? In Jianqiang's view, it is his role as husband to make the decision.

Traditionally, the agent who has the economic resources to support others, be they children, women, elderly parents, are men. Jianqiang's assertiveness in the quoted statement (that he will have another child) is at the same time a demonstration of his sense of insecurity over his masculine identity. He wants a son to secure his masculinity. His wife's agency, at least at the moment he utters his decision, does not occur to him.

*On the structure of production, consumption and accumulation*

The gendered division of labor in rural China has traditionally been *nan-geng nü-zhi* (men tilling while women weaving). In the local context, men work for harvesting grains (mainly rice) and women raise silkworms. Women do most of the cooking, cleaning and childcare. There are also generational characteristics in gender: the grandma is supposed to be the natural carer of little babies, as most young women return to work in factories a few months after giving birth. This is why Guiying senses grandma's guilty feeling towards her for not having nursed her in her babyhood. Guiying reports that grandma was then busy working (probably to save money for Guiying's uncle's marriage). Grandma might have thought Jianqiang and his wife were going to have another child a few years later, possibly a son. She could make up for her neglect of duty in nursing Guiying by nursing Guiying's brother. Unfortunately, things did not turn out as everyone in the family had expected. Guiying's parents had to come to terms with having her as their only child. That was why Guiying mother has been unhappy with grandma and even now cannot reconcile with grandma.

It should be noted that the gendered division of labour was more distinct in the collective years when all villagers worked in the agriculture sector than in the recent period of decollectivization and industrialization. As the family has become the basic unit of production, all members, regardless of age or gender, have to work in the family plot of land in busy seasons. For the rest of the year, most villagers earn wages in factories. With the declining proportion in the contribution of agricultural income, many young villagers have completely withdrawn from farm labour. The tasks have been left to the elderly generation, those men and women over 50.

For Jianqiang as a young person, however, life was tough. These were the critical years in the construction of his gendered identity. Here's how Guiying describes the situation:

At that time, a man's work for a full day earned him 10 workpoints while a woman's workday earned her only 8 points. In my family there was a special situation. Due to my grandfather's poor health, he could not work in the field. When my father, uncle and auntie were young children, grandmother was the only one in the household to earn workpoints. My father, as the first child, started to carry heavy load on his shoulders (*tiaodan*) at a very early age. Auntie told me all about father's early work. Though younger than others, he planted rice seedlings faster than most others, so that he could earn as more workpoints as possible. Works included peeling mulberry sticks, collection grass, feeding silkworms, planting vegetables and selling them, all these were done by himself.

The most significant word here is '*tiaodan*'—to carry a heavy load on one's shoulder. This is supported by other respondents. For instance, to show that as a teenager, he was as strong as any grown man, Jiangyang told me that the pair of wooden barrels he carried had a capacity that doubled some barrels from other households. In the collective years, this did not mean that he earned more workpoints. However, he who shoulders heavy

loads was regarded as manly. There is an overlap here between the different dimensions of gender. The person who carries heavy loads usually has power, symbolic or materialized.

Another significant area is consumption. In the local tradition, it used to be the father who brings in the food (he literally goes to the market town regularly doing the grocery shopping) and the mother who provides clothing, mirroring the division in production of 'men tilling while women weaving'. This pattern has been disrupted as the commodity economy has replaced the economy of scarcity, with supermarkets and shopping centres taking the place of the village and small town markets.

However, it is still interesting to note that Jianqiang instead of Guiying's mother selects and buys clothing for his daughter Guiying. His distrust of his wife's taste is another example of his masculine pride, even narcissism. Scope does not allow me to discuss this matter further, but it is an interesting phenomenon. At least it adds to the diversity and complexity of men's practices.

#### *On the structure of emotional relations*

Adler's notion of 'masculine protest' (Connell, 1987, 1995/2005) might be useful in interpreting Jianqiang's aggressiveness and tension with his mother at an early age, illustrated in the stripping scene. However, his change in attitude to his mother again supports the argument that men do change, and that masculinity is fluid. Further, I would argue that Guiying's auntie's bewilderment about her brother's surprising change might be explained through the lens of Jianqiang's maturity in fatherhood. He has demonstrated his caring side even though his view on women is generally negative. Change in his relations with his wife is not fully revealed, yet his wish to have some more intimate time together with his daughter demonstrates that as a father, he enjoys spending time with wife and daughter together as family. He is not eloquent and expressive to start conversations with



Guiying. Perhaps he is using his wife's presence to alleviate the embarrassment.

Guiying observes that as her father gets older, he has started to seek a closer relationship with Guiying.

When I was in my room in front of the computer, he would come in and sit for a while. But finding it hard to find a topic for conversation, he had to leave in silence. A few moments later, he would come in again. When mother was in, she has a lot to talk with me, so father would stay longer. My mother's presence is important. It makes the three of us ...So when mother is in my room, father likes to join us. But if I was there alone, he walked in and couldn't find a way to start a conversation with me. ...This summer I find he has more to talk about. For example over meals he sometimes talks about someone else's daughter...Though not a great deal, he has much more to say.

The above vignette is valuable in that it details the way a father seeks communication with a grown daughter. He might be verbally not as expressive as his wife, who talks with their daughter almost on a daily basis through the phone when she is away at college. However, he does want to talk to his daughter. Or just be with his daughter more, listening to the conversation between mother and daughter.

Besides, Jianqiang demonstrates his love and care for his daughter in other, more conspicuous ways. According to Guiying, her father has thrown a party for her birthday every year and invites all her friends for a big feast at their home. He would buy her food whenever he went to town during her high school years when she had to stay at school. He would always buy more than she herself could consume and ask her to share the food with classmates. This is a picture of a loving father, which is in sharp contrast to the tough, insensitive guy image in other incidents.

This is not to deny the fact that there is tension in the father-daughter relationship. In the dead rat and railway station incidents Guiying was very upset. Her father's annoying behaviour demonstrates his masculine side: appearing calm, cool, and indifferent to scary scenes. He has been insensitive to Guiying's emotional state. As a young woman, when she has suffered a shock, she wants to seek her father's protection and consolation. Guiying's narrative of her father contains a sense of resentment and even 'hatred', or more accurately, in her own words, '*qi*' (angry and upset).

We may have to ask Jianqiang himself to account for these contrast and contradictions. But at least we can argue that this case supports the theory that masculinities are plural, complex, dynamic, they even vary with an individual man.

#### *On the structure of symbolism, culture and discourse*

I will discuss two issues relevant to this dimension. The first is grandma's secret consultation with a fortune teller after Guiying's dead rat incident.

Whether we categorize it as folk religion or superstition, the practice of consulting fortune tellers (often blind persons) is widespread in the region. When something mysterious or unusual happened in a family, old women would go to a fortune teller to seek advice. The tension between generations, especially between those who had their formative years during the Cultural Revolution and their parents, is observed in other interviews. For instance, Jiangyang (Chapter 10) complained about his mother's devotion to Buddhism in his interview. There is an observable discontinuity in culture as far as the belief and value system is concerned.

Jianqiang's case demonstrates the oppression of state power on the wish of the individual

to affirm masculinity through pro-creation and fatherhood. Jianqiang wanted a son badly. It would have been a modest dream in a different country or a different era for a married man. Just because getting married and fathering sons have been such a taken-for-granted part of manhood in traditional rural Chinese society, the lack of a son is hurtful to a man (his self-esteem). Of course, because of his health problem, he had to be rational and play safe, rather than risk giving birth to an unhealthy child.

In time he had to reconcile with the reality of having an only daughter. He appears to be treating his daughter somewhat like he would have treated his son if he could have one. He is involved in throwing birthday parties, buying snacks, and particularly the feminine or motherly task of selecting clothing and accessories for his daughter. These could be understood as an attempt to compensate for not having a son. This sense of compensation was most obvious when Guiying reports her father's disappointment over her failure to meet the requirements for a four-year undergraduate program. He encouraged Guiying to work hard at junior college to get the qualification for entering a four-year university program. The symbolic meaning might be that for a daughter to be a university graduate, the parents may enjoy the 'social capital', a good reputation that their daughter is as good as a son. Further, gender bias is social. It is not because parents do not love their daughters that they want sons. Rather, it is because they are afraid or they believe that daughters are discriminated against by society that they wanted sons instead. If their daughters could enjoy social distinction (in Guiying's case, become a university graduate), they may no longer worry about or at least worry less about, her disadvantage in gender.

### **15.7 Conclusion**

Hearn (2002, p. 248) observes a 'diversification of patriarchy and patriarchal arenas' from the literature in his review of the debate within Critical Studies of Men on the concept of patriarchy. The distinction between private patriarchy (men as husbands and fathers) and public patriarchy/ies (men's general dominance in the state, management in industries,

etc.) is useful. In the Chinese literature, Chow's conception of 'state patriarchy' (Chow, 2003) has recently been introduced in a translation of her paper in China (Chow, 2009). Jianqiang's masculinity may be understood in Hearn's term of 'private patriarchy', which is a local version of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1987; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). The characteristics of this could be demonstrated in gendered practices of hierarchy, i.e. dominance of masculinities over all femininities; and of some forms of masculinities over other forms, an example of which is the contrast between Jianqiang and his younger brother in response to their sister's injury. Multiplicity and complexity of masculinity have been discussed at length in the analysis section. There is ample evidence that Jianqiang is ambivalent in his relations with his mother and his daughter. But change is an important theme of the new school of critical studies on men and masculinities. Jianqiang's life history support another famous gender theory about performance, that of 'doing gender' (West and Zimmerman, 1987). Gender is not static, not just traits. Guiying's account of her father's life points to the impact of circumstance on the construction of his masculinity. Practice like his childhood rebellion against his mother, his giving birthday parties for Guiying, and his involvement in purchasing clothing for Guiying are all examples of his 'doing masculinity', under changing circumstances.

## CHAPTER 16

### DAIXIA: A WOMAN WITH MANHOOD

#### 16.1 Introduction

The notion of female masculinity came into prominence with the publication of Judith Halberstam's (1998) American book on the topic. Ten years later, an anthology was published under the title *AsiapacificQUEER: Rethinking genders and sexualities* (Martin et al., 2008), which took the idea across the Pacific. Both books offer insights into the under-represented issue of masculinity in the female body. Biological females identifying or constructing themselves as masculine include the androgyne, the tribade, the female husband, the stone butch, the female-to-male transsexual, the drag king and the tomboy. It is not surprising that, guided by queer theory, neither book touches the notion of female masculinity embodied by 'straight' women. In the field of masculinities studies, James Messerschmidt's (2004) book on teenage violence reported the life histories of two young women who are heterosexual yet behave like members of male street gangs.

This chapter is to address the issue of female masculinity outside the Euro-American white urban life. Through the analysis of the life-history of a middle-aged Chinese woman, it argues for the existence of individuals identifying themselves as women yet embodying or performing traits generally categorized as masculine. This leads to a somewhat different view of "female masculinity" from that current in the literature.

#### 16.2 Theoretical discussion on female masculinity

Halberstam (1998) and Messerschmidt (2004) have concluded that the female body may enact masculinity in various forms, such as in fields of sexual orientation and crime. Research on "female masculinity" indicates that women have always been performing other actions that have traditionally been regarded as masculine both in private and public

sectors. Cases in point would be women as decision-makers in major events and women in key management positions (see, for instance, Wajcman, 1999). Connell points out that 'women are bearers of masculinity as well as men' (2005a, p. 230).

Lucetta (2008) treats masculinity as 'a set of masculine traits' culturally assigned to the biological category of men, and observes that masculinity tends to be defined in relation to its opposite category of femininity. She analyzes life history interviews of 'masculine women' in Hong Kong, and offers one list of enabling discourses and another list of disabling discourses about masculine women. Women find their masculine traits enabling because they recognize the cultural superiority of masculinity. Examples are the tomboy as a temporary phase before mature femininity, the degendering of aged women, masculine women as lesbians, defeminization as self-defense strategy against male sexual assault, androgyny in the workplace as a sign of capability, and gender ambiguity as a sign of accessibility in day-to-day interactions. In disabling discourses, masculine women have been portrayed as disqualified adults, as failed women, and even as pathological in that they want to be men.

That female 'manhood' does exist has been supported by researchers in gender studies in different contexts. A notable example is Moodie's (1994) study on South African gold mine workers and their wives. The Mpondo men migrated to the gold mine temporarily to earn money so that they could maintain their *umzi* (rural homestead). *Ubudoda* (manhood) was achieved essentially in presiding justly, wisely and generously over an *umzi* (Moodie, 1994, p. 20). However, while the men were away, it was left to women to fulfill the task of maintaining the *umzi*. For Mpondo men and women, when manhood is defined morally rather than biologically, it is logical to say that women could have *ubudoda*. This provides a useful clue to analyzing the construction of masculinity in China.

### 16.3 The interview

The village market street is a centre for villagers' daily activities. There are three teahouses, three grocery stores, two butcher shops, two barber shops, a noodle shop, a breakfast shop, one fertilizer store and two entertainment rooms (which are called *qipai shi*—rooms for playing board games and cards). The noodle shop is owned and operated by Tang Daixia, a 43-year-old woman.

Daixia's noodle shop is on the ground floor of a two-story building, with a floor area of about 30 square meters. There are four tables on the left side and a counter on the right side with packs of cigarettes and bottles of wine and spirit on display. Daixia serves breakfast, lunch and dinner all by herself, with the occasional help from an old deaf lady who is a relative of hers.

At first I did not know much about Daixia. From conversations with my landlord Uncle Ah Shun I pieced together a picture of her: she was a relative of the former manager of the village factory. She opened the noodle shop many years ago. People from the factory are often her customers; therefore she has a good business. Her husband lives in the same hamlet as Uncle Ah Shun.

I got acquainted with Daixia after having noodles with Uncle Ah Shun, and one day in August 2008, I went to see her and asked her if I could do an interview with her. She was reluctant at the beginning, saying that she did not think she has anything worth talking about. It happened that day that her son was involved in a minor traffic accident. I did not push her then. A week later one afternoon, I came to her shop and asked how her son was getting on. She said that he was OK. When I showed her the kinds of questions I would like to ask her, she agreed and we had an interview there.

I started matter-of-factly and her answers were limited to the information regarding the

questions: her age, parents, education, marriage, work, and children. Gradually she became more relaxed and started to be more reflective in her answers.

