

**MAOISM, THE POST-MAO REFORMS AND THE
CHANGING STATUS OF CHINESE RURAL WOMEN:**

Chinese Women Speak for Themselves

by

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A thesis submitted for the degree of Ph.D.

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DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis has been composed by myself, and has resulted from my own research. Work of others has been appropriately acknowledged.

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ABSTRACT

This study analyses the implications of the state development strategies of the past four decades for gender relations in rural China. Based on rural women's own perspectives, the research examines their gains and losses under the Mao and post-Mao development policies, and allows women themselves to define their needs, priorities and interests as against those defined by the state.

The research reveals a fundamental collision of the Maoist urban-centred development strategy of agricultural collectivisation with the interests of rural women. It demonstrates as well an essential congruence of the ostensibly iconoclastic Cultural Revolution with the orthodox Confucian patriarchal familial and state systems, and thus oppressiveness for women. The post-Mao reorientation of the official development strategy has brought a gradual shift in the function of the state, leading to a changing relationship between the state and women. Rural women, in this process, have acted as agents of change in both defying the state-imposed restrictions and contesting the patriarchal gender rules that have posed constraints on their lives. Women's actions as such have constituted an unprecedented challenge to traditional values, gender expectations and the existing political, social and sexual orders.

However, rural women's inroads into male-dominated occupations and their hopes for further empowerment through education, training and employment, and through political participation and representation have been impeded by the structural urban-rural cleavage, unequal gender power relations, traditional ideas and male prejudice, as well as inadequate government actions. Sexism has simply assumed new forms: the gendered allocation of rights, opportunities and resources in the marketplace. Women are more able now to organise their independent interests and exert pressure on the authorities. Meanwhile, the growing gender inequalities during the economic transition call for a bigger role of the state in guaranteeing social justice and gender equity in the fresh redistribution of rights and interests.

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

This study examines the effects on Chinese women of changes in Chinese state policies, and their interaction with broader social changes, since the late 1970s. Its focus is on rural development policies in the post-Mao reform period and their repercussions for rural women, including both women who remain in the village and female migrants to the urban areas. According to official statistics, the proportion of rural population in China was about 74 percent in 1991.¹ This indicates that the majority of Chinese women still live in the countryside. It is, therefore, vital for an analysis of the development and change in Chinese women's position to look into the situation of rural women. The primary data for this analysis were collected in the course of fieldwork conducted respectively in a village and a city in North China in 1994, and consisting mainly of observations in natural settings and face-to-face interviews with village women and female migrants in the city. The inclusion of the latter group took into account the more recent phenomenon of rural-urban migration, which has involved many young rural women, in order to capture the spatial and temporal variations and diversity of rural women's experiences.

The objective of this research is to let Chinese women speak for themselves about the way the changes affected their lives. However, the roots and implications of their observations cannot be understood fully without a thorough understanding of the socio-economic and political context in which the post-Mao reforms have been adopted, and of the historical processes which have produced them. Such a contextual, interactive and interpretative approach to the gender dimensions of the post-Mao reforms requires more than an analysis of the reforms themselves. It calls for as well an understanding of Chinese traditional systems prescribing women's position and the revolutions before 1949 challenging them. Complexities with respect to women's status and gender relations were generated after 1949 when China was guided by a development paradigm under Chairman Mao Zedong. This paradigm was expressed in its typical mass mobilisation movements of agricultural collectivisation (the Great Leap Forward, or GLF) and the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (GPCR). In the academic arena, there was a tendency to view these officially launched movements as iconoclastic by nature, and hence beneficial to women. Although feminist critiques pointed to the limitations of the Maoist approach to

women's emancipation, they, nonetheless, saw the general orientation of policy radicalisation as holding the potential for undermining the traditional constraints on women (see below for detailed discussions).

My research will, therefore, start from a re-examination of the Maoist period. It is hoped that this attempt will provide the backdrop, against which benefits and costs to women generated by the different economic and political paradigms of the post-Mao period can be assessed. To attain this goal, I shall review the literature on the changes in women's status and gender relations brought about by the 1949 Communist revolution and the post-Mao reforms.

1.1 Women, Confucianism, and the Revolutions prior to 1949

Traditional Chinese society can be categorised as a classical patriarchal one, in that prestige and power were based on not only gender but also age. Despite the fact that both youth and women were under the yoke of a suffocating patriarchal order, it was the latter who suffered most from inferiority, subordination and oppression. Many researchers have pointed to the role of the Chinese traditional familial and kinship systems in the subordination and oppression of women and the young.² The age- and sex-based hierarchical order was especially manifest in the ideal family form, which, according to both Western and Chinese commentators, had several distinctive features. Broadly speaking, these include firstly extended family with several generations living under the same roof with commonly managed property and income by the father or the eldest son. Its hierarchical order demonstrated a typical patriarchal pattern with the older man acting as the household head at the top and the several sons beneath him. While the main wife may exercise authority over other women, such as concubines and daughters-in-law, and young children in the household, she did not have much power over adult men. It should be noted, however, this ideal family structure and life style in Chinese traditional society, in reality, was able to be afforded only by the well-to-do/gentry class. Nevertheless, the majority of the common people might aspire to follow the ideal model as soon as their financial situation allowed.³

Familial systems are closely associated with matrimonial practices. The most prominent characteristic of the traditional Chinese marriage is parental arranged marriage (*baoban hunyin*).⁴ In this regime, romantic love was forbidden and intimacy

between husband and wife was deemed inappropriate and shameless. Young people were not individuals, but belonged to the family unit. Their marriage was thus not their own but the family's business, and must be in the interests of the family. In the traditional extended family, parents-son relationship was above the husband-wife relationship. Grown-up children were economically dependent on and socially and emotionally controlled by their parents. Therefore, the fundamental parameter of the traditional familial, kinship and marital arrangements was their negation of individuality and suppression of individual identity and liberty, especially for the young and women.⁵

The second feature of the traditional marriage system is polygamy. Strictly speaking, however, this system can be defined as monogamy with legal concubinage, which functioned to ensure the continuation of the family line (bearing a male heir by a concubine if the main wife failed to do so). Polygamy also provided a leeway for men to experience some sort of romance or even eroticism suppressed by arranged marriages.⁶ Double moral standards were inherent in this institutional arrangement: whereas it was legal for a man to have multiple wives/concubines, it was legally punishable for a woman to commit adultery (she could be killed by her husband with impunity).⁷ The system also gave men the power to manipulate and control women within the household, reinforcing the stereotype of women as jealous, calculative and repellent to each other, as vividly illustrated in the award-winning film "Raise the Red Lantern".

Yet another characteristic of the traditional marital arrangement is the predominance of patrilocal postnuptial residence, by which a woman must leave her own household on marriage and go to live with her husband's family in a strange environment. This custom not only served to reinforce the male-centred familial and lineage regimes, but also resulted in women's loss of property and inheritance rights and contributed to women's lack of power, especially in the countryside.⁸ Early marriage was widely practised in traditional society. As late as the early 1940s the average marriage age of men was 19 and women 17.⁹ Wedding was expensive with elaborate ceremonies. In certain parts of China, taking a "child bride" (*tongyangxi*) (to raise a little girl by a couple as their future daughter-in-law) became a norm among poor households, which

could not afford such high expenses. In reality the girl taken as a "child bride" was frequently abused by her future in-laws and treated like a servant.¹⁰

Although economic considerations were partially underneath the traditional marital practices, such practices were primarily a product of a social institution, which saw marriage as the family's rather than individuals' business. Furthermore, the social arrangements relegating youth and women to subordinate positions in both the family and society were supported by and based on orthodox Confucian ideology, particularly its moral prescriptions regarding perceived "propriety" in terms of the social, political and sexual order, gender roles and "virtues of a woman". The tenets of the Confucian moral codes included, firstly, three cardinal principles (*san gang*), which defined the "appropriate" order for both the state and family systems. They dictated that ruler governs ministers, father governs sons and husband governs wife. As Chen aptly points out, the three cardinal principles are the core of the Confucian notions of loyalty (to the sovereign) (*zhong*) and filial piety (to one's parents, especially father) (*xiao*).¹¹ In this sense, based on orthodox Confucianism, the traditional family system and the pre-modern state system were moulded on each other. The interweaving of the two saw absolute obedience and subordination being demanded on people to the emperor, the young to the old, women to men and individuals to familial and lineal groups.

Feminist scholars have observed that although the patriarchal ideology and practices were oppressive for both the young (including men) and women, the latter disproportionately bore the suffocation and restrictions of tradition.¹² In traditional ideology three obediences (*san cong*) were specially prescribed for women, i.e., obedience to father before marriage, to husband after marriage, and to eldest son when widowed. The criteria of "appropriateness" were set in accord with the so-called "four virtues of a woman" (*si de*). The demand on women was to strictly follow the prescribed propriety in appearance, behaviour, speech¹³ and performance of women's work, such as weaving, spinning and embroidery.¹⁴ Furthermore, double sexual standard was adopted for men and women. Men could have multiple wives/concubines albeit affordability of such a life-style was considerably differentiated by class. In contrast, women of all classes must follow rigid ethical requirements. One-sided chastity and fidelity were imposed on women, including

virginity before marriage (to commit suicide if virginity was lost before marriage), public performance of chastity when widowed (to commit suicide in public at the funeral of the dead husband), and prohibition of widows' remarriage.¹⁵ To sexually control women, there were also rigid rules of sexual segregation, which confined common women to the household, and upper-class women to the rear chamber.¹⁶

The state and familial systems, the matrimonial arrangement and the underlying Confucian ideology all rendered women a very low position in traditional Chinese society. As pointed out by both Chinese and Western commentators, women's low status was manifested in many aspects of political and socio-economic lives.¹⁷ Women were not allowed to have education (the traditional saying: "A woman's lack of talent/ability is in itself a virtue" [*nüzi wucai bianshi de*]).¹⁸ In consequence, they did not have any chance to serve public office, since officials were selected through imperial examinations organised at various levels, or have careers outside home. In contrast, men enjoyed privileges in almost every aspect of life. They had exclusive divorce rights: husband could cast off his wife and send her home on seven grounds in accord with Confucian ethical codes.¹⁹

Women did not have property and inheritance rights based on the patrilineal kinship and inheritance regime, as well as on the patrilocal post-nuptial residence arrangement. Female infanticide was practised in certain areas, particularly by poor families, as daughters, who would marry out sooner or later, were not regarded as one's "children" but burdens when household resources were limited.²⁰ The most notorious custom disabling women and violating women's bodily integrity was the custom of female foot-binding, which lasted for more than a thousand years. Through binding a woman's feet, the custom reified Confucian moral prescriptions for woman by severely restricting her physical movement, sexual freedom, independence and a life outside home.²¹ Furthermore, viewed as men's property, a married woman often lost her own name: she was formally identified by her husband's surname followed by her father's surname followed by the word "*shi*", which means "someone".²² Although keeping one's own name after marriage may be of symbolic significance, this deprivation experienced by women in traditional society perpetuated the emphasis on male-centred patrilineage and the loss of women's independent female identity.

Forced seclusion, imposed ignorance, lack of occupational opportunities, general discrimination against working women, and repressive matrimonial, familial and kinship regimes led to women's economic dependence. In general, women were made subordinate to men and had low position in the family and wider society. However, women were seen as necessary due to both their reproductive function and a vital role that they often played in mediating rifts and tensions in familial or lineal relations, particularly when inter- or intra-kinship contradictions and conflicts arose. In addition, a woman's status in the household may improve with age in line with the classic patriarchal hierarchy: when her sons grew up and her husband died, she could become the head of the household. Moreover, in parts of China, especially in the South, women's participation in economic activities helped strengthen their position in the family and mitigate the general social discrimination against them.²³

This picture of a stable Confucian familial and state system together with women's oppressive position within them was altered gradually since the mid-19th century. The year 1911 witnessed the first Republican Revolution in China, which successfully overthrew the over-2000-year-old absolute monarchy. Thereafter, the monarchical laws of the family and kinship based on the Confucian moral codes were abolished. The official eulogy of the suicidal virgins and chaste widows, which had escalated during the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) dynasties, was stopped. The practice of female foot-binding went gradually out of fashion. A few educated women, such as the heroine Qiu Jin,²⁴ were actively involved in the Revolution, and their demand for a new female role in the family and society was as strong as their patriotism and the demand for a new political order.²⁵ The abolition of the autocratic monarchy also helped spread the ideas of democracy and equality, undermining the foundation of the traditional familial system moulded after it.

By the mid-late 1910s, China witnessed more social movements, amongst which the New Culture and May 4th Movements were most influential.²⁶ Assimilating such ideas as democracy, science, individual liberty and gender equality, these Movements questioned and challenged the entire Confucian order, which subjugated people to the ruler, sons to father, individuals to the family and women to men. Commentators have noted that the most pronounced phenomenon of the Movements was their unprecedentedly expressed scepticism and critiques of orthodox Confucianism, as

well as the modernisation drive through emancipating the individual, including women, from the traditional fetters.²⁷ Female education was promoted. Arranged marriages and parental control over the young were attacked, whilst freedom of association between the sexes, romantic love and individual freedom were called for. Gender equality and women's rights became an essential part of the new social and political ideals. The New Culture and May 4th Movements as such have been viewed as the beginning of contemporary women's movement in China.²⁸

Literature on this period points to many other factors conducive to the changing position of Chinese women. These included, firstly, rapid development of female education and the introduction of co-education since the Republican Revolution, and particularly during the New Culture and May 4th Movements. Secondly, there was a gradual expansion of modern industry in urban areas since the late 19th – early 20th century, e.g. textile industry and office jobs, which started to employ women as well as affecting the traditional familial structure as women began to work outside home. Growth of urban occupational opportunities combined with improved female education offered the chance for women either to be independent or to make economic contributions to their families.²⁹ Moreover, new legislation on family and kinship laid down by the Nationalist Government in the early 1930s permitted marriage by free choice on the condition of parental approval. Although not radical enough to ban arranged marriages completely, the Nationalist Civil Code was the first legal recognition of the importance and legitimacy of the young couple's own choice and interests concerning their marriage. In addition, it initiated reforms of other aspects of the traditional familial and kinship regimes and gender relations within them by granting women rights to divorce, and partial rights to inheritance and property.³⁰ Despite its recognition of women's rights, the Civil Code failed to fundamentally challenge male power in the family and kinship regime, as it reaffirmed the existing patronymic, patrilineal, patrilocal and patriarchal principles underlying the family system.³¹ As Stacey puts, it was more of an attempt "... to legislate a family system that was a compromise between modern Western values and Confucian patriarchal principles".³²

Researchers have identified some prominent features of the youth and women's movements during the early 20th century. Firstly, these movements proceeded largely

as part of a process of spontaneous social change in contemporary China. They were independent, autonomous movements initiated and led by China's modern intelligentsia and urban elite. On the other hand, this characteristic meant that the movements were largely confined to urban areas. Except for the "Red Areas" controlled by the Communist Party, insufficient effort was made to extend modern education to the majority of the rural population, to promote freedom of marriage and women's equal rights, or challenge the traditional practices in the vast countryside, where people were less exposed to modern ideas and alternative frame of reference with respect to values and norms.³³ Moreover, the Civil Code promulgated by the Nationalist government legalising free choice of marriage partners and prohibiting polygamy was not backed by effective enforcement mechanisms. Little publicity was made to raise public awareness of their existence. As a consequence, the general public was unaware of the legal changes, to say nothing of abiding by such legal regulations.³⁴

The Chinese Communist Party established in 1921 played a significant role in the changes witnessed during the first half of the 20th century. Many members of the earlier Communist leadership, such as Chen Duxiu, Li Dazhao, Zhou Enlai and Mao Zedong, played a vanguard role in the New Culture and May 4 Movements. As young radical intellectuals themselves, they exerted considerable influence over the earlier CCP's outlook on the traditional marriage and the familial and kinship institutions.³⁵ The social movement and ideological background of the CCP leadership was one of the key factors to the formation of its earlier policies on the traditional family and the woman question. During the first and second civil wars between the Nationalists and the Communists (1927-36, 1946-49) as well as the Anti-Japanese War (1937-45), temporary marriage regulations were promulgated by the Communist government in its controlled areas banning arranged marriages, and promoting gender equality and literacy among the peasantry, especially peasant women.³⁶ As shown in the film *Yellow Earth*, the ideas of gender equality, free choice of marriage partners, female literacy and revolution were particularly appealing to rural young women. However, under the guidance of Marxism/Leninism, the CCP regarded women's liberation as subordinate to the proletarian revolution. This position gradually developed into a pattern dominating the CCP's policy on the woman question after the founding of the PRC.³⁷

With the passage of time, however, the CCP's position on women's emancipation was shifted from the May 4th Movement's struggle for democracy, science and individual liberty, as well as national sovereignty, towards Marxist theory of class struggle and proletarian revolution. According to this theory, women's subordination in the family and society is closely associated with private property, capitalism and imperialism. Therefore, women's liberation is possible only when it is attached to the cause of the proletarian revolution, that is, the overthrow of the capitalist and landlord classes and the establishment of the proletarian dictatorship.

The subordinate place given to the cause of women's emancipation before 1949 was manifested also in the CCP's attacks on the left-wing female intellectuals. The young educated urban women, attracted by the Communist revolution, went to work in the Red or Liberated Areas. However, they soon found themselves frowned upon by their male and female comrades of rural background, who often held male chauvinist/conservative attitudes. Their urban class background, romantic personal history and individualistic tendency were viewed as "bourgeois". When they asserted women's rights and gender equality within the male-dominated Communist Party, as indicated in the case of the famous woman writer Ding Ling, they were attacked for pursuing narrowly-defined feminist goals. These women's demand for greater gender equality within the Party was considered divisive and harmful to the broad proletarian revolution.³⁸

Although most analysts of this period have pointed to the above policy tendency of the CCP in its early days, few have observed a sign of gradual deviation from the goals of the New Culture and May 4th movements: democracy, science and individual liberty in relation to women's emancipation. In fact, feminism, originated in the Western context, is individualistic and considers women as independent individuals in contrast with the orthodox Confucian perception of women as essentially belonging to the family and kinship. As I shall discuss in the chapters below, this deviation continued and exacerbated under Mao's rule, which had special implications for Chinese women.

1.2 Political, Legal and Socio-economic Changes Affecting Women during the Mao Era (1949 – 1979)

The above discussion provides a backdrop of the Confucian tradition, women's position in the family and society as prescribed by it, and the changes in these respects prior to the CCP's seizure of national power in 1949. Generally speaking, changes in gender relations and women's status under the Nationalist government, which assumed a *laissez-faire* position on gender issues, occurred gradually as a result of spontaneous social change. This pattern of change was drastically altered under Mao's regime when the state started intervening in every aspect of social relations and socio-economic institutions in an unprecedented manner.

CCP's legal reforms concerning marriage and the family

One of the first steps taken by the CCP to engender social change in familial and gender relations according to its ideology was the Marriage Law of the PRC promulgated in 1950 shortly after the CCP assumed national power. The 1950 Marriage Law outlawed many traditional practices justified by the Confucian moral codes and its familial and kinship institutions. These included, among other things, arranged marriages, polygamy, child bride and interference in widow's remarriage. It also stipulated the legal marital age (18 for women and 20 for men). The 1950 Marriage Law recognised the principle of gender equality, women's divorce right, equal property and inheritance rights between husband and wife, and the right of women to have their own names.³⁹

Moreover, new rules on marriage registration and issuance of marriage certificates were legally introduced on a nation-wide scale replacing the traditional practice of marriage by oral or written contract.⁴⁰ Registration was conducted in a local government office to ensure observance of the law. Officials would check that the marriage was out of free will of the two persons concerned without any third party interference, and that the young couple both reached the legal marital age.⁴¹ However, the marriage registration rule, together with the requirement for "work-unit" sanctions, gradually developed into a mechanism by which government officials exerted tight control over the lives and marriage choice of young people after the mid-1950s. The greater restrictiveness rather than freedom in marriage and divorce, as

well as its implications for women will be analysed in detail in the chapters following this Introduction.

Commentators differ in terms of whether the 1950 Marriage Law of the PRC represented a progress on the basis of, or a break with the Nationalist position on the traditional family. Those who examine the legal changes affecting family and marriage in contemporary China point to the fact that the Nationalist Civil Code of the early 1930s already illegalised many traditional practices, such as polygamy/concubinage and child bride. Therefore, the Communist Law represented a further development in the same direction.⁴² Others, however, argue that the new ideology of marriage based on principles of gender equality and free choice was not introduced on a national scale until the Communist promulgation of the 1950 Marriage Law.⁴³ Nevertheless, both groups agree that unlike the Nationalist Civil Code, the articles of the Communist Marriage Law were unconditional in banning arranged marriage and polygamy. In addition, enforcement of the law was more effective in the early 1950s than under the Nationalist government. The CCP used the mass mobilisation approach evolved in the course of its struggle for national power. Widespread publicity of the Law was carried out on an unprecedented scale, and mechanisms, such as the marriage registration requirement, was created to ensure that the Law was put in place and followed by the public. The use of political power and official propaganda to ban concubinage and promote the idea of marriage by free choice is one of the features distinguishing the Nationalist and Communist approaches to traditional practices, which were harmful to women.⁴⁴

The 1950 Marriage Law of the PRC recognised women's divorce rights. This stipulation was a break with the tradition of granting men exclusive divorce rights. Divorce was rare in traditional Chinese society anyway, owing to Confucian moral prescriptions against human sexual desire, narrow but fairly secured social contact and familial relations, and the stigma attached to divorce for both individuals and their families. Under the Nationalist government, the divorce rate gradually rose, but it was basically an urban phenomenon.⁴⁵ It is reported that following the 1950 Marriage Law, the divorce rate rose sharply.⁴⁶ Some observers have attributed this to the increase in cases where women initiated divorce on the grounds that their marriages had been arranged by parents or in other "feudal" forms, e.g. child bride and

concubinage.⁴⁷ This explanation, however, may only tell part of the story. A few commentators point to the greater complexity in the rise of the divorce rate in the early 1950s. For instance, Meijer notes that many Communist officials with a village background started to despise their rural wives after they came to work in the city following the Communist nation-wide victory. To marry urban educated women was perceived as a symbol of culture and status, thus became fashionable among the newly empowered former guerrilla leaders.⁴⁸ The new Marriage Law was then used to justify the officials' acts of deserting their rural wives. This, though frowned upon by tradition,⁴⁹ was nonetheless tacitly accepted by the new CCP government since many divorce initiators in such cases were its officials. On the other hand, Davin's discussion of the phenomenon of "cadres' divorce", which accounted for a considerable proportion of all the divorce cases in the early 1950s, offers a slightly different explanation.⁵⁰ In her view, divorces initiated by the male dominated cadres of rural background could be due to their genuine sufferings from loveless, arranged marriages considering their better education and higher mobility than their female counterparts, or their changed status and taste following relocation to towns and cities, or a combination of both. It seemed that in any case, divorce initiated by their cadre husbands devastated the village women. These women, "already the victims of the old system, would have become the victim of the new, suffering from social disgrace, economic difficulties, and emotional disturbance"⁵¹, as well as the loss of traditional protection and sense of security.

Divorce rates started to decline after 1953 when the wave of cadre divorce ebbed.⁵² Few analysts have provided sufficient explanations for this reversal. Nonetheless, Davin briefly mentioned that in a "puritanical society" as the Chinese was in the early 1950s, the public tended to view divorcees as acting under the influence of "bourgeois ideas".⁵³ This suggests a new development after 1949, where traditional sexual and moral standards as well as social attitudes were increasingly wrapped and represented in an official "proletarian" rhetoric. Evans' analysis of the dominant discourses of sexuality and gender relations, moreover, pointed to a congruity between the official discourse and the conservative social attitudes towards sex and sexuality implied in divorce.⁵⁴ The tradition-informed public opinion against divorce was backed by an official discourse, which predominantly emphasised the goal of maintaining social stability and sexual morality, which were seen largely as a woman's duty, and

perceived divorce as a threat to the goal. Meijer's account of the extremely complex procedure of bureaucratic and administrative interference manifest in the mediation process in divorce required by the government at various levels suggests increased state restrictions on divorce and control over marriage.⁵⁵ All this could be factors contributing to the declining and extremely low divorce rate after 1953.

As feminist scholars note family and marriage were no longer viewed as private considerations, but turned into "an object of public and political import" in Maoist China.⁵⁶ Some analysts may consider this development as representing the state agency role in bringing about social change and redefining gender roles based on the Marxist/Leninist ideology of gender equality and women's rights. Others, especially the post-Mao Chinese feminists, on the other hand, are highly critical of the tightened state control over marriage and divorce combined with the politicisation of individuals' personal life. Yuan, for instance, argues that the escalating state interference in personal lives, e.g. marriage and divorce, after the mid-1950s constituted a grave violation of rights and reduction of choice. As such, it was a retreat from the principles of free marriage and divorce, as well as women's emancipation stipulated in the 1950 Marriage Law.⁵⁷

The 1950 Marriage Law recognised women's inheritance rights in the family, which was paralleled with the promulgation of the Land Reform Law in the summer of 1950. The land reform, although giving greater emphasis to the class category in contrast with the concerns of social institutions and gender relations in the Marriage Law, provided rural women with rights to an equal share of land.⁵⁸ Such legal changes in women's property rights should help increase women's bargaining power within the family through possible reduction of women's economic dependence on men and the corporate family.

However, as Johnson notes, there were considerable practical, structural and cultural obstacles to the realisation of women's property and inheritance rights stipulated in the Marriage and Land Reform Laws.⁵⁹ In the early 1950s, many rural adult women were still crippled with bound feet, which adversely affected their working capacity on the land. This, coupled with women's general lack of experiences and skills in agriculture, contributed to the continued confinement of women to domestic chores and other tasks around the house. Furthermore, the significance of land deeds in

women's names was limited by the fact that the deeds were handed to and controlled by the household head, who was more often than not an older man. Neither was it practical in the case of divorce for a peasant woman to take the piece of land with her (or sell the land) either on remarriage or return to her parental household.⁶⁰

The realisation of women's property and inheritance rights were also hampered by the custom of patrilocal marriage, by which grown-up daughters must leave their natal households and move into the village of their husbands on marriage. This brought up several issues concerning daughters' property and inheritance rights, including where the land should be allocated for an unmarried daughter: in her natal village or in her future husband's village if she had already betrothed?⁶¹ Other commentators, such as Buxbaum and Meijer, moreover, point out that the equal inheritance rights between parents and children stipulated in the Marriage Law failed to clearly provide that married daughters had equal rights to inheritance with their brothers in their natal households. This ambiguity, in reality, granted permission to the customary law, by which married daughters were not allowed to inherit in their parental households.⁶² It seems that the legal recognition of women's property and inheritance rights in the Marriage and Land Reform Laws alone failed to considerably empower women. Later development, such as the agricultural collectivisation movement after the mid-1950s, further reduced the significance of the Land Reform Law and women's equal land rights.⁶³

Another important aspect, which has not been given sufficient attention in the academic debate on gender relations in Mao's China, relates to the official perception of the necessity and function of a legal system. A few analysts, nevertheless, note that legislative activities witnessed in the early 1950s, such as the promulgation of the Constitution, the Marriage and Land Laws, functioned to consolidate the newly gained political power of the CCP. Once the aim was achieved, these activities ceased, particularly from the late 1950s onwards.⁶⁴ The "rule of law" was increasingly considered a notion associated with "bourgeois legal rights", and thus unsuitable for China's economic and political system. The courts and public prosecutors stopped playing their role, together with the profession of lawyers, after 1958. Laws already published were gradually phased out, or replaced by government policy documents, which were deemed as the "soul of law". The contempt for law was further

exacerbated during the chaotic decade of the GPCR (1966-76), when precedence was given to the arbitrary supremacy of Party-state power (the rule of officials, or *renzhi*) over the supremacy of law (the rule of law, or *fazhi*).⁶⁵

The fact that the legal system under Mao's rule virtually collapsed may undermine analytical assumptions about the state agency role, e.g. through legislation, in promoting gender equality in the process of social change, which were often implicit in studies on gender relations in Mao's China. In the meantime, it may form a useful comparative basis for my research below, which investigates into the different approaches to gender issues and social change in the two distinctive periods, i.e. the Mao and post-Mao eras.

Socio-economic changes and their impact on rural women

The Maoist socio-economic transformation programme that attracted most academic interest in changing gender relations in rural China was agricultural collectivisation taking place in the mid-to-late 1950s and consolidated during the following two decades. Guided by Marxism, the CCP saw women's economic dependency as the main cause of their low status in the family and society. This recognition, together with the urgent need for labour in order to accomplish the paramount tasks of nation-building following half a century of civil wars, foreign invasions and political turmoil, led to the official strategy of mobilising women into social production outside home in both urban and rural areas.

Among the scholars who pioneered in studies on the impact of agricultural collectivisation on the family and the position of women in rural society was Prof. C. K. Yang. Yang, writing in the late 1950s, speculated several fundamental changes in the traditional family and gender relations engendered by the CCP's rural collectivisation programme.⁶⁶ Firstly, collectivisation successfully transferred the means of production from family ownership to agricultural collectives, which then replaced the family as the unit of production. With this change, the role of the household head, or the patriarch, as the leader and organiser of agricultural production was abolished. A scheme of remuneration for labour known as the work-point system was adopted in rural communes, which rewarded individuals, rather than family units, regardless of sex, age, etc., and in accord with their ability and performance. The significance for gender relations was that women's economic position increased as a

result of the weakened patriarchal familial control over them, and of the fact that women were turned into social labourers compared with their single domestic role in the past.⁶⁷

Moreover, Yang argued that the Communist land reform combined with agricultural collectivisation considerably weakened the power of the lineage in Chinese rural society. Land reform took away land and common property previously owned by powerful local lineages (especially in southern China), and collectivisation saw replacement of the economic, social and political functions of the lineages by rural collectives controlled by the Communist government. The perceived benefits of collectivisation to youth and women in this respect were implicit, i.e. through undermining the lineal and familial power, thus reducing their oppressiveness for the young and women. Yang argued that these changes in the function and organisation of the family brought about by agricultural collectivisation produced subversive effect on the structure of family status and authority based on age and sex differentiation, and hence favourable for youth and women.⁶⁸

Yang's analysis first published in 1959 considerably influenced many Western feminist scholars in their perception and assessment of the impact of the Maoist development strategy on familial and gender relations in rural China.⁶⁹ Nonetheless, it was later realised that there were serious limitations in the Maoist approach to women's emancipation through agricultural collectivisation. For instance, Johnson, while recognising that agricultural collectivisation enlarged many rural women's role to embrace economic activities outside home, points out that there was a conspicuous lack of emphasis on enlarging men's role to include domestic labour. She argues that this one-sided expansion of women's role did not constitute a redefinition of gender roles, but an increase in women's burden. Thus, the double-role tension experienced by women in Western and other communist societies was not avoided in rural China either.⁷⁰ Johnson's critique of the Maoist "liberation through labour" approach to gender equality, therefore, points to the failure of this approach in terms of effectively tackling the more complicated, non-economic structural factors that defined the different roles and spheres of work for men and women.

Further development of the collectivisation movement after the late 1950s saw consolidation of the commune system with the formation of a three-tiered structure,

i.e. the production team at the lowest level, the brigade at the middle, and the commune above it. Doubts about the assumed erosive effect of agricultural collectives on rural patrilineages were initially raised by Diamond in her path-breaking research. Diamond demonstrates that instead of a fundamental break with tradition, rural collectives were formed on the basis of the existing social structures. The neighbourhood lineal ties in a larger multi-surnamed village or a single-surname-dominated lineage (*zongzu*) in a smaller natural village often constituted the lowest level (the team or brigade) of the new forms of ownership and management of rural production and organisation, and hence power operation. Based on this, she concludes that there was a considerable overlap between the Communist structure of collective agriculture and the pre-1949 rural organisation and social structure.⁷¹

Since women's position in the traditional lineal networks was only peripheral at most, the newly introduced structure, which was no more than based on patrilineal ties, failed to pose fundamental challenge to the existing social and cultural arrangements insofar as gender relations were concerned. Like what had happened in the traditional lineage system, power in the rural collective was largely controlled and exercised by males who were often connected by a single lineage in a natural village. Diamond argues that the state-organised women's movement in China as such was considerably limited, and that further advancement in women's social position was hindered by these structural constraints.⁷²

The assumption that rural collectivisation with its work-point remuneration scheme fundamentally altered the traditional mode of common ownership and management of property and production by the corporate family, usually the patriarch, was questioned as well. Studies demonstrated that rather than remunerating members on an individual basis, rural collectives calculated the "dividend" annually for each member of a household. They then delivered the "dividend" to the household head (almost always the man), who thus gained control over the household collective income.⁷³ Inequality in remuneration in rural collectives was also observed. It was reported that discrimination against women in remuneration was widespread.⁷⁴ This was partly related to the deep-rooted ideological bias and ingrained gender stereotypes, which considered women as less able in farm work. It was also due to the sexual division of labour, by which women were frequently assigned by male-dominated team cadres

tasks, which were traditionally seen as “suitable for women only” but claimed less work-points than those performed by men.⁷⁵

Much feminist analysis pointing to the limitations of the Maoist approach to women’s liberation through female participation in collectivised agricultural production, however, did not ponder over possible alternatives. To some, the Maoist socialist transformation approach to women’s emancipation was, like what was witnessed in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, a disappointment.⁷⁶ To others, the programmes designed in the Maoist approach were deemed as not thorough or radical enough. The notion of “patriarchal socialism”/“public patriarchy” proposed by Stacey, for instance, argues that the Communist revolution was essentially peasant revolution.⁷⁷ In order to solicit peasant support both during its struggle for national power and the ensuing process of consolidating its power, the CCP formed patriarchal alliance with the conservative and restorational peasantry in its socio-economic transformation programmes. Stacey thus perceived agricultural collectivisation, which failed to completely eliminate the private elements of the pre-1949 patriarchal family economy, as CCP’s compromise with the patriarchal peasantry.⁷⁸ Policy implications along this line of argument pointed to further radicalisation or extremes.