#### 16.4 The life course

Di Xia was born in 1965 in a neighboring village about 3 kilometers north of Xinyue. She has three brothers but no sisters. She said that her natal family was poor and she had only six years of schooling before she started working first as a '*xiangxiaren*' or farm laborer. ('*Xiangxiaren*' literally means 'country people', referring to all rural residents when it is used in the context of urban-rural comparison. Within the village community, the term '*zuo xiangxiaren*' denotes working outdoors as a peasant. The Chinese word *zuo* carries both the senses of 'being' and 'doing'.)

Later she worked for two years in a silk scarf factory and for ten years in the village-run leather factory before she started her own noodle shop, which she has kept for 13 years by the time of the interview. She was married to one of the villagers in Xinyue in 1986. They had a son who is about to get married.

Da Xia told me that when she first met her husband Hankun, he was working as a projectionist at the local cinema, which was regarded as a decent job at that time. Their marriage was a result of rejecting arranged engagements, and was what Chinese contemporary discourse would label as '*ziyou lian'ai*'—free courtship.

The household that Da Xia's husband came from was in sharp contrast with hers. Hankun is the only son of, by local standard, a 'good' family, which means rather rich. Only-sons were rare for that generation, and the privilege of being the only son is that he would be able to inherit all the property from his parents. Furthermore, one of her husband's sisters was married to the man who was the manager of the village leather factory.



Since her coming of age, she has experienced lots of ‘events’. (She used the word *shiti*, which is the local equivalent of a major event like wedding ceremony or funeral, an incident like a dispute involving violence, or an affair such as divorce.) Before she met her husband, her parents had already arranged a marriage partner for her. She fought for her own choice of marriage partner by dating Hankun, who at the time was engaged to another girl. After their marriage, Daixia lived with her husband’s extended family. There were four seniors to support: her father-in-law, her husband’s grandpa, and her father-in-law’s uncle and aunt who had no children of their own. Her mother-in-law had passed away before her marriage. Later she found out that there was another relative, one of their grandpa’s ex-wives, who had left the village but lived in a nearby county with no grown-up children to support her. It is significant that Daixia’s husband was an only son—serious obligations fell on the young couple.

According to Daixia, during the 23 years of her married life, she had managed four funerals (not including the ‘minor grandma’, the grandpa’s ex-wife) and built houses four times. What is unique is that instead of her husband Hankun, she has always been the person in charge in dealing with these events.

More devastating to her is Hankun’s serial affairs with other women. She describes two of them in detail. As a result of the first they were on the verge of divorce, and as a result of the second, they legally divorced. However, they have kept the divorce a secret and are now living in a de facto relationship. She said that her husband has stopped his bad behavior now. I do not refer to him as her ‘ex-husband’, because both in Daixia’s narrative and for other villagers, they are no different from other married couples.

Daixia is economically independent, but still in debt because of those funerals and house-building. Hankun’s affairs also added to the family debt. As a result of his affair with a colleague in the leather factory, he quit his well-paid job and started a small business, in

which he lost money. Now he has returned to work in another factory. To prepare for their son's wedding, they need to decorate a suite in the house.

Daixia does not seem to worry about the debt as it was from a family loan: the money is owed to her sister-in-law. Moreover, Daixia has been making good money from the noodle shop and other businesses.

### *Managing family affairs*

One of the key words that I draw from Daixia's story is 'care'. She is, above all, a kind-hearted and caring woman. She said that one of the reasons why she married her husband was that his mother had passed away and his fiancée was not kind enough to him. If everything she tells me is true, I could picture her as the sole care-giver to three grandparents, her father-in-law, her husband, and her son, all living under the same roof, plus occasional visit to a grandmother living away. The gendered division of labor is obvious here. She has been the dutiful woman taking care of everyone.

What does she get in return? Daixia says that since she was from a poor family, she was looked down upon by the senior members in the family. They were mean to her. Her husband never helps out with housework. 'He would never wash even his underwear'. Apart from countless affairs, he used to insult her by saying that nobody else would want her as if he was doing her a favor by marrying her. As for her son, so far she describes him as '*guai*'—good or well-behaved.

From the point of view of traditional Chinese virtues, Daixia exhibits filial piety because she takes it as her duty to care for all of the senior members of the family. They have by now all passed away. It was she who saw to their welfare while they were alive and arranged for their funerals when they passed away. Her husband is just no good handling

these events, she says. To me, it is at this point that her masculine side is demonstrated.

It is evident that Daixia had the resources to handle considerable life stresses. She seems to be good at managing the family economy. She had worked in the village factory for ten years and has been running the noodle shop for thirteen years. I was told by Uncle Ah Shun that she makes good use of her connections with the village leadership and the migrant workers who are the main customers of her shop. She told me that she was doing some ‘business’ which is more profitable than her restaurant operation. She asked her husband to work in the factory when she found that the pay in the factory was better than his previous job. She has been always in debt, yet she has always found ways to make money. She is rather entrepreneurial.

In the rural region, marriage and funerals are two major events (known as ‘*da shiti*’—‘things or events of great importance’). They traditionally belong to the realm of men’s responsibilities. It is men who make plans, invite guests, round up cash to cover the costs and gather helpers for the events. However, Daixia tells me that in her household, she has been the person who is in charge whenever such events take place, especially when one of the seniors got sick or later died. She was the one who handled the events, while her husband never took charge.

Housing expansion and reconstruction have been one of the main objectives for families in the village. A family’s wealth is symbolized by the house. It is closely related to marriage. For household with multiple sons, building separate houses has been the main strain in the parents’ lives. For the four times between 1986 and 2007 that they built houses, Daixia was in charge each time. It is rare, though not unknown, for a woman to be in charge of house-building. Daixia happens to be one.

Daixia has successfully and proudly dealt with all these events and she does not seem to

have much to complain about. However, what has bothered her has been her husband's numerous affairs with other women. Daixia was not bitter towards her husband, as I had anticipated. She believes her husband is just too tender-hearted. His first lover was an unfortunate woman too. She married a weak husband and her parents-in-law would often abuse her verbally. Hankun expressed sympathy for her, and they developed an affair. Daixia fought to get her husband back when she found out the affair. Hankun at first wanted a divorce to marry his lover, but gave up when he discovered that his lover could not get a divorce.

His more recent affair is with the wife of another villager. He wanted to get a divorce and marry that woman. But the woman could not get a divorce due to strong objection by her husband and his extended family. Divorce is still regarded as a stigma to the family by many villagers.

It is striking to hear Daixia's account of her husband's affairs, especially when she talks about his inability to face up to the consequences. Both times he was beaten by the husband of the woman with whom he had the affair. In both cases, it was Daixia who interfered and negotiated a settlement for the affair. While her husband started each of the affairs, he did not know how to end them. As a result of the more recent affair, Daixia had agreed to divorce her husband, to let him marry the other woman. However, the woman's husband would not divorce her. Daixia helped Hankun save his face by not making their divorce public and let him back into the house. Now they are living in a de facto relationship, though most villagers see them as the usual married couple.

### *Having 'a man's temperament'*

When I asked Daixia to reflect on possible reasons for her husband's disloyalty, she did not give a definitive answer but summarized her own character and her attitude to her

husband's past affairs as follows:

My temperament is very headstrong. (It's like) men's temperament. Encountering an incident (her husband's love affair) I demand that they give me a clear answer. Everything should be settled. If they choose to end (the affair), they should leave no residues. It should be completely over. I don't like it to be half-done. I want them to completely break up the relationship. If you have ended the relationship altogether, I'll be relieved. Whatever had happened doesn't matter now.

When I pushed further by asking if this 'man's temperament' of hers could be one of the causes of the problem in her relationship with her husband, she responds that in public her husband has never complained of any shortcomings on her part. Instead, he praises her in front of others for her capability and kind-heartedness. Her theory of her husband's problem lies in his sentimental sympathy for other women and his inability to end an affair by himself.

Another example that shows Daixia's independence is that she does not want to turn to her natal family for support in crises. In the local culture, it is not unusual for a woman's natal family to interfere if she was unfairly treated. For Daixia, however, she did not allow her brothers to punish her husband because of his infidelity.

### **16.5 Analysis**

I have profiled Daixia's experience from her narrative as to what she has experienced. The next section will analyze her life in the framework of gender relations outlined by Connell (2000, 2009).

## *Power*

Traditionally, the patrilineal and patrilocal marriage custom had subjected rural women as a group to an inferior position to men, contributing at least partly to the favoring of sons. Social transformation in the last few decades has altered the gendered power relations of rural communities.

Commenting on the change in post-Mao era power relations between rural men and women in his research in northern China where in some households women take charge in decision-making, Yan Yunxiang (2003, 102) observes that 'women actually contribute more to the proper functioning of the family both economically and socially, and it is therefore natural that a wife should have the final say'. This is what he concludes from men's concession in allowing women to be in charge of family affairs (*dangjia*). But are those wives who are in charge of family affairs actually more powerful than their husbands? In Daixia's case, it does not seem so. She tells me that her husband gives up his wages to her and then asks for allowances from her, mainly for consumption in cigarettes, cell phone bills and fuel for his motorcycle. She said that recently he has been asking for more money because he feels ashamed if he is found not to have enough to pay for gas. We could see here the negotiation of power in gender relations within the family.

As reported by Yan (2003), for the married couples in the generation currently in their 30s and 40s, it is a common practice that men submit their wages to wives who are in charge of financing and budgeting household expenses. This could be interpreted as a rise in women's power within the family. However, it could also be regarded as a compromise for the part of men, as men in charge of money matters risk more wasteful spending on cigarettes, alcohol, gambling, and, most threatening to wives, on other women. Women who to some extent take control of the family income might have some power over their husbands in decisions regards major events, but it is more often the man who has the final say.

On the other hand, unlike Ellen Judd's (1994) research on rural gender relations in north China where women's power was significantly limited by both culture and the state, in Xinyue it is observable that in many aspects women's status has been greatly improved. This is illustrated by the following facts: 1) in the village economy, women entrepreneurs have been as successful as, if not more successful than, their male counterparts in managing their businesses; 2) there are many female-headed households, either because the female is higher in generational terms or in real power; 3) female children are cherished as well as male heirs, and it is relatively easy for a family with daughters only to get a young man married into the household.

### *Labor*

I have already recorded that Daixia had cared for five senior members of the family. Another important obligation for a married woman is childrearing. Daixia told me that she had had a hard time raising her son. As mentioned before, she had no mother-in-law to help her out. Upon birth of her child, her husband did not help out at all. For the first month after she gave birth to her son, her grandma-in-law took meals to her room. The local custom has it that a woman who has just given birth should stay in bed for the first whole month to ensure the health of both mother and child. This is called *zuo yuezi*—‘sitting out the month.’ It is believed that breaking the taboo may put her at risk of illnesses from which she could never recover. Hence Daixia was grateful that grandma was around to provide meals for her. But that was the only help she ever got from others in her husband's household. Soon she had to go back to work and take care of the child all by herself.

As far as housework is concerned, Daixia says that her husband does none. He never washes his clothes or helps her out in the house. He has not been making more money

than her either. This is one example of the principle that making woman the breadwinner in the house does not necessarily liberate women.

### *Emotional attachment*

The question that I currently have no answer for is why Daixia, despite her complaints about her husband, still wants to maintain the relationship and hopes this would go on forever. I actually asked if she had thought of re-marrying her husband. The answer is that she is still not sure whether her husband will change (*bian*—turn bad) again. Hence, she is content to maintain the de facto relation and hope that he has actually changed his bad habit.

Many Chinese comments on men's extramarital affairs are economic, as indicated in the well-known saying: *A man will turn bad if he makes a fortune, while a woman will make a fortune if she turns bad*. In the case of Daixia's husband, it is not his wealth or power that draws him to develop love affairs with women, nor is this what keeps Daixia in the relationship. Emotional and sexual involvements are presumably involved; but the interview data do not allow any further insight into this.

The form of emotional attachment modeled in "care" is an important thread in this story. It seems to me that Daixia's understanding of manhood is similar to the notion of *ubudoda*, which means to the *Upondo* 'to help people' (Moodie, 1994, p. 38). In her answer to my question on the ideal husband, she highlights the word *zhaogu*—to care for:

**Xingkui:** ... What makes an ideal husband?

**Daixia:** He should be more caring, ... mutual care. Care for me more. ... What else?... Not to lose his temper.... Temperament matters to some extent. Never lose his temper and more care for me. I never lose my temper. I'll be angry if you always ignore my



warnings. I don't mind hard work. Even if I have to work to death, I work from my heart and soul. I'm always working.

This is centrally why I argue that Daixia (whether consciously or subconsciously) embodies masculinity: She thinks a good husband or man should be more caring, which she does not get from her husband. However she herself has been taking care of her husband, the seniors, especially the grandma with whom her husband had no blood relations. It might be argued that caring is a feminine trait, and that would be the usual assumption in Anglophone culture today. But if we look at the context of Daixia's story, we find that 1) she presents one of the causes of her husband's affairs as his sympathy for other women; but sympathy or compassion itself is desirable to her, it is his indecisiveness that has been problematic to her; 2) she said she chose her husband because he needed care, which his fiancée could not offer; and 3) she yearns now for mutual caring, as shown in the paragraph quoted above.

I would argue that Daixia's ideal world of gender relations is one of equality, of mutual care. Unfortunately it is not available yet. But she is not cynical. She has been doing what she can to care for other people in the family. One of the reasons she cites for her making peace with her husband after his first affair was that he could not stand up on himself when tough decisions had to be made. Unfortunately, her husband interpreted it in another way: that she refused to divorce him because she emotionally relied on him. In view of this, Daixia agreed on a divorce in a recent incident. This shows that she is independent-minded, though emotionally she wants to keep her family united.

Work and emotions are closely related in gender relations. In Daixia's quoted answer, there is a sentence about her attitude to work. Her original choice of the word is *zuo*—do things, not *gongzuo*—work. In the local dialect, the notion of *zuo* is close to the English word 'labor'. *Zuo* could also be used as an adjective meaning hard-working. Used

together with the word family, the phrase *zu renjia* means ‘economical’ in the sense that by saving one could make the family rich. Used as a verb phrase, however, *zuo renjia* means to lead a normal family life (for a man and a woman to establish a family through marriage and maintain the bond.)

I sense what Daixia means in the above answer is that she does not mind working to death as long as she feels loved. She does not want to see her family disintegrate on the one hand, but she wants her husband to end his affairs with other women, on the other. She wants her husband to be decisive in his relations with women. This is what she calls ‘men’s temperament’.

Also interesting to note is the word Daixia uses to refer to Hankun’s unfaithfulness to her—*bian*, which literally means ‘change’ in the sense of ‘turning bad or naughty’, or ‘not being himself’. The latter might be closer in meaning to Daixia’s feeling to her husband: he is not a bad person; he was just not himself when he behaved badly. Also significant is that ‘*bian*’ is often a word that parents use on their children when they find their behavior worrisome or rebellious.

Daixia’s other emotional concern seems to focus on her son. He is soon to get married and if she and her husband separated, it would not be good for the son. In the region, divorce of parents puts too much pressure on children. She couldn’t live without her son. Both times when divorce was negotiated, she insisted on having her son in her custody. On the second occasion, when they did end up in divorce, she agreed to take over some of the family debt, but her son should live with her. It seems to me that she now invests her future in her son and hopes to live the rest of her life raising grandchildren, as most women a bit older than her are now doing.

## *Symbolism*

According to Gardiner (2007, p. 203) 'female masculinity' refers to traditionally masculine traits or appearance occurring in biological women. This should always be qualified as culture and time vary. For instance, during the Cultural Revolution, Chinese women were seen to display masculine traits while still identify themselves as female. The 'iron girl' (*tie guniang*) was first and foremost a 'girl', despite her wearing army uniform and performing masculine tasks.

In the case of Daixia, her upbringing in the 1960-70s may have contributed to her sense of self as an independent being. The reform era in her adult years might have constructed her entrepreneurial sense. The local culture of familial loyalty encourages her, and her economic resources enable her, to perform her duty as filial daughter-in-law.

In terms of female masculinity or the masculine female, I should add that some of what Daixia exhibits are not originally male traits. For example, as the only *xifu* (daughter-in-law) in an extended family of four generations, it is expected in the local culture that she take care of the daily lives of the whole family. As Cao et al. (2001) observe in an ethnographic study in a village in the same region, a daughter-in-law's obligation is to provide for and care for her parents-in-law. Daixia had no *popo* (mother-in-law), or any *zhouli* (wife of husband's brother) to either help her or compete with her. It was left to her alone to fulfill the (gendered female) task of caring for the elders, her husband and her son. There is nothing masculine in this sense. Rather, it seems to be another example of women's expected competence. What is unique in Daixia's case is that when 'big events' occurred, she was the one who took control.

Daixia gives another unexpected response regarding raising children. It has been claimed by many that the family-planning policy, particularly the rigid one-child policy, is unpopular in rural communities. However, at least from what she tells me, Daixia first has

no preference for boys over girls, and second believes that one child is enough. In her case, she could legally have another child though her first child is a son. Her husband's uncles and aunt have no children and they were taking care of them. Hence, to respect the local custom of continuing a family lineage, they could have another child in their uncle's name. However, Daixia and her husband chose not to have another.

Yan (2003, p. 188) coins the term 'demystification of parenthood' to describe the weakening of patriarchal power as a result of the collapse of parental superiority in religious and kinship domains. He attributes this first to the 'state-sponsored attack on beliefs and rituals in popular religions' and later to market reforms that 'accelerated the waning of parental authority and the power in the symbolic world'. In the case of Daixia, the symbolic power of filial piety appears to have guided her relationship with the elders. It could be inferred from her complaints that she found herself wronged by the elders in the family. There might have been class issues here. She came from a poor peasant background while her husband's family has a glorious past (not in the name of the revolution, but in the more traditional sense of a big family with education, social networks and other cultural capital). If I am reading her words correctly, she was performing what Confucius called '*yidebaoyuan*'—respond to maltreatment with virtue. She took care of them when they got ill, and organized decent funerals for each one of them.

It seems that Daixia has been influenced by local custom to observe the rituals of filial piety. I find it admirable that she went against her husband's protest to take care of the grandma who in fact had no blood relation with him. In this case, the symbolic has played a significant role. People will not have blamed her for not caring for the grandma, but she took it as a duty, visiting her every year around the Spring Festival and taking care of her funeral. It not only demonstrates her capability in organizing rituals and ceremonies, but her integrity and filial piety as well.

## 16.6 Conclusion

Daixia is full of contradiction: she is rebellious as demonstrated by her rejection of her arranged marriage; she is entrepreneurial as proven by her success in running the noodle shop and making more money than her husband; she is independent as shown by her refusal to let her brothers intervene in her marriage problems; she felt she was wronged by her husband and his seniors but she fought for her rights with dignity. These all point to her masculine side. However, at the same time, she dutifully fulfilled the obligations of a daughter-in-law, and accepted her husband back even after their formal divorce. Here she is enacting a conventional femininity.

Daixia's case illustrates the complexity of gender relations and practices. In traditional Chinese culture, yin-yang theory holds that women should be weaker than men, though if their men are weak, they could be strong, so as to be complementary. If both of the couple are strong, there will be too much of yang. In settling spousal disputes, men tend to resort to coercion while women are supposed to use persuasion. This is the conventional wisdom.

Daixia's case, however, demonstrates that it is, at best, half of the story. She might be a strong-willed woman; so much so that her husband betrays her many times. However, he is not afraid of her. He is not a hen-pecked man with a strong wife as is famously known in our culture. He is in a hegemonic position. Daixia suffered more by showing her weaker side. She won her husband back by asserting herself more, when circumstances seemed to be on her side (her husband's lover did not get a divorce). At least from this case, the idea that feminine women maintain better relations does not hold.

I recall that Daixia's comment on her having 'men's temperament' was in response to my question on the possible reason why her husband repeatedly betrayed her. She made the comment in an assertive way, and I am not implying a negative evaluation of her

femininity, which I have summarized in the previous section. However, there is still a cultural assumption in China that it is undesirable for women to have masculine traits and Daixia appears to be aware of it.

On the other hand, she identified with women in her self-evaluation of fulfilling adequately the obligations of being daughter-in-law, wife and mother. Like many other heroic women in Chinese history—Hua Mulan, Li Qingzhao, Qiu Jin and most of today's female athletes—Daixia is solidly located in her identification as a woman.

Therefore, she is in a sense typical of the women in the region at the modern era. Her femininity appears to be in no doubt. Yet her masculine side is undeniable. She was an independent and rebellious daughter as a teenager, a filial daughter-in-law and granddaughter-in-law, a good wife and mother, a competent shop owner, and a divorcee who lives with her husband. Her independence and her ability in dealing with crises distinguish her from the stereotypical model of Chinese women (for instance, the famous character of Xianglinsao in Lu Xun's novel). She emphasized to me that when she discovered her husband's first affair, she told her brothers not to interfere. In the local setting, as her husband was morally in the wrong, her brothers have the right to discipline him. But she insisted that they should not. She had the determination and confidence that she could and would handle it on her own. I could sense in the interview that deep down she was hurt, but she faced the reality and resolved to get her husband back for the sake of her son and herself. So far she has succeeded.

To conclude, Daixia is a strong woman. Unlike some of the types of 'female masculinity' discussed in the literature, her masculinity has nothing to do with her sexual orientation. It was the tough conditions that she encounters, I consider, that had formed her character.

# **PART VI**

## **CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION**

## CHAPTER 17

### CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

#### **17.1 Summary of main findings**

In Chapter 1 I stated that the aim of the study is to explore the construction, transformation, and representation of different patterns of masculinity in contemporary China. I have discussed both the English and Chinese literature in masculinities studies and suggested adopting the formal term ‘critical studies of men and masculinities’ as my field of study in this project. The methods of rural ethnography combined with life history interviews with men and women prove to be effective, informative and reflexive. I have also discussed the debate on the concept of hegemonic masculinity and the usefulness of the four dimensions of gender analysis in the Chinese context: power, production, emotion and symbolism.

The three chapters in Part II are devoted to the discussion of issues that are relevant to masculinities studies. I draw on data collected from books and articles that are both from academic sources and available through the regular media, as well as documents available on the Internet. This part reveals that in China, gender equality is an official policy but not yet a reality. The study of gender, in particular, educating boys and men, should be given due attention.

Chapters 4 through 6 take globalization as an important perspective in masculinities studies. In their reformulation of the concept of hegemonic masculinity, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) point to the importance of geography: analysing patterns of masculinities at global, regional and local levels. The thesis has dealt with Chinese masculinities at all three levels. Globalization is embedded in both the Chinabounder incident in Chapter 5 and the development of men’s studies and men’s movement



discussed in Chapter 6. These are evidences of China's integration into the global market, with movement of goods and people across national boundaries. Chapter 4 deals with the domestic issue of *bao ernai*, which has gone beyond mainland China to involve men from Taiwan, Hong Kong, even Singapore, and therefore should be dealt with as a regional issue. The local level is the focus of my ethnography in an eastern China village, which is presented in Parts III to V.

From the life histories of village men in Chapters 8 through 12, it is revealed that both the private sphere and public sphere in which men grow up are gendered. These life histories provide evidences that support the major claims in other studies: that masculinities are plural, hierarchical, and body-reflexive; that individual men are both subject to structure (state power, local culture and customs, etc) and able to have individuality or agency; and that masculinities are dynamic: men and masculinities do change. Changes are constrained by the local context, which reflects the complexity and contradiction at both individual level and social level.

The four chapters in Part V present women's perspectives on men and masculinities and discuss the concept of female masculinity in the Chinese context. The findings support the validity of a relational approach in gender studies through revelation of wife-husband, daughter-father, and mother-son relations. Changes in courtship, marriage residence, sexual practices, and impact of the one-child policy are key issues that emerge in the accounts of women. This part therefore examines the dramatic changes in the institution of the family in rural Chinese. The findings are in agreement with most other rural China research on the importance of the family for femininity and masculinity. A step forward in this study is the discussion of female masculinity, exploring the issue of masculine practice among women who appear feminine and identify themselves as women.

Data from the village ethnography support the thesis of the hegemonic position of men

and masculinities. However, there have been challenges to the existing gender order as more women enter management positions in local industries and the younger generation of men and women show different configurations of practices within the family. In the former issue, several women in the village have become corporate executives in firms that have annual production values of millions of yuan. In the latter, the older generations gradually concede their power in the household to grown children, with a relative rise in power of younger generations of women within marriage and family. This is in agreement with Yan's (2003) ethnography but differs from Li Yinhe's (2009) study, in other parts of rural China.

### *Patterns of masculinity within mainland China*

Here I shall summarise the patterns of masculinity documented in the study. Of the three levels, global, regional and local masculinities, I have tried to present some regional patterns of masculinity in Chapter 4 to 6. The word region is given a different sense when it is used to designate different parts within China. This concept of region is as important as another geographical category: that of urban-rural (*cheng-xiang*) residence. In mainland China, one's birth place (*jiguan*) and residency (urban or rural) status are both significant factors in one's identity. The reform and opening up has made it possible for rural residents to migrate to cities and towns to seek waged employment. But they have been mainly treated as seasonal migrants and hold only a 'temporary' residency even though some have worked in the new place for many years. There has been strong criticism of this obviously unequal system, but at present men and women registered as rural residents are still in a second-class status. The rich rural areas along the east coast have undergone industrialization and urbanization at a fast rate in the last quarter century. These places are also destinations of the migrant workers from the inner provinces where economic development lags behind. The migrant workers commonly work in gender segregated industries, such as men in the construction sector and women in the services

sector.

In the power structure, men take general control over all branches of state power, and the state can be seen as the top of a hierarchical gender power structure. The same gendered power structure goes down to local levels and the relationship between the local and central levels of the state could be described as one of both subordination and resistance. Symbolically, the state represents supreme power; this to some extent resembles the imperial court through thousands of years of dynastic successions. It is patriarchal because there is a clear hierarchy between the central government and different levels of local government. Under the neoliberal model of development, women have been marginalised: equal opportunity for gender has been sacrificed when femininity is objectified. Young women in some professions are employed for their beauty and youth. In hospitality and other service sectors, these young women are aware that their careers are tied to their gender, sexuality and age. They call it *chi qingchu fan* (drawing on youthfulness, or literally ‘eat rice at the cost of youth’. This is gender-based exploitation of women’s body and sexuality, with an unarticulated but implied message that women could use their sexual appeal to men as ‘capital’. In my fieldwork trip, when I was entertained by friends in business, they sometimes invited girls to accompany their business associates (all men) in restaurants and karaoke bars. These young women are often migrants with rural origin. Both Yuen et al. (2004) and Zheng (2009a) have covered this issue. My study further supports the argument that the issue is structural: that gender, residence, and region are new configurations of social stratification. Fang’s (2009) study on male sex workers in three cities (in north China, south China, and Taiwan) complicates the issue of gender, but comparisons of Fang’s (2009) and Zheng’s (2009a) works find that male sex workers are in a better position than female sex workers in their sense of power and control of their own agency.

Just as my use of the word ‘region’ has been narrowed down to refer to different regions

within China, so I narrow down the word ‘local’ to my fieldwork site of Xinyue and its vicinity. My ethnography gives an opportunity to provide a more complex picture of the local people. The great majority of adults are hardworking people throughout their lives. Take, for example, the generation of Uncle Ah Shun and Uncle Ah Geng. Both have had little education; both have lived on their physical fitness and physical strength to support their families. They are the generation of men who maintain the tradition but have seen the transition of the rural culture. Uncle Ah Shun’s elder son Aiguo is an example of a new generation of men who have left the land but have not left the hometown by working in a local factory and living in town. Fei Xiaotong (2007) names his proposed solution to China’s rural population as ‘*li tu bu li xiang*’—or leaving the land but not leaving the country. Such a strategy might be viable in Xinyue. Aiguo’s son, growing up and attending schools with the town children, is a new generation that has been integrated into life in the town. In the near future, we will find a new generation of men from the village with no experience of rural life. We can expect more new patterns of masculinity to emerge.

Though Uncle Ah Shun and Aiguo share similar work ethics and family values, their manners of leisure and consumption are different. Uncle Ah Shun thinks it a waste of money to eat out at restaurants, so he often declines invitations by Aiguo to join them in their meals at restaurants in town. Xuewu talks about his father in a similar manner. The fathers’ generation is one whose work has been mainly manual and requires skills learned from practice. Knowledge has been transferred from one generation to another (father-son passage). In the new generation, who have matured in the era of the ‘commodity economy’, establishing relations with clients is very important. Both Aiguo and Xuewu have a network of personal friends and business associates that they need to entertain and hang out with. The hospitality sector in the locality used to be a male-only domain, as it was a public space. The teahouse in the village and those in nearby market towns are relics of that tradition. There are men—and only men—who frequent such venues almost

every day in the morning throughout the year.