Despite the recognised limits of the commune system, feminists, in general, considered positive the effects of collectivisation on women’s role and position in rural society. There was also a tendency to attribute the failure of the GLF (1958) at the peak of the collectivisation drive, and later the nation-wide opposition to the GPCR (1966-1976), to the resistance of the tradition-oriented Chinese peasantry, particularly rural men, to family revolution and women’s emancipation.⁷⁹ Coincidentally, this theoretical understanding of peasantry as essentially backward and conservative lay beneath the CCP’s rural development strategy of collectivisation, which represented an attempt to convert the Chinese peasantry into the more revolutionary proletarian working class. I shall argue in the chapters that follow that the Maoist strategy did not receive “peasant collaboration” as perceived by Stacey.⁸⁰ Rather, the majority of China’s population, the peasantry, resisted the policy tenaciously as it was fundamentally against their interests. The tendency as stated above may partly explain the neglect displayed in much of the literature on gender issues of the Mao era of a fundamental parameter of the Maoist development strategy

– the strong urban bias against rural population. Inadequate attention was paid to the implications of the stringent state restrictions on, say, rural-urban migration, for rural women's economic opportunities, occupational choice, and the related aspect of female education, as well as women's geographical and social mobility.

The fact that interests along the gender line may be intersected, and even overwhelmed by interests along the rural-urban cleavage exacerbated by the Maoist urban-centred development strategy realised through agricultural collectivisation was not pondered much in the feminist scholarship on this period. My discussion of the implications of the Maoist development strategy of agricultural collectivisation for rural women intends partly to fill in this gap by paying special attention to the interwoven analytical categories of gender and the urban-rural divide. Contributing to feminist debates on the relationship between women and the state, especially the latter's development policies and their implications for women's position in the family and society, is also a significant consideration of this part of the research.

1.3 The Impact of Post-Mao Reforms on Rural Women's Status (since 1979)

Since the late 1970s, China has entered a period of transition from centrally planned economy to "market economy with Chinese characteristics". This process, known as post-Mao reforms, in effect, was initiated in the countryside through agricultural decollectivisation. Decollectivisation, however, is not a discrete project. It has been an integral part of an overall restructuring involving economic and political reorientation, market liberalisation and profound social changes as well as continuities.

Decollectivisation, kinship and gender power relations

With the disintegration of the commune system, smallholding family farms have re-emerged to distribute labour and manage productive activities. This reversal of the Maoist development strategy has aroused tremendous interests in the academia both within and outside China with respect to its implications for women. Initially, many scholars expressed deep concerns, fearing that China was embarking on a road that would bring Chinese women back to the traditional way of life. This meant that the gains of rural women achieved through agricultural collectivisation may well be lost under the reform programme with women's labour falling under the supervision and control of the patriarchal household.⁸¹ Although the limitations of the commune

system in liberating women were recognised, as discussed above, collectivisation was, nonetheless, perceived as holding the potential to undermine the authority of local communities based on patrilineage, especially through the Cultural Revolution policy of increasing the level of ownership and accounting.⁸² Decollectivisation was accordingly deemed as moving towards the direction of re-delivering power to the patriarch of the household and the lineage to the detriment of women's interests.

With the passage of time, however, a more complicated picture emerges with regard to the impact of post-Mao reforms on women. The greater sophistication displayed in the analysis of the gender aspect of the reform programme has been facilitated by an ever increasing volume of research based on first-hand fieldwork. For instance, Judd, in her insightful anthropological study of the division of land and labour in northern Chinese villages in the post-Mao era, finds that allocation of land to individual households was shortly followed by voluntary partnership or co-operation, which was largely based on kinship ties. She points out that Chinese village life has been patterned on a "residentially-structured predominance of men in territorially-based communities" during both the collectivisation and decollectivisation periods.⁸³ However, the boundaries of such communities were sharpened in the collective years as a result of the state tight control over population mobility and the elimination of alternative arrangements.⁸⁴

Judd demonstrates that since decollectivisation, the fixed boundaries of male-centred communities have been reopened by a broader range of co-operative arrangements, including agnate and non-agnate ties, as well as non-kinship-based social networks, such as neighbourhood, friendship and political linkages. This has led to her central argument that the emphasis on the rural household as the formal organisation and single unit of production (and the control of women by the patriarch within it) may well obscure the effective practical structures of informal organisations based on broader and diverse co-operative relations. The power of the former is now increasingly constrained by the power of the latter as well as by the alternative, commodity-based forces, which have emerged since the inception of the reform programme.⁸⁵

The post-Mao rural reform programme has also made critical gender issues more visible. One of the vital issues is women's access to land and other resources, which is

both conditioned by and contributed to the continued asymmetry of power between men and women in the household and local communities. Researchers have pointed to considerable local variations in practices of land allocation and readjustment in accord with the (changing) size of individual households. Although equality and equity seemed to have served as universal standards during initial land division and allocation, later development in access to land and land-use rights has shown that women are considerably disadvantaged.⁸⁶ Despite the new laws introduced since the early 1980s to protect women's rights and interests, in reality, customary laws, particularly the pervasive custom of virilocal marriage, have more often than not conditioned women's rights in this respect.

New legislation on women's rights and interests

Many analysts, as indicated earlier, have noted the mutually reinforcing interactions between the virilocal post-marital residence arrangement and the territorially based, patrilineal rural social organisations. Hence its negative effect on women in traditional Chinese society. This was also true during the commune years, when rural collectives were reluctant to "invest" in young women in terms of training (e.g. agricultural techniques) and political participation (e.g. local public service) owing to women's "temporary residence" status.⁸⁷ Continuities in the custom and related disadvantages suffered by women have been observed in the post-Mao years as partly shown above. In the meantime, scholars have pointed to greater dynamics of change owing to a variety of factors.

Some researchers have argued that the accelerating legislative activities since the early 1980s have contributed to this dynamism in rural social relations and institutions such as family and marriage. They point out that the legislative efforts have been associated with the changing attitudes of the current regime towards law and the increased needs for legal arbitration in a market-oriented economy. The new emphasis on rights and interests of individuals and groups, which is in contrast to the "class" paradigm and "obligation" discourse dominant during the Mao era, has represented a new legal perspective of the central government and its prioritisation of stability and social order.⁸⁸ Of the more recently passed laws, quite a few have addressed issues in relation to rights and interests of women and children. These, among others, include the 1982 revised Constitution; the 1980 revised Marriage Law as well as the latest

controversial revised Marriage Law (passed on 30 April 2001); the 1985 Inheritance Law, the 1991 Law on the Protection of Minors, the 1992 Law on the Protection of Rights and Interests of Women, and the 1994 Law on Maternal and Infant Health Care.⁸⁹

In his study on the relationship between women and property as affected by law, Ocko argues that despite the enforcement problems, the significance of the legal emphasis on women's equal claims to different forms of property, which have emerged since the early 1980s, cannot be underestimated.⁹⁰ The independent property rights of women as individuals are increasingly recognised both institutionally and by women themselves, particularly in urban areas, and this has helped strengthen women's position within the family. Although considerable disparities between legal recognition of women's rights and their everyday experiences have continued, the fact that the courts have more frequently been sought as a venue for dispute arbitration in relation to property and inheritance has given rise to greater probability of bringing customs and practices into line with legal provisions on gender equality.⁹¹ In addition, both Western researchers and Chinese sources have demonstrated a rocketing divorce rate since the promulgation of the 1980 Marriage Law, suggesting marked reduction of the official restrictions on divorce – from 3 percent recorded in 1979 to 13.18 percent in 1997.⁹² It is reported that during the first half of the 1980s, 70-80 percent of divorce cases were initiated by women, and this is viewed as an indication of greater independence and freedom enjoyed by women as well as liberalisation in women's own ideas concerning marriage and divorce.⁹³

However, the phenomenon of the rising divorce rate has rendered the issue of women's property rights in the process of divorce especially prominent. Researchers have found that in rural areas a divorced woman tends to face difficulties in housing, land and division of commonly owned property.⁹⁴ Despite the legal provisions on women's equal rights in these respects, a divorced woman has to give up her rights to the house, which is located in the man's village (houses here are not deemed as commonly owned property of husband and wife by customary laws). Women's rights to land use and other resources tend to be eroded as well in divorce as well as marriage. Like houses land is immovable, and thus difficult for a woman to take her share of land with her on divorce. It is neither realistic for a divorced woman to return

and work the land in her ex-husband's village on a regular basis. Even for movable assets, a divorced woman is usually not allowed to have her fair share of the family property acquired during the marriage, but can only take what she had at marriage (e.g. her dowry). In consequence, most divorced women are forced to remarry quickly for the sake of survival.⁹⁵

Similarly, in the case of marriage, a bride is unable to take her share of land in her natal household to the groom's village. Local policies vary in terms of readjustment of land allocation, but in any case, newly married women may well become landless members of their new households, at least for several years.⁹⁶ The problem with rural women's property rights is not confined to situations of divorce and marriage only. It has also been manifested in inheritance by re-married widows or married daughters as noted by both Western and Chinese analysts. In these respects, traditional attitudes and customary laws based partly on the widespread practice of virilocal post-nuptial residence continue to supersede constitutional provisions in most rural areas.⁹⁷

Changes in family, marriage and reproduction

In spite of the continuity and slow-paced change in the entrenched virilocal post-marital arrangement, greater openness of rural communities in the reform years tends to engender a wider range of possibilities in both economic activities and social relations. It has been noted that familial ties and kinship networks, which were considered impeding the modernisation of Chinese society, are nowadays perceived as vital resources in the family farm and off-farm businesses increasingly incorporated into the internal and external market.⁹⁸ Such resources are not exclusively accessible or totally controlled by men. In addition, researchers have discovered gradual but distinctive changes in marriage and family arrangements as affected by broader societal change.

In his insightful study on family division and management and their spatial and temporal changes in rural China, Cohen differentiates the role of "family head" (*jiazhang*) from that of the "family manager" (*dangjia*).⁹⁹ He shows that while the family ideal requires the two roles incorporated in a single person, usually the elderly male in the household, the practical need for family management often sees a separation of the two. Albeit the household head is more often than not a role reserved for the old man, this title is often nominal in terms of real management and daily

decision making in the family farm business. In family management, Cohen identifies the “outside manager” (*wai dangjia*) and “inner manager” (*nei dangjia*), which refer to man and woman in the household respectively.¹⁰⁰ Despite their clear indication of the continued gender division of labour in economic, social and familial life, the very term *dangjia* or manager suggests women’s increased participation in decision making in connection to the household productive activities and family affairs.

Both Cohen and Yan have observed a marked increase in conjugal families in Chinese villages for the past couple of decades.¹⁰¹ Their studies have shown that although strong extended families are more likely to be relatively well off, the trend towards conjugal families through family division and “serial division” is, nonetheless, obvious in present-day rural society. Cohen argues that this suggests that economic considerations of family farm or off-farm businesses, which may favour extended families, are often balanced or even outweighed by other forces, such as external/urban influences over the younger generation, who prefer greater conjugal independence and autonomy, and the move towards consumer culture. Family heads or managers have to consider not only the needs of family enterprises, but also the satisfaction of the young in the household.¹⁰² The increased power of the young versus the old, which is often manifest in early family division, has been discussed by Greenhalgh and Li as well. They argue that daughters-in-law in China’s villages have now become important income earners, and thus able to use this new status to advance conjugal interests.¹⁰³

Interestingly, preference for conjugal households in rural areas is not confined to younger generation alone. As Yan shows, parents have also displayed a tendency to create their own “conjugal fund” out of considerations of old age security by retaining all the cash savings of the household at family division. Some of the parents have even encouraged their married sons to move out so that the elderly couple can have their own conjugal space.¹⁰⁴ This “triumph of conjugality” in today’s rural society is in sharp contrast with the traditional family system, where the relationship between parents and son was always above that between husband and wife. The significance of the change in rural social institutions, e.g. the family, lies in its challenge to the traditional distribution of power, authority, rights and interests between generations and gender, as well as within the household. Moreover, the new focus on horizontal,

conjugal relations may well weaken the male-centred lineage ties and encourage greater individuality and democracy in rural families and communities.

The trend of a shrinking family size in rural areas witnessed by many scholars, on the other hand, tends to be viewed by others as largely resulting from the implementation of a national family planning programme.¹⁰⁵ Indeed, the widely publicised “one-child population policy”, which was introduced since the early 1980s, has triggered unprecedented controversies and criticisms from different directions world-wide. Researchers have pointed out that the official perception of the problem of resource limitation exacerbated by rapid population growth and the challenge this has posed towards China’s modernisation drive has, in large part, underlain the one-child-per-couple policy.¹⁰⁶ Moreover, a historical perspective calls attention to the official position on the population issue during the Mao era, when ideological dogmatism and intolerance combined with strong pronatalist cultural influence led to the suppression of political debates on population policy and persecution of prominent proponents for family planning in the country.¹⁰⁷ This legacy has been one of the vital factors contributing to a rapidly expanding population for the first three decades of the PRC and the drastic measures taken by the post-Mao regime in an attempt to bring China’s population growth under control.

Internationally, critiques of the one-child family planning policy are particularly concerned with its implications for gender relations and women’s well-being. This, to a great extent, has been informed by the rise of second-wave feminism and the international women’s health movement since the late 1970s and early 1980s. These social movements have brought crucial issues of gender and women’s health into focus in the international population-development debates started since the early 1960s.¹⁰⁸ In China’s context, both Western and Chinese sources have reported a rise, since the introduction of the one-child policy, in the number of abandonment and infanticide of baby girls, sex-selective abortion and adoption, and domestic violence against women who gave birth to girls.¹⁰⁹ It is noted that resistance to the family planning programme has mainly come from rural areas, whereas urban couples seem to have either willingly limited the number of children to only one (or chosen not to have any children), or gradually accepted the government requirement for birth limitation.¹¹⁰

The resistance to the one-child family planning programme from the countryside has led to enforcement difficulties. Therefore, the central authorities have to readjust the policy, since the second half of the 1980s, to allow rural couples to have a second child if their first child is a girl.¹¹¹ In reality, however, even this policy cannot be enforced in many areas, particularly in remote and poorer villages, where rural couples tend to have three or more children. Some scholars, therefore, argue that because of the wide range of variations in policy formation, implementation and outcomes, as well as negotiations and bargaining taking place at various levels, it is difficult to perceive China's population policy as a homogeneous, uniform one.¹¹² In addition, interactions have occurred between top-down government initiatives and bottom-up responses to implementation and enforcement, which has involved negotiations between policy makers at higher levels, authorities at the regional and local levels, and rural families and individuals at the grassroots. The outcome has often been a compromise made by each party. The central state may relax its rigorous requirement for birth control, local authorities implement the so-called "informal policies" situated in local socio-economic realities, as well as reproductive culture and treasured values, and rural couples and their families submit their preferences, more or less, to the will of the political power.¹¹³

In the processes of policy formation, implementation and enforcement, gender issues have become prominent. In the international debates on population and development, some feminists have argued against any organised family planning programme on the grounds of women's reproductive rights. However, as analysed by many Western China specialists and understood by ordinary Chinese based on their daily experiences, it is very hard to generalise as to whom in the family has been the decision-maker on matters concerning reproduction, and a wide range of socio-economic and cultural variables have been at work to produce the actual reproductive preferences and outcomes.¹¹⁴ The new focus in the arena of fertility and population since the 1994 UN Conference on Population and Development, therefore, has been placed on reproductive health and well-being.¹¹⁵ This trend has also been reflected in analyses of the Chinese family planning programme. Both Western and Chinese scholars have paid special attention to issues in relation to women's sexual and reproductive health, quality of care in family planning services, infant and child health services, child care provisions, old-age support schemes, gender equality in education

and employment, as well as government responsibility for creating an enabling environment for women.¹¹⁶ Despite the observed general lack of a confrontational approach of Chinese feminists to the official family planning programme,¹¹⁷ women scholars and officials in China do voice their serious concerns with sexual and reproductive health issues, and advocate establishing public provision and insurance schemes, as well as better social policy making.¹¹⁸ Their actions have effectively contested the official discourse on birth control as merely women's "social obligations" and its instrumentalist approach to family planning. As such, these women have played an essential role in the negotiation and bargaining processes for asserting women's reproductive rights and improving sexual and reproductive health in the country.

Women's work and the shifting gender division of labour

Another focus of attention in the body of literature on China's post-Mao reforms and their repercussions on rural women has been on the transformation in women's work and the shifting gender division of labour within and outside the household. Studies in this area have covered the family, education as closely related to the type and nature of women's employment, politics, domestic work, agricultural and rural enterprises, as well as rural-urban migration. As discussed before, concerns with the possibility that women's labour would be once again subject to the control of the family patriarch with the return to family farming initially dominated the Western academic discourse.¹¹⁹ However, closer investigations in village life and social organisations later have revealed a much more complex pattern of change.

In her study on the intra-household distribution of labour and resources, and their effects on women and their work, Li argues that since decollectivisation farming has turned into family enterprises. Although gender inequality has been noted in women's land use rights owing largely to the predominant practice of virilocal marriage, the initial division of land itself followed rules of gender equality. Thus most women had their equal portion of land, which granted them membership status in the family and village community.¹²⁰ Li shows that in the family farm, the woman may not act as the "chief manager". However, she does not assume a passive role of merely obeying assigned tasks and performing designated labour either. To the contrary, women have participated in most productive and managerial activities in family farms, and this has

led to their increased decision-making power in family affairs. It is particularly the case for conjugal households, where women enjoy more freedom and are able to exert greater influence over their husbands.¹²¹

Jacka has examined changes in women's work and the gender division of labour in connection with the development of a commodity economy and rural industrialisation.¹²² Adopting a series of dichotomies in her analysis, including outside-inside, heavy-light, skilled-unskilled work as associated with the socially-constructed dualism of male-female, Jacka argues that in spite of the markedly expanded scope of women's work since post-Mao reforms, the view of women's work as secondary and petty has persisted. Furthermore, the assumption that domestic tasks are "naturally" women's work and the devaluation based on their association with the "inside" domain have not been challenged. This has often led to the intensified double role burden for women.¹²³ Li, on the other hand, sees changes in women's identity from housewives to farmers and further to industrial workers or small entrepreneurs as positively affecting their position in the family and local community. However, she also shows that this shift has been differentiated by age and marital status. In other words, it is more likely to occur to younger women and the change tends to be temporary in nature, or before marriage. She considers this as partly responsible for the lower occupational status of women in terms of skills and pay.¹²⁴ Li's findings suggest that changes in rural economic organisations and social institutions have produced disturbing effects on the traditional gender division of labour. In the meantime, the definitions of skilled and unskilled work, and hence the spheres of men's and women's responsibilities in the family and household businesses have shifted as well. Certain jobs previously deemed "skilled" have been transferred from men to women and are now categorised as unskilled, and *vice versa*. Li argues that the re-division of labour between men and women has merely meant that men have "upgraded" themselves to what is considered more important jobs; while once important tasks carried out by men are now "downgraded" as they are performed by women.¹²⁵

Researchers have pointed out that rural women's employment has been significantly reshaped by the more recent trend of rural-urban migration. The phenomenon of large-scale spontaneous migration has emerged and gained momentum since post-

Mao market reforms, which have significantly reduced official restrictions on and control over population mobility. Literature on rural-urban migration in China, however, has tilted towards quantitative surveys and macro-level data collection,¹²⁶ and inadequate attention has been paid to the gender dimension of the phenomenon. Nevertheless, current studies on migration and gender in post-Mao China have discussed repercussions of migration on the traditional sexual division of labour, the relations between migration and fertility, migration and female education, and the institutional constraints embodied in the household registration regime (*hukou*) on rural women's mobility, their citizenship rights as well as their job prospect in urban areas.¹²⁷

In both traditional society and the collective years, population movement of rural women occurred largely within rural areas through marriage in accord with the prevailing custom of virilocal marriage.¹²⁸ Independent migration of women in search of work away from the countryside was rare in the Mao era owing to the stringent state restrictions on rural-out migration and the elimination of non-state commodity and labour markets. Post-Mao reforms since the early 1980s have either removed or significantly undermined the structural mechanisms to control population mobility, especially rural-urban migration. A surge in female rural-urban migration was revealed in China's 1990 census, suggesting an unprecedented mobility of rural women since the founding of the PRC.¹²⁹

In her study on the interactions between migration and fertility as well as childcare arrangements, Hoy finds that among female migrants in Beijing the sex ratio (male to female) of their children is particularly high.¹³⁰ As discussed before, a variety of variables may have underlain the rising sex ratio at birth for China as a whole after the introduction of the one-child family planning policy, of which son preference has been identified as one of the most crucial. It is also recognised that migration is a highly selective process based on age, gender, education, marital status, etc.¹³¹ Probing into the relationships between migration selectivity and the sex ratio of the children born by the female migrants, Hoy argues that female migration may have been influenced by the sex of their first child. For those who have given birth to a son, negotiations with parents-in-law over childcare arrangements and migration to cities in search of work tend to be in favour of women's movements.¹³² This may suggest

that negotiations and bargaining over fertility and reproduction not only occur between state and individual families, but also between generations and gender within a household, where treasured values (e.g. son preference), norms (gender stereotypes and roles) and gender expectations can be simultaneously reinforced and contested.

The shifting sexual division of labour has been observed at both the origin and destination. Commentators have noted that migration has affected women's work and life in villages in different ways. For married or middle-aged women with children, their movements tend to be constrained by their family responsibilities as well as the structural barrier of the *hukou* system. In the case that the husband has migrated to urban or other rural areas for work, the wife remaining at home often experiences intensified double burdens with an increased workload both in farm work and at home. In the meantime, while the husband becomes a "visiting" one most of the time, the wife tends to perform productive tasks previously deemed as men's and act as the *de facto* household head, making most family decisions and representing the household in local communities as well as in dealing with local authorities.¹³³ At the destination, female migrants tend to concentrate in the lower end of the urban job market characterised by less skill requirement and low wages. The shift in identity from rural farmers to urban workers has undoubtedly produced profound impact on female migrants' self perception and expectation, as well as their roles: from daughters, expected wives and mothers to independent supporters of themselves, and, frequently, of their rural families (if the families are relatively poor). However, this change is often temporary, and their new urban jobs tend to either fit the gender stereotypes or relate to women's traditional roles, e.g. the perception of young rural women as docile and the large proportion of the job openings as domestic aids.¹³⁴

1-4 The Central Themes

The above literature review provides a general background of debates and issues in studies on gender and rural development in China. My research intends to contribute to this growing volume of the scholarship, particularly feminist research, on gender relations as affected by state development strategies in rural China through presenting Chinese rural women's own perspectives. It brings Chinese women into the centre of the gender discourse and allows them to speak in their own voice. The importance of hearing women's own voice and perceptions in academic interpretation of their lives

is based on the ontological understanding of reality as “socially constructed through individual or collective definitions of the situation”,¹³⁵ which serves as the epistemological foundation for qualitative social investigations. My examinations into the effects of the state policies on women will be based on women’s own perspectives expressed by women themselves, which are interpreted as their own definitions of self-needs and interests. This suggests that policy processes are more interactive and discursive, in which rural women have acted as agent of change rather than merely passive recipients of state policies that have affected their lives.

By “women’s own perspectives”, I mean not only the experiences and perceptions of the women interviewees, which I gathered during fieldwork in China, but also my perceptions and interpretations of events in China based on my unique position. As a Chinese woman myself, I have been brought up in the culture, and informed by experiences of women around me as well as by intellectual exchanges with other Chinese female scholars, who were most likely to air their opinions on gender and development issues on private occasions in the specific political context during the fieldwork period (see the methodological chapter for details). As an indigenous, Western-trained academic, I am able to bridge the boundaries of an “insider-outsider” dichotomy in terms of the physical and psychological proximity to and familiarity with the research context and subjects, as well as the relevance of the social world under scrutiny to the actors.¹³⁶ However, unlike a complete “insider”, I am trained in academic disciplines, and thus have the theoretical reflectivity and interest beyond the immediate personal experiences of an “insider”.

The significance of the research lies also in the fact that it will add to our knowledge of the experiences of women, and changes in sex roles and gender relations in response to and interactions with the various official development strategies in rural China. This, in turn, can serve as an input to future development thinking and decision-making processes for both China and other developing nations. The findings from the study will also be of relevance to women in other cultures and societies, especially those that have been undergoing dramatic economic and political changes. As such, the research may constitute a starting point for future, comparative studies which will attempt to compare experiences of the Chinese with those of other

developing or transitional economies, such as other Third World countries, Russia and East Europe.

Among the central themes that are explored in the study, one deals with the relations between the state and society/women and their changes over time. This dimension examines changes in the functions of the state, and the ways in which the state has intervened in society, and analyses the extent of divergence or convergence between state-directed social changes and traditional institutions and concepts, which have exerted strong influence on women's status. The study will contribute to the debates on the roles of the state, society and individuals in bringing about societal changes including gender relations. It will argue that China has been undergoing a period of transition from a centrally planned economy, which required the elimination of a separate society, towards a market economy, which has seen the state shrink in order to facilitate the development of the market. In the meantime, the growing inequalities, including those witnessed in gender relations, accompanying a market economy and the concurrently emerging separate society with diverse group interests competing for limited resources, are calling for a bigger role of the state in guaranteeing equity and social justice in the redistribution of opportunities, resources, interests and rights.

A related issue is the emerging role of the market in rural women's lives. The interactions between women, state and the market in the post-Mao years, and the intricate and mixed meanings of this market for rural women in both the village and urban settings are explored and closely examined. The research points to an often overlooked role of the non-state market, realised through rural women's active engagement in it, in eroding patriarchal state control over women's economic and social lives and in challenging the traditionally-informed gender stereotypes and female propriety. Informed by international scholarship, particularly by Western feminist analysis of market economy and women's positions in it, in both the developed and developing worlds,¹³⁷ and based on rural women's more recent experiences and their own perceptions, the study analyses the dynamics of gender relations and the emerging patterns of sexual asymmetry associated with the market. These include processes of bargaining and negotiation along the gender line, the development of individualism in women in connection with their market activities,

and the reallocation of rights, opportunities, resources as well as benefits and risks by the market on a gender, as well as rural-urban basis.

The institutional cleavage between the town and the country, and its role in shaping the relations between the two sectors and between rural women and the state is yet another central theme that has run through the research. The Chinese feminist scholar Jin points out the importance of this phenomenon when she notes, "In the eyes of rural women, both in terms of objective indexes and subjective perceptions, the difference between town and country is far greater than that between the sexes."¹³⁸

Based on this recognition, my research will scrutinise the formation, consolidation and operational mechanisms of this rural-urban dichotomy within the centrally-planned economic framework, and its retention, though in an eroded form, in the post-Mao years. I shall argue that the many constraints placed by the urban-rural divide on rural people and the related deep-rooted urban bias against them have particularly disadvantaged rural women in the marketplace, and engendered further institutional barriers to women's status improvement and empowerment. The urban-rural dualism is, therefore, imperative to an understanding of the many issues faced by rural women both yesterday and today. In addition, the study argues that the institutional urban-rural cleavage, which has received inadequate attention in Western discourse on gender equality in China, has complicated the picture of gender asymmetry and pointed to a possible alliance, as well as conflict, of needs and interests across gender and other social strata.

In addition to the structural dimensions as mentioned above, my study pays attention to the social and cultural aspects. It emphasises the strong correlation between the relevant traditional values, norms, customs and common-sense beliefs and the low status of women in the family and society. The research analyses the complex ways in which the Maoist state perpetuated a patriarchal culture and ideology through its unique adaptation and reinforcement. It also discusses the indirect and intricate influences of the more recent legislation, demographic policies, as well as the surviving customs and conventions on rural society with respect to marriage, reproduction, female education, inheritance, values and norms, women's general welfare, their self-perceptions, and their aspirations for their families and themselves. It examines both changes and continuity in the cultural domain and scrutinises the

assumptions underlying much of the new legislation and social policies at different levels, which affect women's lives and gender relations. The study as such is interdisciplinary, adopting a feminist political and sociological perspective in its exploration of a wide range of issues that have affected rural women's lives and status in the family and the wider society.

1-5 Outline

The thesis is composed of three major parts. The first two parts are devoted, respectively, to the most influential economic and political events of the Mao era -- the GLF and the GPCR; and the third part focuses on the post-Mao era. At the beginning of each historical period under investigation, I introduce, in a rather sketchy way, background in order to provide a socio-economic and political context, in which rural women's experiences as affected by or interacted with official policies at various level are to be unveiled.

Part I contains chapters 3-5. Chapter 3 discusses the process and consequences of agricultural collectivisation, and its functions in the crystallisation and implementation of the Soviet-style economic and political framework of central planning. It analyses both the operation of the collectives at the micro level and the aims that collectivisation served to realise at the macro economic and political level. Through presenting a wider picture of this kind, the study hopes to elicit an understanding of the living environment, created by the state development policies, of rural women. It is to signal as well a rather distinct approach of my research, which is not confined to the immediate concerns with micro-level changes, but involves multiple, complex and cross-sectoral categories and relationships at the macro level.

Chapters 4 and 5 examine and assess the immediate and longer term effects of the idiosyncratic GLF in the late 1950s and the general Maoist strategy of agricultural collectivisation up until the late 1970s on the position of rural women. These chapters question the Maoist state's interpretation of women's emancipation as their "social participation", i.e. in collectivised agricultural production, by analysing the nature of this obligatory participation by women, as well as rural women's gains and losses in relation to the government measures. They look at the changes in women's lives in response to collectivisation and discuss its effects on women's economic

independence, and the links between women's required participation in collective labour and their general welfare.

In addition, these chapters look into the broader societal change influenced by the development paradigm of collectivisation, whose repercussions for rural women were often implicit and indirect. Several key components of this paradigm are closely scrutinised, such as stringent state restrictions on rural non-state market and commerce, and on population movement. Special attention is paid to the role of agricultural collectivisation in the formation and entrenchment of a structural urban-rural divide, along which new inequalities emerged and social stratifications developed. The research then analyses the effects of such policies and the new hierarchical structure on traditional social institutions, such as rural patrilineage, which has exerted strong influence on gender relations in village communities, on rural women's choice, opportunities and mobility, and on general orientations, values and norms in rural society.

Part II (chapters 6-9) is devoted to the GPCR period. Chapters 6-8 discuss the most notable features of the GPCR movement, including the escalation and magnification of the "class struggle" and "blood lineage" themes, the personality cult of Mao Zedong, and the puritan approach to sex and sexuality. Going beneath the surface of the official "radical" and "revolutionary" rhetoric surrounding these GPCR practices and policies, which was ostensibly iconoclastic and pro-women, these chapters examine the links between the Maoist "proletarian" politics and their traditional cultural and moral sources. Elucidation of this relationship then lies at the core of my evaluation of the actual implications of the GPCR politics for Chinese women. The last chapter in this part, chapter 9, looks at the more specific debate, in the GPCR context, on the "sameness" versus "difference" approach to the "woman question". This can be understood as being represented in the officially erected "Iron Girl" model, which was a typical phenomenon of the GPCR decade, and the section discusses its merits and problems with respect to its cultural and political meanings for gender relations.

Part III (chapters 10-15) examines the implications of post-Mao reforms for rural women. This part constitutes the focus of the whole research project. Chapter 10 presents the background with an outline of the major changes in China's rural

development strategy after Mao's death starting from decollectivisation. It argues that, just as collectivisation is deemed as inseparable from the general programme of economic central planning and self-containment, decollectivisation should be treated as an integral part of an overall reorientation towards the market and greater openness in economy and society. The implications of the post-Mao reforms for rural women and the resultant changes in the state-society/women relationship, therefore, are much more complex than a simplified interpretation as a women's "returning to household" movement, or as "the withdrawal ... of strong central government support for women".¹³⁹

This is the wider context that I hope to introduce at the beginning of this part of the research. I then examine the policy effects on rural women during the post-Mao era. Chapter 11 discusses village women's experiences in response to post-Mao policy switches. The first three sections of the chapter analyse more recent changes in women's autonomy and the state-women relationship, as well as the effects of rural economic diversification on women's work and welfare. By highlighting rural women's active role in an emerging non-state market, the analysis centres on village women as agent of change and on the interactions between policy makers and rural women affected by the market. Section 4 looks at changes in the gender composition of the agricultural labour force, or the emergence of the phenomenon "feminisation of agriculture" in parts of rural China in recent years. It probes the policy effects on rural out-migration, which has lain behind this phenomenon, and analyses the double-edged implications of the market for women.

Chapter 12 looks at the aspects specifically affecting women's lives, such as reproduction, marriage, education and employment, as well as the complicated interactions between and among them. Sections 1 and 2 examine continuities and changes in reproductive culture and matrimonial practices. They analyse how government legislation and relevant social policies have influenced, or been shaped by the existing social institutions and prevailing customary practices and norms. Section 3 discusses the interplay between the more recent availability of women's alternative employment opportunities and their education, including both parental attitudes towards daughters' education and women's own perceptions of the "usefulness" of education in relation to their empowerment. It also discusses the

subtle and intricate interactions between female employment, education and the shifting patterns of post-nuptial residence arrangements. Section 4 analyses the strengths and weaknesses of the Women's Federation, as an aspect and manifestation of the changing relationships between the state and women, in representing women to fight for their rights and interests.

Chapter 13 elaborates continuity and change in gender relations affected by official legislation and relevant social policies in rural society in general and the village community in particular. The sections of the chapter reveal contradictions and inconsistencies contained in the central and local policies with respect to gender equality and equity in allocating resources, benefits and rights. They illustrate how such factors, combined with the entrenched traditional concepts, and customary laws, as well as assignments of duties and rights, have contributed to the marked disparity between legislation and reality in areas of inheritance, as well as women's political participation and representation. They analyse the operation of sexual politics in both the private and public domains, and reveal a pattern of women's lack of real power in both spheres. These sections also look into the ways in which gender power asymmetries filter into policy processes disadvantaging rural women and female cadres.