During the collective years almost all men were required to carry on the same task with limited division of labour and narrow gaps in pay. This is different now as village men are in different occupations. Jiangyang (Chapter 10) has been in several occupations. He has experienced both hardship in agricultural work and non-agricultural work. He seeks leisure activities with friends in dining, drinking and smoking, as well as card games that involve gambling. Though strictly speaking illegal, the practice is common among men of his generation. The older ones play similar games with less gambling, while the younger generation now turn to net surfing or computer games. Again, there is going to be more similarity between rural and urban youth as modern technology and media is shortening the distance between rural and urban exposure to media. Another homogenizing trend is the increasing numbers of high school graduates going to universities. With fewer children per household in the new generation, rural men in this region are going to resemble urban men. The process of urbanization has already begun.

Currently, however, there are still big gaps between urban and rural residents in work and leisure. The average per capita income of urban residents is about double the income of rural residents in the same region. Urban residents with jobs have regular wages and a safety net if unemployed. They enjoy an old age pension when retired. The new rural policies are to provide similar services to rural residents, but at this stage the payments to rural residents do not match the level of urban residents. As for leisure, rural workers have few holidays. One reason for villagers in Xinyue to prefer working in the Taiwanese-owned firm is that it gives its employees regular days off on weekends. Other local factories still operate according to the rural work day system. Some factories pay their employees well, but workers have to endure long hours, up to 14 hours a day. This has sometimes caused strong reaction from the workers. But so far, as it has been the norm for factories to make workers do extra hours, the workers' power of resistance is limited.

They do have the choice of changing jobs if they are skilled in a trade, but the differences in wages and working conditions do not vary much within one sector or trade.

## **17.2 Discussion on the significance of the research**

### *Gender order in contemporary China*

The studies on the *bao ernai* phenomenon and domestic violence point to the hierarchical order in gender relations in contemporary China. Men's domination in power, production, emotion, and symbolism is demonstrated by their practices in public and private lives. Women are not fully complicit in supporting the continued persistence of patriarchy, be it in the realms of the public or private. Yet the overall pattern of hegemony of men, or masculine domination, whichever theoretical terms are used, can be found. Masculinity is viewed as superior to femininity and some forms of masculinities are subordinated or marginalised.

As China embraces globalization and the market economy, men's pursuit of wealth, fame, power, and beautiful women is gradually legitimized. In the collective years, representatives of the working class were hegemonic. In the reform era, private property symbolised by housing and cars has become a measuring stick for men and masculinity. The representative figures are now entrepreneurs, high-ranking officials, and stars in pop culture and sports. New classes emerge and social mobility is possible as the Chinese economy develops at high rate. For women to share in these new privileges, they either need the luck to be born into these families or the opportunities to be married to men of the rich class, if they have the capital of being young and beautiful, good education or some special talents.

In the international arena, nationalistic feelings and masculinity are inextricably linked,

which is reflected by media representation of Chinese masculinities. The blogger in Chapter 5 is an example of orientalism which takes western values and norms as standards for masculinity to attack Chinese men's lack of masculinity, and incited some Chinese men's nationalistic and anti-west sentiment.

In their epilogue to their edited volume on Chinese femininities and Chinese masculinities, Brownwell and Wasserstrom (2002) raise the hypothesis that 'Chinese masculinity may be recovering its potency after a century of emasculation' as indicated in China's rising power in world politics, economic, sports, and cultural exchanges. Brownwell and Wasserstrom's anthology was published not long after the NATO bombing of the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade. Recent events seem to prove the validity their hypothesis. Talk of China as a rising power has been around in Chinese media in recent years, as the official tone refers to China as a *responsible major nation*. The notions of *daguo* (big nation) and *qiangguo* (strong nation) have gendered implications that have not been highlighted in the Chinese context. When China had been humiliated during the century from the Opium War to the end of the Second World War, she was said to have been 'raped' by foreign powers. In Internet jokes now, for a Chinese men to have sex with a western women, he is demonstrating patriotism. As China's presence in the global arena is getting prominent, the relationship between nationalism and masculinity in this context is an urgent topic for further study.

Within mainland China, there are still gaps in China between social groups. Among them, the most obvious class distinction in China is the rural-urban division and the difficulty in breaking this boundary. Rural masculinity was subordinated to urban masculinity as the CCP defined the workers as the main ruling class upon the founding of the PRC. Marxist class analysis, which is still officially endorsed by the ruling CCP in China, considered the working class (the proletarians, excluding peasants), as the most revolutionary and in the Chinese context, the most 'advanced' class for the future of humanity. Under the

leadership of Jiang Zeming (CCP Secretary General from 1989 to 2002), the CCP reiterated that the party members represent the most 'advanced' groups of Chinese people. This is to ideologically legitimate the power of elites in the party-state. The actual workers have been 'represented' by the party, but do not have the power or hegemony in leadership.

In the rural setting, women's power and status come after men (their husbands and sons). It is conventional that a mother obtains nobility through her son (*mu-yi-zi-gui*), and a wife wins honour through her husband (*qi-yi-fu-rong*). In gender terms, a bachelor is never a man, and a spinster never becomes a woman. Single adults are rare and all young people at a certain age, and their parents, are under pressure to make arrangements for marriage. It is very hard in such a social environment to think of other patterns of gender relations.

### *Power and resistance*

In discussion of the urban-rural divide, the power of the state over daily lives of the individual peasants is implicated. But what has been the impact of state power over rural China on rural masculinity? For rural men, the divide not only limited their mobility in a special sense, it also virtually prohibited their social mobility. During the Maoist era under the planned economy, peasants had no autonomy over what to plant and how to organize their production. How did men at that time maintain their role as provider of the family? In Xinyue, it was significant in the collective era that a small plot of land was allocated to individual households. Most of the households' livelihood depended on that little private plot to grow a variety of vegetables in different seasons, preserve them after harvest and sell them in town. During the Cultural Revolution, such kind of household production was labelled 'tail of capitalism' and risked being cut. Rural men were made virtually powerless in the face of state power.



However, there were also cases of resistance. The classic example was the story of how 18 households in the village of Xiaogang in Anhui Province decided to divide up the collective land into individual households. They signed a secret pledge together promising to turn in the grains that the state required. This historical event took place in early winter of 1978 (Lu, 2007, p. 179). The heads of households who put their finger prints with red ink on the document also agreed that if any leaders of the village were imprisoned for dividing up the land to individual households, the villagers should support their children until each turned 18. At that time, individual farming (*dangan*) was illegal. But the villagers' bold resistance was intended to allow them to live a life of decency as they, not the state, defined it.

From the story, I am trying to draw an argument about power and resistance that is important in the notion of hegemonic masculinity. At the local level, being able to feed one's family is the basic requirement for a man. From the names in the original document, I could see the great majority of the heads of households were men. They had had enough of humiliation as they had to travel to other regions to beg for food as the inefficiency of collective farming did not provide them with enough food.

I see a relationship between the Xiaogang story and Uncle Ah Shun's life history. His life since the age of 10 has been that of labouring on farmland (*zuo tianfan*). For his generation, being a man is to devote himself to keeping the family well-fed and building and expanding the house as the family grows. In times and places where survival and subsistence are key concerns, masculinity means being able to work and support the family; and later for sons to get married, so that the patrilineal lineage can be extended. It appears modest, but in times of hardship, it was not simple to do.

Today, the situation has changed, and hegemonic masculinity is changing too. Men need to prove their manhood through a higher living standard, or sending their children to

schools in town, purchasing apartments in town, so that their children's future will be the same as the urban dwellers now. In this way, the hegemony of the urban over the rural will be blurred when many people enjoy both rural background and urban residency.

There is another story in Uncle Ah Shun's account that involves resistance. The episode tells of a cadre from the township who did not know much about agriculture and did not speak the vernacular, either. But he was in a position of power and he bossed people around by scolding a peasant who said he was going to '*zhongtian*' (literally 'plant field') instead of '*chayang*' (transplant seedlings) as the cadre had ordered. In fact, the two terms refer to the same activity. The more colloquial term *zhongtian* is one that peasants identify themselves with, as they call themselves '*zhongtian ren*' (people who plant field). The formal term *chayang* as official discourse is more accurate in describing the activity of transplanting rice seedlings but use of the term distanced the cadres from the peasants. The circulation of such jokes is itself a form of resistance. By making fun of the cadre's ignorance, the peasants' own autonomy and masculinity are highlighted.

### *Rural masculinities in the new era*

Yuen et al.'s (2004) southern China village ethnography finds that since the 1980s, the preoccupation for rural people is to improve their living standards through hard work and business opportunities. Many villagers have turned from traditional peasants working in agriculture to industrial workers and later to entrepreneurs. A common experience shared by many of my respondents is that in and around 1996, before the south-east Asian financial crisis, many of the Xinyue villagers quit their wage-earning jobs in the factories and went to the nearby markets to open clothes shops. This demonstrates their ambition to be their own boss. Some succeeded through persistence; others failed and had to return to factories as wage earners. Today there are young people who want to be their own boss. There are the cases of Xuewu and Jiangyang, who are both very independent. Uncle's Ah

Shun's son Aiguo has maintained a fulltime job as an accountant but at the same time supports his wife in running a fashion shop. All these indicate that there is a turning point from peasant to wage-earner-entrepreneur. Women have been part of it, as represented by Daixia (Chapter 16) and Huilin (Chapter 13), in addition to Aiguo's wife and some other women that I learnt about but did not interview. To be in business is not just the practice of men. So the complexity is that there is both masculinity and femininity displayed in persons like Daixia and Huilin, which I will discuss later.

### *Men's tension with women*

There is something that Jiangyang and Xuewu have in common. In both men, I see their love for their mothers as the men talk about their mothers' having good qualities. Jiangyang foregrounds his mother's kindness by emphasizing her faithfulness and generosity in helping others. Xuewu speaks with admiration of mother's care for him in his childhood and her hard work for the family. But both men want their autonomy from the control of their mother. Jiangyang hates his mother's attempts to engage him in religious ceremonies. He was so angry once that he told his mother that he would rather be damned than follow her request for him to go to the village temple. Xuewu once told his mother not to behave like the Empress Cixi (the late-Qing empress who ruled China on behalf of her son, known in the west as the Dowager Empress) bossing him around. Both these episodes can be interpreted as attempts by men, whether consciously or unconsciously, to break away from the control of women. These young men have conflicts with their fathers as well, but their conflicts with their mothers involve broader attitudes to women: they see women as behaving inappropriately in attempting to control their sons. Their fathers are strong and hardworking. The young men have inherited their father's role as head of the family, though their lives have different trajectories from those of their fathers.

As a village cadre, Weiguo is in a position of power. He represents a different generation of men who is one of the first generations of only children and has received better education than their parents' generation. Weiguo is very reflexive about his position and his experiences. There is something of an organic intellectual in Weiguo as he presents himself as an expert about the situation of the village and as of what the best interest for villagers should be.

### *Division of labour*

In the four case studies of men's lives presented above, women's roles are not as crucial as men's. The men in their interviews did not touch on the issues of women's identity, women's interests, or women's role in their lives in general. For some men, childcare is completely in women's hands, but for Weiguo, childcare is part of his shared responsibility. This is different for women like Daixia, Cuiwa and Xuelian. Their husbands are involved very little in domestic work. For Baisong, Aiguo and the two other men working in Heshui, childcare is part of their responsibilities. The pattern seems to be changing towards cooperative work in childrearing.

For Uncle Ah Shun, his life is still centred around the house and his contracted land. His routine is the teahouse and noodle shop early in the morning and work in the field during the day, and meals and TV at home in the evening. He does not have power over his children now, but he does not feel dependent on them either. As a representative of the older generation, he understands that the future is in the hands of the younger generation and they are taking care of it by themselves. He is content. What he sometimes complains about is his diminishing strength, as this has been his only capital in his younger years that has contributed to his supporting a big family.

For the three younger men in Chapters 10-12 and other men in Chapter 8, the reform and

opening up has provided them with opportunities to pursue a new life style that is different from their parents' generation. Some have already succeeded in gaining urban jobs and urban residence through higher education; some have obtained urban residence through purchasing apartments in town; still others could not afford that but aspire to make more money to improve on their current state of living conditions. Not all villagers will be able to realise such upward mobility in the near future. But if the current rate of development is sustainable, it will not be long before the gap between the urban and rural gap in that particular region is bridged. By then, the gender gap will necessarily be changed as residency and marriage will not be such a critical issue as it is right now.

Respondents such as Weiguo and Cuiwa have expressed the view that their daughter or son's future residency is not a critical concern. With fewer children per family, young people's own opportunities to develop into their full potential will be a major concern of their parents. This is an area that needs to be followed in further study. As gender is surely to be factor of concern, the second generation of only children might experience different constructions of gender from that of their parents' generation. A cause for optimism is that gender bias has not been held so strongly by the younger generation of parents in the village. A cause for pessimism is that the broader structure of hegemonic masculinity still retains its dominance in the social structure in contemporary China.

### *Two levels of patriarchy*

I turn to the local gender order again in discussing the two levels of patriarchy. In Chapter 7, I have argued that the state has, in the last 6 decades, left its trace and determined to a large extent the pattern of gender relations. As there are some similarities between public and private patriarchy, the two levels of patriarchy are in effect complicit. When village men are emasculated by the state they still resort to local culture to dominate women in terms of power, and exploit women in domestic work. Women, on their side, were not

empowered to resist as the patrilineal and patrilocal gender hierarchy did not give them much space for resistance. There have been constant changes in the gender relations and change is particularly dramatic in both production and reproduction. In the sphere of production, there is transformation from collective to privatised household farming, and from farming to wage earning. In reproduction, the younger generations are having fewer children and the children are having more years of education.

There is research and debate on the merits or defects of the one-child per-couple policy. There is some research that has pointed to gender issue—the imbalance in SRB (sex ratio at birth) of children. Within the Chinese context, however, the debate has been more focussed on the impact on the nation as a whole. For instance, the aging population, the rising number of young men (some predicted as many as 30 million, see Bossen 2003) who are potential bachelors, implying that social stability is at stake. Feminists have rightly pointed to the more individual level questions: what about the rights of the female foetuses that have been deprived of life? What about women's (and men's) rights to make decisions regarding reproduction? Should the state have the power to force women to end pregnancy? These are contested issues.