Chapter 14 moves away from the village to the city and presents the experiences of rural women in the more recent wave of rural-urban migration, particularly their experiences in the urban labour market. It explores the factors and characteristics surrounding female rural out-migration, analyses the development of individualistic orientation in female migrant workers, and discusses changes in the traditional gender expectations in relation to rural women's new experiences. Unlike some academic researches on female rural-urban migration in the developing world, which tend to construe rural women as victims of industrialisation and urbanisation,¹⁴⁰ my research of the female migrants in Chinese towns concentrates on the actions and role taken by rural women, in their pursuit of individual economic interests, in contesting and eroding the spatial and socio-economic boundaries structurally (the urban-rural dichotomy) and culturally (the traditional beliefs in female appropriateness) defined for them. This chapter also examines the inadequate role of the state in market regulation and labour, particularly female migrant labour protection during the

economic transition. The meanings of this, together with the existing institutional barrier of rural-urban dualism, to rural women's further status advancement are then discussed.

Extra institutional constraints placed on rural women in both the labour market and the family expressed in either the continued or changed patterns of the sexual division of labour are elaborated in chapter 15. Finally, chapter 16 synthesises the findings of the research as discussed in earlier chapters and draws general conclusions against a broad backdrop of international scholarship in the field of gender and rural development in China.

CHAPTER 2 METHODOLOGY AND SOURCES

2-1 Structure of the Thesis and Data Sources

The body of the thesis falls into three major parts with each being devoted to a particular historical period: the GLF, the GPCR and the post-Mao reform, with the specific methods of inquiry applied varying according to the period concerned.

Research Methods and Sources for Parts I and II

Parts I and II, which reflect on and assess, respectively, the earlier periods of the GLF and the GPCR, involve largely systematic analyses based on a variety of primary and secondary unofficial sources, including retrospections of the female interviewees during fieldwork, autobiographies and memoirs as a kind of historical testimony, and personal experiences of my female acquaintances. Some recently published official sources, such as government statistics like the censuses,¹ and researches by Western social scientists based on interviews with Chinese emigrants outside the country during the GPCR are also utilised.

In more recent years, scholars have noted that the virtual impossibility for Western social scientists to carry out empirical research in China during the Mao era has resulted in studies on Chinese women for the period being heavily reliant on official sources.² It has become widely recognised, however, that the official documentation of events and the rhetoric of the time, particularly during the periods of the GLF and the GPCR, was a far cry from what happened in reality.³ The use of the above sources in my analysis and evaluation of the Mao era, therefore, is to avoid the pitfalls of depending on the official documents of the time, which may lead to interpretations of events analogous to the government accounts and rhetoric.

One point that should be noted here is the limit placed by the above-mentioned sources on the assessment of the situation of rural women for the GPCR period. I have realised during the course of the research that the available non-official sources, especially the biographical and autobiographical accounts, are mainly concerned with urban women. This is likely because the urban-based elite and the better endowed urbanites have been more articulate in recording and recollecting their feelings and experiences of the period. In view of this limitation, my discussions on the gender implications of the GPCR have included urban as well as rural women.

There are several other reasons for this. One is the fact, which has been pointed out by many Chinese and Western academics, that there was little change in the basic economic and political thinking and structures between the two periods of the GLF and the GPCR. For example, measures and approaches attempted during the GLF, such as increased level of collective accounting and distribution, elimination of, or strict restrictions on, private economic activities, greater constraints on non-state market and the stress on regional and local self-sufficiency, featured in the rural policies of both the GLF and the GPCR.⁴ As the effects of these policies on women are dealt with in part I, which is devoted to agricultural collectivisation, there is no need to discuss them again in relation to the later period of the GPCR.

On the other hand, the political aspects of the GPCR movement, such as the heightened class struggle campaigns, the personality cult, as well as the ideological purification and sexual asceticism, were most conspicuous during the period and hence distinguished the GPCR from other periods of the People's Republic. These aspects, moreover, created similar repercussions in both rural and urban areas, including unbridled violence, widespread destruction, political scapegoating and sexual repression.⁵ Based on all the above considerations, my analysis of the GPCR's effects on women will not differentiate them in light of the structural urban-rural dualism. It will focus on the political and cultural spheres where there was less urban-rural difference with respect to policy outcomes than the economic aspect in which the urban-rural divide was more pronounced.

Sources for Part III

Part III of the thesis, that is, the investigation into the current reform period is based mainly on fieldwork, during which firsthand information and data were gathered through interviews and observations, and other primary sources, such as related policy documents and statistics at various levels were systematically collected. In addition, the fact that I am a native speaker of Chinese with useful contacts in China in political institutions and academic circles made it possible for me to be granted access to some relevant research findings and data, which had not been made generally available hitherto. One example of such information is the result of a research on female illiteracy in rural areas around Tianjin carried out by the city's Women's Federation.⁶ The data showed serious gender asymmetry and thus

Methodological Foundation of the Research

Broadly speaking, the research strategy was based on the grounded theory developed by Glaser and Strauss, who have argued that concepts and theories in social sciences must be solidly “grounded” in empirical reality represented by firsthand information and data gathered in fieldwork.⁷ In light of this understanding, they have viewed the process of social research as inductive, where the social investigator starts his or her research with an open mind. The selection of people, social events and phenomena, etc., for investigation should reflect this developing and unfolding nature of the inductive process, and thus cannot be predicted at the start. Themes, patterns or theories should emerge and develop in the course of the study rather than being predetermined by hypotheses or existing theoretical frameworks.⁸ Data and information gathered in the field, however, are not to be presented “as found”, i.e. in a purely descriptive manner. Researchers situated in this methodological tradition are expected to deal with their data in an analytical, interpretative way through careful organisation and handling, e.g. coding and making sense, of the fieldwork materials. Theories induced during an interactive process of data gathering and analysis in the grounded theory approach can be at various levels: from substantive explanations to higher-level “general” theory. Systematic analysis of data and information collected intensively in the field is guided by the researcher’s central interest in identifying patterns of actions and interactions between and among a variety of social actors and institutions, as well as in discovering processes of reciprocal change, or continuity.⁹

The methodology used in the study, accordingly, falls into the category of qualitative research, and adopts an observational, interactive and contextual approach. This approach is to enable Chinese rural women to represent themselves and to express their own understanding of and viewpoints on government policies, particularly the more recent economic, social and legal changes, as well as their repercussions affecting a broad range of the key aspects of women’s lives. In this way, it is expected that rural women’s experiences in terms of both the constraints imposed by the patriarchal structure on their lives and women’s own agency role in questioning and contesting the existing arrangements will emerge from the interviews in all their complex reality. However, my research strategy is different from the descriptive, ethnographic approach employed most often by anthropologists, in that it is a conscious collecting of theoretically relevant data, rather than a recording of the

fullest observational details of the social group under scrutiny. Interpretation, analysis and making sense of the fieldwork materials informed by feminist conceptualisations of the gendered aspects of social processes and power relations have characterised the interactive processes of data collection and analysis of my research. In addition, my research adopts the “grounded theory” approach in its loose sense, as broadly discussed by Denscombe.¹⁰ Instead of making efforts to produce or develop theoretical insights into grand theories, the study is geared to shedding light on context-bound interactions and relationships, as well as adding knowledge to localised explanations and interpretations of the social world based on the immediate fieldwork evidence.

2-3 Research Design

This aspect of the study involves such research techniques as observations and in-depth interviews, as well as intensive collection of original documents of different kinds, such as local statistics of the village council and *xiang* government, and internal documents of governmental or semi-governmental organisations. The adoption of such instruments enabled me to reconstruct a political and social reality as perceived by women themselves. The focus of this study determined that rural women were the principal actors in the interviews. They were then classified into two main groups: village women and female migrants in urban areas. This led to the decision to carry out fieldwork in two separate sites: a village and a city. In addition to this main body of interviewees, village and city government officials were interviewed in order to grasp the local conditions and gather information on development and policy-related issues at various levels. Moreover, to collect relevant data about official policies and policy changes on specific issues concerning women, such as political recruitment of women and family planning, female officials and women entrepreneurs working in, or affiliated to the Women’s Federation, female scholars in women’s studies and its related fields, e.g. demography, family and marriage research, were also interviewed.

The decisions on who would be interviewed and where the interviews would take place were made on the basis of the research problem and purpose elaborated before, as well as of my knowledge about the more recent development and changes in rural women’s occupational structure and experiences. Such knowledge may be deemed as

that of an insider's, as it is based on the broadly shared cultural and gender identities as well as situated experiences between me as a native researcher and the women informants. It was also informed by Chinese newspapers, popular magazines and academic journals including, among others, *Renmin Ribao (People's Daily)*, *Zhongguo Funü (Chinese Women)*, *Zhongguo Qingnian (Chinese Youth)*, and *Funü Yanjiu Luncong (Collection of Women's Studies)*. The specific selections of the people and the locations took into account the general accessibility of the actors and their settings, the probability of their possession of the properties, processes and interactions which were most relevant to the study, as well as the available resources for the fieldwork.

Sampling Principles and Interviewing Methods

The selection of the women informants followed the qualitative principle of "non-probability sampling", where random or representative sampling of a large size was not given primary consideration.¹¹ This was because my study's major concern was not with the generalisability of the research findings to a wider universe, but with the exploration of the heterogeneous patterns and problems that took place in the specific context under investigation. My sampling method falls into the sub-category known as "judgement or opportunistic sampling", by which the informants are selected for interview in accordance with a set of criteria determined by the investigator to meet his/her research needs.¹² The criteria may include, among others, age, sex, occupation, marital status, education and household income levels, etc. In "judgement or opportunistic sampling", replication is difficult, if not impossible, since the samples are composed of individuals who are available for interviewing and willing to co-operate with the researcher at the time.

The size of the main samples for interviewing is relatively small: 15 village women and 10 female migrant workers in urban areas. The non-randomly selected small size, though non-representative by quantitative standards, is in keeping with the aims and parameters of the qualitative approach, particularly feminist methodology, which sets depth, details and insights into the intricacies of the gendered social reality and processes, and female experiences as its priorities.¹³ It is worth noting as well that the size of the interview samples was not pre-determined at the outset of the research. Rather, guided by the grounded theory, especially its concept of "theoretical

saturation”, and based on the qualitative understanding of social research as a process of discovering an unfolding reality, the study made the decision in the field. The sampling ceased for each group or sub-group of the women informants when no fresh data were added to the already obtained information on the categories and themes.¹⁴

Interviews with rural women were conducted on a face-to-face basis in repeated individual sessions of three to four hours. Some group sessions took place with village officials. Interviews with other civil servants, such as women officials, and female researchers, were unstructured in situations resembling natural conversations. Interviews with the rural women were semi-structured, in that they were based on questionnaires dominated by open-ended questions. Unlike structured interviews with standardised schedules in terms of questions and answers, my interviews allowed the informants to describe events, give retrospections, relate processes and experiences, and express widely their perceptions and opinions on topics and issues which were significant to their lives and relevant to the research. The information and data gathered this way also enabled me to adopt a historically dynamic, contextualised approach, linking the micro aspects of women’s daily experiences, intra-household, intra-kinship power relations with meso and macro changes in legislation and state policies, as well as broader social change. This type of interviewing shares many aspects with unstructured interviews, but differs from the latter in that the procedure of labelling and coding the questions is moved up to the preparatory stage prior to or during the fieldwork.¹⁵ In my research basic questions for interviewing village women were prepared before I set out for fieldwork in China, whereas questions for interviewing female migrant workers were worked out while I was in the field.

Although many of the interview questions were pre-categorised for the study, this did not ossify the data gathering process, as sufficient flexibility was exercised in terms of the questions asked, the order of the questions within or between categories, and the extensiveness of the answers. One example of such flexibility is the variations of the same questions asked to women interviewees in different age groups. To younger women who did not have reproductive experiences, the question “Did you ever encounter any discrimination when you gave birth to girls?” changed into whether their mothers had ever had such experiences. In addition, the pre-

categorised questions in the semi-structured interviewing functioned as prompts and guides in the course of the interviews, which I found very helpful to enable the women informants to articulate their feelings, experiences and perceptions. An extra advantage of this type of interviews was its time-sensitivity and efficiency: as a feminist social researcher, I was well aware of women's double roles, which often left the women interviewees a very tight time-budget.

During the interviews, I used the note-taking technique to record observations and interview data. Indeed, as a trained journalist, I did this with facility. Although I carried a portable cassette recorder with me for fieldwork, I finally decided to put it away and rely on my mind and pen alone on consideration of several other factors that may affect the outcomes of the interviews and quality of the interview data. Because of China's recent political history, using a tape recorder to record interview data would make the informants nervous. Relying on the alternative method of note-taking combined with the prior exposition of the ethical principle of retaining the informants' anonymity, therefore, would help to create a more relaxed atmosphere and establish a relationship of mutual trust. Moreover, the adoption of this technique would dispel my fears of possible mechanical or technical failure of the recorder and the consequent loss of important interview data.

Construction of the Questionnaires

Existing international feminist scholarship on gender and development, particularly on women's conditions and gender relations as related to cultural traditions or affected by government policies, informed and guided the construction of the questionnaires to be used in the fieldwork.¹⁶ The inclusion of the categories and themes in the questionnaires was also helped by my firsthand knowledge about those aspects unique to the Chinese culture, which had important bearings on Chinese women's position in the family and society. For instance, in rural China, free choice of marriage partners as opposed to arranged marriage, daughters' equal inheritance rights as related to post-nuptial residence arrangements and parental attitudes towards girls' education remain important gender issues nowadays, in contrast to industrialised countries, where discourse on gender issues seems to have passed the stage of fighting for women's freedom and equality in these aspects.

It is recognised that any study on women will involve multiple dimensions intersecting different academic fields and disciplines. My research is not an exception: the data collection process employed interdisciplinary concepts and notions, such as women's basic needs, life chances and alternatives, liberty and mobility, and female status enhancement and empowerment.

Under these broader concepts, interviews with village women focused on the following themes and categories: health and well-being; livelihood and employment; earning and equal pay; education and legal and political expression; decision-making power within the family; sexual freedom and reproduction; the gender division of labour inside and outside the household; and women's own views on the advantages and disadvantages of the Mao and post-Mao development paradigms from the perspective of women's rights and interests. Each of these categories and themes was then broken down into sub-categories and their dimensions. For example, the education, and legal and political expression of women embraced many related aspects, such as parental attitudes towards daughters' education, women's property and inheritance rights, and female political participation and representation. Questions designed for interviewing female migrants in the city covered such categories as economic independence; living and working conditions; education and training; pay and labour market experiences; love and marriage; and influence of urban life.¹⁷

Selection of Fieldwork Settings and Interviewees

The selection of the fieldwork site did not go through the formalities usually required by the Chinese government for foreign academics conducting fieldwork in China. This was largely owing to the advantages, as a native Chinese myself, that I spoke the language and thus did not need an interpreter, and that I had inside knowledge about how the Chinese systems worked. It followed that I was able to form, in accord with circumstances, proper strategies to move around freely and overcome successfully obstacles and difficulties encountered in the research process, in order to guarantee the quality of data and achieve the research goals. Another consideration for selecting the field site independently was that I would prefer retaining research autonomy rather than carrying out research under the arrangements made by the authorities, despite that the latter was recommended by my social scientist friends in

Beijing as a "safer" option in view of the political atmosphere around June in the early to mid-1990s. Although it is not uncommon nowadays for foreign academics to select research sites after undergoing officially required procedures, the process, nevertheless, tends to elicit suspicions of the researcher being positioned in "showcases", a phenomenon that was familiar to many foreign visitors and academics during the Mao era, or being controlled by the government. My fieldwork approach utilised the many direct and indirect ties that I had in both academic institutions and the local government. The following episode, which occurred while I was trying to select the field site, illustrates the above points.

To choose a village for fieldwork, I first visited the City Women's Federation in Tianjin, where I was received by the head of its General Office, Ms. Cheng Lanshu. We had a brief conversation, and I soon realised that Ms. Cheng, as "fresh blood" injected to the organisation in the "invigoration" effort during the reform era, was open-minded, well-informed and well-connected in governmental, business and academic circles. I then told Ms. Cheng the purpose of my visit: I was based in a UK university, currently doing PhD research on the changing gender relations in China, and would like to find a village not too far from Tianjin to do fieldwork. I would also like to interview personnel in the Women's Federation, and gather data and information on the situation of women in rural areas and female migrants in the city. Ms. Cheng went upstairs to make arrangements for me to meet the relevant personnel. She then led me to the Department of Urban and Rural Work on the second floor, and introduced me to its head and deputy head. As both were in the middle of a meeting, Cheng left me in the Department's reference library. Thanks to Cheng's introduction, I was allowed to browse the collection of the references therein and make enquiries to the librarian.

While I was waiting for a formal meeting with the Departmental heads, I looked at the references and marked those which I identified as relevant to my research project. I then requested to make a copy of the selected references. However, the librarian said that the photocopier of the Women's Federation had been out of order for a couple of days, and it was impossible for me to make a copy there. I, therefore, asked whether I could borrow the useful references and make a copy outside.

The librarian, out of consideration of the safety of their materials, then asked me for a letter of introduction (*jieshaoxin*) from my work unit (*danwei*). I did not possess such a letter since I was not based in an academic institution in China. However, I had a letter obtained from the Education Section of the China Embassy in London indicating that I was an “overseas Chinese student” (*liuxuesheng*) who was on a research trip to China. I presented that letter and explained the situation to the librarian. As I feared, things went wrong from that moment. Immediately the librarian’s attitudes changed: from being trusting and helpful to interrogative and suspicious. Obviously, until then she had assumed that I were a researcher based in a Chinese academic institution, and, accordingly, treated me as an “insider” (*zijiren*). On learning my real identity, the librarian rushed to report this “important discovery” to the Departmental heads. “We must discuss this,” she said to me on her return, referring to my request for photocopying their materials. By then, I realised that I would never be able to get the materials out. While the bureaucratic process of “discussing the matter” was going on, I noted down as quickly as possible the most relevant information and data in my notebook. By the time when the Departmental heads finished their meeting and “discussion”, I had already succeeded in completing my job.

This was the first lesson that I learnt from my interactions with the officialdom as a perceived “outsider”. When I mentioned this to Ms. Cheng in the General Office, she laughed, suggesting that I be more flexible in the future with respect to presenting myself to Chinese officials and even ordinary people. Not until then did I realise that Cheng deliberately avoided mentioning my real identity to the heads of the Department of Urban and Rural Work when she introduced me to them. Indeed, the Chinese have the saying *jiachou buke waiyang*, which means that domestic shame should not be exposed to non-family members, or outsiders. Parts of the data that I was interested to obtain were related to a survey conducted by the Tianjin City Women’s Federation, which indicated a significant gender discrepancy in educational attainment among the rural population inhabiting the city outskirts. This was obviously deemed as “*jiachou*”, or domestic “dirty linen”, which must not be seen by “non-family members”.

This experience taught me that in order to gather genuinely valuable and valid information and data in fieldwork, I needed to, according to circumstances, present

myself as an "insider". In my later contacts with local officials and women as well as men at the grassroots level, who were often down-to-earth ordinary people and never asked me for a formal identification, I simply introduced myself as a researcher from either Beijing or the City Women's Federation of Tianjin, working on a research project on the changing positions of rural women.

Despite the non-co-operative attitudes of the Department of Urban and Rural Work, I managed to get in touch with the Women's Federation in Jixian County with the help of Ms. Cheng. Initially, I was offered two options for the first part of the fieldwork, both are located in the suburbs of Tianjin city, and thus not too far away. One was Baodi County and the other Jixian County. Cheng kindly informed me that some staff from the city's Women's Federation planned to visit Baodi in a couple of days and thus would be able to give me a lift if I chose Baodi as the field setting. This, of course, would be of some help in consideration of my limited research budget. However, I was also aware that Baodi was the hometown, hence the virtual constituency of Mr. Li Ruihuan, former mayor of Tianjin and currently serving as the Chairman of China's People's Congress (the Chinese Parliament). I suspected that the uniquely close connection of Baodi with a senior official in the central government would render it atypical in terms of the socio-economic development level. Jixian, in contrast, was relatively disadvantaged in terms of natural endowment and general income levels. According to local officials, it has been put under the administration of the Tianjin Municipal government since 1973. In this County, those classified as poor (*pinkun renkou*) (in a relative sense) and living in the disadvantaged mountainous areas with poor-quality land or reservoir areas with limited arable land (*shanqu, kuqu renkou*) accounted for more than half of its total population. Furthermore, township and village enterprises, an important indicator of the rural development level, which considerably affected the employment opportunities and income of local people, started relatively late compared with other nearby counties. Pondering over the different features of the two counties, I finally selected Jixian as the fieldwork setting.

When I met the officials in the county's Women's Federation, I explained the purpose of my visit and the criteria of the village for fieldwork: it should be in the middle to lower middle range of the development and income level. The staff of the county's Women's Federation were very helpful as the well-connected Ms. Cheng in

the City Women's Federation had informed them in advance of my visit as well as, very roughly, research task. Through these women, I contacted Lüzhuangzi Xiang (Township) and finally identified a village for fieldwork.

Dongdatun Village was selected as the location for interviewing rural women. It was a fairly big village with a population of more than 1,300.¹⁸ The village was a brigade during the collectivisation period from the late 1950s till the late 1970s. Nowadays, it is among the 22 villages in varied sizes under the administration of Lüzhuangzi Xiang, the seat of a former people's commune. The township is located at a similar distance (about 120 km) to both Beijing and Tianjin. Though administratively within Jixian County, it is under the broad jurisdiction of the Tianjin municipal government. The *per capita* income of the village was 993 *yuan* in 1992, which ranked it medium as against the Xiang's average of 1,000 *yuan*,¹⁹ but upper-middle compared with the national average of 784 *yuan* for the same year.²⁰

In spite of its relatively high income level, Dongdatun was not considered particularly advantageous in resource endowment. It lies about 2 km to the south-east of a chain of hills, and its farmland becomes hilly as it extends in that direction. Furthermore, during the first half of the 1980s, a reservoir was built near Dongdatun in order to solve the problem of drinking water for Tianjin. According to the village officials, the reservoir submerged some 200 *mu* of Dongdatun's fertile land (1 *mu* = 1/15 hectare), about one third of its total arable land. This further exacerbated the existing problem of land shortage, reducing its arable land to as little as 0.5 *mu* per person in 1992 (a total of 651 *mu* of farmland divided by the village's population of 1,309).²¹

Because of its topographical features and its land loss owing to the infrastructure project benefiting Tianjin City, also as a result of negotiations and bargaining between the local, county and Tianjin municipal authorities, the village was classified as a semi-mountainous, reservoir area. Such a categorisation rendered the village entitled to special treatment from the municipal government of Tianjin. For instance, the village was exempted from agricultural tax. In other words, villagers in Dongdatun did not have to sign contracts with the state, by which a certain quota of grain should be sold to the state at the officially set prices.

For the past decade and more, Dongdatun's economic and social landscapes have been considerably reshaped by post-Mao reforms. The economy of the village was characterised by a marked diversification of rural livelihoods. This was manifested in the rapid growth of rural industry, a diversification of ownership structure and development of sidelines. In the vicinity of the village, there were three township-owned garment factories and a county-owned textile factory. At the village level, there were a dozen collective enterprises and privately owned small-scale businesses, such as a brickyard, a quarry, several small-scale factories, a construction contract team, and six groceries. There were more than 20 specialised households engaging in poultry breeding, pisciculture and contracting orchards, and over 40 households doing local or long-distance transportation business. Yet another 10 or so households were involved in commerce and trade. Most sideline production was developed or expanded in line with the specific local conditions. For instance, as a significant proportion of its land was hilly or full of gullies and ridges, the village planned and developed new orchards, and then contracted them out to individual households after decollectivisation, which provided villagers with alternative income-generating channels. The construction of the reservoir in the early 1980s further exacerbated the already adverse land-person ratio in the village. However, the development of all these off-farm and specialised economic activities significantly reduced the villagers' dependence on land for a living.

Livelihood diversification in the form of increasing rural industrial and off-farm economic activities has been a major development and characteristic of the post-Mao period, and Dongdatun typically displayed this trend. Meanwhile, the village's physical proximity to China's two large cities, i.e. Tianjin and Beijing, may have rendered it less typical in terms of the socio-economic development levels, which undoubtedly affected many aspects of women's lives and their perceptions of policies and policy shifts. However, this was, more or less, balanced by the fact that the average income and development level of Dongdatun was medium in the regional and local settings within the vastly diverse national context. More importantly, my research does not intend to generalise rural China as a whole, but to contribute to the aggregate knowledge about development policies and their implications for gender relations engendered by researches carried out in a wide range of very different settings.

The 15 village women interviewed were chosen from different marital status categories (single, married, divorced, widowed), three age groups (≤ 25 , 26-45, ≥ 46), and households at varied income levels (low, medium, high). It should be noted that there was no set of objective criteria for judging household income levels, and the villagers were reluctant to give precise figures regarding the income of the individual family members for both privacy and tax considerations. As a result, the actual selection of the women interviewees was based on either initial recommendations by the village women's representative, who was familiar with the local circumstances, or later the judgement of the women informants themselves when I started looking for women interviewees independently. The above set of the sampling criteria were determined out of life-cycle considerations for the village women. They were also intended to trace changes in women's lives as affected by different state development policies over time, and to analyse policy outcomes differentiated by gender, age, marital status, social stratification, etc. However, no special attempt was made to find women in particularly destitute situations for interviewing. This was largely due to the fact that from my daily contact with the villagers, I understood that although there were inequalities, polarisation of wealth was not a prominent issue in Dongdatun, which may be attributable to its collective legacy as well as local political economy. Thus, the majority of households in the village were in the medium range in terms of income, and few actually living in destitution. This characteristic of the interview sample, i.e., women informants were selected from a range of lower-middle to upper-middle income households, had the advantage of being able to reflect the outlooks and perceptions of the majority of the village women. In the meantime, it may not catch the idiosyncrasies of village women's lives, including those of the most successful or those of the especially poor.

The village women representative, Li Shuying, was the first person whom I contacted. Before carrying out the selection and interviewing, I explained to Mrs. Li in plain language my sampling criteria, and was then introduced to my first interviewee, 62-year-old Di Cuiping. On our arrival at Mrs. Di's house, she was busily attending chickens in her courtyard. It was a relatively big courtyard with chicken sheds standing on both left- and right-hand sides. Mrs. Li greeted Mrs. Di and said, "Comrade Zhang (referring to me) from Tianjin Women's Federation wants to talk with you about village women's status."²² "No, no, I don't know what to say.

I haven't got any education, and you'd better find somebody else," Mrs. Di declined immediately. I hastened to explain to her that the questions were quite simple and easy to answer, and it would not take her a too long time. I also assured her of the confidentiality of our conversation. This, together with Mrs. Li's encouragement, finally persuaded Mrs. Di to go along with the interview.

From experiences like this, I was able to tell that Mrs. Li, as a local government official,²³ did not particularly pick the informants for me based on any special characteristics such as exceptionally active party membership or connections to village officials. This guaranteed that data and information obtained from the interviews were natural and reliable. Nonetheless, I was wary of the presence, or even an introduction by Mrs. Li as a medium to the female informants, which might affect their responses to my questions in one way or another due to her special position as a woman cadre. To overcome this potential limitation, as well as in consideration of Mrs. Li's particularly busy daily schedule, I was determined to familiarise myself with the environment as soon as possible, so that I could find the women interviewees on my own.

As I became more familiar with the village surroundings, I located the rest of the women interviewees by walking into different courtyards or small businesses in the village, and asking the women there for consent and co-operation. A number of the female informants as well as other villagers whom I met showed curiosity about my research. A question often asked was, "What's the use of your research?" Some of them expressed disagreement with official policies at the national or local level, or reported practices or events that they thought as unfair or adversely affecting their lives, in a hope that I would raise the issue to the upper level authority and the problems could be effectively addressed. I did my best to help by passing on the messages, especially about events perceived by the village women as inflicting upon their interests, to officials in the City Women's Federation in Tianjin. However, whether my "intervention" actually made any difference afterwards was beyond my knowledge.

The northern city of Tianjin was chosen for interviewing the female migrants. The selection of the city took into consideration such factors as the industrial and labour market characteristics, that is, whether the city had an expanding tertiary industry

and attracted overseas investment. These characteristics determine the composition and orientation of the urban industry, and hence have an important bearing on whether there are plenty of employment opportunities so as to attract large numbers of rural women from densely populated agricultural provinces in the hinterland. In Tianjin, the tertiary sector has been expanding rapidly since the early 1980s and the economic development zone in its Tanggu District along the Bohai Bay has absorbed hundreds of millions of *yuan* of overseas investments during the recent decade.

Among the 10 female migrant interviewees, five worked in the city proper in either domestic or catering services, the other five were contract workers employed by enterprises with sole foreign investment in Tanggu District. I gained access to these women via different channels. For the first sub-group, I found some of them through relatives who were aware of rural girls working in domestic service in their neighbourhood. I located some others through the service companies affiliated to Tianjin Women's Federation, which often functioned as a contact point for rural girls to find jobs in domestic service in the city. I found the girls working in small restaurants or other private businesses along busy market streets in Tianjin. For the second sub-group, some were found through my contacts in business in Tanggu Economic Development Zone. I found others on weekends outside some company dormitories or near public recreational places, such as cinemas and parks, where I deliberately went to look for potential interviewees.

Although the initial idea was to choose women migrant informants from varied cohorts and with different marital status, this idea had to be dropped when I discovered that the female migrant workers in the city were predominantly young and unmarried. In the end, the women interviewees in this category turned out to be all in their late teens or early 20's, single, and had worked in the city for varying lengths of time, from a few months to a few years.

It should be noted that the research methods used in my study share the inherent weaknesses of the qualitative approach as identified by many research methodologists – the limits in its representativeness and generalisability.²⁴ Such weaknesses are partly rectified by the use of other, more broad-based sources including the more recent official government documents and statistics, newspapers, and relevant research findings on the regional and national levels. This type of data is

used as well to both compare with and double-check the validity of the locally collected, detailed information. The utilisation of such supplementary data, furthermore, represents an effort to bring in a wider social context, in which the face-to-face interactions of the field research occurred, and to make links between this micro study and its macro implications.

It is worth noting as well that my study shares the basic feature of any social investigation, where interpretations of the data gathered in fieldwork are bound up with the "self" of the researcher, especially when qualitative research methods are applied. The researcher, in his/her attempt to make sense of the social world under investigation, is embedded in his/her own culture and tradition, as well as bearing a set of values and beliefs, and employs notions engendered in his/her own social world. In this sense, no social scientist can claim that his/her research has been conducted from a vantage point of entire neutrality and objectivity.²⁵ As discussed earlier, however, compared with a non-indigenous academic, I had the advantage of transcending a potential "insider"/"outsider" dualism in conducting firsthand research. On the other hand, my identity as an educated, Western-trained urban intellectual, which was undoubtedly at a distance to that of the rural women informants, some of whom were illiterate or semi-literate, might influence the whole process of the research. It follows that my personal background, experiences and beliefs might have shaped the meanings that I have given to the events, situations and life stories of the women interviewees. I acknowledge this inevitable "bias" in my research. Hence the findings drawn from the study are more cautious and tentative, and serve only as a beginning rather than an end of possibly more systematic, larger-scale future research projects.

PART I COLLECTIVISATION IN RETROSPECT: A RE-THINKING OF ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR RURAL WOMEN

As shown in the Introduction, despite the many limitations pointed out by Western feminist scholars, China's agricultural collectivisation was viewed, by and large, rather favourably in international academia with respect to its effects on gender relations in rural China. This understanding, as indicated before, was initiated in the late 1950s by the pioneering study of Prof. C. K. Yang.¹ Yang's functional analysis of the operations of rural collectives versus the traditional household economy, and the speculated changes in women's roles and labour following collectivisation exerted considerable influence over feminist outlook on the relationship between collectivisation and women's status in rural China. As a Chinese woman myself, however, I have sensed a gap between this academic stance and the perceptions of Chinese women, which was expressed, for instance, in rural women's preference for decollectivisation found during my fieldwork. If rural women had benefited from collectivisation in the main, why did they prefer decollectivisation? Were they under the spell of "false consciousness", or "social conditioning", which had blinded them from seeing their own interests? Or else there could be alternative explanations?

Those questions aroused my intellectual curiosity and led to this tentative attempt to find possible answers. In the process of examining the existing literature on agricultural collectivisation, I found that the detrimental effects of collectivisation, including the GLF, on rural development have been discussed, especially in the reassessment of the Maoist development approach, in academic circles around the world since the early 1980s. However, this body of literature tends to be separate from that focusing on collectivisation and gender relations. This part of the research, therefore, tries to link the two bodies of scholarship and re-examine the relationship between agricultural collectivisation and rural women. In this part of the thesis, I first look at the process, objectives and consequences of rural collectivisation, which is followed by an attempt to analyse its impact on rural development in general, and rural women's lives and status in particular. I must admit that this effort represents only a moderate attempt to offer a partial explanation for the phenomenon observed in fieldwork and an alternative perspective, which goes beyond the relative gender relations (e.g. within the household) as affected by collectivisation, to bear on the existing scholarship on the topic.

3-1 Process of Collectivisation

China was largely an agrarian society when the People's Republic was founded in 1949. Its rural economy was based on family farming, and the majority of the peasant families made their living on the land. Land was then owned/leased by landlords/rich farmers, or worked on by peasants as small landholders. The CCP, guided by orthodox Marxism and convinced of the superiority of the Soviet-style collective agriculture, accordingly decided to restructure the Chinese economy on this model. Here ideological factors coincided with the perceived need to develop the country's industrial base as rapidly as possible, and the belief that this goal would be facilitated by a state-controlled agriculture. This view was reinforced further by the generally hostile international environment that the Chinese communist regime faced in the early 1950s, which was marked by such events as China's military confrontation with the United States in the Korean War and the US-led Western economic blockade.¹ However, as will be illustrated later in the chapter, emulating the Soviet model cost China dearly. It led to an economic catastrophe and crisis followed by stagnation and recession. In this sense, China acted in a way that defeated her own goals.