In Part IV of this thesis, the life histories of the village men reveal changing patterns of gender relations: men are still symbolically and substantially in important positions of public and private spheres. In the village administrative structure, men take key positions in the CCP branch and the Villagers' Committee. All but one of the villagers' group leaders are men, although since privatisation, group leaders have had little power or privilege. The great majority of men head their household in census records. Men are also in charge of family finance, and are decision makers of important events. Aiguo claims that, in dealing with crisis, women are not as good as men. Guiying's father Jianqiang's life course seems to support Aiguo's point of view. However, from the story of Daixia, we see that at least some women are as capable as or even better than men in handling crisis

or dealing with important events. This is a significant example of the need to go beyond simple notions of masculinity.

### **17.3 Theoretical and methodological reflections**

#### *On rural ethnography and life history interviews*

My reflections on methodology are in areas of the researcher, reflexivity and ethical issues.

As a man with a rural background from the same region as the research site, I chose the topic and site with some personal biases. But the fieldwork is also a learning experience. For the past 20 years before the fieldwork, I had not been back to the region for prolonged stays. Much of my presumed knowledge about village life has proved to be limited. It has been an experience of re-education.

I had no problem talking to the villagers but I did have concerns as to whether villagers would agree to be interviewed while being recorded. Some actually asked for me not to record, but most took it easily. My reflection is that if I had tried hard enough to build up rapport with respondents, chances were that they would be willing to share their stories with me. The stories collected convinced me that by listening to the voices of the ordinary people and focussing on issues that are concerns of the ordinary people, social scientists can build significant knowledge about society and human beings, relevant to the assessment of existing policies and the creation of new policies.

#### *The concept of hegemonic masculinity*

Sofia Aboim (2010, p. 39) argues that hegemonic masculinity ‘comprises diverse symbolic models and practices’ and hence should be understood as plural. This is in

agreement with Wetherell and Edley's (1999) view that there could be more than one hegemonic masculinity. Notions of hegemonic masculinity also change historically. In China, men who were rich and business-oriented were the target of struggles in collective years, but later, these *nengren* (capable persons) were embraced as leaders to create wealth and job opportunities for the region as well as building up their own wealth. Often there are differences between models of masculinity sanctioned by the state, those represented by the media, and those of folk heroes.

In a revision to Connell and Messerschmidt's (2005) article, Messerschmidt (2010) provides clarification of the discussion of hegemonic masculinity. These discussions are thought-provoking in my final writing of this thesis. Messerschmidt (2010) highlights the importance of legitimacy and tries to delineate between 'hegemonic' and 'dominant' and 'dominate' forms of masculinity. This way of delineating leads to his support of Connell's comment on the possibility of positive hegemony. From dialogue and critique of authors such as Beasley (2008), Schippers (2007), and Howson (2005), Messerschmidt (2010) argues that the concept of hegemonic masculinity can still inspire innovative research on men and masculinities. There is a question: where does legitimacy come from?

If we take hegemonic masculinity as exemplary, culturally exalted, and socially sanctioned, a few big names immediately come to my mind. But I am hesitant to provide names as different people have different preferences for role models and hegemonic masculinity does not equate to a role model. To problematise the notion of masculinity, names of women can be mentioned. Women and masculinity has already entered in the debate. Both Aboim (2010) and Messerschmidt (2004, 2010) support the idea of female masculinity. In Chapter 16, I have presented the case of Daixia as an example to demonstrate that hegemonic masculinity could be embodied by heterosexual women if the conception of hegemonic masculinity is not reified as men-behaving-badly.



If masculinity can be embodied in a female body, there is another problem within gender studies. Should masculinity come with itself some positive evaluation? Our culture has given masculinity some positive traits. One of the translations of the English term masculinity is '*yanggang zhiqi*', meaning the embodiment of *yang* and toughness. The positive side of degendering the term is to subvert the traditional discrimination against women with talents that are regarded as manly qualities. This implies the woman is 'unwomanly' and hence leads to a negative, normalising attitude towards women who transgress, abandoning feminine activities and embracing masculine activities. Although there are still problems in adopting the term female masculinity, it is in general more positive to develop the notion that women's practices, talents and temperament are comparable to men's most prestigious and privileged practices. It is a challenge to the existing hierarchy which puts men and masculinity in a hegemonic position.

If female bodied persons are proved to be perfectly able to construct and demonstrate masculinity, then another notion, which is also hinted at by Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) becomes significant: that hegemonic masculinity does not necessarily equate to the negative, toxic side of men's practices. The traditional and culturally sanctioned concept of masculinity, understood as cultural ideal, could be retained as something desirable for both men and women, while discarding the normalising feature of the terms that makes men feel inadequate and effeminate if they could not live up to the norms. This could be regarded as a transitory stage in the process of degendering (Lorber, 2005), a time when neither men nor women are judged first of all by their biological sex. This is the line of gender politics that I would like to discuss. The implication for the one child generation is to create a society where inequality based on birth could be eliminated. One does not automatically have access to power and privilege upon birth as the class, ethnicity, residence, region, and gender determine the fate of that person.

This idealised society will not come automatically without creative thinking of its

possibility in the first place. Utopian views of equality as sameness and radical movements have proved to be counterproductive as China's Great Leap Forward and Cultural Revolution have demonstrated. It is not a good solution to eliminate a whole class of men and women who used to enjoy privilege. It is equally wrong to believe that as inequality has been with human beings for millennia, any attempt to seek equality is inherently fraud. Feminist movement has not reached all its goals, but at least in many countries, progress has been made in empowering women and making men's lives better at the same time.

That brings me back to the *yin-sheng-yang-shuai* thesis discussed in Chapters 2 and 4, which falls into the same trap. The thesis is based on binary thinking, claiming that China's rising women's status has victimised men, whose jobs are taken by women, and whose masculinity is at stake when women take over that precious commodity to which men used to claim exclusive ownership. But if we believe that masculinity is plural, diverse, fluid and can be embodied by both sexes, the rigid hierarchy can be subverted and new configurations of masculinities can be imagined until there is a time when gender does not matter as much as it does today.

To take Connell's gender order, and Messerschmidt's (2010) differentiation of the dominating, dominant and hegemonic forms of masculinities, power and wealth are objectives, so men associated with power and wealth are dominating and dominant. However, they still lack legitimacy in the ways their power and wealth have been obtained and accumulated. Therefore the rich and powerful, while being the dominant class of China now, are at the same time target of social discontent. They have been condemned sometimes for making Chinese society deteriorate. If we can define a form of potentially hegemonic masculinity that embeds moral integrity, power used wisely in eliminating the evil and helping the good, then such hegemony might be welcomed.

Although in China there is obviously a turn from hollow and insincere altruism (that had been promoted under Mao) to a more pragmatic profit-seeking culture, the social fabric has not been completely destroyed as some sociologists (Sun, 2004) have theorised. My village ethnography does not support that the idea that a society has been destroyed by the corrupt culture of business and politics. Social justice will be regained through the persistence of ordinary people in their resilience of hard work, frugality, family values, and other traditional virtues. It is true that the socialist experiment in China had in the first three decades eroded the former Chinese culture through communism and in the next three decades through neo-liberal money-worship. But that will not last forever, as culture persists: it is immature to declare the death of a civilization.

I would like to add at this point the importance of recognising the complexity of gender relations. There has been both ambiguity and ambivalence in Guiying's relations with her father and Daixia's relations with her husband. We could not declare sexist men as an enemy class and incite class warfare. Gender equality requires joint efforts of both men and women, starting from the institutions of marriage and family, and extending to other institutions such as school, workplace, and the state.

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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX A GLOSSARY

- bainian* 拜年  
*baixiang* 白相  
*baniang* 把娘  
*bang* 浜  
*bao ernai* 包二奶  
*baoban hunyin* 包办婚姻  
*baxian zhuo* 八仙桌  
*baoyang qingren* 包养情人  
*bayang* 拔秧  
Bayue ban 八月半  
*bian* 匾  
*bian* 变  
*caizi-jiaren* 才子佳人  
*cansang* 蚕桑  
Chen Guidi 陈桂棣  
Chen Min 陈敏  
*cheng-xiang* 城乡  
*chengcai* 成才  
*chengzhen jumin* 城镇居民  
*chaoji nüsheng* 超级女声  
*chikui* 吃苦  
*chi qingchu fan* 吃青春饭  
*chong yang mei wai* 崇洋媚外  
*choufu* 仇富  
*chouguan* 仇官  
*chuangye* 创业  
*chuan-zong-jie-dai* 传宗接代  
*chuji hezuo she* 初级合作社  
*chushan* 出山  
*chuangye* 创业  
*cong-yi-er-zhong* 从一而终  
*cunmin weiyuanhui* 村民委员会  
*chunpu* 纯朴  
*cuxin* 粗心  
*da shiti* 大事件  
*da xiaodui* 大小队  
*dabo* 大伯  
*dadui* 大队  
*daguo* 大国  
*dama* 大妈  
*dagong* 打工  
*daiguan* 带管  
*daling nüqingnian* 大龄女青年  
*dalumei* 大陆妹  
*dangan hu* 单干户  
*dangjia* 当家  
*danxiao pashi* 胆小怕事  
*danzi da* 胆子大  
*dazhangfu* 大丈夫  
*di* 地  
*di'er chanye* 第二产业  
*difen* 底分  
*disan chanye* 第三产业  
*dongshi* 懂事  
*Dongzhi* 冬至  
*Duanwu* 端午  
*duo-lao-duo-de* 多劳多得  
*dushengnü* 独生女  
*dusheng zinu* 独生子女  
*ernai* 二奶

<i>chuzhang</i> 出账	<i>Ernai Weiquan Wang</i> 二奶维权网
<i>Cixi Taihou</i> 慈禧太后	<i>Fang Gang</i> 方刚
<i>fayan quan</i> 发言权	<i>huokou dengji</i> 户口登记
<i>feichu</i> 非处	<i>huzhu zu</i> 互助组
<i>fengchangzuoxi</i> 逢场作戏	<i>jia</i> 家
<i>fengguang</i> 风光	<i>jia</i> 嫁
<i>fenjia</i> 分家	<i>jian</i> 间
<i>fumu zhi ming, meishuo zhi yan</i> 父母之命, 媒妁之言	<i>jiang</i> 犟
<i>funü</i> 妇女	<i>Jiankang Ren</i> 健康人
<i>funü zhuren</i> 妇女主任	<i>jiao gongliang</i> 交公粮
<i>gaige kaifang</i> 改革开放	<i>jiating guannian</i> 家庭观念
<i>gang</i> 港	<i>jiguan</i> 籍贯
<i>gangqiang</i> 刚强	<i>jihua shengyu</i> 计划生育
<i>gang and rou</i> 刚与柔	<i>jin</i> 斤
<i>gao poxie</i> 搞破鞋	<i>jindao hen zu</i> 劲道很足
<i>gaoji hezuo she</i> 高级合作社	<i>jingji baoguan yuan</i> 经济保管员
<i>gongchan feng</i> 共产风	<i>jishu</i> 技术
<i>gongpo</i> 公婆	<i>juehu</i> 绝户
<i>gongzuo</i> 工作	<i>junzi</i> 君子
<i>guai</i> 乖	<i>kai heiche</i> 开黑车
<i>guanxin</i> 关心	<i>kaitou ren</i> 开头人
<i>gufu</i> 姑夫	<i>ku</i> 苦
<i>guijie</i> 鬼节	<i>ku delai, tian xiaode</i> 苦得来, 天晓得
<i>guo</i> 国	<i>Kua Shiji</i> 跨世纪
<i>handi</i> 旱地	<i>kuaile nansheng</i> 快乐男声
<i>hongyan huoshui</i> 红颜祸水	<i>kuozhao</i> 扩招
<i>Hou Yonglu</i> 侯永禄	<i>laji laowai</i> 垃圾老外
<i>hou-ji-you-ren</i> 后继有人	<i>Lan Huai'en</i> 蓝怀恩
<i>Hua Mulan</i> 花木兰	<i>laobaixing</i> 老百姓
<i>Huang Lin</i> 荒林	<i>laoban</i> 老板
<i>huangmei tian</i> 黄梅天	<i>laolaoshishi</i> 老老实实
<i>Huangpujiang</i> 黄浦江	<i>laomuyang gongfen</i> 老母羊工分
<i>Huai</i> 坏	<i>laoshi</i> 老实
<i>hukou</i> 户口	<i>li (gift)</i> 礼
<i>hunhun'e'e</i> 浑浑噩噩	<i>li tu bu li xiang</i> 离土不离乡
	<i>lianchan chengbao</i> 联产承包
	<i>liangguansuo</i> 粮管所

*hunrizi* 混日子  
*hunyin quan* 婚姻圈  
*liangxin* 良心  
*liangzhan* 粮站  
*liumang waijiao* 流氓外教  
 Li Qingzhao 李清照  
 Li Xiaojiang 李小江  
 Li Yinhe 李银河  
 Li Yuchun 李宇春  
*liulian* 留恋  
*liumangzui* 流氓罪  
 Long Yingtai 龙应台  
*longzhong* 隆重  
*loufang* 楼房  
*luo-ye-gui-gen* 落叶归根  
*maimai hunyin* 买卖婚姻  
*matong* 马桶  
*meiren* 媒人  
 Min Jiayin 闵家胤  
*mu-yi-zi-gui* 母以子贵  
*nan-da-dang-hun, nü-da-dang-jia*  
 男大当婚，女大当嫁  
*nan-geng-nü-zhi* 男耕女织  
*Nanfang Dushi Bao* 南方都市报  
*nankan* 难看  
*nannü pingdeng* 男女平等  
*nanxing guanhuai* 男性关怀  
*nanxing jiefang* 男性解放  
*nanxing yangjiu* 男性研究  
*nanzihan* 男子汉  
*nanzhuwai, nuzhunei* 男主外，女主内  
*nan-zun-nü-bei* 男尊女卑  
*nan zuo nü gong, yue zuo yue qiong* 男  
 做女工，越做越穷  
*nengren* 能人  
*nianfo* 念佛  
*liangtou kaimen* 两头开门  
*liangtou dun* 两头蹲  
*nongmin* 农民  
*nongye* 农业  
*nüxing* 女性  
*Nuxin Yuekan* 女性月刊  
*pingfang* 平房  
*qi* 气  
*qi* 七  
*qi* 妻  
*qi-yi-fu-rong* 妻以夫荣  
*qiangguo* 强国  
*qili hao* 气力好  
*qiju* 起居  
*qingchunfan* 青春饭  
*Qingming* 清明  
*qinqinkenken* 勤勤恳恳  
*qipai shi* 棋牌室  
 Qiu Jin 秋瑾  
 Qiyue ban 七月半  
*qu* 娶  
*quntixing shijian* 群体性事件  
*renmin gongshe* 人民公社  
*renqing* 人情  
*ri-chu-er-zuo, ri-luo-er-xi*  
 日出而作，日落而息  
*sannong* 三农  
*sanpei* 三陪  
*saomu* 扫墓  
*shangfang* 上访  
*shangmen nüxu* 上门女婿  
*shenchan dadui* 生产大队  
*shengchan dui* 生产队  
*shengchan zeren zhi* 生产责任制  
*shenghuo suosui* 生活琐碎  
*shengnü* 剩女  
*shengyi* 生意

*niangniangqiang* 娘娘腔

*nong* 农

*nongcun* 农村

*shiye* 事业

*shuitian* 水田

*shuixiang* 水乡

*shuji* 书记

*shunqi ziran* 顺其自然

Sun Liping 孙立平

*sushi* 素质

*sichou zhi fu, yumi zhixiang*

丝绸之府，鱼米之乡

*taitaipinging* 太平平

*tangjie* 堂姐

*tao xifu* 讨媳妇

*tian* 田

*tiaodan* 挑担

*tie guniang* 铁姑娘

*ting* 听

*titie* 体贴

*tongzhuo* 同桌

*tounao jiandan* 头脑简单

*wanglian* 网恋

*wanyuanhu* 万元户

Wei Hui 卫慧

*wencai* 文才

*wen-wu* 文武

*Wenhui Daily* 文汇报

*Wenren* 文人

*wo fen-nu* 我愤怒

Wu Chuntao 吴春桃

*Xianjin* 先进

*xian-qi liang-mu* 贤妻良母

*xiang* 乡

*Xianglinsao* 祥林嫂

*xiangqin* 相亲

*xiangxiaren* 乡下人

*shifu* 师傅

*shiye* 实业

*xiaohuozi* 小伙子

*xiaojie* 小节

*xiao jiemei* 小姐妹

*xiao pengyou* 小朋友

*xiao riben* 小日本

*xiaosan* 小三

*xifu* 媳妇

*xin-kuan-ti-pang* 心宽体胖

*xin nongcun* 新农村

*xinbing lian* 新兵连

*xingbie* 性别

*xingbie qishi* 性别歧视

*xingbie wenhua* 性别文化

*xintai* 心态

*xinku* 辛苦

*xin kuan ti pang* 心宽体胖

Xinxi Shibao 信息时报

Xinyue 新月

*xixin* 细心

*xuelingqian ertong* 学龄前儿童

*yang-er-fang-lao* 养儿防老

*yanggang* 阳刚

*Yanggang yu yinrou de bianzou*

阳刚与阴柔的变奏

*yanggang zhiqi* 阳刚之气

*yanjing jian* 眼睛尖

*yaochuan* 摇船

*yaoqiang* 要强

*ye* 野

*yidebaoyuan* 以德报怨

*yi-ku-si-tian* 忆苦思甜

*yin-sheng-yang-shuai* 阴盛阳衰

*yingchou* 应酬

*yingxiong* 英雄

*yingxiong-meiren* 英雄美人

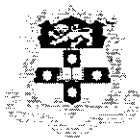


xiaobo 小伯  
xiaodui 小队  
xiao'er 小二  
yi-pian-gai-quan 以偏概全  
Yi Zhongtian 易中天  
you chuxi 有出息  
you qiantu 有前途  
Yu-wang Shang-hai 欲望上海  
zaolian 早恋  
zhuanzhi 转制  
zhacai 榨菜  
zhaijidi 宅基地  
Zhang Ming 张鸣  
Zhang Zaizhou 张在舟  
zhao duixiang 找对象  
zhao nüxu 招女婿  
zhen 镇  
Zheng Yefu 郑也夫  
zhenjing 镇静  
zhenming tianzi 真命天子  
zhishi fenzi 知识分子  
zhishi qingnian shangshanxiaxiang  
知识青年上山下乡  
Zhong Xueping 钟雪萍  
zhong-nan-qing-nü 重男轻女  
Zhongguo Jingshen Jibing Jianding  
Biaozhun  
中国精神疾病鉴定标准  
Zhongqiu 中秋  
zhongtian 种田  
zhongtian ren 种田人  
Zhongyuan 中元  
Zhou Huashan 周华山  
Zhou Weiwen 周伟文  
zhouli 妯娌  
zhuanye duiko 专业对口

yinrou 阴柔  
yituo gan 依托感  
ziliu di 自留地  
zisun tong 子孙桶  
ziyou fahui 自由发挥  
ziyou lian'ai 自由恋爱  
zizhao duixiang 自找对象  
zui xinfu 最幸福  
zuo renjia 做人家  
zuo shenghuo 做生活  
zuo tianfan li 做田坂里  
zuo yuezi 坐月子



## APPENDIX B: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION STATEMENT



The University of Sydney

Faculty of Education & Social Work

ABN 15 211 513 464

**Professor Raewyn Connell**  
University Chair

Room 544  
Education Building A35  
University of Sydney NSW 2006  
AUSTRALIA  
Telephone: +61 2 9351 6247  
Facsimile: +61 2 9351 4580  
Email: r.connell@edfac.usyd.edu.au

### PARTICIPANT INFORMATION STATEMENT 受访须知

#### Research Project

Title: The Construction and Transformation of Rural Masculinity: An Ethnography of Gender Relations in a Rural Chinese Community

项目名称: 农村男性气质的形成和变迁: 有关中国农村性别关系的实地田野调查

(1) What is the study about?

#### 研究内容

You are invited to participate in a study into the formation and transformation of masculinity. Through a better understanding of men's lives and how men and women think about men in rural China, the study hopes to make gender issues visible and further promote gender equality.

您将参与的项目旨在研究男性气质的形成和变迁。本研究试图通过了解男人的生活经历、思想和感受,以及来自其他男性和女性对他们的评说,唤起人们对社会性别问题的重视,从而使男女平等的观念更深入人心。

(2) Who is carrying out the study?

#### 研究执行人

The study is being conducted by Mr Xingkui Zhang and will form the basis for the degree of PhD at The University of Sydney under the supervision of Professor Raewyn Connell.

本研究将由张兴奎在 Raewyn Connell 教授指导下承担,将作为张在悉尼大学攻读博士学位论文的素材。

(3) What does the study involve?

#### 受访内容

The study will involve you taking part in interviews at your home, work site, market place or other sites. It will also involve observations of your daily routine in these places. In the interviews, you will be asked about your experiences from childhood, education and work to your private lives such as dating, marriage and other aspects of family life, and your relationship with your parents, spouse, siblings,

children, friends, relatives and neighbours. The interviews might be audio-recorded on condition of your consent.

研究人员将在您的家中、工作场所、市场或其他场合对您就您进行访谈。所提的问题主要涉及您的生活经历和感受，如童年生活、学校生活、工作劳动、恋爱、婚姻、子女抚养等，您与父母、配偶、子女、兄弟姐妹、亲友、邻里等的关系。如果您不反对，访谈过程将以录音的形式记录。

(4) How much time will the study take?

参与研究时间？

Each formal interview will last about 1 hour, with the possibility of follow-up interviews and other casual conversations.

每次约 30 分钟。

(5) Can I withdraw from the study?

可否终止受访？

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary; you are not obliged to participate. Even after giving consent, you can withdraw from the study at any time.

本研究属自愿参与。签署受访须知后，可随时退出访谈。

(6) Will anyone else know the results?

他人可否获知研究结果？

All aspects of this study, including results, will be strictly confidential and only the researchers will have access to information on participants. A report of the study may be submitted for publication, but individual participants will not be identifiable in such a report. Identifying details will be removed from audio data.

本研究所有内容（包括结果），均严格保密，只有研究者了解受访人情况。研究报告可能会公开发表，但不会公开受访人个人身份。涉及受访人身份的资料会在录音或录像数据中隐去。

(7) Will the study benefit me?

访谈收益？

It is hoped that, through the study, you will have an opportunity to reflect on your own life and your relations with people of both your own the other sex, so that you will be able to think about gender issues and improve your relations with others in gender terms.

本研究希望您通过参与调查与访谈，使您能有机会回顾自己过去的生活和与他人的关系，从而能对性别问题进行思考并改善与他人的关系。

(8) Can I tell other people about the study?

可否将此研究转告他人？

Yes. There are no concealed motives to this study.

可以，本研究项目无须保密。

(9) What if I require further information?

### 如何进一步了解本研究?

When you have read this information, Xingkui Zhang will discuss it with you further and answer any questions you may have. If you would like to know more at any stage, please feel free to contact Xingkui Zhang, who is a PhD Candidate in the Faculty of Education and Social Work at the University of Sydney, at xzha4213@usyd.edu.au or at +61 2 9351 6378.

有关参与本研究的任何问题, 请随时与悉尼大学教育与社会工作学院博士生张兴奎联系, 他会悉心解答。

电子邮箱: xzha4213@usyd.edu.au

电话: +61 2 9351 6378

(10) What if I have a complaint or concerns?

**Any person with concerns or complaints about the conduct of a research study can contact the Senior Ethics Officer, Ethics Administration, University of Sydney on +61 2 9351 4811 (Telephone); +61 2 9351 6706 (Facsimile); or, gbriody@mail.usyd.edu.au (E-mail).**

如对本研究实施方式有意见或建议, 请与悉尼大学学术伦理办公室负责人联系。

联系方式:

电话: +61 2 9351 4811

传真: +61 2 9351 6706

电子邮箱: gbriody@mail.usyd.edu.au

### 如何表达意见或投诉?

**This information sheet is for you to keep.**

请保留本受访须知。

## APPENDIX C: PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM



The University of Sydney

Faculty of Education & Social Work

ABN 15 211 513 464

**Professor Raewyn Connell**

University Chair

Room 544

Education Building A35

University of Sydney NSW 2006

AUSTRALIA

Telephone: +61 2 9351 6247

Facsimile: +61 2 9351 4580

Email: r.connell@edfac.usyd.edu.au

### PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM 受访者同意书

I, ..... (Name, please print), give consent to my participation in the research project.

我, ..... (姓名, 请用正体书写), 自愿参与此研究项目。

Title: The Construction and Transformation of Rural Masculinity: An Ethnography of Gender Relations in a Rural Chinese Community

项目名称: 农村男性气质的形成和变迁: 有关中国农村性别关系的实地田野调查

In giving my consent I acknowledge that:

本人同意参与此项目并已清楚了解下述内容:

1. The procedures required for the project and the time involved have been explained to me, and any questions I have about the project have been answered to my satisfaction.

我已被告知参与此项目所要求的程序和时间, 所提问题已得到满意答复。

2. I have read the Participant Information Statement and have been given the opportunity to discuss the information and my involvement in the project with the researcher.

我已阅读《受访须知》, 并与项目研究人员就参与项目的细节进行了讨论。

3. I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time, without affecting my relationship with the researcher(s) now or in the future.

我知道我可随时退出此研究, 此举不会影响我与研究人员目前和今后的关系。

4. I understand that my involvement is strictly confidential and no information about me will be used in any way that reveals my identity.

我知道我的参与信息严格保密, 我的个人身份不会在使用中有任何形式的泄漏。

5. I agree to the audio-recording of my interviews: No  Yes   
是否同意在我的访谈过程中录音 否 是

Signed (签名): .....

Name (姓名): \_\_\_\_\_

Date (日期): \_\_\_\_\_

**APPENDIX D: TRANSLATED TEXT OF *BAO ERNAI* AGREEMENT FOR  
CHAPTER 4**

**Agreement of Contract and Support**

Party A: x x (man)

Party B: x x (woman )

To maintain the emotional relationship of Party A and Party B, not to affect each party's study, work and family, after careful consideration, both parties agree on the following:

1. Party A should provide Party B with an apartment with at least one bedroom and one living room, in a location close to the university that Party B is currently attending, with expenses such as rent and utilities covered by Party A.

2. Party A pays Party B a living stipend on a monthly basis, at RMB10,000 *yuan*. Party B should not under any excuse ask for extra fees or gifts from Party A, unless Party A voluntarily offers.

3. Not until after her graduation, i.e. during the period of this *baoyang* agreement from 2005 to July 2008, may Party B date any male as boyfriend, let alone have sex with any man other than Party A. On discovering (such violation), Party A shall annul this agreement without hesitation and reserve the right to seek compensation for previously paid fees.

4. Party A requires that Party B should accompany and serve Party A at least from

Friday evening to Sunday evening each week, except for special circumstances such as when Party A is out on business trips or holidays. As long as it does not affect Party B's study, Party B has the obligation to accompany and serve Party A on other days.

5. During the three years, Party A and Party B only maintain a relationship of boyfriend and girlfriend. Party B has no obligation to produce child for Party A, therefore Party B may require Party A to take voluntary measures of contraception. In case of accidental pregnancy, Party A should cover the medical and nutrition fees (as actually paid).

6. The content of this agreement is absolutely confidential, with only two identical copies. Both Party A and B have the obligation to keep the secret, or else face the consequences.

The above agreement should be observed by both parties. They should maintain mutual care, concern, consideration, and understanding.

Party A: ×× (Signature) 25/04/2005

• Party B: ×× (Signature) 25/04/2005



## APPENDIX E: SAMPLE INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTION

Li Baisong

August 11, 2008

**Zhang:** OK. Can I start with some basic questions of your life history? First, when were you born?

**Li:** 80, 1980.

**Zhang:** So, you are 28 now.

**Li:** Yes, 28 full.

**Zhang:** Can you tell me about your family situation when you were born? ... Your brothers and/or sisters, your parents and grandparents.

**Li:** My grandpa was still around when I was born. But within a few months (after my birth), he passed away. Er... (hesitation)... Should I give all the details?

**Zhang:** Yes, try to recall your childhood. What did your parents do?

**Li:** They made ropes. Ropes made of hemp. Do you know hemp ropes?

**Zhang:** Yes.

**Li:** It was a business of every household in the village then.

**Zhang:** Really?

**Li:** And we built a new building when I was very young. Five rooms.

**Zhang:** Two storeys?

**Li:** Yes. 5 rooms. 2 storeys.

**Zhang:** Oh.

**Li:** I was only 5. We were one of the first to have built (such a good house).

**Zhang:** Yes. Could I ask how many siblings did you have then?

**Li:** I had a big brother. We were twins.

**Zhang:** Oh, twins.

**Li:** Yes, twins.

**Zhang:** Could you tell me something about you and your brother? Is it different from other children? As you see, most other children of your age were 'only child(ren)'.