The whole process of China's state enforced rural collectivisation movement can be divided into the following three stages: (1) mutual-aid groups and elementary agricultural producers' co-operatives (1949-55); (2) higher co-operatives (1956-57); (3) people's communes and the GLF (1958).²

An early measure that the CCP took to consolidate its leadership and transform rural society was the 1949-52 land reform (*tudi gaige*). This was an effort to continue and spread throughout the country its land policy in the "liberated areas" prior to 1949 during the CCP-led peasant revolution for national power. With the land reform, land and property owned by the landlord class were confiscated, and then redistributed to the landless and land-short peasant families. In the course of this movement, a voluntary co-operative organisation called "mutual-aid group" (*huzhuzu*) started gaining popularity among the rural population. Such co-operatives pooled labour and productive means from three to five peasant families, who aided each other in production during busy seasons. The ownership and management of land and the

distribution of produce remained in the hands of the individual households. By 1952, about 40 percent of the rural families joined the mutual-aid groups.³

However, private ownership of land and other means of production was not regarded by the CCP as socialist. The leadership represented by Mao Zedong feared that this form of ownership threatened the achievements and egalitarian goals of the revolution. These fears lay behind the CCP's decision in 1953 to bring about "socialist transformation" in the countryside through expanding the relatively small "elementary producers' co-operatives" (*chujishe*), which were formed on the basis of mutual-aid groups, into larger "higher producers' co-operatives" (*gaojishe*). This virtually marked the end of the Chinese peasantry's spontaneous co-operative organisations. The direction of agricultural co-operation was afterwards increasingly dictated by an intensified official mobilisational approach.

Starting from late 1955, the co-operation campaign was brought into high gear. Within the single year of 1956, almost 88 percent of the total peasant households throughout the country were required to join the "higher agricultural producers' co-operatives". In just three months in 1958, the newly formed higher co-operatives, which had members representing about 96 percent of all the peasant families, were swept into even larger "people's communes" (*renmin gongshe*).⁴ With the elimination of other economic options realised through the state monopolisation of the market, every peasant household had to join the rural communes in the end.

The rash agricultural collectivisation completed in China within one year in 1956 was attained mainly through administrative means and moral and political pressure exerted upon the peasants who had been reluctant to give up their land together with its management and yield distribution rights. These were the typical means adopted by the mobilisational approach of the CCP. The approach also featured the concept of "class struggle" (*jieji douzheng*), whose abuses characterised all the officially manipulated political movements in the Mao era. The functions that this notion served, its operation within the Maoist political framework, and its ideological roots are issues which will be dealt with below (see part II of the thesis). Suffice it here to say that it was used by the state to tighten its political and ideological control over society, and to deter political opposition to unpopular policies. Furthermore, the

notion was a ready weapon for the state to find political scapegoats for whatever went wrong in society. "

Following the nation-wide collectivisation, China's leadership carried the themes of levelism, antipathy to the market and local and regional autarky to what proved to be disastrous extremes during the GLF of 1958-59. Dissent and opposition to the Maoist approach existed within and outside the Party. However, Mao managed to push the movement ahead through pressure, command, suppression of differing voices and purges. As a result, unrealistically high production targets were set for brigades and communes, which had to be met later through wild exaggerations and false reporting of output by cadres at various levels.⁵ The local authorities soon had to face the severe consequence of their own conduct: the state grain procurement target rose excessively in direct proportion to the reported production increase, leaving the peasants with insufficient food for the rest of the year.⁶

The GLF was characterised by a fanatical rhetoric that there was an early arrival of communism, hence the accomplishment of the transition from the principle of "distribution according to work" (*anlaofenpei*) to "distribution according to need" (*anxufenpei*). It was believed that everything should be communised, and people did not have to worry about the possibility of scarcity and shortage, since there was inexhaustibility in the communes' big pots. This afterwards came to be known as "blowing communist wind" (*gongchan feng*). In this atmosphere, food was provided "free" in the communes' dining halls.⁷ In the strenuous attempts to attain "simultaneous development" for varied localities,⁸ hundreds of thousands of small furnaces were built in urban and rural communities all over the country, only to produce large amount of useless, substandard pig iron.⁹

3-2 The Immediate and Long-term Effects of Collectivisation on Rural Development

What immediately followed the GLF was not the communist paradise, into which China was expected to jump, but three years of economic hardship from 1959-61. This period, which was officially defined as "three years of natural disasters" (*sannian ziran zaihai*), witnessed a severe famine across the country. Grain yield at the national level declined significantly by 12 percent in 1959, 26 percent in 1960, and 24 percent in 1961, compared with that of 1957. Not until 1965 did grain output

recover to the pre-GLF level. Outputs of other agricultural produce, such as cotton, edible oil and cattle in 1960 dived by a large margin of 12.5% -- 54% as against those of 1957 to the 1951 or even pre-1949 level.¹⁰ Starting from 1959, rural per capita food consumption decreased sharply. It was not until the late 1970s that it slightly surpassed the pre-collectivisation level of 1952.¹¹

The collapse of the rural economy engendered a serious famine and grave human loss in the country. It is estimated that during the "three hard years", between 16-30 million people died of starvation and its associated illness.¹² Malnutrition is estimated at 15 percent, with one to two hundred million people suffering from serious food shortage. The rural population bore the brunt of the disaster, and most deaths occurred to the peasants.¹³ (I shall demonstrate later that although it was a catastrophe for rural people in general, it was most devastating for rural women as daughters, wives and mothers).

The severe famine and the many deaths in association with it were officially attributed to the natural plagues, such as draughts and floods, and the hostility of and betrayal by the "bourgeois revisionist" Soviet leadership during the period.¹⁴ However, these were not the key factors.¹⁵ As shown above and will be analysed further, the grave human sufferings and losses during the three years were largely policy-induced. The severe food shortage and widespread starvation were direct consequences of the GLF, which encouraged irrationality and fanaticism, wasted resources, exhausted grain reserves and extracted maximum rural surplus for state-perceived priorities and goals.

The evaluation of the long-term effects of agricultural collectivisation involves examinations in two major aspects. One is the role played by agricultural collectivisation in the introduction and consolidation of the centrally-planned economy. The other is the implications of this economic structure for China's rural development.

The state's attempt to collectivise agriculture was accompanied by other measures at the macro level. Starting from late 1953, the state introduced a scheme called unified purchase and marketing of grain (*tonggou tongxiao*) in the countryside. Under the scheme, the state manipulated and monopolised rural markets through eliminating or

strictly restricting alternative non-state markets and private trade and commerce. In consequence, the peasants could only trade through the government-controlled "supply and marketing co-operatives" (*gongxiaoshe*). This greatly facilitated the formation of a price structure unfavourable to the agricultural sector, which came to be known as "price scissors" (*jiandaocha*). In this structure, the fluctuation of price was no longer determined by the demand and supply of the market. Rather, a distortion of price was institutionally maintained by the state, which purchased agricultural produce at artificially lowered prices and sold manufactured agricultural inputs at high prices.

The state unified procurement system, the "price scissors" structure and the state monopolisation of the market combined to serve several functions in economic central planning. They guaranteed a cheap supply of agricultural produce for urbanites as foodstuffs and for urban industry as raw materials. The state was thus able to maximise its extraction of rural surplus to increase capital accumulation for, and hence investment in urban heavy industry.¹⁶ However, these schemes and measures structurally limited peasant income and the rural collectives' ability to accumulate capital for local development. Furthermore, since rural sidelines competed with urban industries for agricultural raw materials, their development was discouraged and checked (I shall examine the implications of this policy for rural women in chapter 4). This further reduced the earning capacity of the peasants.

In 1955, the state took another action in the formation of its centrally planned economic structure -- the establishment of a household registration system (*hukou zhidu*).¹⁷ Similar to the other measures, this system was aimed at minimising consumption and increasing primary accumulation to feed the capital-intensive heavy industry.¹⁸ Under this system, state wages in the cities were kept at a minimum level, which was achieved through artificially maintaining low prices for consumer goods. This, however, could only be attained by tight control over rural-urban migration so that the numbers of both the waged labourers and the heavily subsidised goods could be retained at the lowest possible level.

To accomplish this objective, the household registration system stringently regulated, and thus, in the main, prevented, rural out-migration by allocating food and commodities of daily necessity through rationing, and by restricting residence in

urban areas to holders of special permits. Following the introduction of the system, rural people were no longer free to move. Furthermore, even if they managed to leave their villages, it would be very difficult for them to survive in the city, since they would have no way to obtain state-controlled food supply, housing and urban jobs. The working of this system not only confined China's problems of under-employment and poverty to the already underdeveloped countryside, but also effectively closed most channels of spatial and social mobility for rural people. It bound the peasants life-long to the land, rendering them subjugated to the power of the local officials as well as lineages (The effects of this measure on women will be discussed later).

As such, agricultural collectivisation, in combination with the above-mentioned macro measures, constituted a general development strategy that enabled the state to control rural economic activities and market through eliminating options and restricting choice, and thus to bring agriculture into the planned economic framework. It ensured the concentration of power over production management and produce disposition in the hands of the state through transferring decision-making power from over 120 million of individual peasant households to a much smaller number (some 23,600) of state-controlled communes.¹⁹ In addition, it served as an effective means for the state to tighten its control over society in the economic, political and ideological domains to a degree that no previous regimes had ever achieved.

Furthermore, collectivisation helped to crystallise and consolidate a centrally planned economic structure which greatly swayed to heavy industry concentrated in urban areas at the expense of agriculture. Seen in this light, the main purpose of collectivisation was for the state to mobilise and control rural resources, and to maximise the state extraction of rural surplus for its perceived priorities and objectives.²⁰

Instead of an officially promised and ideologically envisaged "common prosperity" and a narrowed urban-rural gap, the Maoist rural development strategy centring on agricultural collectivisation produced opposing effects in the long run. It led to an economically less diverse and socially static rural society. Low agricultural productivity,²¹ sluggishness in income and consumption of the peasants,²² and a

widened cleavage between urban and rural society²³ were the hallmarks of the entire collectivisation period.

Rural economic stagnation was partly due to the dampened peasants' incentives by collectivisation. The collective's remuneration mechanism -- the work-point payment scheme -- was based on a principle of levelling and age and sex differentiation,²⁴ and hence was a disincentive to commune members in general, and to women in particular. Age and sex were regarded as the yardsticks of an agricultural labourer's ability in production. For instance, on assumptions of the female's weaker physique, women were usually graded lower than men on the labour scale, and received fewer work-points no matter how well they did their jobs (I shall discuss in greater detail the scheme's effects on women in chapter 4). With communisation and the official emphasis on raising the level of accountancy from the smaller production team to the bigger brigade, the disconnection between individual efforts and labour rewards was further severed. This made the peasants hardly motivated to work for the collectives.

The peasants' loss of control over planning and management of agricultural production and produce disposition in the collective was another factor adversely affecting their incentives. The state determined both the grain procurement quotas, which often left the peasants with little surplus, and the kinds of crops that rural collectives must grow and their sown areas. This meant that production decisions were made in accordance with the central planners' perceived needs instead of local conditions and interests. As discussed earlier, the state also decided the terms of trade between industry and agriculture realised through the "price scissors" structure. All these factors combined to further devalue rural labour, making farming the least profitable, and hence most undesirable occupation in the country.

Agricultural collectivisation greatly hindered the pace of improvement in rural living standards and the overall development of the Chinese countryside. By the late 1970s, rural per capita income and living standards failed to exceed the level of the mid-1950s.²⁵ According to a World Bank estimate using a poverty line based on food intake requirements of 2,185 kilocalories per day, in 1979, more than two decades after collectivisation, the proportion of the rural population in poverty was 31 percent.²⁶ Educational and non-farm employment opportunities for rural people were rare. By the early 1980s, there were around 200 million illiterates and semi-literates

in the country, of whom the majority were rural dwellers.²⁷ (I shall demonstrate in part III that a serious sexual imbalance was interwoven with this salient urban-rural dichotomy in education) By the mid-1970s, rural unemployment and underemployment became serious problems.²⁸

A widened urban-rural gap in every aspect of life was registered for the period of collectivisation. The privileges enjoyed by the urbanites, such as the state subsidised supply of grain and other foodstuffs, heavily subsidised housing, state pensions for the retired, free health services and better education, were not available to the peasants. Further, the benefits guaranteed for the urbanites alone were sustained at the expense of rural people. As aforementioned, industrial growth in urban areas was attained through intensive capital investment by the state. However, guided by a combination of ideological dogmatism and central plans, which frequently ignored market relations, this growth was achieved at high production cost and huge waste,²⁹ and through deprivation and depletion of the countryside.

The household registration system structurally barred the peasants from leaving the land to seek urban employment and a better livelihood. The majority of China's population, the peasants, thereby were kept at the bottom of society characterised by an urban-rural hierarchy with very little opportunity to move upward via increasing their income prospect or changing their peasant identity. It is worth noting, however, that the household registration system in general prohibited most rural-urban migration, and to a lesser degree, rural-rural migration. In the meantime, one major exception to this rule was that women continued to be married out, but largely within rural areas, in conformity with the tradition of patrilocal marriage.³⁰

It is undeniable that some positive effects were produced during the collectivisation period. Conditions for agricultural production improved to some extent, particularly through infrastructure construction, such as building of reservoirs and irrigation networks,³¹ and the application of new technology in farming. The rate of accumulation for and investment in industry increased, leading to the establishment and strengthening of China's industrial base.³² However, such progress and improvement, as I have demonstrated, were attained at an unacceptable economic and human cost. A large proportion of this cost, furthermore, was unfairly borne by the overwhelming majority of the population -- the Chinese peasantry. In short,

collectivisation facilitated the institutionalisation of the systematic denial of the independent needs and interests of the peasants while sharpening the socio-economic boundaries between the urban and rural societies.

Furthermore, arbitrariness and commandism marked the mass mobilisation approach of collectivisation. This approach, by exerting political pressure and repressing political opposition, eliminated alternatives to national development, which might have been less costly but more efficient and popular. In the following chapter, I shall elaborate on the effects of the policy package of agricultural collectivisation on women's lives, and the theoretical and practical intricacies involved in understanding the benefits and costs of this official approach to women's liberation in China.

CHAPTER 4 COLLECTIVISATION AND RURAL WOMEN: THE GREAT LEAP FORWARD

As noted above, China's rural development strategy of the 1950-1970 decades, which focused on agricultural collectivisation, was fundamentally damaging to the Chinese countryside, and hence in collision with the interests of the rural population. Rural women have accounted for half of this population. Viewing in this light, the effects of agricultural collectivisation on rural women, at the macro-level, were self-evident. However, the development strategy had gender-specific implications, and the disadvantages experienced by men and women varied in view of the existing cultural values and sexual arrangements. To substantiate this point, I now discuss more specifically the policy implications for rural women.

4-1 Impact of the GLF and Its Induced Famine on Women's Lives

4-1-1 Practices and inventions pertinent to women during the GLF

As demonstrated in the Introduction, women were devalued and occupied a subjugated and degraded position in traditional Chinese society. Gradual industrialisation and the influx of modern Western ideas eroded the traditional society together with its customs and norms after the mid-nineteenth century. However, until the mid-twentieth century when the CCP took the national power, changes in such aspects as women's education, employment, political participation and family life were largely confined to the cities. And women, on the whole, were subordinate to men and oppressed within a patriarchal sexual order.

This picture of the female position in the family and society was believed to have been drastically changed following the victory of the Chinese communist revolution in 1949. Soon after its assumption of state power, the CCP promulgated a new marriage law, which illegalised many traditional practices justified by Confucian ideology, such as polygamy (*qiqiezhi*), female infanticide (*shanüying*), child brides (*tongyangxi*) and arranged marriages (*baoban hunyin*).¹ This represented a big step forward in terms of gender equality compared with the Republican period, although terms, such as "equality between the sexes" (*nanüpingdeng*) and "freedom of marriage" (*hunyin ziyou*) were to be increasingly interpreted in order to suit the needs of the Party-state officials.² Guided by Marxism, the CCP adopted the approach to the "woman question" of mobilising women into "social production", as

exclusion of women from socially productive labour is identified by Engels as one of the sources for women's oppression and subordination under capitalism.³

Starting from the mid-1950s, large numbers of rural women were mobilised into collectivised agricultural production in the course of collectivisation, which climaxed with the GLF. In analysing this phenomenon, it is worth noting that collectivisation was not, in the first place, designed for women's liberation or changes in rural women's traditional roles although repeated statements were made by the Chinese government then to the effect that agricultural collectivisation benefited women through "socialising" women's labour.⁴ Nor was it a spontaneous movement initiated and participated in voluntarily by women. Given the aims of collectivisation, women were mobilised to participate in the movement because their labour and the value it produced were needed in the process of producing more agricultural surplus in order to be extracted by the state for the expansion of urban heavy industry.

As aforementioned, the hastened collectivisation and the GLF in the late 1950s were launched in an extreme fanatical atmosphere. Accompanying the movement were numerous poorly planned projects, which were irrational, uneconomical and ecologically damaging. These included building "backyard furnaces" (*xiao gaolu*) to make iron and steel, which only produced substandard, useless product; water conservancy projects like dams, many of which collapsed under the earliest harsh weather condition following completion; and other capital construction projects, which were often undertaken through expropriation of rural labour.⁵ In this atmosphere, there was high pressure on women to take part in these projects alongside men.⁶ Women were also mobilised to fill the manpower shortage owing to these projects' extraction of male labour from farming. It is estimated that the proportion of all able-bodied women in agricultural production was, on average, 46 percent in 1950, this figure rose to 60 to 70 percent in 1957, and further to 90 percent in 1958 during the feverish period of mobilisational collectivisation and the GLF.⁷ In this period, women represented about one half of the agricultural labour force, and in certain areas where men were required for various construction projects, this figure went as high as 70 to 80 percent.⁸

Coupled with the marked increase in women's participation in communised production were new arrangements, such as "free" mess halls, nurseries and

kindergartens operated by the communes, to facilitate women's required participation. However, the finance needed to run such facilities came from the pocket of the local peasants. Given the fact that the ultimate purpose of the collectivisation programme was to facilitate the state's seizure of rural surplus, which took from the peasants much of the local resources necessary for running and maintaining such services, the brevity and unsustainability of the communes' attempts to "socialise housework" were hardly surprising. The collapse of such projects was accelerated further by the huge waste and grave mismanagement in running them, and with the extreme scarcity as a consequence of the failed Great Leap strategy. Those facilities were hastily created during the GLF in an atmosphere of fanaticism (e.g. the belief of an early arrival of communism) instead of a consideration of developing new institutions to encourage change in or redefine women's roles, alleviating women's workload, or being sensitive to women's needs. This, coupled with the fact that many of the domestic kitchen utensils had been taken away to melt for "small furnaces", and that the majority of women were mobilised to meet the manpower shortage caused by the official construction projects, prompted the communes to establish "free" dining halls and child-care services. Given this context, the collapse of these services seemed to be inevitable. The real cause of the failure of the communes' attempts to "socialise housework" was, in this perspective, the absurdity and mismanagement of the whole economic and social programme of the GLF itself.

It is worth noting, however, that the ideas of introducing collectively supported mechanisms to provide social services, such as childcare and communal mills, in Chinese villages experimented during the GLF have been picked up and realised to varied extent in many rural communities in the post-Mao years. This trend was observed as well during my fieldwork (see part III for more detailed discussions). However, unlike what had happened to them before, such services were sustained and expanded over the years. The contrast between the two eras in terms of attempts of socialising, at least, part of housework may suggest that the problems involved have not been with the ideas themselves. Rather, the distinctive state rural development strategies have rendered the outcomes drastically different.

4-1-2 Women's sufferings during a largely man-made disaster

The immediate effect of agricultural collectivisation and the GLF on women's lives in the context of a nation-wide severe famine and economic crisis can be imagined even without supportive statistical figures. There is little doubt that the material scarcity induced by the GLF hit hardest the most vulnerable groups, such as the sick, the elderly and the young. Women, as daughters, mothers and wives, who had been socially and culturally required to sacrifice themselves for other, particularly male, family members, were among those who bore the brunt of the disaster.

Demographic studies based on China's 1982 one-per-thousand fertility survey identify a massive fertility fluctuation around the famine period. It is estimated that compared with the pre-Leap level of birth rate, China experienced excessive birth decline, attributable to famine-related miscarriages, abortions or postponements, of about 25 million, or 90 percent of a normal year's births during 1958-62.⁹ As for the excess mortality, estimated figures for the country range from 16.5 million by Coale,¹⁰ 23 million by Peng¹¹ and 29.5 million by Ashton, *et al.*¹² These studies indicate as well that the rural population endured more excess mortality than the urban population.

Studies on the Chinese family, marriage and fertility show that son preference, the typical expression of a patriarchal culture, has continued to govern China's rural fertility behaviour for the past four decades.¹³ This reproductive culture lends high probability to the argument that when faced with extreme hardships of the late 1950s and early 1960s, rural households tended to give preferential treatment to male children and men. For instance, Chan, Madsen and Unger reported that when physical survival was threatened, as in the case of the post-GLF famine, some rural households even purposely let the new-born baby girls die.¹⁴ In their analysis of the birth and mortality rates of male and female infants in China based on modern Chinese census data, Coale and Banister discovered that "female children suffered more than male children from the increased mortality in the years of the great famine" in the wake of the GLF.¹⁵

In many literary writings, rural women are depicted as quietly enduring starvation, while leaving the limited food for their children, husbands, brothers or parents. One story carried in *Duzhe (Readers)* tells the experience of a man named Lao Wang,

who never drinks the soup while having soup noodles. Being asked about the reason, Lao Wang recalls that during the three years of hardships following the GLF, the family did not have enough food. His wife persuaded him to eat the little noodles on the grounds that his job needed more strength, whereas she herself quietly drank the soup as a meal. Before long, Lao Wang's wife died of malnutrition and starvation.¹⁶ Women's sufferings were also implied by both the high fertility loss and the fact that in such devastating circumstances, men, who were more mobile than women, might move to other rural areas in search of work and food, leaving behind their wives and children in the starving villages. Friedman, Pickowicz and Selden in their research on Chinese rural society, described the sufferings of women and children during the post-GLF famine thus:

"In Raoyang, a few husbands sold wives for food and cash. The poorer the region, the greater the amount of wife selling. To hide the shame, the wives were called cousins ... in some of the worst-hit areas children with placards around their necks were left at busy places, in hopes that some better-off family would take in the starving young. If the top family earner died, a teenage daughter might be sold to the highest bidder in a distant place to obtain grain to keep the rest of the household alive."¹⁷

4-2 Women's Lack of Economic Independence

Generally speaking, the policy of agricultural collectivisation was implemented and upheld for over two decades after its introduction during the GLF. It can certainly be argued that the effects of the GLF and its ensuing famine on women as analysed above may well be idiosyncratic, and thus not represent the whole picture. It was once assumed that after communisation, rural collectives replaced the household as a dominant unit of agricultural production through transferring the means of production from private family ownership to collective ownership. By so doing, it positioned the newly empowered leaders of collectives as the chief organiser and manager of economic activities in substitution for the household head, who was most likely to be a man.¹⁸

Women's status may have been raised through such institutional changes since in the commune system the unit of production and labour remuneration was supposed to be

the individual worker regardless of sex and age rather than the family. This change could be in favour of women's economic independence, and able to increase women's bargaining power within their households. It would lead to weakened power of both the male household head and the local lineage over individual family members. This practice of "individual payment", if happened, would also help make women's labour visible: women's contribution to the household economy could be measured by the work-points they earned in the collectives. Thus, the payment system of the collectives may have held the potential to produce erosive and subversive effects on the traditional institutions and attitudes that had kept women from "socially productive work" and denied women's economic contribution to the family by claiming that women were supported by men.¹⁹

However, the possibility of empowering women through requiring them to work in the communes was significantly reduced, in the first place, by the macro- and micro-level problems that agricultural collectivisation created for rural households. Both Western and Chinese studies carried out before 1949, e.g. by Buck, and Fei and Chang, reported that women had participated in agricultural production, although their participation rates were lower than those of men.²⁰ Women's labour force participation in pre-1949 rural China also varied with regions, farm produce, demand on agricultural labour, ethnicity, class, as well as with the prevalence of foot-binding practices. Moreover, women were found involved in "subsidiary" activities, including petty trade and commerce, skilled and unskilled labour, domestic animal rearing, spinning, weaving, and cash-crop cultivation (e.g. tea growing and sericulture).²¹

This shows that rural women, particularly in the South, were actively involved in both subsistence and cash-generating economic activities before agricultural collectivisation. The diversity and variation in women's participation in agricultural and non-agricultural work as well as their contributions to the household economy suggest that women may not be completely powerless in household-based economic management and decision-making, although limited research on intra-household power relations has been conducted for the period. Nonetheless, based on the above findings, the assumption that women's labour was totally controlled by the household head in rural families can be deemed as over-generalisation. It follows that policy towards women justified by such an over-generalised assumption may

well lead to the removal of women's autonomy in family-based agricultural production together with men's. Seen in this light, the state, while depriving the "man-led" farm household of its autonomy in production planning, management and disposition of its produce, failed to function as a "liberating force" for women.

Agricultural collectivisation as a core component of the centrally planned economic structure reshaped the relationship between rural women's work and the market. The existence of a non-state market before collectivisation made it possible for women to both enter the exchange process and obtain a measure of autonomy, however limited, through their involvement in market-related activities performed either within or outside the household, as discussed above. Women's labour, explicitly or implicitly valued by the market, thus contained some exchange value on top of the use value produced by subsistence activities. However, following collectivisation, the non-state market ceased playing any meaningful role. The value of women's labour then was largely determined by the influence of the urban-rural exchange terms set by the state, which was severely biased against the agricultural sector in general and rural women in particular. Furthermore, as Jacka aptly points out, the state collectivisation programme, through restraining the linkages of women's work with internal and external market, led to devaluation of women's work rather than much change in the existing public/private dichotomy.²²

This may partly explain the fact that although most rural women worked outside home after collectivisation, and thus were claimed to be "liberated" in the official rhetoric, they did not gain much life satisfaction from their required "participation in social production". Although they might not be aware of the ultimate aims that agricultural collectivisation served in state central plans, they could feel, at the micro level, how worthless their labour became because of collectivisation. One aspect of the depreciation of women's labour was manifest in the disproportionate return that women received for their work, i.e., the disconnection between women's "labour force participation" and their welfare (I shall further elaborate on this point in chapter 5). During my fieldwork, I noticed that recollections of the village women interviewees about lives in the commune years were often related to poverty and food shortage. That "the family did not have enough to eat" was a frequently heard remark about lives during the commune period. According to the village women, the value of the work-points that they earned was very low: only a bit over one *jiao* for a

day's backbreaking labour (one *jiao* is 0.1 *yuan*). The low value attached to women's labour and the widespread poverty then adversely affected women's education. My interviews with village women revealed that poverty, or financial hardships (*shenghuo kunnan*), significantly exacerbated the gender bias of rural parents in terms of provision for daughters' education. According to the older women informants and the younger women's accounts of their mothers' experiences, poverty and parental attitudes of favouring boys in education provision were the top reasons for the lack of schooling among the older women.

Women's position relative to men's at home may have improved with their increased participation in collective agricultural production as compared with the past. For instance, 49-year-old Qi Sulan mentioned that because her father was a worker in town, all the work at home was done by her mother alone, and thus her mother had the final say in most matters related to the family. As Sulan recalled:

"Mother had to do all the work both inside and outside home, including looking after the kids, taking care of the elderly parents-in-law, doing domestic chores and working in the collective fields. The family suffered from financial difficulties thus couldn't afford buying goods like clothes and shoes. Mother had to make clothes for the whole family. She was the first person to get up in the morning and the last to go to bed at night. Life was very hard for her, but without mother, the family couldn't manage. That's why mother was the decision-maker and enjoyed relatively high status at home." (Interview with Qi Sulan)

But as revealed in my interviews as well, the improvement or non-improvement in women's status in the household in relation to their participation in agricultural production can be significantly varied. Main factors involved here ranged from the personality of the woman (whether she was strong-willed), the personality of the husband, the residence arrangement (whether the young couple lived under the same roof with the man's parents and siblings), the presence or absence of the husband, and the sex composition of the children a woman bore (women without sons tended to have low status at home up till the 1980s). For instance, 62-year-old Di Cuiping related that her mother, living in "old society", illiterate with bound feet, hence

unable to work in the fields, had relatively high status at home because her father was incompetent. She attributed her mother's relatively high status to the fact that her mother "worked harder and had a heavy burden at home". Nonetheless, Mrs. Di admitted that when her mother's parents-in-law were alive, "she didn't have much status as she was bullied by her mother-in-law." (Interview with Di Cuiping).

One of the differences that agricultural collectivisation made for village women was that women working in the collectives earned work-points, as compared with the previous practice where their labour in household-based farm work tended to be invisible. This change may suggest that women receive their own wages from the collectives, and their economic independence could thus be enhanced. However, as discussed in the Introduction, studies since the late 1970s show that women's independent income from the collectives was largely a myth. In their in-depth researches on China's post-1949 rural society, Parish and Whyte, and Potter and Potter discussed in detail the practice of remuneration adopted in rural collectives.²³ They discovered that payments from teams or brigades were most often in the form of kind with a little cash. In almost all the cases, these were calculated on the basis of the total work-points earned by the working members of a household. At the end of each year (by the Chinese lunar calendar), such payments were delivered to the household head, who was most likely to be a man.²⁴ Whether the man alone controlled the payment made by the collective to the household, however, varied with the degree of power that the woman held and her status at home. Nonetheless, my fieldwork indicated that most of such payments at the end of the year would be used for subsistence purposes, and the disposable cash income was extremely limited. This was evidenced in 33-year-old Li Yufen's account:

"When I was at school, my family didn't have much money. My parents often traded eggs lay by the chicken in the courtyard for my exercise books. ... In the past, we earned work-points. Dividends were delivered only at the end of the year, and people didn't have cash in hand. When we finally got paid by the collective at year-end, families with more male labourers could receive, at most, 100-200 *yuan* in cash, whereas families without many labourers would owe money to the Brigade instead." (Interview with Li Yufen)²⁵

This shows that the subsistence agriculture sustained by collectivisation combined with the way in which the rural collective remunerated its members failed to produce women's independent income. Nor did the system create any potential for village women to develop a sense of individuality in the collective economy. Furthermore, the state restrictions on private economic activities and sidelines, many of which were traditionally performed by women, considerably limited women's earning ability. In this context, women were forced to compete with men in areas of their comparative disadvantage, such as an inflexible timetable for farm work set by the collectives, which was highly inconvenient for women with heavy family responsibilities, and the physical strength required by the traditional way of farming. Conversely, they were not allowed to realise their comparative advantage in non-farm activities that demanded less physical strength but more skills, and were more lucrative and flexible in terms of time.

On the other hand, it may be argued that the commune's remuneration scheme, that is, the work-point system, would be able to make women's work not only visible, but more objectively assessable. Women's labour in the collectives was recorded as work-points, which could serve as a tangible indicator of women's economic contributions both to their households and to the collectives. Women would thereby gain greater bargaining power and their position could well be improved in both the family and society.²⁶

However, the "objective indicator" of the work-points would lose much of its "objectivity" when being examined from a broader, macro-level perspective. The worthlessness of the work-points as a consequence of the state's excessive extraction of rural surplus more distorted than "objectively" reflected the real value of women's work. This reality was further exacerbated by practices at grass-roots, where women were constantly discriminated against in the collectives' work-point payment scheme regardless of the different forms (time rate, piece rate, etc.) or the reforms that the scheme had tried.

4-3 Gender Discrimination in the Commune's Remuneration Scheme

As aforementioned, the work-point payment system of the communes was introduced at the initial stage of agricultural collectivisation to facilitate remuneration and distribution in collectives. It was based mainly on the principle of

age and sex differentiation. In the traditional mode of agricultural production, age and sex were regarded as the principal determinants of people's physical strength, and hence working ability. Accordingly, they were adopted as yardsticks for agricultural remuneration. Following the GLF, the so-called standard-rate, or labour-grade form became dominant in the majority of the rural collectives. This form of the work-point scheme worked like this: A labourer was assigned work-points for each working day in accordance with his/her grade on a locally determined labour scale. An individual labourer's position on this scale was usually worked out at the collective's annual general meeting.

Discrimination against women crept into the system in varied ways. Potter and Potter reported that in some places, the allocations of work-points to men and women were different even within the same labour grade.²⁷ For example, the daily work-points were set as a fixed ten for a first-class male labourer, but only about eight for a female labourer in the same class. In some other places, although sex-based disparity in work-point assignment was not obvious within the same labour grade, women were generally rated lower than men on the labour scale. There were also places where a combination of the two discriminative practices was observed, which relegated women to an even more disadvantaged position in remuneration.²⁸

In consequence, women in general were constantly paid less (usually 20 percent) than men, even where women and men performed identical work, such as accounting and tractor driving, for which physical strength was almost irrelevant. In later stages of collectivisation, several other systems for allocating work-points were developed and tried by rural collectives in different regions to deal with the problem of low peasant incentive and declined agricultural productivity. These included, among other things, the task-rate and time-rate payment methods. However, the practice of gender discrimination always found its way into the varied forms through, for example, task evaluation or job assignment. As some scholars observed, the tasks that were likely to be performed by women, such as weeding and afforestation, were often given lower evaluation in work-points. In work assignment, women would more often find themselves being sent for those jobs that were unlikely to claim high work-points while the jobs that registered high work-points tended to be reserved for men.²⁹

At the micro-level, the effects of the gender discrimination in the collectives' remuneration scheme on women were multi-faceted. Psychologically, women's enthusiasm for participating in the communised agricultural production was dampened by the persistent devaluation of their labour in the communes, and their self-confidence and self-esteem, which might be boosted through their engagement in productive activities outside home, suffered. This is evident from the following remark of village woman Li Yufen when she recalled her life under the commune system:

"We earned work-points during the commune years. The highest work-point for a day's work was 6 points for a woman, and 8 points for a man. Even though you did the same job, or could do work more and better than a man, particularly for young women as I was in those days, you could make no more than 6 points. So why should we women exert ourselves?" (Interviews with Li Yufen, 33)

Ideologically, instead of raising women's position by mobilising women into social production, the commune's payment scheme reinforced the popular assumption that women are inferior to men and the cultural values that debase women. As Howard discovered during her fieldwork in rural China in the 1970s, because most men earned ten work-points each day while women only got eight at most, new-born baby girls were referred to as "eight-pointers" (*bafen*) by local people in prediction of their limited earning potential relative to boys.³⁰

The reinforcement of the traditional value of "emphasising men over women" (*zhongnanqingnü*) was reflected in the rise in rural fertility throughout the years of agricultural collectivisation, except for the period during the post-GLF famine, as families sought to produce more boys.³¹ Although the increase can be interpreted as largely motivated by the traditional cultural preference for sons, it was, nevertheless, encouraged by the communes' remuneration scheme that institutionally ensured that boys had greater earning prospect than girls. The high fertility of women then adversely affected their possible achievements in education, political participation, and their ability to participate in communised production. This scenario indicated that the annual work-points, or the yearly income, earned by women could be further decreased.

Gender discrimination against women in the commune's remuneration scheme had several bases. The traditional agrarian mode of production in China was heavily dependent on physical strength. In this respect, women, in general, were disadvantaged compared with men. In addition, there were ingrained social prejudices against women involving stereotype of women as the weaker sex and traditional attitudes of male supremacy in farm work. Such ideology often shaped the perceptions of rural cadres operating the collectives' remuneration scheme, most of whom were males.

The economies of scale created by rural collectivisation, which replaced a smallholder farming structure, might be suitable for speeding up agricultural mechanisation. This, then, would lend the potential to reduce the dependence of farming on physical strength, and hence weaken the sexually discriminative base underlying the communes' remuneration methods. However, several state policies that went hand in hand with collectivisation indirectly discouraged agricultural mechanisation. The rationing and household registration regime effectively prevented most rural out-migration. This, together with a pro-natalist population policy, helped worsen the situation of rural unemployment and under-employment. The combined effects of these policies constituted a considerable check on the adoption of farm machinery. Furthermore, the low state investment in agriculture, the state-imposed trade terms biased against the rural sector, and the stringent restrictions on the peasants' market and off-farm activities worked together to keep the rural economy at the subsistence level. All this severely limited the ability of collectives to accumulate funds for local development including purchasing farm machines for collective use.

Undermining the ideological base -- the key element responsible for discrimination against women in collectivised agricultural remuneration -- would require longer-term social changes. Sustainable and overall rural development would serve as the premises for such changes. However, as I shall discuss shortly, China's development strategy centring on agricultural collectivisation was, unfortunately, very ineffective in this respect.

5-1 The Rural Lineage System and Women's Status

The discussed before, the potential benefits of collectivisation for women were once seen as lying partly in the commune's function to substitute for the household head as the organiser of women's labour. With this transformation, the commune system could destroy the economic power base of the household head, who was most likely to be a man. Empirical evidence provided later, however, has suggested that other males in the patrilineage may well replace the household head as a possible organiser and controller of women's labour.¹ In her pioneering study on collectivisation, kinship relations and rural women in China, Diamond argues that instead of a fundamental break with tradition, rural collectives were formed on the basis of the existing social structures and institutions. At the lowest level of rural collectives was the production team, which was usually composed of a natural village, whose residents were linked through male-centred lineage networks.² In such networks, women, either as married-in wives possessing different surnames from that of the lineage, or as daughters, who tended to be viewed as temporary members based on the predominant virilocal post-marital residence, were seen as outsiders and treated as marginal. This is in sharp contrast with men's position in the lineage: they were deemed as the root of the lineage and treated as central.

In their study of village politics in China during the Mao era, Friedman, Pickowicz and Selden demonstrate that collectivisation merely realised the substitution of the new lineage representatives acting as team and brigade cadres for the previous wealthy lineage heads of the same or different lineages.³ Their finding has been further backed by a study of Gao Village in Jiangxi Province in southern part of China.⁴ These studies have provided evidence that the age-old lineage regime in rural China did not die and changes under the communist rule occurred largely in form. In view of this continuity, the working experiences of rural women under the commune system, except for their disassociation from the market and the subsequent decrease in the exchange value of women's labour, were not significantly different from those in the pre-collectivisation period.

Rural lineage in traditional Chinese society was a hierarchical system marked by two sets of dichotomy. One was between the sexes with male at the centre and female at the periphery. The other was between the male-centred seniority and power and the internal and external competitions and struggles for power. In this lineage regime, men were given much more emphasis and human significance than women, who, being marginalised in the lineage networks, were traditionally viewed as inferior, subordinate and threatening to male power; but necessary as mediators between the male members of the lineages. Furthermore, the traditional system stressed lineage solidarity, which stressed the age- and power-based hierarchical order. The young and the powerless were accordingly kept under the control of the powerful or more senior lineage members. At the same time, rivalry for power existed both within the same lineage and between different lineages with the larger, older lineages often taking an upper hand in such power struggles.⁵ The traditional lineage institution in rural China, as such, embodied the typical patriarchal social structure and represented a major conservative and repressive force as far as women's status is concerned.

The fact that the rural collectives were largely lineage-based has been viewed as a continuity of China's age-old tradition and culture. This continuity is seen, rather pessimistically by scholars situated in structuralism, as demonstrating an "enormous strength and absorptive power of the fundamental ideas of Chinese civilisation",⁶ and hence, as intrinsic limitations of the Chinese peasant revolution. The continuity, however, is interpreted differently from the standpoint of other theoretical positions. Modernisation theories and functionalism, for instance, tend to attribute the tenacious lineage structure in Chinese village communities to the subsistence economy and immobility of the agrarian population. Yang, for example, points out:

"The lack of occupational diversification in the agricultural economy and the insulating character of subsistence farming fostered a uniform mode of life, enhanced intimate economic and social co-operation, restricted population mobility, and furthered the internal cohesion of the lineage group, the kinship organisation."⁷

A logical inference from this analysis is that greater spatial and social mobility of the rural population in connection with a diversified rural occupational structure and

expanded external linkages may serve to either erode the entrenched lineage regime or provide possible escapes for the young and women from the oppressive kinship network within a local community. Perceived in this light, official policies could indirectly influence societal change by encouraging rural industrialisation, population mobility, and stimulating rural economic and occupational diversification and openness. Such policies would be expected to weaken the power of the rural lineage, which may result in increased power of rural women. However, as discussed above and will be further illustrated below, the collectivisation approach only helped create contrary orientations.

In both the pre- and post-collectivisation years, kinship networks played an important role in agricultural production. Before rural collectivisation, farm work sometimes required related households to help one another during busy seasons like the harvest. However, this kinship-based mutual aid prior to collectivisation differed from the largely lineage-based collectives, in that kinship was defined more broadly than patrilineage in both relational and spatial senses. Parish and Whyte, for instance, point out that affinal ties involved in the pre-collectivisation form of agricultural co-operation and mutual aid were indicative of broader social and economic contacts and relationships of villagers, which had gone beyond the immediate confines of a patrilineage or a natural village.⁸ In contrast, after collectivisation, co-operation in agricultural production was in the main contained within natural villages, which were the basis of production teams or brigades.⁹ As Judd argues, communities based on patrilineages were "further consolidated during the collective era by rendering them fundamental political and economic units, as well as social ones."¹⁰ This generated a few repercussions significant to women's position in the family and local community. One was that a broader network of kinship mutual aid relations involving those on the woman's side was reduced to a narrower circle of agnation. This then worked to stress the centrality of males in the patrilineage, and of the patrilineage in the range of social contact of rural families as well as local communities. As the significance of relations on a woman's side was reduced in rural people's kinship ties and networks, women's position in the local community may well be further marginalised.

Collectivisation reinforced the traditional lineage solidarity and power, as well as its ideology, in other ways. Field studies on rural Chinese society have revealed that

transformation of the property ownership from individual peasant households to the collectives enabled the latter, which were frequently led by powerful lineage males, to gain a property base. In addition, the levelling principle adopted in the collective's remuneration scheme reduced competitions within the teams, which tended to consolidate the interests of the village-based, lineage-dominated teams as a whole, at the expense of the interests of the peasant households and individuals.¹¹ Furthermore, the principles built and measures taken in agricultural collectivisation, such as absolute equality, ascriptiveness¹² and the homogenisation of interests, turned out to be in line with the marked features of the Chinese traditional familial and lineage systems, which were identified by some scholars as essentially integrative and ascriptive, and suppressing individuality and personal freedom.¹³ Despite all the officially pronounced ideological goals and positions, rural collectivisation paradoxically strengthened the traditional familial and lineal base and its ideology.

The village-based lineage institution was simultaneously reinforced as well with the implementation of official policies stringently restricting private commercial activities and rural non-state markets during the commune years.¹⁴ As discussed in chapter 3, these policies operated both to level rural income and to facilitate the state's extraction of rural surplus through market monopolisation and imposition of the urban-biased trade terms on the peasants. While serving to realise the state-perceived objectives and priorities, the policies considerably checked the economic activities associated with internal and external markets of rural people, both men and women. This led to villagers' narrowed circle of economic and social contacts, as well as interactions outside their native villages, limiting their horizons and knowledge about the outside world.

Combined with the population control mechanisms of household registration and rationing (see below), these policies pushed the rural economy to a greater degree of subsistence and closeness, turning the peasants more inward to the lineage-based production team and their families for meeting their material, emotional and social needs. The collectives' leaders, as rural cadres and male representatives of the leading lineages, embodied the power of both the state and the powerful lineage. As such, the two authorities converged, exerting joint control over the peasants within village communities. This unintended consequence of the collectivisation policy package had special implications for rural women, since the power of the lineage was

identified as one of the four major forces that had oppressed peasant women in traditional society (The others were the power of the state, of religion, and of men).¹⁵ The merger of the two forces thus generated tighter patriarchal control over women's lives.

Following collectivisation, Chinese rural society remained static and conservative despite the many officially organised campaigns to counter the perceived "backwardness" of the peasants. It should be noted, however, that during the first three decades after 1949, the CCP, based on its ideological position informed by Marxism, made some efforts to facilitate linkages and communication between rural communities and urban centres. Efforts in this respect included organising infrastructure projects such as building roads and setting up wired broadcasting networks in communes linking different villages under their administration. It also attempted to bring modern ideas, including the concept of equality between men and women, to the countryside by launching political campaigns, such as those propagating "equal pay for equal work" (*nannü tonggong tongchou*) and "transformation of customs and traditions" (*yifengyisu*) in the 1960s and 1970s. Paradoxically, the trend induced by its market-curtailling policies went against the officially promoted ideas of gender equality, and rendered these efforts largely ineffectual.

My interviews with the village women indicated that among the older women above the age of 50, the 1950 Marriage Law exerted greater influence over their perceptions of gender relations compared with the women in the cohort of between 26-45, who were most likely to have undergone the Cultural Revolution. One aspect of this was the usage by women in the former group of the term *nannü pingquan*, meaning equal rights between men and women, whereas the term adopted by the latter was *nannü pengdeng* meaning equality between men and women. This difference in gender-related language used by village women may have reflected a shift in official discourse during the two periods. In the early 1950s, when the Communist first Marriage Law went into force, women's rights may have received greater emphasis. However, as discussed in the Introduction, the notion of rights gradually phased out after the mid- to late-1950s simultaneously with agricultural collectivisation, which removed rural people's rights to land, and with the diminishing role of laws.

Stagnation and conservatism in the Chinese countryside were reflected as well in the continued domination of the traditional sexual morality emphasising sexual segregation and female premarital virginity. During the interviews, quite a few women mentioned that social contact between man and woman were frowned upon and tended to draw disapproval and social pressure from the village community. As 62-year-old Di Cuiping recalled, "In the past, it was deemed inappropriate and shameless for young man and woman to even talk with each other alone. People would gossip against them." (Interview with Di Cuiping). The traditional demand on women's premarital virginity in villages, which had been regarded as a matter of honour for the lineage and the family in traditional society, did not change much either during the collective years. The village women informants recollected that girls who had lost virginity before marriage at the time were sometimes beaten to death by lineage members or driven to suicide by parents. Conservative cultural attitudes were also displayed in the very low divorce rate, particularly for women, during the collective period. In 1982 at the initial stage of rural decollectivisation, the average divorce rate for the country stood at about six per thousand, with the female rate at 2.5 per thousand and the male rate at nine per thousand.¹⁶

However, the data cited above need to be read with caution. In fact, divorce rates have been measured in two distinctive ways in the PRC. Before 1985, they tended to be presented by the number of divorce per thousand population. This way, divorce rates could display an extremely low pattern, which often served to back the official claims of stability and prosperity of the Chinese family and society. The extreme low divorce rate, nonetheless, can be true in view of the official discouragement of and restrictions on divorce, which was perceived as resulting from "bourgeois influences".¹⁷ Since 1985, the number of divorce cases as a percentage of the total registered marriages in a year has frequently been used to measure the divorce rate.¹⁸ In this method, divorce rates are the same for men and women. The employment of the former measurement in the years prior to 1985 may partly explain why the divorce rate for men and women could be different as shown above. There may be other explanations for the lower rate of divorce for women. One was that because of the very difficult situation, which a female divorcee could find herself in, women tended to remarry soon. Another reason might be the strong stigma attached to female divorcees, and hence under-reporting of divorce experiences by these women.

5-2 The Household Registration System as Related to Rural Women

In addition to the above mentioned factors, the household registration and rationing system introduced and consolidated through collectivisation contributed to a reinforced lineage power in rural China. The establishment of the system meant that rural people in general were institutionally confined to their native or, in the case of women, their husbands' villages for life. This virtually closed most outlets through which individuals could escape the conservatism and lineage oppression in the village. In this way, those positioned lower on the age and sex hierarchy -- young people and women -- were made more subject to the power of the lineage males who often acted as collective leaders, losing control and decision-making power over their own labour and mobility.

The strengthened lineage power and the reduced geographical mobility in rural society had special implications for rural women. It meant that women had even less choice and freedom in marriage or divorce compared with men, given the fact that traditional moral standards and related practices and norms tended to be applied more stringently to the female sex.¹⁹ Prior to rural collectivisation, there was some possibility for women, who resisted parental-arranged marriage or initiated divorce, to escape and make a living in other places, because of less economic and political control over mobility and the existence of non-state labour market. However, after collectivisation, such possibilities were eliminated with the instatement of the household registration system and the state monopolisation of the market. Rural women who dared to challenge the traditional moral standards and taboos had to face the stern reality that there was almost no way for them to escape from conservative patrilineal and familial forces, and from patriarchal control over their lives.

Potter and Potter reported that following collectivisation, a divorced woman would be faced with great difficulty either in keeping her residence in her estranged husband's collective, or in regaining her resident status in her parents' collective.²⁰ This was because her divorce was deemed in either village as a disgrace to the family and the lineage. Unless she was forced to remarry soon, she had to stay with her grudging parents, suffering from discrimination and prejudice.²¹ This effect of collectivisation on women's choice may partly explain the very low divorce rate in rural China during the collective years. It was, in effect, behind the many tragic

stories of rural young women depicted in literary forms who, following futile efforts to break out of the constraints imposed upon them by the joint forces of the family, lineage, collective and state, committed suicide in despair.

The implication of the household registration system for rural women had another aspect: women's social mobility. As noted in chapter 3, one of the long-term consequences of rural collectivisation was an enlarged gulf between cities and towns in terms of socio-economic development. This increased gap reinforced an occupation-based social stratification with farming lying at the bottom. Under different circumstances, this situation would have drawn rural people to the cities in their search of more remunerative jobs and better living conditions, but the household registration regime deprived rural residents of such means to improve their lives. However, given their relative freedom and mobility based on culturally assigned sex roles, as well as privileges in, say education and training, men could still seize the few opportunities granted to the peasantry to work in the cities, while women could get almost none. For example, during my fieldwork, I learnt that some older village women had to live separately for most years of their lives from their husbands, who were employed by enterprises in towns. These women as well as their children were not allowed to move away from the village by the official household registration system. The official restrictions on movements meant that they could not change their rural residence status, hence no way to obtain rationed food or urban jobs if they joined their husbands in the city. Furthermore, the *hukou* of their children in such a situation must follow the mother's. The women thus had to stay in the countryside, labouring in the collectives and shouldering alone all the family responsibilities of looking after the young and their husbands' elderly parents. This, in combination with the government policy of circumscribing rural off-farm economic activities, produced a scenario in which few, if any, alternative employment opportunities were available to village women. Thus, rural women's chances to increase income, enhance status and gain upward social mobility through their own efforts were significantly limited.

The few other channels for rural people to gain upward social mobility included military service²² and higher education.²³ However, the former was seldom open to rural women; and the latter greatly disadvantaged women because of the gender-biased parental attitudes, which tended to give preferential treatment to boys in

education under circumstances of limited resources.²⁴ It seemed that the only channel readily available for rural women to move was through marriage. Indeed, studies on mobility differentiation associated with marriage between men and women in the collective years have shown a visible “spatial hierarchy” both between rural and urban, and within rural areas.²⁵ Most village women continued moving residence at marriage owing to the predominant virilocal marriage. However, their movements were most likely to occur within rural areas.²⁶ Rural women may have wished to change their rural identity and make advance in society through marriage. But, because of the restrictions imposed by the household registration system, few urban men were inclined to marry rural women, unless they had serious health, financial or other personal problems.²⁷

5-3 Women’s Participation in “Social Production” and Their Welfare

As pointed out earlier, women’s required participation in rural collectivisation during the GLF represented a typical mobilisational approach of the CCP to the “woman question”. In this respect, the CCP was guided by Marxism, which identifies the roots of women’s oppression and subordination as private property and women’s exclusion from socially productive labour. In accord with this ideological guidance, collectivisation may have succeeded in removing both the obstacles, and hence emancipatory for rural women. With the passage of time, however, it became more and more obvious that the gains brought to rural women through their obligatory participation in collectivised labour were obtained at a disproportionate cost in terms of women’s choice, opportunities and mobility as discussed above.

One widely acknowledged problem in conjunction with women’s participation in productive labour has been the double burden that women have to shoulder in both the public and private realms.²⁸ Women in rural China more acutely felt this problem during the collectivisation era. For them, working in the communised fields required physically demanding, arduous efforts and entailed arrangements by the commune’s inflexible timetable. In addition, working conditions were tough. During my interviews, village women in the older cohorts often used expressions, such as “backbreaking” and “toiling under the scorching sun”, to describe their work in the collective fields. Furthermore, women were required to take part in most of the manual labour irrespective of their physical conditions or familial responsibilities.

It was revealed in my interviews that in the collective years, menstruating women were sometimes assigned tasks in icy rice fields in early spring when the weather was still chilly, and lactating women were expected to work in the same strength and length of labour as other commune members. The tasks of overcoming the difficulties related to their reproductive role, but affecting their role as commune labourers, were left completely to rural women themselves. Although there had been attempts to "socialise domestic labour" during the GLF, they were short-lived owing to the intrinsic problems of the GLF itself and the state exploitation of the agricultural sector. Little attention was paid to the health of women and little knowledge disseminated about maternal and child health and hygiene. As the village women recalled, it was quite common in those days that women died of childbirth and young children died of contagious diseases. This is partly evidenced that although women informants in the older cohort of 46 or above had much higher fertility rate than that of the women in the younger cohorts, the surviving children of the older women tended to be much fewer than the actual births. This was, as revealed in the interviews, largely attributable to the inadequate maternal and child health services available to village women, which led to high infant mortality rates of the time. For instance, among the women interviewees in the oldest cohort, 62-year-old Di Cuiping (married in 1953) gave birth to nine children, but only five survived. 53-year-old Wang Guifen and 46-year-old Wang Guiying both had five live births with only three surviving.

Collectivisation produced detrimental effects on rural development through state maximum extraction of agricultural surplus. This, in turn, severely limited the ability of rural collectives to finance welfare institutions that would help socialise housework or improve health care services. It also reduced the capacity of rural households to purchase labour-saving appliances to lighten women's burdens in domestic tasks. With much of the domestic chores performed in a tiring and time-consuming traditional fashion, such as grinding by pulling millstones, fetching water in buckets from wells distance away from home, collecting fuel to prepare meals, and making shoes and clothes by hand for the family, the double workload of rural women was much heavier than that of urban women. The following recollection of village woman informant Wang Guifen depicted the situation:

"They [women] spent much of their time on the tiring and endless household chores... Life for me was extremely exhausting then. I was working in the fields for the Brigade, and couldn't take any break as my fellow commune members did during the mid-day, because I had to find time to make shoes for the kids. Following a backbreaking day of labour in the fields I couldn't have much rest in the evenings, as I had to continue making clothes and shoes for the family. We didn't have the money to buy them. I was busy and worked hard from morning till night, but life was still poor for us." (Interview with Wang Guifen, 52)

The Maoist approach to gender equality, at the micro level, can be interpreted as stressing the sameness between men and women. This was often expressed in a slogan derived from Chairman Mao's quotation: "Time has changed, what men can do women can do as well." However, as Jacka aptly points out, "the reverse claim was never made."²⁹ The approach in the collectivisation context often led to a gender-neutral perspective, which judged and treated women by standards informed by male experiences in the absence of the gender-specific reproductive role. This proved to have done more harm than good to women, who had to play dual roles, and resulted in "a general deterioration of women's health and the spread of gynaecological diseases".³⁰

Rural impoverishment caused by agricultural collectivisation made women's productive activities in communised agriculture more strenuous but less rewarding, and more out of necessity for survival than out of choice. It led to a conspicuous disassociation of women's participation in "social production" from their general well-being. Poverty and destitution, caused or exacerbated by the policy package of collectivisation, constituted serious barriers to the improvement in women's social status. This is manifest in the following report of rural women's state of existence in the area of Yan'an, the onetime leading revolutionary base, during the GPCR by a sent-down urban young woman:

"Because of poverty, many women could not afford clothes. Women in their 40's were often found half naked. Young girls had to rotate wearing the only shirt made from home-woven, coarse white cloth with other members of the family. When the shirt got too dirty to wear, they would

just scrub it in the yellow earth, then shaken off the dirt before wearing it again. The whole family had only one crude china bowl which was used for both meals and washing. Old women had never had their hair washed for life, and when being combed with a fine-toothed comb, nits came off like raindrops ... Women's plight was multiplied in such abject poverty. A very high proportion of the local women suffered from gynaecological diseases. Few girls ever received adequate education. Closeness, poverty and ignorance combined to abet conservative patriarchal forces. As a result, arranged or even mercenary marriages ran rampant. Women there had few alternatives in life and were too powerless to resist the arrangements made by others for their own lives ...³¹

This adverse living environment of rural women and their subjugation to hunger, poverty, illiteracy and poor health points to a big problem of the rural collectivisation approach in conjunction with women's lives: its failure to address issues of women's primary concerns and basic needs. In other words, the priorities set on the government agenda for rural development were at odds with those perceived by rural women. In addition, the separation of rural women's required "social participation" and their welfare was largely the result of agricultural collectivisation itself, which gravely hindered socio-economic development of the Chinese countryside. Seen in this light, rural collectivisation failed to create a material base, necessary conditions and an enabling environment for women's advancement and empowerment.

The GLF, as analysed above, proved to be destructive to China's socio-economic development with the ensuing severe famine causing widespread hunger, malnutrition and deaths, which was unprecedented in the history of the PRC. The failure of the Leap, therefore, diminished the prestige of Mao Zedong within the Party. Following the GLF, Mao was, on the surface, politically sidelined.³² For a brief, though constantly interrupted, period during the early 1960s, a set of economic readjustment policies were introduced to relieve the crisis and recession caused by the GLF.³³ To some extent, these policies were able to bring about economic recovery and improvement in people's lives. While China was still recovering from the disasters of the GLF, another political storm loomed large as Mao was prepared

to launch the unprecedented Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. The GLF and the GPCR shared many characteristics with respect to their repercussions for women, such as the official accentuation on the Maoist principle of collectivisation for both periods. In this sense, the GPCR saw further radicalisation of the communisation approach. Nonetheless, the GPCR, with its overwhelming focus on politics, had its own hallmarks. What were the implications of the GPCR's politics for Chinese women? This is the question, into which I am now turning to investigate in part II.

PART II PROGRESS OR RETROGRESSION FOR CHINESE WOMEN? -- THE GPCR REVISITED

China's Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution was formally launched by Mao Zedong in 1966 and ended with Mao's death in 1976.¹ The decade-long political movement profoundly affected the lives of most Chinese of the time, and its repercussions and influences went beyond China's national boundaries and lasted much longer than a decade. In this part of the thesis, I shall take a close look at the implications of the GPCR specific for women. Using the many non-official sources that have recently become available, it attempts to provide an assessment of the state-launched movement from the perspective of Chinese women. I shall discuss women's experiences during the decade and try to address the broader issue of whether the social and political *milieu* created and reinforced by the GPCR politics was emancipatory or repressive for women. As noted in chapter 2, analysis in this part of the thesis has included urban as well as rural women owing largely to limitations of the available non-official sources, which by far are mostly focused on urban women's experiences.

6-1 “Class Struggle” and Political Scapegoating

It should be noted that the GPCR was, in the first place, a product and embodiment of Mao Zedong’s problem-ridden “theory of continuous revolution” (*jixu geming lilun*).¹ It represented as well an attempt by Mao to reassert the much-questioned, and even criticised Stalinism in both the international communist movement and domestic politics, and to reassume the GLF strategy, which was criticised in the wake of its collapse. Here ideological commitment, confined in a very narrow frame of reference, personality politics and vested interests were interwoven in the context of a gradually surfacing and escalating power struggle within the CCP.²

One of the most salient features of the GPCR was the politicisation of almost all aspects of social life, which was expressed in the theme of “class struggle” and the pervasive personality cult of Mao Zedong. Compared with the pre-GPCR years, there was a greatly intensified nation-wide imposition of policies such as “taking class struggle as the key link” (*jieji douzheng weigang*) and “putting politics in command” (*zhengzhi guashuai*). In practice, the implementation of such policies meant two things: “class struggle” consisting of fierce attacks on political scapegoats in the many sub-campaigns during the GPCR, and “politics” of Mao’s quotations in the little red book. The scapegoats were those branded as “class enemies”, including the “five sinister elements” (*wulei fenzi*) labelled before the GPCR³ and newly identified categories, such as the “capitalist roaders”, “counterrevolutionary revisionists”,⁴ and “bourgeois academic authorities”.⁵ Whenever a new round of “class struggle” was called for from the above, these people were the first to be attacked as the ready targets. Furthermore, they had to endure constant physical and psychological abuses, such as street parades, maltreatment and illegal incarceration, by the powerful local rebels, the Red Guards and the militia.

The theoretical justification for such practices was claimed by the GPCR authorities as Marxist class analysis and the Maoist “continuous revolution” doctrine based on the “theory of the proletarian dictatorship” (*wuchan jieji zhuanzheng*), which perceived society in a black/white dichotomy. In reality, however, those branded as “class enemies”, hence under attack in the campaigns of “class struggle”, were often the people who had been personal or lineal enemies of the attackers.⁶ Besides, they

were likely to be individuals who tended to think independently or behave unconventionally. In the absence of an independent, appropriately developed legal system to protect the rights of individuals, these manipulated “class struggle” campaigns served to provide ideological justification and practical opportunities for people to vent personal spite against one another, for the state to exert coercive and arbitrary power over individuals, and for society to express unbounded malice and intolerance.

6-2 The Extension of “Class Struggle” into “Blood Lineage” and Its Effects on Women

The “class struggle” during the GPCR, in effect, was not confined to assailing the aforementioned “class enemies”. It extended to their families and relatives as well. This was legitimated by the infamous “theory of blood lineage” or “theory of class origin” (*xuetong lun*), which held that one’s class status was indelibly determined by birth, particularly one’s family background on the father’s side. For women, both birth and marriage were counted as determinants of their class status.

It is true that the CCP consistently attached importance to people’s family background and class origins in exerting overall economic, political and social control in the pre-GPCR years. But it was during the GPCR that the importance of one’s class origin and kinship connections was exclusively stressed. Those with “bad” blood lineage or family associations were selected as automatic targets in the endless political sub-campaigns of the GPCR, and even small children were discriminated against, humiliated and beaten for nothing but their “black” parents. The prevalent practice of the time was that people were categorised in terms of their class origin, or both conjugal relation and natal family background for women. They were then judged and treated accordingly with regard to their general well-being and life chances such as educational and occupational opportunities, and career prospects.

The official stress on the “class struggle” theme did immeasurable harm to Chinese people in general. It instigated and justified excesses, resulting in a great many unnatural deaths owing to both persecution and factional violence.⁷ The practice of incriminating families and kinship in patrilineal and patriarchal terms hit the young and women in particular.⁸ For the young, their future and destiny were made

exclusively dependent on the mere circumstance of birth. For women, the dual contingency of birth and marriage rendered them doubly vulnerable to prejudice, discrimination and persecution. Adding to their vulnerability were women's family responsibilities and their role as "shock absorbers" in both their natal and conjugal households when man-made disasters struck their families.

Field studies, interviews with mainland Chinese emigrants in Hong Kong conducted by Western social scientists during and after the GPCR, and fictional and non-fictional writings in Chinese published in the past decade and more have provided ample evidence of the devastating effects produced with the implementation of the "class struggle" and "blood lineage" themes. Although most of the writings have not focused on the policy impact on women, they have revealed part of the trauma experienced by women as well as the harm done to them.

In *Chen Village under Mao and Deng*, Chan, Madsen and Unger report shocking events of persecution against a few village widows with "undesirable" family background during a GPCR's sub-campaign called Cleansing Class Ranks (*qingli jieji duiwu*).⁹ These women became objects of the "proletarian dictatorship" (*zhuanzheng duixiang*) not so much for who they themselves were as for who their fathers or dead husbands had been. One of the widows was targeted because her father was an ex-landlord and her late husband was an ex-rich farmer. The fact that her own class status was within the category of the "poor peasant", which was defined by the Party as the mainstay of the revolution, in light of the land reform policies of the time, was made irrelevant in the struggle sessions against her. Her manner and attitude, which were deemed as "arrogant", were other "indictments" added to her "bad" class background; the assumption was that a woman should always behave in a timid and humble manner as socially expected, and all the more so a woman with "contaminated" class origins. For similar reasons several other widows in the village were denounced, struggled against and tortured. One widow was finally driven insane and died while illegally detained.¹⁰

Autobiographies written by women who survived the GPCR and literary works published more recently have recounted how women as wives and daughters of male arrestees experienced personal humiliations and torments for nothing but familial

connections. Many women were thereby persecuted, evicted from their homes, or even beaten to death.¹¹

In her autobiographical novel *Wild Swans*, Chang writes that her mother was forced to attend some 100 denunciation meetings against herself. The grounds for the denunciation was that Chang's father was labelled a "counterrevolutionary" and her maternal grandfather, of whom her mother had little recollection, was a warlord general.¹² Cheng, a woman entrepreneur in Shanghai before the GPCR, recalls in her autobiography, *Life and Death in Shanghai*, how her daughter, a popular actress in her 20's, was illegally detained, tortured and finally killed by the rebels for nothing but her foreign birthplace, which implied overseas connections,¹³ and her parents.¹⁴ Tsai Chin, a well-known London actress of Chinese origin in the 1970s, describes horrendous scenes where her mother, wife of the famous Beijing opera actor Zhou Xinfang, underwent all sorts of physical and psychological torments. Her mother was only a housewife, but fell victim of the persecution for the same reasons as given above: the alleged crimes of her husband. "She was used like a football. Her whole body was puffed and swollen from repeated beatings, and her skin was suffused with purple bruises from head to foot." Tsai Chin's mother finally died of torture.¹⁵

It is true that personal experiences varied, but the Chinese know too well that these experiences were by no means atypical. During the decade-long nation-wide havoc, such tragedies were almost daily happenings. The fact that women occupied fewer important leading positions and played less prominent roles because of lower social, political status did not spare them from the inhumanity and violence of the GPCR. In many cases, women endured and suffered even more than their menfolk did, not only because of their double vulnerability in the officially-launched "class struggle" campaigns, but also because of their lower social position than men's. This fact sometimes meant, ironically, the lack of the "prison protection" that the men got. The case of Tsai Chin's parents is illustrative of this point. While her father was imprisoned and endured relatively less torment in the first years of the GPCR, Tsai Chin's mother was tortured to death staying at home.¹⁶ The prison where many prominent men like Tsai Chin's father were locked up sometimes happened to be a safer place than the outside, as the Red Guards would have some hesitation to take extreme actions against the men without upper-level sanctions. The lesser prominence of women, however, failed to qualify them for this possible "protection".

As a consequence, many of the women attacked for the prominence of their husbands were more exposed to the excesses and violence of the GPCR.

In her insightful study of the long-term psychological effects of the GPCR on its survivors, Thurston reported many gender-specific cases of women who suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder and mental illness.¹⁷ Tracing the sources, she realised that these women's problems were largely rooted in their GPCR experiences. During the GPCR, most of the women suffered from discrimination and persecution of varied kinds, not for anything involving themselves, but for mere associations -- their husbands or parents (mainly fathers). They were socially ostracised because of their familial connections. Furthermore, in spite of their own sufferings, these women had family responsibilities. They had to summon up all the courage to face both political pressures and economic hardships in order to ensure that their families, particularly the children, could survive. When the GPCR havoc was finally over, and the men, for whom they had been attacked or discriminated against, were either rehabilitated or reinstated to their previous important positions, the women collapsed. They started suffering from neurasthenia, depression or other serious psychological and psychic problems.