**Li:** Yes. Kind of different.

**Zhang:** In what ways?

**Li:** The only children were more cherished by parents.

**Zhang:** Really?

**Li:** Yes, they could have everything to themselves.

**Zhang:** In what sense?

**Li:** For instance, when their parents bought them ice creams, they could each have a whole one. But I had to share one with my brother.

**Zhang:** Why did your parents buy only one ice cream?

**Li:** They said we needed to save; save money to build our new house.

...

**Li:** At that time, our parents were very frugal. ...Others could have a whole (ice cream), while we two shared one.

**Zhang:** Interesting. How did you get along with your brother?

**Li:** We got along fairly well.

**Zhang:** Did you have to fight to get your share of the food?

**Li:** It was just when we were very young. It was kind of making fun of each other, ('play' or 'being naughty'). Now as we grow up, we get along pretty well. ... But back then sure there were times when we fought each other.

**Zhang:** How many years of schooling did you have.

**Li:** I did not finish school.

**Zhang:** What stage?

**Li:** I did not finish junior high. (I) dropped out at Grade 2 in junior high.

**Zhang:** Grade 2?

**Li:** Yes.

**Zhang:** And what about your big brother?

**Li:** He didn't complete Grade 1 in junior high.

**Zhang:** So neither of you has had much schooling?

**Li:** Neither of us has.

**Zhang:** Why did you quit school? Could you say something about your school life? What do you remember about your school life?

**Li:** Mainly because I could not catch up with school work, and (I) lost interest in it.

**Zhang:** You didn't like school?

**Li:** Right, (I) lost interest, wasn't good at school work...I was good at the beginning, but later I spent too much time playing, and dating... so I could not catch up.

**Zhang:** At that time? In junior high?

**Li:** Yes, I dated girls in junior high.

**Zhang:** That was amazing. Could you say something more about that? Which girl? How did you approach her?

**Li:** I first asked her to lend me a book. A girl student.

**Zhang:** What kind of girl? Could you describe her?

**Li:** She was tall.

**Zhang:** Tall?

**Li:** Very good-looking, with dark skin. ...I first borrowed a book from her. Then I slipped a note in the book when I returned it to her. And after she had read my note, she did the same thing. She borrowed a book from me and inserted a note for me too.

**Zhang:** So she was also fond of you.

**Li:** Yes. But as a result of that, my school work lagged behind. And she was also affected. She fell behind in her school work too.

**Zhang:** Did she quit school too?

**Li:** No, she finished junior high.

**Zhang:** Oh... What about your big brother?

**Li:** He quit school a year earlier. He did not date any girls. ...He was not as open as I was. He was more silent. He had to work. At that time, we were very poor (*ku*).

**Zhang:** But you said your house was built a few years before?

**Li:** My mother passed away when we were very young.

**Zhang:** I'm sorry. How old were you when your mother passed away?

**Li:** I was 11.

**Zhang:** When you were 11. So at that time you were still in elementary school.

**Li:** Yes, elementary school. Our elementary school was run-down, in our own village. ... That was a long time ago.

**Zhang:** Your mother passed away when you were so young. Did you have to do housework then?

**Li:** Yes.

**Zhang:** What kind of work?

**Li:** I helped with transplanting rice, and pulling up rice seedlings. I was so young. I remember once when I was weeding I stepped on a rotten nail with my bare foot. It happened to be around the time of summer when we were going to do the 'double rush' (the busiest time of the year in later July and early August when the first crop of rice had to be harvested and the second crop of rice be transplanted). After my foot was injured I had to wear a boot while working in the wet field. I cried. I felt I was so unfortunate (*ku*).

**Zhang:** Who did the works in the house then? For instance, cooking, washing clothes?

**Li:** My father did them.

**Zhang:** Your father?

**Li:** Sometimes (I) did them too.

**Zhang:** You and your brother?

**Li:** Earlier my grandma was still around.

**Zhang:** Your grandma?

**Li:** Grandma ate at our place. She helped us with washing clothes, and also making ropes, and cooking.

**Zhang:** So apart from working on the land, your main business was making ropes.

**Li:** Yes, ropes. And later we ran a factory, vegetables (processing) factory.

**Zhang:** A factory of your family owned?

**Li:** Yes. We ran it. We operated jointly it with our cousin.

**Zhang:** Which cousin?

**Li:** A son of my aunt (father's sister) and uncle's.

**Zhang:** Oh, uncle's son. What did you do after you quit school?

**Li:** I started to work at the factory. It had been started by then.

**Zhang:** What was your task at the factory?

**Li:** Packing.

**Zhang:** Was it putting the *zhacai* (pickled mustard tuber) into small bags.

**Li:** Yes. My job was to pack the finished pickles into small bags.

**Zhang:** Did your factory employ other workers?

**Li:** Yes. About 10.

**Zhang:** Was there any division of labor between men and women in the factory?

**Li:** Men's works included carrying the vegetables, bags of salt, and stones, ... all the heavy stuff. Women's works were mainly packing and peeling old strings (of the roots).

**Zhang:** What did you do when you first started?

**Li:** I did almost everything. When fresh vegetables were first processed, I carried (bags of) salt, and spread salt.

**Zhang:** So at that time you just finished Junior 2. In terms of physical strength, did you feel you were already as strong as a grown man?

**Li:** I'm not as strong, but was strong enough.

**Zhang:** Fairly strong?

**Li:** Yes, fairly strong. I started manual work when I was rather young, so I was already very strong then.

**Zhang:** What about the factory now?

**Li:** It was closed a few years ago.

**Zhang:** Closed. Did you work for it until it closed?

**Li:** No. I had quit before it was closed.

**Zhang:** When did you change your job?

**Li:** About 5 years ago.

**Zhang:** So that was when you were 22 or 23?

**Li:** Yes. About 23.

**Zhang:** What did you do then?

**Li:** I weaved wool sweaters.

**Zhang:** Where did you work?

**Li:** In Han Village. It was a private firm with tens of weaving machines at the household of Han's.

**Zhang:** Was it still in operation?

**Li:** No. They have closed it.

**Zhang:** How long did you work there?

**Li:** Just for a few months. Then I was introduced to work in Green Island (A chemical firm own by a Taiwanese businessman).

**Zhang:** So was it after you had been engaged?

**Li:** Yes.

**Zhang:** How much did you make while working at the sweater factory.

**Li:** About 1000 *Yuan* a month.

**Zhang:** And what about the new place.

**Li:** When I started as a trainee, I was paid only about 400 *Yuan* a month.

**Zhang:** What did you do there?

**Li:** Loading and unloading goods. At first, it was unloading only. Later, the two warehouses were combined. One for raw materials, the other for finished products.

**Zhang:** I saw you drive the forklift truck. Was it the same when you started or did you have to carry (in hands and on shoulders)?

**Li:** It was with forklift truck then. There were only 4 trucks, now there are 7.

**Zhang:** Are all the drivers male?

**Li:** Yes. Women are unable to do it.

**Zhang:** What is the division of labor like in terms of men and women (at Green Island)?

**Li:** Women are mainly in offices and laboratories. ...No other jobs except cleaning, such as cleaning the toilets... and offices.

**Zhang:** What do the men do?

**Li:** (They work) in the workshops. There are two workshops.

**Zhang:** All men?

**Li:** Yes, all men. And all are young men. Older men could not do the job.

**Zhang:** Is it because of the educational requirement?

**Li:** Not necessarily. Perhaps the management wants people who are relatively easier to control. For instance, it is more difficult to scold an older employee.

**Zhang:** I understand your boss is from Taiwan. Are those in the management from Taiwan too?

**Li:** Yes, they are Taiwanese too.

**Zhang:** Taiwanese?

**Li:** Yes. And younger, in their 30s.

**Zhang:** Do you find any difference in the styles of management between Taiwanese and local people?

**Li:** There are differences. The local bosses do not pay attention to minor issues, but the Taiwanese attend to small matters.

**Zhang:** For instance?

**Li:** Take gloves for instance. In the past, we were allocated 5 pairs a month. But now only 3 pairs a month. ...They think we are too wasteful. And things like towels are not given to us. We have to go and ask for them by putting our signatures. Some of us don't want to bother. They never go to collect them. On the other hand, for people working in a local firm, items like gloves are distributed to them each month. They can keep the unused ones at home. But in the Taiwanese firm, they are stingier.

**Zhang:** Interesting.

**Li:** As for the local firms, items like towels are distributed every month. But here, these are not distributed. The same is true with soap and soap powder. We have to buy them at our own expenses.

**Zhang:** What about working hours? Are there any differences from your previous jobs?

**Li:** There are differences. Working hours are shorter here. Eight hours a day. In other firms, it is much longer. For instance, if a delivery is due, it is likely that workers will have to work overtime, even whole night long. Here we seldom work overtime. There might be exceptions.

**Zhang:** Is there any conflict between the management and the staff?

**Li:** Few conflicts between them and the staff. On the contrary, those in management may have conflicts amongst themselves. Among cadres of the same rank, there are cases in which one belittles another.

**Zhang:** How many people are there in management?

**Li:** Not many. 5-6 in the general company.

**Zhang:** Oh.

**Zhang:** Now for how many years have you been working after you left school? How old were you when you left school, 15?

**Li:** Older. I repeated some grades, one grade.

**Zhang:** So you were about 16 when you started to work, to make money?

**Li:** Actually I started to make money while I was still at school.

**Zhang:** What did you do during school holidays?

**Li:** I caught loaches, eels and snakes and sold them to get some cash.

**Zhang:** Did you do it on your own or with your brother?

**Li:** Together with my brother.

**Zhang:** Fancy you were able to catch these.

**Li:** They were available then. They were not expensive, but enough to cover my expenses. We went to catch them on Saturdays and Sundays and the money will be used to pay for our lunch at school the following week.

**Zhang:** Did you go to a boarding school?

**Li:** No. It was just a bit far from my home. We had lunch there. We ate dinner at home.

**Zhang:** How far was it? Say how long did it take to go by bike?

**Li:** About half an hour. We bought our own lunch, rice and vegetables.

**Zhang:** So you made your own money to buy lunch?

**Li:** Yes. And other expenditures.

**Zhang:** Amazing.

**Li:** We were poor then. If I asked my father for money, I might not get it. He had no money then. Very poor.

**Zhang:** Had the factory been started then?

**Li:** Not yet.

**Zhang:** So the opening of the factory by your father coincided with your finishing school?

**Li:** Yes. Even if dad could give us money when we asked, it was only 10 or 20 *Yuan*. We had to be frugal.

**Zhang:** So you started to make money at an early age. Did you do any other work during vacations?

**Li:** I went to catch eels in summer, often naked to the waist. My skin got black. (I) also caught loaches in muddy ditches. You just need to dam the ditch and drain it. I remember during one summer vacation, dad, brother and I, the three of us went together.

**Zhang:** How did you manage to catch the loaches? Where?

**Li:** From the ditches. We built a dam and drain the water, and then we dug the loaches from the mud. There were lots of them. There aren't any now. They have been caught almost to distinction by people using batteries.

**Zhang:** Electricity?

**Li:** Yes. I was once bitten by an eel when I tried to catch it from its cave.

**Zhang:** How big was it?

**Li:** Very big. More than half a *jin*. About 7 *liang*.

**Zhang:** Did you catch it?

**Li:** I did. The bite of the eel was very painful.

**Zhang:** Oh. That was interesting. ... Now, I'd like to ask you some question regarding marriage. ... You've mentioned a girl you dated in middle school. What happened in that relationship?

**Li:** It ended after someone else was involved. There was another girl who wanted to date me. In fact, (there were) several girls. That particular girl was very bold. She threw a love letter to me from the top floor of the school building, shouting out loud that she loved me. And the first girl must have heard this. That was the end (of my relationship with her). ... Several girls dated me. Another girl asked to go to Guangming for the Lantern Show.

**Zhang:** In January (of the lunar calendar)?

**Li:** I declined. I didn't go because I didn't want to go out with her.

**Zhang:** So what about your current marriage? Was it arranged through a matchmaker?

**Li:** Yes.

**Zhang:** When was that?

**Li:** When I was rather young, 21 or 22 years old.

**Zhang:** That was a few years after you had left school?

**Li:** Yes. About 5 years.

**Zhang:** What made you agree to the arrangement? You said you had several other opportunities.

**Li:** Actually I have been introduced to other girls before. But none of them had caught my fancy. I was introduced to a few.

**Zhang:** So your current wife caught your fancy?

**Li:** Yes, Kind of. After seeing many, I thought I had to settle for someone.

**Zhang:** So for the girls that you were introduced to, there were no male siblings and they were trying to have you marry into their household?

**Li:** Yes.

**Zhang:** What about your brother? Have you made a deal that he would stay and you marry out? How did you think about the arrangement then?

**Li:** At that time my father was still around. But it was already arranged that I should leave. The reason was that we were not doing very well economically. The factory was not running very well, either. We were beyond the means. If I had chosen to stay, we would have to build two houses.

**Zhang:** Right, for two sons to start two families, two buildings are needed. There was the economic factor.

**Li:** Yes. The economic factor. It was hard to even build one house.

**Zhang:** So for those who had tried to go out with you, did they also want to get you to their household?

**Li:** Yes.

**Zhang:** So that's why you were so popular. By the way, your father had passed away too?

**Li:** Yes, it was the year 2000.... He was still in his forties.

**Zhang:** So your mother died when you were very young. You and your brother were very ...

**Li:** My father passed away when I was 22.

**Zhang:** So you lost both parents before you got married. Who helped with your marriage arrangements and weddings? You know, things like these need grown-ups to take their roles.

**Li:** Our two uncles. They helped out.

**Zhang:** It wasn't easy for your brother and you.

**Li:** It was not easy.

**Zhang:** You said you were only 11 when your mother died.

**Li:** Yes. I wasn't mature then. I was still playing at that time.

**Zhang:** What was your thought when you chose to leave? How did you persuade yourself?

**Li:** I knew that we were poor. It would be difficult for me to stay. But if I agreed to leave, I could choose (a wife and her family); one with good conditions. If our own conditions had been better, I would not have chosen to leave. That applies to all people. Those from unfavorable conditions choose to leave.