Thurston found that the GPCR had inflicted psychic wounds on women, displayed in the form of frequent nightmares. One woman felt guilty for her inability, as a "class struggle" target, to protect her then seven-year-old son from bullies and attacks at school. This little boy, like many other children with "black" parents, was abusively called a "gouzaizi"¹⁸ and struggled against in class-organised sessions. Nowadays, the mother still wakes up at night with her arms pushing away invisible attackers, crying and exclaiming, "They are just little children; they are just little children!"¹⁹

There were special ways conceived and devised to humiliate women, including even young school girls. One of these devices was the so-called "yinyang haircut" (*yinyang tou*), in which half the head was shaved to show the skin while the other half was randomly cut with hair still left to symbolise the Chinese concept of *yinyang*. This kind of haircut could be traced back to ancient China when, in some places, people shaved the head of a deceased person before burial, and the corpse was referred to as a "ghost head" (*guitou*). The GPCR revitalised this past practice with one variation: it was no longer done to the deceased, but the alive, particularly

to women victims, as a way of humiliating and dehumanising them. Chang, for instance, recalls that her childhood friend Ai-ling suddenly fell into the category of "black origin" one day when her grandfather, an Oxford-trained prominent economist, was brutally attacked and their house ransacked. The young girl was given a *yinyang* head by the house raiders for her "reactionary technocrat" grandfather. Afterwards, Ai-ling had to have her head completely shaved, then covered with a scarf before daring to go to school.²⁰

Numerous suicides occurred as a result of the blatant discrimination and unbearable humiliation. The victims were mainly young people, whose hopes for the future were dashed simply for what they could not choose -- their class origins and family associations. Chang and Gao both recall that during the GPCR school children were categorised as "reds", "blacks" and "greys".²¹ At Chang's school, the "blacks" and the "greys" like her friend Ai-ling were to be kept under surveillance, publicly humiliated with forced labour such as cleaning the school's toilets, and always reminded of their "inferior birth" by such demands as bowing their heads at all times and being lectured by the Red Guards. Such extreme discrimination and humiliation caused tragedies every day. One of the alleged "black" students, a teenage girl, attempted suicide by jumping out of a classroom window, and became crippled for life.²² It should be noted that the categorisation in accord with one's class origin later developed into a more subtle type, the so-called "*ke jiaoyu hao ziniu*", into which all the children with "problematic" family background were grouped. The term literally means that children from "bad" class origin could be re-educated and reformed into new human beings different from their parents, and thus was claimed to be the "correct Party guideline" in treating people with "undesirable" family background. However, the underlying assumption of this new version of classification was that these children were born "contaminated", hence needed re-education and remoulding in the first place. In reality, instead of discouraging and checking political and social discrimination and prejudice, the guideline provided basis for stark discriminative practices.

The GPCR's stress on the "class struggle" and "blood lineage" themes, as such, witch-hunted women in particular. Under this principle, the social prejudice against women was augmented, although, being coated in Marxist terminology, this process was not readily perceptible. These themes were, in fact, none other than a

reaffirmation of China's traditional mores and values based on orthodox Confucianism. The underlying assumption of the notion of "blood lineage" was that the identity of a person was essentially his/her family rather than an individual, and therefore, should be treated accordingly. In this context, neither men nor women would ever become independent individuals, but for women, who had been powerless, rightless subordinates in the old family system, the shoring up of traditional values was more damaging. Just as the rural collectivisation approach consolidated, via economic policy-making, traditional familial and lineal institutions and values, by negation of individuality through homogenisation of interests and ascription of status, so the GPCR approach led to a similar suffocation of individuality and strengthened familial values via political and ideological means.

As discussed in the Introduction, the old oppressive familial regime had been challenged ever since the New Culture and May 4th Movements in the early twentieth century. However, its influence seemed to have hung on persistently, whether women were confined to the household or came out of it as social labourers. By the GPCR, over half a century had elapsed since the 1919 May 4th Movement, but the ideas supporting the old family system had not died. Rather, it crept into the CCP's strategy of "class struggle" and its related notion of "blood lineage". This scenario demonstrates how a Marxist analytical concept of class was vulgarised, abused and then readily adapted to a patriarchal ideology; and how the concept, in the GPCR's context, functioned in a similar way as the most oppressive patriarchal ideology did in Chinese history to scapegoat, victimise and oppress women.

In a sense, the expression of the themes of "class struggle" and "blood lineage" can be deemed as restoring another age-old Chinese tradition *lianzuo*, which means to be punished for being related to somebody who has allegedly committed an offence. During the long history of imperial China, emperors could hold an entire lineage to account for what one of its members did, and order a severe penalty such as imprisonment or execution of the lineage (*yizu* or *zhulian jiuzu*).²³ During the Republican period before 1949, the Nationalist government often resorted to the same means to suppress the Communist revolution through punishing the whole family or lineage for the deeds of a single Communist family member. Clearly, the Communist obsession with people's class origins was operating within this very tradition.²⁴ With respect to its effect on women, it can be viewed as a revitalisation of

a rotten practice devastating to women -- a modern version of the outworn patrimonial concept, which has lain at the inveterate patriarchal, patrilineal root of women's subordination and oppression; or, in a broader context, a Chinese equivalent of the Western notion of "biological essentialism",²⁵ which has served to justify racism and sexism in modern Western societies.

The other side of the coin was that a few women did seize some power in a basically male-dominated power structure during the GPCR. However, their ascendance was most likely to be on account of their ascriptive traits such as "good" class origins or influential familial associations. In this respect, Mao's wife, Jiang Qing, was a typical example, as well as several other women, such as Wang Hairong and Wang Mantian, who gained prominence as a result of their kinship relations.²⁶ Subsequently, from the very top downwards, there developed a trend, or a norm, to instate a few women with powerful familial links in some leading positions at various levels irrespective of their qualifications and abilities. Despite the fact that even these politically privileged women could only hold leadership posts much less important than those held by men, such as deputies or token posts like the heads of women's federations, they were frequently used as showcases by the authorities for propaganda purposes.

Unfortunately, this ostensible promotion of women into leadership positions fell again into China's yet another age-old feudal tradition -- nepotism, which is sarcastically expressed in an ancient Chinese saying, "When a man gets power, even his chickens and dogs rise to heaven" (*yiren dedao, jiquan shengtian*). This development, in addition to its explicit encouragement of overt, unbridled corruption manifested in such rampant practices as *zou houmen* (through backdoors) and *la guanxi* (personal relations overriding principles, regulations and laws), carried in itself a sexist message: it implied that a woman's worth and position in society should be dependent on and defined by the position of her husband, father or other agnate relations.

Women as individuals, with their own worth, abilities and achievements were not recognised. What was recognised and strengthened instead was simply male worth and male power -- women were still deemed as men's inferiors and subordinates. Furthermore, it was this sort of nepotistic and patrimonial system that, for thousands

of years, had kept women at the bottom of a social and sexual hierarchy. It was fundamentally damaging to women's efforts for equality and independence, causing an unhealthy mentality of dependency on men in some women, while alienating and even dooming those women who did not have important male associations. This GPCR practice, therefore, failed to empower women. Through revitalising pre-modern, outworn concepts and practices, it more reinforced than undermined the traditional power relations between men and women, and hence ran essentially contrary to feminist values and goals.

It might be argued that through whatever means women gained some political power, it was nevertheless a symbol of status enhancement. However, a close examination reveals that a few women's gains achieved in accordance with a patriarchal principle within the traditional framework of thinking and behaviour were likely to be offset by the sufferings experienced by the majority of women who fell victims to this very principle and tradition. The process of reinforcing and reviving the patriarchal elements of traditions meant more retrogression than progress for women, who, in the end, found themselves losing rather than gaining ground. What is more, the abuse of power by the few women, particularly Jiang Qing, whose power was based mainly on the influence of their male connections, paradoxically had the effect of reinforcing, rather than weakening the explicit prejudice against women in the wake of the GPCR. This was demonstrated by the frequent citation of a Chinese saying, usually by men, when referring to the chieftain of the Gang of Four, "There is no heart in the world that is more vicious than a woman's." (*tianxia zuidu furen xin*)

CHAPTER 7 A NEW CULT VERSUS AN OLD WORSHIP AND THE PARTY-STATE VIS-À-VIS THE FAMILY PATRIARCH

As pointed out earlier, the politicisation of social life during the GPCR was also represented in the extreme personality cult of Mao Zedong. Officially encouraged and imposed, this cult was expressed explicitly in fanatical quasi-religious practices such as dancing the so-called “royal dances” (*zhongziwu*) and chanting the “quotation songs” (*yuluge*), and implicitly in slogans like “putting politics in command” (*zhengzhi guashuai*). Most Chinese who witnessed the GPCR know what this so-called “politics” meant: the performance of cult rituals and recital sessions of Mao’s quotations.

The cult was pursued in such a fanatical and coercive way that nearly all alternative schools of thought were excluded and illegalised, and any attempt to think independently was rendered risky and dangerous. It was reported by occasional Western visitors and observers and experienced by millions of the Chinese that in book stores all over the country, the bulk of display spaces was devoted to the four volumes of *The Selected Works of Mao Zedong* (*Mao Zedong Xuanji*), the little red-books of Mao’s quotations (*Mao Zhuxi Yulu*) and their varied forms of interpretations. For over a decade, few books apart from those disseminating empty political slogans were published. It was a decade of enforced ideological destitution and a cultural desert. People were persecuted, jailed or even executed merely for their opinions and ideas,¹ and books and publications in any subject, except the officially designated “bibles” and their related materials, were destroyed, burnt, or simply disappeared from public sight.²

The activities of eliminating alternative cultural and ideological representations so as to establish Mao’s absolute authority constituted an essential part of a GPCR sub-movement called “Destroying the Four Olds Campaign” (*po sijiu*). The declared aim of the campaign was to put an end to all the “old” customary practices and attitudes deemed to deviate from the officially assented “proletarian” way of thinking and behaviour, and then fill the void with the power and glory of Mao Zedong Thought. However, the definition of the “four olds”, that is, old ideas, old culture, old customs and old habits (*jiusixiang, jiuwenhua, jiufengsu, jiuxiguan*), was vague and largely

arbitrary. Besides, the enforcement of the movement represented a state-imposed conformity in cultural, ideological and behavioural senses.

The loose definition of the “four olds”, the state-imposed conformity and the fanatic atmosphere of the time led to mindless demolition of China’s priceless cultural heritage. The previously preserved cultural relics and historical sites were smashed, books burned, and nearly all types of entertainment, except for the eight “model operas” (*yangbanxi*) promoted by Jiang Qing, banned. The demarcation between the “new”, the “revolutionary” and the “old”, the “bourgeois” was so arbitrarily set that people’s life styles, costumes and even hair styles were attacked as “olds” and forcibly brought in line with the equally arbitrarily defined “revolutionary” styles. Such practices coincided with extreme cultural asceticism as well, whose effects on women will be dealt with in chapter 8.

The process of destroying the “olds” certainly assailed some residuals of the feudal past like superstitious practices. However, its exclusion of alternatives and denial of cultural pluralism rendered a colourful, diverse and rich cultural life monotonous and impoverished. In many parts of rural China prior to the GPCR, peasants customarily put up certain big characters written in red paper like the word *Fu* (good luck) on the households’ front doors, and paper images of the *Zaowangye* (kitchen god) above their brick-built stoves (*zaotai*) in their houses. Some of them kept tablets at home for their ancestors. During the GPCR, all such symbols and rituals were smashed and banned. However, what emerged from such apparently iconoclastic activities was the establishment and imposition of a new god and of the Party-state as the unquestionable authority for the peasants. The omnipresent red-coloured “quotations” replaced the old *Fus*, the pictures of the new deity substituted the household gods, and where the ancestral tablets had stood now hung Mao’s portraits.³

The GPCR’s destruction and prohibition of the traditional rituals would apparently seem to be potentially beneficial to women’s liberation since some of these rituals embodied fatalistic ideas discouraging women, who occupied lower social positions, from actively seeking positive changes in their lives. As such, these rituals may be deemed as part of the religious authority, which constituted one of the four “thick ropes” that bound and oppressed peasant women in traditional Chinese society.⁴

However, a scrutiny of the substitute for the rituals and the "four olds" merely unveils a circular pattern: they were replaced only by something equally old but politically more powerful and restraining. In fact, the fanatical personality cult restored yet another obsolete tradition of pre-modern China: the traditional requirement to show absolute loyalty and obedience to the sovereign under the assumption that the ruler possessed supreme power over his subjects and inborn entitlement to decide their fates.

As discussed in the Introduction, in traditional Chinese society the state and familial systems were patterned after one another in terms of structure and concept. The absolute authority of the emperor resembled that of the patriarch in the family, and vice versa.⁵ This traditional demand by the ruler lies at the core of one of the principal Confucian moral codes -- "The Three Cardinals" (*san gang*), which served to rationalise and underpin an oppressive political, social and sexual hierarchy (see Introduction). The GPCR started with the nominal aim of smashing and eliminating all the "old" residues, only to end up by replacing them with a more powerful old practice rooted deeply in Confucian moral codes and familial traditions. As such, it effectively re-established the system as a reification of the very obsolete tradition, the political and sexual order, and the values that lay at the base of women's oppression and subordination.

At another level, the official deification of the ruler accelerated a merging process of the several traditional authorities -- the religious, the state and the patriarchal -- identified as oppressive for women.⁶ This process developed with Mao increasingly becoming a new God-figure emblematic of both God and state. This merger of the various authorities, in reality, led to a consolidation of the tradition-oriented social and political structures, diminished chances for women to become full individuals, and tightened control over women's lives by the Party-state. The accompanying practice of indiscriminately attacking all Western influences as "bourgeois" effectively reversed the trend of eroding the authoritarian familial and political systems in China initiated during the May 4th Movement with the introduction of Western ideas of individual liberty, rights, and freedom of association and equality between the sexes. As discussed in the Introduction, such ideas had inspired women and the young to resist and reject their traditional subordinate roles in the family and society in social movements prior to 1949. The reversal of that trend after 1949,

particularly during the GPCR brought a considerable loss of personal freedom and autonomy to Chinese people in general and women in particular.

The fact that no space was allowed for the existence and development of any independent women's studies or organisations meant women's complete lack of academic freedom and political autonomy. Furthermore, women's interests as perceived and defined by women themselves rather than by the Party-state were systematically denied and illegitimatised. Even personal decisions of women with regard to matters like choice of marriage partners, careers and so on fell increasingly subject to surveillance, interference and control of the Party-state.

The traditional parental arranged marriage (*baoban hunyin*) has been challenged by the slow but gradual process of industrialisation, urbanisation, the dissemination of the idea of romantic love, and, especially, by the women's movement since the early twentieth century, which has led to significant increases in women's education and broadening of women's social contact. The practice was formally illegalised with the promulgation of the 1950 Marriage Law. However, the arranged marriage was by no means eliminated, particularly in the vast countryside, where many women were still under the yoke of this stifling traditional marriage pattern. What is more, the official ideologically encouraged struggles against the practice were often undermined by the attempts of the same officialdom to take the place previously occupied by the parents, mainly the family patriarch, to infringe upon the rights of women and the young to choose their own spouses. This was particularly serious during the GPCR when the abuse of power by the Party-state was at its peak and its control over society was tightened.⁷

This scenario reflected the inherent contradictions and ambivalence in the CCP's perception of and approach to women's liberation. Although it sometimes encouraged women to rebel against the authority of the family patriarch, especially during the period when women's support was badly needed in its armed struggle for national power, the CCP could not challenge the patriarchal authority from its base. This was because the Maoist Party-state was constructed on the same principle as demonstrated above, and because its predominantly male power holders were all too compatible with the traditional values and behavioural patterns. As such, the Maoist state can be construed as a reproduced and enlarged familial patriarchal authority

rather than a transcendence over it. The goal of women's liberation perceived by the Party-state, in this light, diverged fundamentally from the goal of equality, independence and freedom seen and fought for by women themselves.

Personal experiences of some of my female acquaintances may help illustrate this point. In China, after the institutional changes in the 1950s, which effectively wiped out most private economic sectors together with non-official employment channels, almost everyone was made permanently attached to a work unit (*danwei*).⁸ It followed that any decision with regard to women's private lives such as marriage, divorce or abortion had to be approved by the unit's Party authority. Without the required certificates granted by such an authority, women could not get married or divorced, or receive operations for abortion.⁹ With the state and collective sectors as the sole source of employment, welfare and even social identity, few people could afford to object to the decisions made by the Party-state, especially the representatives of the Party as immediate superiors of their work units.

This Party-state monopoly in economic, social and political domains enabled Party officials to wield considerable power over women's lives. For instance, one of my female acquaintances was introduced to a young man as a potential marriage partner by her work unit's Party secretary during the GPCR. But the woman did not like the man and thus did not develop the relationship after the introductory meeting. This personal decision soon became a source of her ensuing frustration, as when she found her ideal marriage partner and applied for endorsement from the work unit, she was repeatedly rejected by the Party secretary who felt offended by the woman's rejection of his "kind" arrangement. This woman had to delay her marriage for a long time before she managed to obtain an approval paper from the work unit while the Party secretary was away on holiday.

Another woman acquaintance served in the army during the GPCR, and was forced by the Party leadership to break with her boyfriend and marry a man she did not love. Although she resented the arrangement and the stark infringement on the part of the Party upon her personal life, she did not have much choice at the time. Any disobedience or rejection of the Party's decision would mean the ruin of her future career and life. The potential danger was too obvious: she could be demobilised at any time and then assigned an undesirable job for life in remote areas, which would

have little to do with her qualification and training. More seriously, some “black materials” (*heicailiao*) would have found their way into her personal dossier, which, in turn, would have further rendered her politically untrustworthy. This would have virtually reduced her to a second-class citizen, which, in turn, could adversely affect all her family members and future offspring under the “class struggle” doctrine. According to this woman, such instances of arranged matches or forced breaks realised through exerting political pressure by the authorities were not rare or exceptional.¹⁰ Based on her experience and that of her friends, she believed that the group of young women including herself had been recruited in the first place as potential marriage partners for the army men, who were usually much older than these women, and for one reason or another, failed to find girlfriends themselves. It seemed to have been planned beforehand by the Party organisation, which, like the old family patriarch, made arrangements for women’s own lives. While the family patriarch arranged marriages with the family interests in view, the Party authorities, in this case, imposed marriage partners upon the young women in the interests of the army men and the state, which was in direct conflict with the interests of the young women concerned.

CHAPTER 8 IDEOLOGICAL PURIFICATION AND CULTURAL ASCETICISM

Another hallmark of the GPCR period was the socially- and politically imposed ideological and cultural asceticism. The asceticism was displayed in many aspects, such as literature, art, public and popular discourses and officially sanctioned behaviour and attitudes.¹ Many non-endogenous words and notions about love, sexuality and male-female relations, which are relevant to women's position in both the family and society, became taboos, and excluded from public attention and discussion. The GPCR witnessed extreme sexual prudery, suppression and ignorance, with people's concerns with love, marriage, sex and related issues being labelled as "bourgeois" and "decadent", or as the work of the "class enemies" who tried to corrode people's thoughts.² With suppression, illegitimation and exclusion of these issues from the social and political discourses, came a virtual restoration of the sexual taboos built in Confucian moral codes.

The sexually repressive element of Confucianism served, for thousands of years, to maintain a sexual hierarchy, which was particularly insensitive, inhumane and oppressive for women. Many of the old cruel customs victimising women and the young, such as female foot-binding, arranged marriages, cultural and social obsession with women's pre-marital virginity, demands for women's one-sided fidelity, and prohibition on the remarriage of widows, could all be traced to the Confucian moral prescriptions. In pre-modern China, one function of binding women's feet was to check women's sexuality through restraining their physical mobility. As pointed out in the Introduction, strict sexual segregation prescribed by Confucian moral codes was a major factor contributing to female seclusion and the exclusion of women from schooling and public life.

Under the regime of sexual repression were also arranged marriages that precluded romantic love, intimacy and affection between spouses. This regime deemed women's sexuality as dangerous, and free association between the sexes as a potential threat to family integrity, parental control over the young and the absolute authority of the patriarch. The notion of *zhencao*, that is, virginity before marriage, public performance of chastity when widowed and prohibition of widows' remarriage as mentioned above all served to suppress women's sexuality and ensure men's control and power over women. The perception of sex as dirty and immoral

was culturally ingrained, particularly for women, but the necessity of sex was justified by its function of producing male descendants and continuing the patrilineal line for the men's families. However, despite the fact that women played an important role in this respect, they did not have any sexual rights. Further, they were considered potentially dangerous for being able to split the family unit and divert the sons' loyalty to the father and the lineage. In sum, the sexual repression of Confucianism lay beneath the set of values and mores that had sustained an oppressive sexual order, and hence constituted one of the moral shackles on women.

The GPCR's asceticism brought China under the very shadow of this Confucian sexual conservatism. Although romantic love was not so rigidly prohibited as under the traditional family regime, it was discouraged through being associated with "bourgeois ideas" or "petty bourgeois sentiments". Resembling the old familial system, under which intimacy and feelings between spouses, and sex seen by women as pleasure rather than mere obligations to men and their families, were not tolerated, the GPCR authorities treated romance and sex as politically deviant. This was because the individualistic tendencies implied in and expressed through these notions constituted a potential threat to the homogenising, ascriptive and authoritarian character of state power. This parallel between the traditional family and the GPCR in their treatment of sex and sexuality demonstrated a convergence of the Confucian moral code and the Maoist ideological and moral requirements.

This convergence was also displayed in tightened official restrictions on divorce. Although right to divorce was legally acknowledged, divorce in reality was discouraged by ideology, government specific guidelines and social customs. As Davin points out in her research, divorce was officially interpreted as arising from influences of "bourgeois ideas" and "capitalist life style".³ Such an interpretation was literally put into practice during the GPCR decade. It is true that both men and women could fall victims to such a moral straight-jacket, as was the case in China's long feudal history when Confucianism held the dominant ideological position and the demand on the young to sacrifice their happiness for the family's interests was overwhelming. But, in a closed, intolerant society, the repressive rules and stifling moral prescriptions were always applied most rigidly to those in lower social positions. During the GPCR, the official adaptation of the obsolete Confucian moral code in the name of the "revolution" functioned to direct social prejudice against

divorce, which was associated with disgrace and discrimination, almost solely towards women and their children. Pressure was particularly high on women who initiated divorces. This pressure was both social and political, since the social and cultural disapproval of divorce was inflamed by the intolerant attitudes of the government functionaries and legal personnel in their handling of divorce cases. All this made it extremely difficult for women who had been locked in unhappy marriages to get divorces. Even if she won a divorce, the divorcee would often find herself suffering from social opprobrium and ostracisation, frowned upon by society and regarded as a disgrace by her natal families and relatives.

As aforementioned, in China, permissions and certificates granted by the work units of the involved parties were required for marriage, divorce or abortion. This provided the Party and government officials with the power to control the lives of ordinary people in general and women in particular. The tremendous difficulty faced by women who sought divorce to end unhappy marriages was demonstrated by the experiences of a former female colleague of mine. This woman fought for nearly a decade in the 1970s for a divorce before she finally persuaded the leaders in her work-unit to grant her the required certificates. The reason for her long frustration and struggle was her husband's refusal to end the dead marriage, which was used as the main grounds by the officials of both her unit and her husband's for their refusal to provide the woman with the certificates. But underneath their decision was the assumption, shared by society at large and the officials and legal personnel involved, that a woman divorce initiator was morally unsound and sexually loose, and thus required moral guards to check her sexuality. Although this assumption alone may not be enough to control women's lives, its implementing mechanisms embodied in the entire political and social and power structure, such as the work unit, guaranteed this result.

The extreme asceticism and sexual prudery during the GPCR set free all the traditional conservative elements. This, coupled with the tightened control over women's lives by Party-state officials who were deeply embedded in this very tradition, restrained women severely in terms of their freedom and control over their own body and sexuality. Again, as witnessed in the "class struggle" scenes, the GPCR highlight of the sexual aspect of conservatism inflicted humiliation, maltreatment, and long-lasting physical and psychological wounds upon women who

showed less respect for the traditionally-defined proper sexual behaviour or deviated from the officially-imposed cultural and social norms. Furthermore, it served to reinforce the traditionally informed social bias against women.

Although it is impossible to quantify the exact extent to which this suffocating political and cultural atmosphere oppressed and scapegoated women, owing to the difficulty in gathering systematic evidence, analysis of the post-Mao literature, autobiographical and retrospective accounts and some social studies serve to vindicate the argument. According to Chang, at least two of her female acquaintances lost their young lives in the fanatical atmosphere of the GPCR owing to their loss of premarital virginity, either by committing suicide or through “underground” abortion.⁴ The reason behind their deaths included, among other things, the virtual non-existence of institutional sex education, no access by the young, especially unmarried girls to relevant information on reproductive health and contraceptives.⁵ Sexual ignorance and unprotected sex caused some unmarried women to face the unavoidable outcome of sex: pregnancy and abortion,⁶ which, in the GPCR context, meant humiliation and social ostracism.

Women’s frustration and plight caused by the traditional obsession with premarital virginity were worsened by relevant government restrictions on women’s decision-making power over their own body. To obtain an abortion, for instance, a woman had to show the gynaecologist her marriage certificate together with a permission paper from her work unit. Furthermore, for an unmarried woman, this formed a potential source of her subsequent public humiliation. In order to get the required permission paper from the work unit, the woman had to answer various questions during the official inquiries at her work-unit, which were often humiliating and insulting. She sometimes had to write a “self-criticism” to condemn her “bourgeois decadent acts”. Some work units even demanded that the woman read such forced self-denunciation in front of her co-workers. After enduring these events, the woman would be known as a “worn-out shoe” (*poxie*),⁷ and consequently became ostracised in her work-unit.⁸ While desperately trying to avoid such consequences, the women often risked their lives by seeking illegal or “back-door” abortions,⁹ as demonstrated by the aforementioned tragic case. In the latter circumstances, the women often had to wait for a long time before getting any special arrangement for the operation, and thus risked their health in abortion at an advanced stage of pregnancy.¹⁰

In the extremely puritan climate, women were abused, their privacy violated and their sexuality repressed. Chang relates that during the GPCR, her philosophy teacher at school was struggled against and beaten for the alleged “crime” that she met her husband on a bus, and the two young persons fell in love at the first sight (*yijianzhongqing*).¹¹ The condemnation of this woman teacher as “degenerate” and influenced by “bourgeois ideology”, albeit worded in modern Maoist terminology, was in essence in compliance with the Confucian moral prescription of sexual segregation. While the traditional cultural conservatism held the reins, women bore the brunt. In the so-called “Destroy the Four Olds” campaign, girls and women in cities and villages alike were required to wear the identical “revolutionary” straight, short hairstyle. Long plaits and other hairstyles like permed hair were considered “bourgeois”, and therefore not allowed. Evans, for instance, aptly terms this as “defeminisation of female appearance” and “its approximation to male standards of dress”.¹² Throughout the country, women were frequently harassed, attacked and humiliated simply because what they wore was not up to the arbitrarily set “proletarian” criteria. In *Life and Death in Shanghai*, Cheng tells what she saw in a Shanghai street one day at the inception of the GPCR:

“Suddenly I was startled to see the group of Red Guards right in front of me seize a pretty young woman. While one Red Guard held her, another removed her shoes and a third one cut the legs of her slacks open. The Red Guards were shouting, ‘Why do you wear shoes with pointed toes? Why do you wear slacks with narrow legs?’ In the struggle, the Red Guards removed her slacks altogether, much to the amusement of the crowd that had gathered to watch the scene. The onlookers were laughing and jeering. One of the Red Guards slapped the girl’s face to stop her from struggling ... ”¹³

Alongside the social obsession with women’s premarital virginity stood the equally obsessive condemnation of women’s extramarital sexuality. Again, this indignation was fanned by the excessive puritanism of the GPCR. Everywhere in the country, it seems, one could find women being humiliated and discriminated against for their heterodox sexual behaviour. The witch-hunting was so widespread that almost in every work-unit and during each sub-campaign of the GPCR, there were women being singled out as “worn-out shoes”, and treated similarly to the branded “class

enemies". They were paraded, struggled against and physically and psychologically tortured. Women's sexuality became one of the biggest enemies of the "revolution" and the most serious crime, which must be wiped out by the revolution, or brought under tight control by the state. In *Born Red*, Gao Yuan recounts how the Red Guards carried out the GPCR and the "class struggle" theme in his high school of a small town. Resorting to physical and mental torments, the Red Guards pressed two female teachers to "confess" in detail their unorthodox sexual lives, then manhandled and paraded them in the town. Gao depicts the astounding scene thus:

"Guo Pei [one of the woman teachers], ... wore a long pink silk *qipao* [cheongsam] that the students had found in her wardrobe. A pair of frayed red satin shoes hung around her neck. Her shoulder-length hair had been cut into a tangled haystack, with patches shaved to the scalp. She held a gong and a stick. Tang Hong [the other woman teacher] wore a long black gown and had a pair of old leather shoes dangling around her neck. All that was left of her hair was a long strip down the middle. She held a pair of cymbals. On orders from the rebel leaders, the three [including the two women's alleged lover] had to chant in turn as they walked ... 'I am Guo Pei, and I am a worn shoe.' 'I am Tang Hong, and I am a worn shoe too.'"¹⁴

The scapegoating of women and the young for their unorthodox sexual behaviour assumed a less violent form with the abatement of the initial storms of the GPCR. Gradually, it became routinised with an enforced notion of "dirt", "sin" and "crime" associated with such words as love, sex and sexuality. Not only were the latter terms removed from most publications, but also their expression in daily life tended to invite scandals and persecution. This is evidenced in the fact that the young men and women involved in premarital or extramarital sex usually had to face penalties more serious than those that most other kinds of officially defined "mistakes" or "malpractices" were likely to receive.

Walder's study of industrial relations in China provided examples of how this officially-held cultural puritanism facilitated the transformation of the deep-rooted male bias against women into concrete actions. Through extensive interviews with factory workers, Walder discovered that except for political and legal reasons, there

were very few cases of firing in enterprises during the GPCR. However, he noticed an exception to this: the dismissal of workers on moralistic grounds. One female apprentice had a premarital pregnancy. Because of this, she was considered “morally loose and subsequently sacked. Another apprentice became pregnant by her fiancé. But this woman, instead of admitting her “mistake” and showing a “sense of shame” as demanded by her superiors, acted in a defiant way. As a consequence, the factory heads refused to grant her the certificate required for registering her marriage. As an unmarried woman, she was not entitled to maternity leave, so she was fired near the end of her pregnancy for being absent from work.¹⁵

9-1 The "Iron Girl" Model

The GPCR period was often associated with a specific historical phenomenon in terms of gender relations: the "Iron Girls" (*Tieguniang*). The official depiction of the "Iron Girls" was that they were groups of young women, who won people's admiration for their devotion to the revolutionary cause and their selfless attitudes towards work: they often undertook the most difficult, demanding and sometimes back-breaking tasks. The prototype of the "Iron Girls" was a group of young women in Dazhai, a brigade set by Mao as a national model in adhering to the collective principle in agriculture.¹ According to official reports during the "learning from Dazhai" campaigns of the GPCR, Dazhai women, organised in a women's team, fought a local disastrous flood bravely in 1963. They worked alongside men to salvage crops in the fields and rescue peasants from their endangered homes. Their courageous acts gained them the title of "Iron Girls".² During the GPCR when the "Learning from Dazhai" movement reached its high tide, the "Iron Girl" team rose to national prominence. The "Iron Girls" were erected as a model for women to follow throughout the country, and as an exemplification of Mao's teaching that women supported half the heaven.

The "Iron Girls" were officially presented as a role model for women (*xianjin dianxing*). These girls were endowed with exceptional mental and physical strength. After a heavy workday contributing to the "revolution" and production, the women would still be full of energy, moving to, say, a basketball court for exercises. They were also reported doing types of work, which were deemed unsuitable for women, such as repairing high-voltage lines at dangerous height. In the 1970s an all-woman oil-drilling team was formed to work on the famous Daqing Oil Field,³ and the first March 8th bridge-building team came into being.

The ideological promotion of sexual equality through the official publicity of the "Iron Girl" model produced some positive effects. There was a favourable message delivered in this model in terms of gender equality: female was not a weaker sex with an inferior biology, and women could do whatever men can as long as they were armed with the "advanced Mao Zedong Thought". In effect, this message can be viewed as a specific version of Mao's general perception of the relationship

between the willpower of man and the physical world in his socio-economic transformation efforts. In other words, most Maoist development programmes, such as the GLF, embodies this idea that mere human will could overcome all objective constraints, and the revolutionary masses armed with an “advanced ideology” of Marxism and Leninism could create miracles. Although this perception was often carried to absurdity during both the GLF and the GPCR, it did express a desire to defy an age-old fatalistic tradition.

In addition to contesting gender stereotypes in society, the wide and intensified publicity for the model and the asexual image of the “Iron Girls” may have produced some positive psychological impact on women themselves with respect to their self-perception and self-confidence. Young women, seeing the “Iron Girl” examples, may have believed that given enough revolutionary enthusiasm, they could match men in achievements in public domains. These achievements would then become their tickets to a new society, in which traditional constraints on women’s role outside the household would fall away and their aspirations for social advancement could be realised.

9-2 Problems with the “Sameness” Approach

The promotion of the “Iron Girl” model was typical of the official approach to women’s liberation throughout the Mao era: the denial of sexual differences in any sense with exclusive emphasis on the “sameness” between the sexes. This approach was expressed in the frequently cited slogan of Chairman Mao of the time, “Time has changed, what men comrades can do, women comrades can do too.” However, despite the possible positive effects that this “sameness” approach might have produced, it created serious problems and dilemmas in the GPCR political and cultural context.

To begin with, the majority of the “Iron Girls” were most likely to be situated in the model units, such as Dazhai production brigade and Daqing oil field. Such model units were atypical since they tended to be artificially erected as ideological showcases or used as political weapons in intra-Party power struggles. As such, they often turned out to be fakes as their exceptionally superb performance was achieved through handsome government subsidies, as was the case in Dazhai. By the same token, the “Iron Girls” nourished in these model units in the politically charged

atmosphere of the GPCR faced a similar question of credibility. Indeed, the very official laudation and the excessive propaganda of the “Iron Girl” model subjected it to suspicions of political orchestration and instrumentalisation.⁴ Moreover, digging beneath the surface of this “sexual equality” model, one can always sense the typical GPCR expectations for women to demonstrate their absolute loyalty and obedience to the Party and the “great leader” in their actions, which frequently parroted the official slogans and Party guidelines. This may partially explain the widespread cynicism towards and the rapid public dismissal of the “Iron Girl” model following the end of the GPCR, when critical thinking and individualistic tendencies started to rise.

The application of the “sameness” approach posed two further questions. One was its denial of the diversity of experiences within the female gender. The “Iron Girls” were basically composed of young, unmarried women, and one could not help wondering how they would cope when they became wives and mothers.⁵ The second question was the dilemma involved in the “Iron Girl” model and the “sameness” approach: does gender equality mean that women are the same as men? A simplified interpretation of the issue during the GPCR led to women’s loss of both their sexual and political identity. It also implied that women should be judged, and accordingly treated by a set of standards based on male experiences alone, which clearly denied the significant differences between male and female experiences, such as the dual-role conflict keenly felt by working women. Furthermore, as Jacka aptly points out, while stress was placed on women’s becoming the same as men, the reverse claim was never made.⁶ The GPCR’s systematic negation of difference and diversity both between women and men and among women themselves created unrealistically high social expectations of women in general, and produced great pressure on married women with children in particular. However, it failed to pose any genuine challenge to the socially defined sexual roles that exempted most men from family responsibilities such as housework and child care. In consequence, the approach only increased the already heavy burdens on women’s shoulders.

Problems with the “Iron Girl” model and the “sameness” approach included, as well, its elimination of choice for women. Of course, there have been women in both Western countries and recent China who have, by their own choice, played down the socially-defined “feminine attributes” and dressed and behaved as men do in order to

gain “qualifications” for success by male-set criteria.⁷ In contrast, the identical image of the “revolutionary women” represented in the “Iron Girl” model was officially imposed on all women without exception. The image of the Chinese woman depicted and lauded in the official media was an asexual figure, which reflected a “unitary moral didacticism” delivered in the dominant official discourse on sexuality and gender relations of the time.⁸ Like the heroines in the eight model operas (*yangbanxi*),⁹ women mirrored in this image were often devoted revolutionaries without personal distractions.¹⁰ Both men and women wore the same clothes, or the officially endorsed Mao-style uniform, in either green or blue colour. Political and social demand for uniformity was particularly high for women. Any attempts by women to display individual styles and characters or to be distinct from others, such as showing the curvaceous figure of the female body in dress, wearing colourful clothes, or having a personal style in speech, risked being labelled as “bourgeois”, and then were subject to political criticisms and even attacks. Differences in any sense were not tolerated, and people, women as well as men, were expected to be the same in ideology and in physical appearance.

In a sense, the rationality underlying the GPCR “sameness” approach can be viewed as an extension of the CCP’s economic programme of collectivisation into the political domain: both of which denied the heterogeneous, pluralistic nature of society, polity and gender interests. This again can be traced to the integrative characteristic of the Confucian familial regime and its way of thinking, which, while homogenising the interests of the family unit, was intolerant towards individualistic expressions and orientations of women as well as the young. Furthermore, as shown above, many of the practices, either directed or informed by the GPCR “sameness” approach, were characterised by suppression and suffocation of the physical features of the female sex and sexuality, or as Evans terms it, the “defeminisation of female appearance”.¹¹ It thus conveyed a strong message of sexual conservatism and intolerance. As such, this seemingly iconoclastic Maoist approach to changes in gender roles paradoxically echoed the obsolete tones of Confucian mores of asceticism, which, as discussed before, constituted the most repressive moral yokes placed on women by tradition.

9-3 Women's Cynicism towards the GPCR

Like the GLF, the GPCR ostensibly highlighted the issue of "women's liberation" through female mobilisation and compulsory participation. However, there was a fundamental problem shared by both the GLF and the GPCR approaches: the very problematic government socio-economic and political programmes themselves, in which women were required to participate. This shared character has lain at the source of the cynicism felt by Chinese women towards these officially-manipulated political movements throughout the Mao era, and of women's disillusionment of the official rhetoric to "emancipate" them.¹² The GPCR was marked by violence and fanaticism, which incurred huge cost and hindered the progress of Chinese society. In addition, issues perceived by women as closely related to their lives and status were either discarded by the state or restricted by the official development policies. One example was the forced dissolution of women's federation and the closure of the two popular publications dealing with the concerns of women and the young, i.e. *Chinese Women* and *Chinese Youth*.¹³ Further, the irrationality of the many development projects of the time undermined the attempts to overcome the limitations of resources needed for specific socio-economic programmes particularly beneficial to women.

Undeniably, there were some gains for women, especially those achieved through the wide publicity and vigorous propagation of the gender equality principle. With the passage of time, women holding jobs outside home became a norm, and women's equal access to education was taken for granted, especially in urban areas. However, because of the broad problems with macro-level policy and the general political atmosphere, the achievements in female employment and education were significantly undermined. For the majority of the Chinese women residing in rural areas, working outside home did not bring them much financial reward or economic independence. As demonstrated in part I of the thesis, the rural surplus produced by women in the communes was simply seized by the state for realising its urban-biased plans.

Official statistics on female school enrolment displayed a favourable pattern during the latter part of the GPCR,¹⁴ which pointed to an improvement in women's education. According to ZFF and SFY, for instance, the national average of the

proportion of female primary school attendance stood at 45.5 percent in 1976; and this figure was only surpassed after over a decade in 1988 at 45.6 percent.¹⁵ However, progress in this aspect was largely cancelled out by the educational policies of the time. To begin with, education no longer operated as an effective avenue for female empowerment and upward social mobility because of the implementation of the CCP's anti-intellectual guidelines and the associated discriminatory practices.¹⁶ Apart from this, the official requirement for educated urban youth to settle in the remote frontier areas and the countryside produced a reverse relationship between education and social mobility, leading to further devaluation of education. Furthermore, the content of schooling was changed considerably by the "education reform" project of the GPCR. Education served a function less of passing on knowledge and skills than of quasi-religious teaching and ideological indoctrination, as Mao's quotations and GPCR slogans filled textbooks and other teaching materials. Educators and professionals were required to labour in the factories and countryside, whereas uneducated workers and peasants were asked to enter and teach in the classrooms. This "education reform" rendered schooling even more boring for pupils. In addition, much of the school time had to be spent on performing unskilled, manual labour in the fields or factories, as students were asked to receive "re-education" from the peasants and workers by the education guidelines of the time.

In consequence, women who were of school age during the GPCR were among the most poorly educated in spite of their nominal educational levels. This was evidenced in the village women's literacy state discovered in my fieldwork. Women in the age cohort of 26-45 mentioned that during the GPCR they did not learn much at school. One woman, 38-year-old, semi-literate Jia Chunying, related:

"When I was in primary school, it happened to be during the Cultural Revolution. Schools were all managed by the poor and lower-middle peasants. No knowledge was taught at school, and we were asked to go down to the village to take part in physical labour all the time."

(Interview with Jia Chunying)

Another village women, 33-year-old Li Yufen, mentioned that she had had high aspirations for herself when she was at school. However, "[her school years]

happened to be in bad times. There was no point to carry on with schooling after junior high, since even if one received senior high school education, one had to end up in the countryside as a peasant. The national university entrance examination system hadn't resumed yet." (Interview with Li Yufen)

This feature of the GPCR lends support to the argument that a genuine understanding of the movement in terms of its impact on women requires examination beyond the official rhetoric, or the "face value", of the time. In effect, the very absurdity of the GPCR's "innovations" and projects, in which women were required to participate, alienated the majority of Chinese women.

A case in point was the nation-wide "farmland and water conservancy project", which was designed to increase grain production during the "Learning from Dazhai" campaigns. Women, particularly the Iron Girl teams and female students from the cities, were asked to participate in these projects alongside men, doing heavy physical labour. Although regional variations in policy implementation may have shown some successful cases in these undertakings, in which local conditions were taken into account and grain yields increased as a result, most of these projects were likely to be characterised by "formalism" and irrationality. One of the farmland construction projects demanded that the peasants create "man-made plains" (*xiao pingyuan*) for growing grain by filling up large margins of lakes. Years later, these "man-made plains", applauded as a "wonder" created by the GPCR at the time, had to be removed in order to restore the disrupted ecological balance.¹⁷ Similar projects, such as the one described by Chang, required peasants and students, both male and female, to flatten hills covered by green orchards to fill gullies and create "man-made terraced fields" (*renzao títian*) for grain production. However, what replaced the green orchards in this "creative" move was nothing but "a wasteland of blast holes piled up with stones and shapeless cement masses".¹⁸

There were numerous projects like these with some lasting for years during the GPCR decade. One that I myself experienced was the national afforestation drive. As students from the city, we were asked to plant trees on mountains and hills. Each winter we went to such places to dig scale-shaped pits (*yulinkeng*) along the slopes, and in spring we went again to plant saplings. It was hard physical labour indeed, particularly for female students. We excavated pits with heavy picks on hard frozen

earth in winter, and carried heavy buckets of water up the steep hills for the newly-planted saplings in spring. Often our cotton-padded coats were soaked in sweat, and no special consideration was given to those of us who were in menstruation. The physical demand on young girls was so high that many of us suffered from gynaecological ailments. But what was the fruit of our hard labour? In each drive, quotas were set by the upper-level authorities beforehand as to how many trees must be planted in how large an area within how many days by how many people. Unfortunately, in the fanatical atmosphere of the GPCR these quotas were always disproportionately set. It followed that what concerned the leaders and the masses alike was not so much afforesting the hills as completing the quotas, and people simply planted a dozen or more saplings in each pit in order to finish the several trucks of saplings within the designated time. In the end, we found ourselves coming back to the same places each year to do the same job.¹⁹

There were other projects, which were more political than economic, but equally devoid of positive meanings. These included, among other things, the inhuman struggle sessions against the so-called “class enemies” and the tedious political study meetings composed of reading Mao’s teachings and slogan-ridden editorials of official newspapers. These “political activities” were compulsory for women, but, instead of “increasing the legitimacy of female activity outside the home”,²⁰ represented state coercive force over women. The “class struggle” sessions might well be directed against the parents or husbands of the women who were forced to participate in such sessions. The off-work time devoured by such activities simply added to the burden of women’s double workday and to their worries about their children.

Thurston reports a case of a young child, who, while having to try to make a meal by himself, tragically set both the kitchen and himself on fire.²¹ She terms this as the “*de facto* orphans” of the GPCR. The phenomenon was that children with living parents had to be taken care of by neighbours or relatives owing to the state imposed after-work study and struggle sessions on their parents, particularly mothers. She reported that the many tragedies occurred to their young children as “*de facto* orphans” was largely responsible for the deep sense of guilt felt by many mothers who suffered from the post-traumatic stress disorder after the GPCR.²² For professional and intellectual women, their forced participation in these “political activities” meant

deprivation of their liberty, choice and right to work and think independently. They also constituted a rigorous test -- no matter how they abhorred these sessions, they could not afford to show signs of repugnance for safety's sake. By the end of the decade, these women shared a profound sense of waste and loss:

“... loss of culture and of spiritual values; loss of status and honour; loss of career and dignity; loss of hope and ideals; loss of time, truth, and of life; loss, in short, of nearly everything that gives meaning to life.”²³

The above analysis in this part of the study demonstrates that, on the whole, the GPCR, like the GLF, developed and operated within the traditional framework of thinking and behaviour, which underpinned the existing unequal sexual arrangements, rather than posing a genuine threat to it. As such, the ideology and practices of the GPCR fell into a self-referential circle. The existing sexual hierarchy and its underlying ideology in Chinese society could not be fundamentally challenged without breaking the circle and transcending the officially interpreted orthodox Marxism in approaching the question of women's emancipation. This perception of the Maoist approach points to the possibility of alternative approaches to both economic and social development and gender issues. In part III, I shall look at the alternatives and options for women that have emerged since the late 1970s.

PART III UNDERSTANDING CHANGES IN WOMEN'S STATUS IN THE CONTEXT OF THE POST-MAO REFORMS

The Maoist development strategy based on the centrally planned economic model failed to attain its officially declared goals. This, together with the regime's high-handed behaviour and discriminating policies against some social groups, led to mounting economic and political crises and growing social discontent in the last years of the GPCR.¹ The death of Mao Zedong in September 1976 and the purge, soon afterwards, of the Cultural Revolution Group, the so-called Gang of Four, from the Party's leadership, signalled the virtual end of both the GPCR and the entire Mao era.² These events also left open the direction in which China might move in the immediate future, and pointed to possible changes in the leadership's development thinking and the state organised mobilisational approach to the "woman question".

CHAPTER 10 MAJOR POLICY SHIFTS IN THE POST-MAO YEARS

Following Mao's death, there was a brief transitional period when Mao's designated successor Hua Guofeng acted as the Party chief. Although conflicting with Mao's trusted GPCR Group in power struggles, Hua did not show any inclination to make radical changes in the Maoist guidelines. The widespread discontent that China faced in the wake of the GPCR not only demanded a more powerful leadership than Hua represented, but also prompted the CCP to consider possibilities of change in its unpopular policies. Against this backdrop, and backed by a people calling for and expecting change, Deng Xiaoping, known for his pragmatic approaches, made his political comeback in 1977,¹ which was followed by the rapid removal of the close followers of Mao and the Gang of Four, and their replacement by Deng's supporters within the power structure.² Firmly in control, Deng was able to start a process of political rectification and reappraisal of the major historical events, notably, the GPCR, the GLF and the anti-rightist campaign, in order to relieve social dissatisfaction and win over a disillusioned public. This transition in Party-state power thus prepared the stage for the ensuing comprehensive reform programme and the overhaul of China's development approach, which is sharply distinct from the Maoist strategy of the earlier three decades.

The Third Plenum of the CCP's Eleventh Central Committee held in December 1978 represented a turning point in China's recent developmental history. The policy focus on ideological purification and "class struggle", and the stress on levelling and "self-sufficiency" highlighted in the Maoist development paradigm were officially repudiated, and the formerly excluded alternative views on development became dominant. Consequently, important decisions were made on the reorientation of China's development policies towards reform and greater openness to the outside world.³

The basic guideline changes made at the Third Plenum granted ideological legitimacy to local initiatives of reducing the rural accounting unit from production brigades or teams to smaller groups, and then to individual households.

This process, later to be known as decollectivisation and widely publicised as the heart of the institutional changes in China's countryside, was not, however, an

unprecedented and completely new innovation of the post-Mao era. In effect, much of the inspiration came from an early 1960s practice in the economic readjustment programme, the so-called “three freedoms and one contract” (*sanzi yibao*) scheme, adopted both as a temporary compromise to rural passive resistance to collectivisation and as an expedient for alleviating the devastating effect of the GLF.⁴ As the earlier policy had demonstrated a notable positive effect on rural productivity and livelihood,⁵ similar local initiatives were taken quietly to mitigate the poverty-stricken situation in parts of the agrarian provinces of Anhui and Sichuan a couple of years before the Third Plenum’s official ratification of such practices.⁶ With the official sanction delivered at the Third Plenum, the local pilot schemes were followed responsively by the rest of the country. According to official statistics, by the end of 1983, over 97 percent of all rural households adopted the “household responsibility system” (*jiating shengchan zerenzhi*, or *baochan daohu*),⁷ which effectively pronounced the end of China’s two-decade-long agricultural collectivisation.

The “household responsibility system” as an alternative to people’s communes has been viewed as the core of the micro-level economic restructuring in rural China. The basic idea behind it is to re-establish a closer link between rural labour rewards and the efforts and performance of each individual household. Under this system, collectively owned land and agricultural machinery are leased out to individual farm households. The allocation of land, whose ownership has been retained by the then collectives and now the village and *xiang* governments, to individual households was largely in accordance with the household’s size (*an renkou fendi*). Moreover, land quality, such as the fertility of the soil and the distance of the plot from the village, was taken into account to obtain a fairer result in land division.⁸ In addition, other means of production owned by the collectives such as farm machinery and draught animals were divided among the villagers. Some of such means was auctioned off to the highest bidders in villages, others leased out through arrangements between villagers and the village government.⁹ Equality and equity seemed to have operated as the main criteria in land division within village communities at this stage, and both men and women received an equal share of land in most rural areas (gender inequality in land use rights as a later development will be analysed below).¹⁰ The contract households are, in return, obliged to sell to the state certain quotas of grain at set

prices as a major part of agricultural tax.¹¹ Once the specified quotas are completed, anything left over can be disposed of at will by the contract farm households.

This adoption of the "household responsibility system" represents a significant decentralisation of power. With the disintegration of rural communes, the state no longer controls the management and direction of agricultural production. It also makes it more difficult for the state to arbitrarily impose unrealistically high procurement targets on the peasants. Negotiation and bargaining at the local level have replaced upper-level state fiat in working out the quotas of agricultural produce that rural households must sell to the state. The chronic disincentive problem caused both by the commune's function to seize maximum rural surplus through setting disproportionately high state procurement tasks, and by its strong tendency to level remuneration irrespective of individual labourers' efforts and performance in production is, in this way, effectively curtailed. And most of the micro-level problems in collectivised agriculture imposed by a centrally-planned economy, such as top-down blind directives in production planning and management in disregard of local conditions and peasant interests, are avoided.

As an integral part of a general economic reorientation, rural decollectivisation has been accompanied by important policy shifts in many other aspects. At the ideological level, there has been the formal abandonment of the "class struggle" theme and the "class origin" concept.¹² The Third Plenum officially declared the removal of the negatively differentiating labels tagged on the branded people and their families, and announced their re-admission to the ranks of the "Chinese people". This decision not only cleared up a source of a constant tension and oppression in Chinese society, but also signalled the beginning of a different age in which "ascriptive" values are being replaced by "achievement" ones.

At the organisational level, the people's communes' three-tiered structure (teams, brigades and communes), which had also functioned as local government administrations, was replaced by the newly introduced village (*cun*) and township (*xiang* or *zhen*) councils simultaneously with decollectivisation during 1982-1985.¹³ However, in many Chinese villages after decollectivisation, rural people still use the terms of the commune period when referring to the new administrative structures. In Dongdatun, for instance, villagers called the village council, or the villagers'

committee, *Dadui* (the Brigade) instead of *Cunmin Wenyuanhui* (the Village Council), but the village head *Cunzhang* (Head of the Village) rather than *Duizhang* (the Brigade Head). This mixture of old and new references and names may reflect a real situation, in which the current administrative, managerial and organisational structures and their functions remain a mixture of the collective legacy and the new roles demanded by an emerging market economy.

Significant policy switches have taken place at the macro-economic level as well. The artificial "price scissors" structure has been readjusted.¹⁴ The state monopoly of rural and urban markets embodied in the unified state procurement system in the country¹⁵ and the rationing scheme in towns and cities was relinquished.¹⁶ Accompanying these changes has been a considerable relaxation of official control over rural out-migration.¹⁷ In addition, there has been a marked shift from inhibiting towards tolerating, and then encouraging the revival and expansion of rural and urban markets,¹⁸ and from restricting towards promoting rural economic diversification demonstrated, in particular, in the development of household specialised production (*zhuan yehu*) and rural enterprises (*xiangzhen qiye*).¹⁹

Added to these macro-measures is the decision to end China's long-time policy of isolation and self-containment, and to re-enter the world economic system and international market through expanding foreign trade and attracting overseas investment.

What I have presented above is a highly condensed and generalised account of the reform process and policy shifts to serve the purpose of providing a background for analysis in the following chapters. However, one should bear in mind that the policy process in reality has been much more complicated, discursive and incremental rather than lineal and happening at a single blow. It is also the case that grass-roots and local initiatives have often taken the lead in reforming the old economic regime, with official policies lagging behind and then being brought in line with the changed conditions and realities.²⁰ The policy formation and implementation in the post-Mao years, therefore, should be viewed as a two-way process. In this process, the leadership has often played a passive role, making concessions to sectoral and local appeals and interests, rather than actively taking the initiative to remove existing restrictions. This parameter of the post-Mao policy process has been both a cause and

effect of greater heterogeneity and plurality in Chinese politics in the expression of power relations and local and group interests. In the meantime, as Judd aptly points out, post-Mao rural reforms were initially dominated by a rather narrow discourse of economic growth, which could be seen as another attempt of China to find a “fundamental solution” to her modernisation problems. Official attentions were focused on the collective versus household paradigms at the expense of gender power relations within and outside the household.²¹

CHAPTER 11 RURAL REFORMS AS EXPERIENCED BY WOMEN IN THE VILLAGE

11-1 Women's Autonomy

Women in China have frequently seen their autonomy as opposed not only by men but also by the state. This is because, as argued in the first two parts of the analysis, the Maoist state took over much of the power previously held by the family patriarch in controlling women's lives in both the public and private realms through institutional changes and policy processes. The state's omnipresent interference resulted in a strengthened patriarchal power and a diminishing autonomy on the part of women. In addition, gender relations and interests have been interwoven with, and often overwhelmed by, striking sectoral inequalities sustained by a state-enforced urban-rural dichotomy. All this imposed restraints, on top of the social and cultural ones, on rural women.

The general reversal of the Maoist policies and practices in the reform era, which can be interpreted as an overall retreat of the state in respect of its highly centralised power and tight control over society, has engendered flexible elements and liberal changes in the economic and political structures of the country. Return to family farming together with greater mobility of the rural population has resulted in an erosion of the lineally-linked, residentially-structured and territorially-based male power as the centre of local communities.¹ As boundaries of lineal-based rural communities are increasingly blurred, gender relations start assuming a more dynamic form of expression and representation. Rural women in this context have been able to create more manoeuvring space for themselves in their fight for greater equality and equity in both urban-rural and gender relations.

In effect, rural women, much more motivated by their sectoral interests, were among the initiators of the post-Mao reforms. They expressed their preference for the economic changes by engaging in sidelines, spreading the practice of family farming prior to its official recognition in their own informal ways, and with their direct or indirect contact with and active engagement in the market. Zhou, for example, shows that in the late 1970s when decollectivisation was at its local trial stage, many rural young women in Anhui and Jiangsu provinces displayed their preference for the new arrangement through their selection of marriage partners mainly from farmers in the decollectivised areas. In this way, they helped spread the practice into areas where

local authorities were more cautious about taking any risk of being labelled as embarking on the “capitalist road”.² From a perspective of construing rural reforms as more of locally initiated, interactive processes, rural women, rather than passively accepting policies imposed by the central government, have played the part of actors and agents in precipitating reforms and influencing official policies in varied informal ways. Such interactions in policy processes during the post-Mao era have been increasingly constraining the power of the central state, thus helped redefine the role and function of the state, and reshaped the relations between the state and rural women.

In academic discourse on gender equality, state socialism tends to be considered “protective” for women. This is partly due to the urban social security scheme in the state socialist countries, under which women employed in government sectors and state enterprises were entitled to a variety of benefits, such as paid maternity leave, low-cost child-care, life-long employment and basic state pensions. However, as discussed before, urban women paid a great deal for such benefits as they became more and more dependent on the state, which increasingly assumed the role of a family patriarch in its control over women’s lives through imposing restrictions and removing choices. Furthermore, the sharpened boundaries between urban and rural areas realised through economic central planning and official tight control over population movement meant that like many other urban-centred schemes, such as the guaranteed state grain supplies and the benefit of almost free housing and medical care, the social security scheme was sustained largely on the premise of a non-market economy and at the expense of rural inhabitants.

In fact, the state social security programme did not cover the vast countryside where the majority of China’s population had to take full responsibility for their own welfare. Rural people used to compare state-paid urban jobs to an “iron rice bowl” (*tie fanwan*), which implied life-long employment in a state sector, but analogise agricultural occupations to “clay-legs” (*nituizi*) holding a “clay rice bowl” (*ni fanwan*), which suggested an unsecured job in hard working conditions. The lack of state welfare provision for rural people was further exacerbated by low state investment in agriculture and the stagnant rural production and standard of living

induced by the commune system, which limited the ability of rural collectives to finance local social security schemes for rural residents.

This scenario suggests that in the pre-reform years, rural women paid a great deal in terms of choice, opportunities and mobility under the state-imposed constraints, but received much less than urban women in return. It seems that the state withdrawal of its all-embracing interference, which has probably meant the loss of a certain measure of state “protection” for urban women,³ has given rural women something to gain but little to lose.⁴

In my interviews with the village women, a term that frequently came up in women’s own account of their experiences under the “responsibility system” was “freedom” (*ziyou*). This reflected, in my understanding, women’s greater autonomy vis-à-vis an essentially patriarchal, repressive state during the Mao era. In fact, it was this “freedom” and autonomy that was perceived by the village women as the most significant advantage of rural reforms:

“It [the reform] has liberated women. Nowadays women have more incentives to work, and enjoy more autonomy in, say, the management of land, engagement in sideline production and non-farm economic activities.” (Interview with Zhao Yuchun, 22, teacher and senior high school graduate)

To my question “What do you think of the rural reforms, and why?”, the village women informants all responded with a positive assessment. Their answers indicated that they based their judgements on comparisons with their direct or indirect commune experiences. Wang Guiying, a mother of three, said:

“Nowadays, women enjoy more freedom and flexibility. Under the commune system, we had to go to work every day in the collective’s fields for fixed hours. If you were delayed by child care or housework, your daily work-points would be reduced. For women with small babies, they had to rush home to breast-feed their babies while others were taking a break at the edge of the fields. There were also specified working days that women must complete for each month, that is, 24-25 days. Otherwise, their work-points would be affected. However, women

had a lot of family responsibilities, and some women did not feel well during menstruation. But they were not to decide when to do what for themselves, and sometimes menstruating women were assigned work in cold paddy fields. Women in those days always felt exhausted. Things are different now. Since the land was contracted to the households (*chengbao*), women have been able to adjust their time and make suitable arrangements according to their physical conditions and the actual needs in their contracted land and at home.” (Interview with Wang Guiying, 46, farmer)

As stated earlier, agricultural collectivisation was doubly disincentive for rural women, both because of the state maximum extraction of rural surplus through the commune system and as a result of the sexual discrimination built in the commune’s remuneration scheme. Returning to family farming, therefore, has, to some extent, blurred the dual disincentive factor. This was evident from the remarks by some village women in the older age cohorts:

“In the past, we all worked in the collective’s fields, taking the same portions of meal from the ‘big pot’ (*chi daguofan*).⁵ We weren’t allowed to put our energy anywhere else ... You worked for the Brigade for one day, that day’s work-point was recorded in the collective’s account book. People weren’t motivated much as no matter how hard they worked, the work-points they earned wouldn’t change. Furthermore, the work-points were worth little in value. Since the land was divided (*sanshe*), we’ve got more drive to work. We’ve worked from dawn to dusk, and harvested more grains than in the past.” (Interview with Jia Chunying, 38, farmer)

“Now you no longer have to dawdle along with many others in the fields all day long to complete tasks that needed much fewer people for limited work-points. You work diligently on your own initiative on the contracted land ... The busiest time of the year is during the summer and autumn harvests. In other times, you only have to attend the land in the morning and evening, so you have more time and energy to engage

in sideline and other kinds of income-earning activities.” (Interview with Li Yufen, 33, checker in the village’s brickyard)

Getting rid of the commune system together with its work-point remuneration scheme motivated village women. Decollectivisation allowed village women in Dongdatun to regain their rights and freedom in allocating their time and energy in light of their own needs and interests. As economic activities in the family farm became increasingly market-oriented, possibilities for some women to earn more than men grew; whereas in the past there had been only one possibility for almost all rural women: the institutionally-determined fixed low income relative to men. Moreover, the decentralisation of decision-making with decollectivisation enabled village women to enjoy some new autonomy in determining the direction of production, which, in turn, significantly enlarged the scope of their income-earning activities. This is evident from the comments by some women interviewees:

“Nowadays, land is less than before, however, the grains produced are sufficient to feed us. The reasons are the policies of the commune years didn’t allow you to show your abilities. But now all your ideas can be realised. When you have an idea about how to earn more money, such as doing business and trade, you can set out to realise it ... Although I’m busier, I feel freer, as I can make decisions on my own now. So I prefer the current system, it’s much better than the communes.” (Interview with Lu Suping, 36, farmer)

“In the past, we were only allowed to grow grains, but now we can make decisions on what to grow ourselves. Developing domestic sidelines is encouraged now, while in the past we had neither time nor guts to carry out such activities: you’d be charged with taking capitalist road then ... I’ve grown vegetables and raised domestic animals. All these have brought me more income than before.” (Interview with Wang Guifen, 52, farmer)

The diversification of women’s economic activities has increased both their income and the necessary resources for pursuing more lucrative business opportunities. Rural women’s greater financial strength and confidence were reflected in the fact that some

village women signed contracts with the village authority to manage collectively owned assets such as fish ponds and orchards. Yang Zhiying, a woman contractor, spoke of the greater economic strength of rural women in relation to their new autonomy:

“Now women have got more ways to earn money. They can engage in trade and commerce outside home, or earn their wages in township and village enterprises. They can also develop domestic sidelines, such as animal breeding and cash crop cultivation. They can grow vegetables and contract orchards. In fact, women have played a major role in sideline production. All these were impossible in the past. These economic activities have increased women’s income-earning ability.”

(Interview with Yang Zhiying, 37)

Another woman, 22-year-old Zhao Yuchun, believed that her mother benefited most in the three-member family from the more recent policy switches as far as income earning ability was concerned. She made a comparison between her father and mother. Her father worked in the county’s Construction Materials Bureau as an employee, the kind of job that used to be envied by the country folks, and her mother was an ordinary peasant woman. Prior to the rural reform when Yuchun was about seven or eight years old, the salary and bonus that her father earned were about 90 *yuan* a month, whereas her mother did not bring in much cash as a commune member (*sheyuan*). But since the rural reform, her mother engaged in pig finishing, that is, purchasing young piglings and fattening them for market. A piglet kept for three to four months now could fetch 600-1,000 *yuan*. While her father’s monthly salary grew to 300-400 *yuan*, her mother, by selling seven to eight pigs each year alone, made 4,000-5,000 *yuan* after deducting production cost on feed and piglets. If fowls and cattle reared by her mother were counted in, Yuchun reckoned, the money she brought in to the household would be even greater.

Based on their experiences, village women saw the abolition of the commune system as emancipatory. Indeed, women facilitated rural reforms through their active participation in the newly emerging non-state market, which helped erode state power together with the centrally planned economic structure. This, in turn, prompted the state to further deepen reforms and retreat from its monopoly of the market and

restrictions on rural women. In this process, women, particularly those with good business sense, were able to display their talents, make money, and develop their own careers in the marketplace. At the same time, their actions constituted an unprecedented challenge to the traditional definitions of the “appropriate” roles and place of the female sex as mothers, wives and daughters-in-law inside home. This subtle change in the sexual roles and expectations as against conventional gender stereotypes was discernible from the attitudes of 64-year-old Zhou Shuying towards her daughters-in-law. Traditionally, women who went travelling on their own for work, particularly if their jobs involved dealing with men, say in business, were disapproved and their activities prohibited by the elderly in the family, and gossiped about in local communities. Nowadays, Mrs. Zhou’s daughters-in-law were doing exactly such unconventional jobs for the family businesses. Instead of frowning upon the younger women, Mrs. Zhou took a pride in their courage and ability. Moreover, it was revealed during the interviews that she actually took over the responsibility of looking after her grandchildren so that her daughters-in-law could do their businesses. Mrs. Zhou observed:

“Women now have more opportunities to develop their own careers ...

Some women have started their own business in trade. Recently, a woman from another part of the country has come to the village to trade in machines. She knows everything about the machines, such as their property and condition. She’s got three assistants, and she’s the boss. My three daughters-in-law are very capable. They’ve acted as purchasing agents for the family businesses, travelling around to buy vehicle parts from wholesalers in different parts of the country, whereas my sons work at home repairing vehicles and selling the parts. My daughters-in-law are as able as my sons. My youngest daughter-in-law is even more capable than my youngest son. She has contact with a foreign trade company, and contracted batches of work from it. She’s then subcontracted the work to women in the village ... Since the reform, women can make the most of their abilities and contacts. They are no longer restricted.” (Interview with Zhou Shuying)

The experiences of Mrs. Zhou's daughters-in-law were in marked contrast with those of her own when she was young. She recalled that during the second civil war between the Nationalist and the Communist (1946-49), a Liberation Army unit passed her natal village. At a tender age of 17, she had already been a member of the women's federation in the village, and actively involved in making socks and shoes organised by the federation for the Liberation Army in their support for the "people's war". Influenced by the Army people, she was eager to go outside home, follow the Army and participate in public life. She even joined the Liberation Army for a while. However, her parents objected fiercely, scolding her for mingling with men in the Army without any sense of shame. Under the pressure of her "old-fashioned" (*jiu naojin*) parents, she had to drop out after about a month in the Army and returned home (otherwise she could have become a veteran revolutionary and enjoyed a much better social position now). Judging from the different life experiences of Mrs. Zhou and her daughters-in-law, it seems that young village women before 1949 tended to be restricted by their families, but after collectivisation were further constrained by the institutionalised mechanisms such as the *hukou* regime and the limited occupational choice and market-related activities. In the reform years, the extra restrictions imposed by the state upon women seemed to be considerably alleviated, making the ideological promotion of gender equality initiated during the Mao period more effectual in terms of its impact on women's own perception of their roles and positions.

Rural women's greater engagement in income-earning activities has brought them higher financial rewards and strengthened their position in their households. This was reflected in the inclination shown by a few strong-willed women to keep their self-earned money in accounts separate from the parental accounts, or control the family's joint accounts. Women's higher earning ability coupled with their greater access to domestic resources, then, made them more independent and assertive in resisting possible parental or patriarchal control over their lives, and more confident in fulfilling their aspirations through their own efforts. It also equipped them with greater bargaining leverage in domestic decision making, where women's own needs and interests may sometimes come in conflict with those perceived by the family unit or the patriarch.