**Zhang:** So when did you actually get married?

**Li:** When I was 25, or 26?... 25.

**Zhang:** And how do you make of your life after marriage? How does it compare with your life prior to marriage?

**Li:** It's good. My brother, who stays home, has to do everything by himself. He has nobody else to turn to; only himself.... planting and harvesting rice, administering pesticides....

**Zhang:** Acting the role of the household head?

**Li:** Yes, he has to do things by himself. Nobody else helps him out. Grandma had passed away too. Even when she was still around, she wouldn't be able to help, even doing the cooking.

**Zhang:** Oh.

**Li:** Here, I've got parents, parents-in-law. They take care of things such as administering pesticides, weeding the rice field. I could be spared of these chores. If I stayed, I would have to do them. One has to follow the neighbors when pesticides have to be administered. If you failed to do so, there would be no harvest of grains in the field. There will be huge differences even if one just skips once.

**Zhang:** How much land do you have?

**Li:** Not much. A bit more than 2 *mu* of rice paddy, and much more dry land.

**Zhang:** What do you grow on the dry land?

**Li:** Nothing after dad had passed away. Soy beans once in a while. No time to grow things like cucumbers. We don't know how to grow them.

**Zhang:** What about silkworms?

**Li:** No. We don't know how to (raise them). Young people don't know how to (do these).

**Zhang:** Oh, yes.

**Li:** You need someone older, especially when the silkworms are tiny.

**Zhang:** What does your brother do for a living?

**Li:** He works in the same company where I am working now. He is in one of the workshops.

**Zhang:** Oh. What about his income?

**Li:** Not much. About 1000 yuan; 1200-1300 *yuan* per month. My sister-in-law works in a factory too; in our village in a stocking factory.



**Zhang:** Sewing stockings?

**Li:** Sewing stockings. She also earns about 1000 *yuan* per month.

**Zhang:** What about your house? Have you rebuilt your two-storey building?

**Li:** Yes. The five-room two-storey house was demolished. It had to be. It was no longer in fashion. The walls were coated with mud. The roofing was not cement. When the wind blew, dust fell.

**Zhang:** So you have built a three-storey house now? When was it?

**Li:** After the death of my father.

**Zhang:** Your brother and you did it. Not easy for you.

...

**Zhang:** After you have married, have your in-laws treated you well?

**Li:** Yes, very well.

**Zhang:** How old is your son now?

**Li:** We call it 2. 10 month to be exact.

**Zhang:** You've now got married and become a father yourself. Do you find any change in yourself?

**Li:** Yes. There are changes. A major change comes after the birth of the child. You have to have your child in mind. You are anxious if he gets a cold. You have to be more thoughtful.

**Zhang:** What do you actually do in caring for the child?

**Li:** I help out with his bathing. ...In the morning I change his diapers, or I cook breakfast. With the baby to care for, my wife has no time to cook breakfast. If she cooks, it is my turn to attend to the baby, until after she has finished washing clothes.

**Zhang:** When do you get up in the morning?

**Li:** A bit after 6. 6 o'clock sharp.

**Zhang:** When do you have to be at work? 8 am?

**Li:** 7.30. That's why I have to get up at 6.

**Zhang:** So you have to rush?

**Li:** Yes. After the cooking and washing, I leave home by motorbike around 7.15.

**Zhang:** When do you finish usually?

**Li:** 5.

**Zhang:** 8 hours a day.

**Li:** Yes, with one and half hours for lunch.

**Zhang:** And do you help out with caring for the baby after work?

**Li:** Sure. Either carry the baby or cook dinner. Sometimes I have to work overtime. Then my mother-in-law has to do the cooking. When I get back in time, I do the cooking so that she could go out to collect grass for the sheep. We have kept a few sheep. She sometimes works in the field.

**Zhang:** Do you work in the field both before and after you get married?

**Li:** Yes. Especially in busy seasons. A few years ago, in particular, when rice seedlings had to be transplanted. If after work it was too late to go out, I would cook dinner. On days off from work, I help out a bit more. But not much.

**Zhang:** So mainly in times of rice planting.

**Li:** Yes, mainly the busy seasons, and when spring silkworms are grown.

**Zhang:** Picking mulberry leaves?

**Li:** Not much of going out (to pick the leaves). But after the branches have been cut and carried home, I help with separating the leaves and branches. And feed the silkworms.

**Zhang:** What do you do in leisure? How's your circle of friends like?

**Li:** I hang out mainly with co-workers at the factory. I haven't got much time with my real friends except on special occasions. We are all too busy. They might be busy when I am free and I am busy when they are free. There isn't much time for leisure. If we all had nothing to do, we would hang around. But we are all working now. Because of work, I can't spend time with my friends.

**Zhang:** What about your leisure prior to marriage.

**Li:** Before marriage I hung around a lot more.

**Zhang:** What did you do then? I mean as a means of entertainment.

**Li:** When I was still a teenager, just left school, say 17, 18, we mainly went to Songwang. I rode my motorbike to Songwang.

**Zhang:** When did you start to ride a motorbike?

**Li:** That was during my school years.

**Zhang:** Middle school?

**Li:** Yes, my father bought me a motorbike when I was in Junior 1.

**Zhang:** Well, that was rather early. You were barely 15, I guess. How were you allowed?

**Li:** At that time, I didn't need a license to ride a motorbike. There were no police to catch you. And there were quite few motorbikes. Now there are police to catch you. But then there were nobody to catch you. I sometimes even rode to school. I parked it in the street. I dared not park it at school for fear that teachers might scold me. So I parked in the street and rode home after school.

**Zhang:** What did you do in Songwang for entertainment?

**Li:** I went dancing.

**Zhang:** Dancing?

**Li:** At ballrooms, together with those still at school. We went from one ballroom to another. We went to Guangming. At that time there were ballrooms in smaller towns such as Weiqiao and Manqiao. There were lots of ballrooms. We went from one to another.

**Zhang:** Where were the dancing partners from? I mean girls.

**Li:** Sometimes we brought our own partners, friends of our age. There were also girls at the ballrooms.

**Zhang:** Who were these girls? Where did they come from?

**Li:** Those were women a bit older, unlike those of our own age. Some were the 'escort girls', who were older than 20.

**Zhang:** Were they local or from afar?

**Li:** From afar.

**Zhang:** Did you know where they came from?

**Li:** From the north, Jilin.

**Zhang:** Do many people go to the ballrooms now.

**Li:** Not that many. There are not so many ballrooms now. There are more discotheques instead.

**Zhang:** So when you went ballroom dancing, you needed a partner. What's the difference at the discotheque?

**Li:** At the discotheque you just dance. You don't need a partner. The discotheques are taking over.

**Zhang:** Do you know if there are many people from Xinyue that go to the discotheques?

**Li:** Not many. It is mainly for the teenagers.

**Zhang:** Those just finished school?

**Li:** Roughly. To use exclusive rooms (*baoxiang*) one must have more money. (That is for) those with a high income.

**Zhang:** You mean the KTVs (karaoke bars).

**Li:** Yes.

**Zhang:** So for those who are bosses?

**Li:** Yes, or those whose parents are bosses. They just need to ask their parents for money. They can afford to consume there. Others cannot afford. Even just for a cup of tea.

**Zhang:** Oh... After you got married, did you ever go dancing?

**Li:** No. Not even once.

**Zhang:** How long did it last? I mean, before you get married?

**Li:** Until I was about 22. Yes, I played at least until 21.

**Zhang:** How did you come up with the money to spend at dances?

**Li:** From my wages. And sometimes I did need to pay. I got friends to pay for me.

**Zhang:** So you went as a group.

**Li:** Yes. Always in groups of 3 or 4. We always had companions. It was rather cheap then though. Just a few *yuan* apiece. 10 *yuan* would suffice. You got a cup of tea, and some snacks. And there were a line of female partners for you to hire.

**Zhang:** Those employed by the ballroom owners?

**Li:** Yes. They were for you to hire.

**Zhang:** Are there any other places nearby for entertainment that people go now?

**Li:** Now many go to the video game rooms.

**Zhang:** In the village?

**Li:** None in the village. But there are game rooms in *Manqiao*.

**Zhang:** Oh.

**Li:** There have been video game rooms for many years. People go net surfing and play video games. They also gamble. You can lose a thousand *yuan* easily.

**Zhang:** Who are the people in these game rooms? Which age group?

**Li:** Unusually rather young, 20 something.

**Zhang:** Unmarried?

**Li:** Some are married. As long as they have money and love gambling, they go there whenever they are free. Some even ask for leaves to go there gambling.

**Zhang:** Wow.

**Li:** They lose all their wages. The machines are more likely to win. The owners make the money.

**Zhang:** Are the machines legal?

**Li:** No. But the owners operate them underground. The police of course know them. But they pay bribes. If they did not bribe the police, they could not operate the business. They are usually from outside, not local. For example, from Wenzhou.

**Zhang:** The village has some Chess and Poker rooms. Do you know the people who often go there?

**Li:** There are five automatic mahjong tables next to the tea house. The owner charges 20 *yuan* a table.

**Zhang:** Does it mean 5 *yuan* for one person for a whole day?

**Li:** No, not a whole day. It was divided into sessions, such as morning, afternoon and evening. So for one table, it could get 60 *yuan* a day. Business is good when there are many customers.

**Zhang:** Who are the customers?

**Li:** They are people who work in the village, or those who have no jobs. I go there on weekends when I do not work.

**Zhang:** Are there any women customers?

**Li:** Yes. For example, there is one that I know who goes to play mahjong every weekend and even on weekdays after work. She is a cleaner in my factory.

**Zhang:** Interesting.

...

**Zhang:** I'd like now to turn to some more personal questions. You may choose not to comment if there is anything too embarrassing. Just feel free to talk about your own feelings. You know I'm in the area of gender studies. And I'm interested in the issue of marriage arrangements. Traditionally, as a man, he gets a bride. For men to marry out, it has been rare. But now it is getting more common for men to marry out. From your own experience, what do you have to say about it? More specifically, have you ever heard of or experienced discrimination or being made fun of?

**Li:** To me it is different. Living in my own home, I have more freedom.

....

**Li:** It is different. They are not my biological parents. For instance, if I have to be away and back home late, it is alright when my parents asked about my whereabouts and require me to return as early as possible. But the same thing said from my in-laws would make me angry. It is different, even if it is the same sentence.

**Zhang:** What about other people? Neighbors, co-workers, for instance?

**Li:** They do not treat me differently. They never look down upon me. But the relationship between me and my in-laws are different. When they ask me to help out with something, I am not in the position to decline, even if I have already had some other appointment. For instance, to hang out with friends for a card game. I have to take my in-laws' feelings into consideration. It is a dilemma. If it were my own parents, I could just tell the truth.

**Zhang:** You mean you could still be the child in front of your own parents, but not to your in-laws.

**Li:** Right. It is harder to tell (the in-laws). And this is the difference.

**Zhang:** You are a father now. And you have a son. Is there any difference between having a daughter and a son?

**Li:** Yes, definitely. Openly most people would say daughters and sons are the same. But if the first child is a daughter, one would try to have another child, ideally a son.

**Zhang:** The policy now is that you can have two children, even if the first is a son.

**Li:** Yes.

**Zhang:** Are you thinking about having another child?

**Li:** Ideally, if we could have a daughter. If it is another son, I don't like it.

**Zhang:** Why?

**Li:** It will be much harder to raise two sons. It is hard. When my wife was in hospital giving birth to our son, I had experienced the hardship.

**Zhang:** Yes, now you've had the experience.

**Li:** When my mother-in-law did not have the time, I had to be at the hospital myself.

**Zhang:** You went?

**Li:** Yes. I asked for a week's leave from work and stay at the hospital (with my wife).

**Zhang:** In Songwang?

**Li:** Yes.

**Zhang:** For just one week. So it was natural birth?

**Li:** No, it was a Caesarean. We got back home earlier to save money. My mother-in-law had to attend the noodle shop. I had to take care of my wife. In other cases, say for a mother-in-law working in a factory, she may take 2 or 3 months' leave from work to take care of the baby. Our circumstances did not allow that.

**Zhang:** Oh,

**Li:** The noodle shop had to be open.

**Zhang:** Yes, that provides a source of your family income.

**Li:** The shop could not be closed.

**Zhang:** Speak about children... Have you heard about 'opening doors at both ends'?

**Li:** Yes. I know. Those are in cases in which both the bride and groom are 'only children'. So they open both doors. They have to have two children.

**Zhang:** Have you ever thought of having two children?

**Li:** No.

**Zhang:** One for each family name?

**Li:** No.

**Zhang:** Not ever?

**Li:** I think it is meaningless. As long as it is your own kid, it does not matter which name. There is no difference between the family name here and my own.

**Zhang:** But I have heard about disputes over the child's family name.

**Li:** Yes, there are quarrels over the name. This (quarreling) is actually common. But I think it is meaningless. The child is my own no matter which family name. I will raise him to grow up and support him to have his own family.

There are now even couples who choose not to have another child even if the first child is a daughter. Several workers in my factory are among them. It is so hard and they think it too costly to raise an extra child, the cost of education, for instance. My sister-in-law is now in a third-tier college. It is a heavy burden. For a couple of mere wage earners, it would be too hard.

**Zhang:** Oh

**Li:** Adding to the daily expenditure, the cost of education is beyond their means. Without other sources of income, such as opening a shop or doing some business, the family would have to give up the child's education. There are cases of students who could not afford third-tier college education and gave up.

**Zhang:** You didn't finish junior high yourself. Now what do you think of your son regarding education. Do you have any expectations on him?

**Li:** I will let him have as much education as possible, whether he does well or not.

It's best to get more education. I am at a disadvantage just because I have not had enough education. I wasn't good at study, though. But one is at an advantageous position if he is good at study.

**Zhang:** Would you be in a better position if you had finished senior high?

**Li:** Yes, especially in employment. I could have a better job. It was easier to get a good job for senior high graduates at that time. Right now, it is not sufficient.

**Zhang:** Yes, that was almost ten years ago. For those doing the same job as you, does educational qualification make a difference?

**Li:** Junior high and senior high graduates are the same. But those with special knowledge and skills are different. For instance, if you have received training in chemistry, you can work in the laboratory and have a better job. There is much of difference in pay, but the work is lighter at the lab. And the lab is air-conditioned. The job does not depend on your physical strength any more.

**Zhang:** It is already rather late. Maybe I should stop the recording and check if it is alright. Then we could have some more relaxed conversation. Thank you.