This point is illustrated by the experiences of the young village women Gu Weimin and Li Yufen. Weimin entered a township-run garment factory as a worker shortly after graduation from junior high school. After working there for a while, she then decided to start a barbershop of her own. In response to a television advertisement, she went to register at a training course in Jixian, the seat of the county government. Weimin said:

“The whole idea of doing my own business in hair-dressing was opposed by both my parents, especially father, and almost all the relatives. My parents have had the old idea of valuing son over daughter, but they don’t have a son. They objected my idea and refused to pay for the training fee. I myself paid it all, from the money I earned at the township garment factory. I have liked hair styling and beauty culture since at school, and wanted to develop along this line. Besides, there wasn’t a barbershop in the village before. If I open one, it would be handy for the villagers as well as for myself. So although I was under family pressure, I was still determined to achieve my goals.” (Interview with Gu Weimin, 22)

Weimin believed that the cultural values in rural society was still “stressing men over women” (*zhongnanqingnü*), and this was also true in her natal family where there were three daughters but no sons. She reckoned that behind the objections of her parents were the typical peasants’ attitudes of caution and avoidance of risk; however, a more decisive factor was their view of a woman’s appropriate role as a docile follower rather than a bold initiator. Weimin refused to accept this, as she observed,

“I don’t think that women are inferior to men although society still believes so. I admire women entrepreneurs and understand that to be successful, they must have withstood a lot of social and familial pressures.” (Interview with Gu Weimin)

Due to her determination, Weimin finally managed to persuade her parents, and succeeded in running her small barbershop for a few years. Besides offering hair-dressing services to the villagers, she also engaged in retailing as she sold shampoos

and cosmetics inside the shop, and ice-creams outside. However, she was not content with what she had done, as indicated in the following remarks:

“I had various ideas to start my own business before, such as tailoring and franchising. I even thought of migrating to town, where I could earn more money, start and develop a business faster. In the end, I didn’t leave home because I felt that my parents, who were sonless, needed me in the family farm as well as to look after them when they get old... Although I’ve now opened a business in the village, I’ve been thinking forward. Village women wouldn’t be satisfied merely with a simple haircut: they, particularly young women, will soon have new demand. I’ll broaden the scope of my service and improve my skills in make-up and beauty therapy in order to meet such new needs.” (Interview with Gu Weimin)

While pressures on Weimin came from her parents, those on Yufen, a working mother aged 33, were largely from the conservatism of the village community. Prior to her current job as a cashier and checker in the village’s brickyard, Yufen had engaged in various market-related activities ever since decollectivisation. She grew vegetables as well as grains in the contracted land, sold vegetables by retail and wholesale, did some petty trade away from the village and temporary work in a county owned garment factory, and aided her husband in the family’s transportation business. She was also a local political activist and often aired her opinions on the village public affairs to the largely male-dominated village officials.

Yufen’s active role in the income-earning activities outside home won her respect from her husband and high status at home. She said, rather proudly, that her contribution to the household economy was no less than that made by her husband, thus she had the final say in almost 80 percent of the matters in domestic settings. However, the jobs she had done, such as wholesaling and working in the brickyard, and her interest in the village’s public affairs, were traditionally deemed as either man’s job and man’s concerns or in a male-dominated environment. This, together with her bold, confident manner and sociable personality brought her frowns and disapproval from the conservative corners of the village.

In today's Dongdatun, family matters requiring external contacts or public appearance were still regarded by many, especially the older generation, as the domain of the man in the family. Women were discouraged by village opinion from representing their families on formal occasions. People used an old expression "*nanzhuwai, nüzhunei*" meaning "man managing the affairs outside home and woman inside" to justify the practice (I shall analyse in detail the gender division of labour underneath this phenomenon in chapter 15). However, when digging deeper, I sensed that this sexual division of "management domain" between the public and private was partly rooted in the Confucian tradition of sexual segregation and female seclusion. Some older villagers still held the belief that no decent woman would "show her face in public" (*paotoulumian*) or mingle with men other than her husband outside home. As Yufen noted, young village women working outside home were constantly wary of the possible gossips about their "decency". Men returning home late was taken for granted: they were entitled to public and social life outside home in evenings. However, if a woman arrived home late for whatever reason, the husband would become suspicious and show a long face. Frequently, women who visited friends or relatives in the evening must be escorted home by an elder, but for men there was never such need. The continued influence of the traditional ideas and sexual morality was conducive to the village expectation that a woman would rely on her husband for dealing with all external concerns and remain retiring and timid in public.

The growing market activities and blurred boundaries between towns and villages in the post-Mao years have posed a serious threat to such deep-rooted attitudes. New ideas flooded in through market exchanges, and village women, particularly the young and better educated, became more confident as they gained more experiences in the marketplace outside home and earned increased incomes. Li Yufen represented this trend when she, in defiance of the ideas and expectations of the villagers, applied for and obtained a bank loan of 4,000 *yuan* on her own in 1987. In 1993, she shocked the villagers again by making a tender in her own name for a contract. Yufen recollected:

"Last year, I made a bid for contracting a project in my name at a public bidding organised by the Xiang government ... As soon as the news came to the village, gossips arose. I was said to be 'crazy' and 'flighty'.

And I should be 'behaving myself and doing my duty at home' (*shoubenfen*) rather than 'running outside'. But all these won't deter me. In the future, whenever there's the opportunity, I'll bid again, in my own rather than my husband's name. I'm determined to do this in order to win credit for women." (Interview with Li Yufen, 33, checker in the village's brickyard)

11-2 Changing State-Women Relationships

The increased role played by the non-state market in economic and social lives during rural reforms has gradually devolved the highly centralised state power to regional and local levels, and prompted a gradual but distinct change in the function of the government. The role of the authorities as the top-down, inflexible central planner or an instrument for carrying out upper-level administrative fiats has given way to powerful market forces. Rural women's active involvement in the market has further prompted the state to adapt to the new situation. It is gradually shifting from suppressing or restricting women's spontaneous economic activities to greater tolerance for women's initiatives and ingenuity, as well as delivery of services and co-ordination in an overall effort to boost the rural economy.

The above has induced changes in state-women relations. An example of this change is a nation-wide project undertaken since 1989, which has targeted rural women. The project, named "Double Learning and Double Competition" (*shuangxue shuangbi*), has been organised by the All China Women's Federation, a para-governmental national network for women, in collaboration with a dozen other government ministries and organisations. These are: Ministries of Agriculture, of Forestry, of Water Conservancy, of Commerce, of Radio, Film and Television, State Education Commission, State Commissions of Science and Technology, of Ethnic Affairs, of Family Planning, China Association for Science and Technology, Agricultural Bank of China, and State Council's Leading Group for Economic Development in Poor Regions. The themes of the project are: "learn to read and write" (*xue wenhua*), "learn skills and technology" (*xue jishu*), "compete for achievements" (*bi chengji*), and "compete for contribution" [to society] (*bi gongxian*).⁶

Since the project began, various sub-projects have been organised together with local, regional and central authorities, reflecting conditions and needs in the various

localities. Centres that combine technological training, production and scientific experiments (*yitihua jidi*) have been jointly set up by local women's federations, the State Commission of Science and Technology, the State Education Commission, and the China Association for Science and Technology. A so-called "courtyard economy" (*tingyuan jingji*) project has been initiated. The term "courtyard economy" has been adopted on the ground that it has encouraged the development of a diversified economy encompassing many sideline activities, such as breeding, cultivation and handicraft, which were traditionally performed in the courtyard of the household, and most probably by women. A 10-year "March-8th green project" (*sanba lüse gongcheng*) has been started. It was jointly organised by the All-China Women's Federation and the Ministry of Forestry in early 1990, and since then has attracted women nation-wide to participate in afforestation and ecological improvement and protection. Unlike in the collective years where rural labour employed in state-organised public infrastructure projects was frequently uncompensated, women who participated in these sub-projects are to be rewarded, at least on paper.

On the surface, the "Double Learning and Double Competition" project resembles the Maoist state-organised women's movement. However, unlike the top-down mass mobilisation approach, such as the collectivisation movement, which produced outcomes contrary to rural women's economic interests, the recent project may not be seen as an example of political mobilisation. The content of the project indicates that it has been based largely on market initiatives by individual women, such as domestic sidelines, specialised production and cash crop cultivation, and operated by the principle of voluntary participation. One major contribution of the project has been publicising and disseminating the success stories of these individual women to wider female communities across the country so as to create a demonstration effect. In addition, part of the official consideration for organising the project that provides services and co-ordination has, in effect, been to develop rural economy through promoting the so-called "commodity production" (*shangpin shengchan*).⁷ This has coincided with rural women's eagerness to obtain information, new knowledge and technology, make money based on their available skills and their rising hope and expectation to achieve a better life prospect for themselves and their families through their own efforts.

The All China Women's Federation reports that between 1989 and 1994, some 120 million rural women participated in the "Double Learning and Double Competition" project. More than 20 million of them overcame illiteracy, and nearly 10 million received general technical training. Over half a million became qualified agrotechnicians.⁸ It should be noted, however, that the project's actual implementation and effectiveness have varied under different local conditions and degrees of commitment by local authorities. Cases have been reported of local officials ignoring women's work and diverting funds earmarked for the project. This has happened to women in Dongdatun as well. In 1992, several hundred women participated in a local "March-8th green project", reclaiming land on the hills and planting over 2,000 fruit trees. However, funds designated for the project totalling about 10,000 *yuan*, including payments due to the women participants, never reached the village. The fund was suspected to have been misappropriated by the financial department of the county government, and the shortfall had to be met by the village council from its own resources. In spite of repeated inquiries and demands by the village council, it was still unknown where the fund had gone, and whether the village would finally be able to recover it by the time when I visited the village.

Despite such problems, a basic government functional change in relation to women was reflected in the "Double Learning and Double Competition" project, and this was evident in Dongdatun. During the interviews, most older women stated similar experiences in the commune years: "I had to work all day long in the collective fields", or "I had to work on a fixed timetable no matter how heavy domestic responsibilities were for women". The expression "had to" used by these women actually indicated their helplessness and powerlessness in the face of the powerful, male-dominated central and local state. Women's accounts of their experiences after decollectivisation no longer contain such expressions. This was also true for their participation in the "Double Learning Double Competition" project. It seemed that this shift in attitudes was partly due to the fact that women's work performed through taking part in the project was properly rewarded, and hence tangible in terms of their contributions to the family and local community. For instance, to my question "Have you ever engaged in any economic activities other than farming?" several women informants mentioned growing trees on the hills surrounding the village organised by the project of Double Learning and Double Competition.

This suggested that village women contributed actively to rural livelihood diversification, and their activities now received more encouragement from village authorities. Since diversification led to a growing number of alternative income-generating opportunities, village women benefited in this process. According to village officials, prior to the reform, most non-farm economic activities had been banned. In consequence, few such employment options had existed for village women, thus almost all of them had to toil in the fields alongside men. Things were quite different now. Rural industrialisation and diversification have been a marked feature of the areas around Dongdatun, and this has profoundly affected the lives of almost every villager. In 1994, there were three township-owned garment factories and a county-owned textile factory near the village, where many young village women worked. At the village level, there were a dozen privately- and collectively-owned, small-scale enterprises. Among them were a brickyard, an iron works, a vegetable processing factory, a canned food factory, a Chinese ink factory, a flour mill, and a construction contracting team. Women from both the native and other villages were working in these enterprises.

Rural specialisation and crop diversification were another trend since post-Mao reforms, both of which contributed to the expanded scope of women's economic activities and their increased incomes as well. In 1994, the village had, among other things, 13 households specialising in poultry breeding and pisciculture, 11 households in orchard contracting, six groceries and commissioned shops, a small restaurant, a snack bar and a barbershop. My interviews with the village women showed that such activities, which had often been classified as "sidelines" and thus fallen into the domain of women's work during the collective years, were still deemed as better performed by women. This may partly explain the fact that instead of passively obeying men's orders and instructions, village women were actively involved in the daily management and decision-making of these economic endeavours.

Grain monoculture, which was exclusively enforced in the collective years, has lost its influence since decollectivisation, which has witnessed greater rural commercialisation. Diversified farming consisting of grain and a variety of cash crops has become a new characteristic of the village's farming business. One measure that village authorities took to promote crop diversification was provision of loans and

technology for women. In 1994, women engaged in growing the so-called “three baby crops” (*san xiao zuowu*), i.e. baby aubergines, cucumbers and chillies, received 100-, 80-, and 50-*yuan* supportive funds from the village council for each sown *mu* (about one sixth of an acre) of the aubergines, cucumbers and chillies, respectively.

In the early 1980s when the “three baby crops” were first introduced into the village, most villagers were reluctant to grow them because of the risks involved. This was due to the fact that most vegetables would be pickled and canned before being sold to foreign trade companies for export. The grower’s gains and losses, therefore, were highly dependent on the demand of the export company that purchased the produce. On the other hand, there was the potential benefit of greater returns, in that the grain yielded on one *mu* of farmland could fetch some 200 *yuan* a year, whereas the “three baby crops” produced from the same area of land could make about 2,000 *yuan*.⁹ Weighing the risks against the potential gains, the village women’s representative, Mrs. Li Shuying, decided to grow the vegetables on a trial area of 1.5 *mu* in 1981. The yield from the plot brought in over 1,300 *yuan* that year. Seeing her example, many other women followed suit in the following years.

This trend was further boosted by the village authority’s promotive measures as mentioned above. As a result, the growing area of the vegetables increased from some 30 *mu* in the early 1980s to about 200 *mu* in 1994. The centre of agrosience and technology and the veterinary centre at the township level organised technical training and consulting sessions to meet villagers’ needs for knowledge and skills in pomiculture and livestock and poultry breeding. In addition, the village council was planning to invite a specialist from the Tianjin Academy of Agricultural Sciences to pass on the technique of building plastic greenhouses for cash crops. All these promotive measures by the local government may well be taken from a gender-neutral perspective: more as an attempt to boost local economic development than out of consideration of increasing women’s income. Nonetheless, the legacy of the gender division of labour, which saw, say growing vegetables, as “light” work, and thus mainly women’s tasks (such tasks were performed in the limited private plots during the commune years and barely enough for domestic consumption) meant that village women were able to take advantage of the official encouragement. They, therefore, welcomed such measures as evidenced in Zhao Yuchun’s comments:

“Nowadays, the percentage of women doing non-agricultural jobs has increased. Scientific animal raising has been promoted, and women engaging in it can receive training and instruction. The village has organised study trips for those rearing domestic animals, and some of the participants are women. The new scientific methods are much better than the conventional ones, and women’s incomes have risen as a result.” (Interview with Zhao Yuchun, 22, school teacher)

It is worth noting, however, that the encouraging and co-ordinating role newly adopted by the authorities is by no means sufficient and flawless. In fact, many official projects have often been instrumental in the recognition of women’s special needs and interests in rural development, which has led to low priority given to gender issues on the government agenda. This is not a new tendency, but one shared by policy-makers in both the pre- and post-reform eras.

In effect, male perspectives and male-centred motives have often influenced the way in which policies relating to women are carried out. A precursor for this was the Chinese enlightenment movement, which attacked female foot-binding and parental arranged marriages, and promoted women’s education. At the turn of the century, advocates of the Constitutional Reform and Modernisation movement (*Bianfa Weixin*) (1898) often cited the salvation of the nation, rearing of children, and men’s need to find educated wives after they absconded from arranged marriages as the main grounds for promoting women’s education.¹⁰ Access to modern education as women’s basic rights, and on equal terms with men, and as a potential means to seek employment outside the family, and hence a challenge to socially and culturally defined gender roles and the patriarchal sexual order, was rarely mentioned.

Similar modes of reasoning have been displayed in many current economic and social programmes, such as the family planning project, which, though potentially beneficial to women, has been dominated by an official discourse emphasising linear relationships between population growth and development. It follows that fundamental issues including gender power relations, women’s well-being (reproductive and sexual health), as well as the safety net problem in the countryside have been given inadequate attention. In consequence, many of the practical concerns of rural women arising from the implementation of the policy, such as quality of care

in the family planning programme and old age support, which have called for more gender-sensitive policies and government responsibilities, tend to be neglected.¹¹

The latest "Double Learning and Double Competition" project has not deviated much from this line of thinking. Huang Qizao, Vice Chairwoman and First Party Secretary of the All-China Women's Federation, writes in an article that the project has been launched primarily to boost rural production and ensure the supply of agricultural produce. Women are targeted only because in the process of rural labour transfer, more women than men have been left in the agricultural sector; women now account for nearly 50 percent of the total agricultural labour force, and, in some places, even as high as 60 to 70 percent.¹² (I shall further elaborate on this shortly)

11-3 Women's Basic Needs and Well-being

Some studies on China's rural reforms have expressed concerns over the possible decline, as a result of decollectivisation, in the provision of welfare and services, which were delivered and maintained by the collectives prior to post-Mao reforms,¹³ a development which would have significant effects on women's lives. In my fieldwork I examined closely both the link between women's "labour force participation" and their welfare, and the quantity and quality of public or collective investments and welfare services in the village.

The improvement of economic performance and diversification of livelihoods in the post-Mao years have led to a significant rise in people's standard of living in most parts of rural China.¹⁴ In line with this trend, Dongdatun witnessed a remarkable improvement in living conditions for the past decade. At the onset of decollectivisation in 1982, the village's gross social product was 186,700 *yuan*, as against 1,830,400 *yuan* in 1992. The *per capita* income of the village in 1982 was 71 *yuan*, whereas by 1992, it rose to 993 *yuan*.¹⁵ It should be noted that data on the local inflation rates were unavailable, and the national average was hardly applicable here owing to considerable regional variations and a salient urban-rural cleavage. The village head (*cunzhang*) used the rule of thumb to give me a rough idea of the price rises. He recalled that in 1982, the price for one-*jin* (half a kilogram) pork was about 1.4 *yuan*, which rose to 3 *yuan* by 1992, whereas prices for grains in the local area increased very little during the decade. Based on such rough estimation, the rise in *per capita* income of the village for the decade in real terms can be said as approximately

600 percent. Improvement in living standards was partly manifest in the fact that many village households bought and installed domestic appliances, such as washing machines, high pressure pots, gas cookers or coal-saving honeycomb briquette stoves (*jiemeilu*), and home-made central heating (*tunuanqi*). Some higher-income households like Mrs. Zhou Shuying's even installed solar energy showers and flush toilets in their houses.

As women were the major bearers of the domestic chores, such labour- and time-saving appliances adopted in rural households reduced women's burdens at home and eased their lives. From the perspective of village women, therefore, economic development and increased income in Dongdatun, and the accompanying improvement in living conditions benefited women as well as men. Women felt that their "labour force participation" was better rewarded now, as it became closely associated with market-related activities and cash incomes. This motivated rural women to participate in productive activities on and off their family farms, and this was particularly the case for women who had the drive to do well for their families and themselves:

"I work harder and am busier than before ... [but] I wouldn't complain much, as the harder and better you work, the more prosperous you'd become." (Interview with Li Yufen, 33, checker in the village's brickyard)

During the commune years, Dongdatun as a brigade had been on the medium level in terms of the collective economy within both Jixian County and Lüzhuangzi Commune. However, village women's accounts of their experiences in the Mao and post-Mao eras sounded like "speaking bitterness of the past and comparing with a better present and hopeful future". In fact, almost all the women interviewees in Dongdatun expressed a greater life satisfaction in the post-Mao years as compared with its predecessor. This is represented in the following remarks:

"Before we had only coarse food grain. Now we have wheat and rice as our staple food. We have more meat and vegetables every day, whereas in the past we even couldn't afford salted vegetables.... Before we couldn't afford a box of matches for just two *fen* [Chinese equivalent of pence], whereas nowadays we have the money to buy a four-wheel tractor....

When I was young, I couldn't finish primary school because of the straitened circumstances of the family. My children now have both gone to school and got better education." (Interview with Lu Suping, 36, farmer)

The improvement in living conditions of village women and their families were closely associated with women's active participation in the production and management of the family business, both on and off farm. The higher living standard was then viewed by many village women as the necessary material base for their further self-development and social advancement:

"Meeting people's basic needs relieves the worries of women about food and clothing for their families, and removes a source of complaint and squabble between couples. It provides a basis for women's self-development. Only on this base can women get education and think about developing other interests in life." (Interview with Zhang Jinxia, 18, junior high school graduate)

"The improvement in our daily lives is an outcome of the increase in our incomes. It partly shows the value of ourselves. Furthermore, when the general living standards rise, women's demand to work outside the household grows. They become more and more reluctant to stay home, doing housework or engaging in full-time agriculture. They are likely to pursue a more fulfilled life by having their own paid jobs, an independent income and greater self-confidence." (Interview with Zhao Yuchun, 22, senior high school graduate)

The fact that women nowadays receive greater rewards for their productive activities both inside and outside home has particular significance for changes in the balance of power between the sexes, and in social and cultural attitudes. The closer linkage of women's productive activities with the market and cash income has been able to bring women greater economic strength, resources and further money-making potentials, the possession of which is pertinent to an individual's power and status in the family and the wider village community. All this has helped boost village women's self-confidence and develop a sense of self-value and individuality in themselves. This

was evidenced in the above-cited comments, as well as in the examples of Gu Weimin, Li Yufen and the female entrepreneurs such as the daughters-in-law of Mrs. Zhou Shuying.

In the post-Mao years, considerable increases in the village's collective and private resources made it possible for village authorities to initiate, retain or resume in a much improved way certain welfare projects, which had been run by the former brigade, or left off owing to shortages of funding. Now the funds required for the collective good came mainly from the profits turned over to the village council by the village-owned enterprises, together with money paid by contractors who managed the village-owned assets, such as orchards and other small businesses.

In 1983, the village authority laid and extended water pipes into the courtyards of every household, which enabled villagers to have running water and to buy and use domestic appliances like washing machines. According to the village officials, the public funds helped support several other infrastructure and welfare projects in the village. One was the extension and maintenance of the irrigation works managed by the collective before and the village authority currently through setting up and financing a special irrigation team. Since decollectivisation, the village spent an average of 20,000 *yuan* each year on maintaining such works, and in 1993 it invested over 60,000 *yuan* in drilling four motor-pumped wells to turn some hilly land into irrigated fields.¹⁶ Such collective investment benefited women employed in agriculture. The woman interviewee Wang Guiying said that the yield for each *mu* of unirrigated hilly land was between 100-200 *jin*, but it reached 700-800 *jin* following the irrigation projects. This, together with the family's switch to vegetable cultivation, contributed to the improved income and living conditions of her family.

With development and higher living standards, many indicators of women's status improved. This was partially manifest in the fact that younger women in Dongdatun enjoyed better education, and were more likely to work in non-farm occupations and hold higher aspirations for themselves, in comparison with their older sisters and mothers (I shall elaborate on this point in chapter 12).

The growth in Dongdatun's accumulated resources, in addition, enabled the village government to resume operation of a pre-school nursery (*yuhongban*). The nursery

was set up in 1975 but had to be closed down shortly afterwards for lack of finance. In 1981, the nursery class was re-opened, but it could only afford to employ one teacher and take in a small number of about 30 children owing to the weakness of the collective economy of the time. Since then, the nursery gradually expanded. By mid-1994, it developed into two classes with three teachers and 58 children.¹⁷

When I visited the village in the summer, construction work of 12 new rooms in two blocks of double-storied buildings designated for the nursery as classrooms and teachers' offices had just been completed, in which the village invested over 60,000 *yuan*. Following the summer harvest in June, I was told, the nursery would further expand into four classes. By then, all the village's pre-school children above the age of four (children's formal school age was seven in that locality), around 120 in total, would be enrolled, and the village was to recruit more teachers for the two newly-formed classes. The teachers were appointed by the village council. They were usually junior or senior high school graduates with a few months' training for nursery education. During the summer vacation, the teachers were often required to attend further in-service training courses organised by the county's education bureau. The operational costs of the nursery school, including the teachers' salaries and their end-year bonuses, and expenditures on teaching materials and utilities, were exclusively shouldered by the village. And the nursery was free for all the enrolled children in the village.

The nursery shared a pretty big courtyard with a junior primary school (*chuxiao*) in the village. Children finishing primary four would go to the two Xiang-run senior primary schools (*gaoxiao*), which were about half an hour's walk from the village. There were also two junior high schools located in the seat of Xiang, and four senior high schools in Jixian County. Facilities of the village school were considerably upgraded for the past decade and more. In the early 1980s, the school had only 12 rooms, which included teachers' offices and living quarters, lying in a single row of a shaky one-storied building. Rows of piled mud-bricks in varied heights were used as desks and chairs. Since the mid-1980s, newly-built, brick and tile-roofed two-storey buildings housing 24 classrooms equipped with standard wooden desks and chairs replaced the previous simple and crude facilities.

On my visit to the school, Wang Jinhua, the headmistress, told me that both the conditions of the school and the quality of education improved significantly during the past decade. The number of teachers grew from four to seven, of whom five were females and six with teacher training qualifications. The six teachers were employed and paid by the state. The remaining teacher without the special qualification was classified as "staff members employed by local authorities" (*zipin jiaoshi*), who were jointly paid by the County's Education Bureau and Lüzhuangzi Xiang Council. All the 142 school-age children in the village were enrolled, half of whom were girls. Primary school education was not free, but the school fees were charged mainly for expenses on textbooks and notebooks. I saw work still going on in the middle of the large courtyard, and Mrs. Wang said that a flower bed was to be built there. Pointing to the left- and right-hand sides of the courtyard, she said that playgrounds for the nursery were also to be constructed, but the funding needed for purchasing the necessary facilities was yet to be guaranteed. A village official confirmed this, and added that the village planned to further expand the nursery to include even younger children when it raised more funds.

Many factors may have contributed to the relatively high priority granted to children's education by the village. Amongst them, the reduced number of children for each couple following the introduction of the family planning programme and the growth in collective resources in the recent decade may have constituted the major ones. Negotiations and bargaining around the issue of children's education may have also occurred between village women as well as their families, who were expected to adopt family planning measures and limit their number of children, and local, regional and central authorities, which tried to implement the birth control policy. Whereas most young couples in the village decided to limit their family size to one or two children, increasing collective and private resources were channelled to the education and healthcare of the young generation.

The improvements achieved through local efforts engendered positive effects on women's lives, lightening women's child care burden and freeing their time and energy for more income-generating activities. In present-day Dongdatun, women had a high rate of labour force participation. Many young women, particularly those employed in rural enterprises, which required fixed working hours away from home,

could get some help from their mothers-in-law for child care. Older women above the age of 60 tended to retire from farm work, and their major tasks would be in certain sidelines like domestic animal breeding, and housework including helping look after grandchildren. However, such help would not be “full-time” child care, and thus women with young children usually had to spend a couple of years at home after childbirth. Shortly after the weaning of the baby, the woman would resume work in the fields or other income-earning activities on a “full-time” basis. There were also women whose mothers-in-law died or who could not get available help from such relations because of varied reasons. A glimpse of the variations over time in the village women’s child care arrangements can be obtained from the following accounts of the woman informant Wang Guiying:

“When my eldest daughter was very young, I had to surround her with cotton-padded quilts, wooden pillows and bricks at the corner of the *kang* while I went to work in the Brigade’s fields.¹⁸ During the breaks in the morning and afternoon I rushed home to breast-feed her. When she grew old enough to walk, I carried her with me to the fields, and placed her at the field-edge when I was working. After I had my second daughter, I’d bring my two girls with me to the fields, and the older one was to look after the younger one. I never missed one day’s work then ... I had my son after the rural reform, and was able to spend a couple of years at home taking care of him. When he was 2 -- 3 years old, I’d carry him on my back when I went to work in the fields. He went to the village nursery at 6, and then to school.” (Interview with Wang Guiying, 46)

In addition to pre-school child care, my interviews with village women indicated that children’s education was a major concern of women who had school-age children or grandchildren. The importance attached to children’s education was largely based on village women’s personal experiences, particularly their missed educational opportunities because of varied historical and cultural reasons and household financial restraints. This is discernible from the following recollections:

“I was at primary school for only a week. Then the [anti-Japanese] war broke out and I had to stop ... I don’t read and write for my whole life, and although with good eyesight I am still like a blind person

(*zhengyanxia*). So I was firmly determined my children must have education ... Now I hope my grandchildren can get good education ...”

(Interview with Di Cuiping, 62)

The village council's attempts to improve pre-school child care and children's education as demonstrated above were proved to be responsive to women's concerns and needs. In the interviews, village women showed greater satisfaction with their children's education:

“The conditions at school for my kids are better than before. The teachers are more responsible and the quality of teaching is higher. When I was at school, teachers were not respected: the pupils were putting up big character posters (*dazibao*) against their teachers in those days!”¹⁹

(Interview with Yang Zhiying, 37)

Besides children's education, there was considerable improvement in health care services in Dongdatun, especially for women and children. During the commune years, co-operative medical service (*hezuo yiliao*) was practised in the village. The scheme was introduced towards the end of the GPCR in the mid-1970s, and financed by all the brigade members with each contributing two to three *yuan* a year to the scheme. At a time when work-point value was very low and cash scarce, the compulsory contribution per head constituted a big burden to the cash-strained peasant households. Cash shortage was illustrated by Li Yufen's following remarks:

“Before, we earned work-points from the Brigade, and it was not until the end of each year when we were able to get some dividends from the collective (*fenhong*), and these were usually not much. A household with more labourers could get 100-200 *yuan* in cash; but a household with labour shortage could turn out to be in debt to the Brigade, to say nothing of getting any cash at all.” (Interview with Li Yufen, 33)

Village households' scarce cash resources, combined with poorly trained medical staff and low-quality service, forced the brigade to abandon the scheme in the end, which had operated for only a year or so between 1975-76.²⁰ This suggests that the assumption of the collective era as a “golden age” in terms of collective provisions of welfare and social services may well be a myth in the majority of rural areas largely

owing to the limited resources available to local authorities.²¹ Although the ideas of collective provisions of welfare were initiated and experimented on during that era, the realisation of such ideas was hampered by the collectivisation programme, which had depleted rural communities of surplus funds, hence their capacities, to finance such schemes.

Since the early 1980s, an alternative medical care scheme consisting of several co-operative and private clinics went into operation. The first clinic, financed jointly by the village council and individual medical personnel, was opened shortly after the rural reform. Later, a couple of privately-owned clinics staffed by qualified medical personnel were set up. These clinics provided handy services to the villagers; in the meantime, they charged fees. Opening clinics required approval and licences from the County's Health Bureau. On the whole, village clinics seemed to treat mainly common or chronic ailments, as well as carry out preventative procedures. Villagers and women with more serious health problems or genuine healthcare needs, such as child birth, usually went to the larger clinics located in the Xiang seat or hospitals in the County seat. In more serious cases, they would visit more prestigious hospitals in big cities like Tianjin and Beijing for medical services.

In addition to the medical services for the general public, special attention was paid to the health care of women and children (*fuyou baojian*). This is demonstrated in the following remarks:

“Now we have more clinics in the village than before, and seeing a doctor is more handy. The doctors are better trained now, and the equipment and facilities of the clinics are improved. All my three children were born at home, delivered by the midwife of the commune. Now my daughters-in-law have given birth in hospital. I didn't receive any medical check-up during pregnancies, but my daughters-in-law have got medical examinations for 3-4 times during each pregnancy, ... On the day my child was born I was still working in the Brigade's fields. But now women who are working in factories enjoy 3-month maternity leave with pay. When I was a teenager, I often heard such things as women died of childbirth ... Few women die of childbirth now. My two sons didn't receive any inoculation during the commune years, ... Nowadays, my

grandchildren have got regular vaccination and inoculation. We've spent 150 *yuan* to buy a seven-year insurance for each child for such service." (Interview with Qi Sulan, 49)

"There wasn't a gynaecological department in the [nearby] hospitals during the commune years, and women couldn't get any examinations and treatments locally if they suffered from such diseases. Now there is a gynaecological department in either the *xiang* or county hospital, and women get better health care services." (Interview with Wang Guifen, 52)

"Today's doctors are better trained than the bare-foot doctors in the past. My children were all born at home. At that time, going to the hospital for delivery wasn't so easy ... In 1976, I gave birth to a son, [who] died shortly. In 1977, I had another son, but he died of high fever 10 months after birth, and the doctors couldn't find out the cause. If my two sons had been born in recent years, they wouldn't have died." (Interview with Wang Guiying, 46)

It is worth noting that the improvements in education and health care for women and children resulted from not only local authorities' efforts to shoulder considerable expenses on these public projects but also women's own contributions to the accumulated public funds for such projects. For instance, the locally-run garment factories which employed mainly female workers turned over part of their profits to the local authorities each year. Moreover, a noticeable correlation was observed between improved public services and the national birth control policy, which limited the number of children for each rural couple to a maximum of two (Issues involved in rural reproductive culture and family planning are to be discussed in chapter 12). The family planning programme enforced simultaneously with post-Mao reforms curtailed the fertility rate in Dongdatun. The village women now were able to spend less time and energy on reproductive activities, but more on income-generation. The increased accumulation of the private and public wealth made available more resources for projects and services of the public good. Further, the reduced number of children and the increased resources created a more benign ratio between the two, which tended to bring greater benefits to the recipients of the services and welfare projects.

However, in the process of programme delivery and implementation, women have borne most birth control burdens. The majority of the contraceptive measures are designed for women and their effects realised through artificially interfering in women's natural physiological cycles. In addition, pressure on and discrimination against daughter-only families rooted in traditional cultural values are frequently directed at and hence borne by the women of the households. In the absence of a well-developed welfare system in the countryside, particularly an effective old-age support scheme, looking after the elderly is mainly the responsibility of women as daughters-in-law and the cost shouldered by individual families (I shall return to this point shortly). It is evident that the pressure generated and cost incurred during the process of implementing the family planning policy have fallen disproportionately on the shoulders of women.

The national and local authorities may have pushed ahead the birth control programme without giving much heed to women's experiences and needs that have emerged in the course of policy delivery and implementation. A sign of this is the single-minded emphasis on a highly simplified relationship between development and population growth in the official discourse. However, the locally observed situation, where village and Xiang authorities made an effort to improve education and health care services was indicative of women pressure groups operating both within and outside the state apparatus. These groups include female officials working in the women's federation at varied levels and the more articulate female academics influenced by modern feminist ideas, who have called for greater official attention to the more fundamental issues in relation to women's sexual and reproductive health and rights.²²

It was revealed in the interviews, however, that while old problems were being dealt with, new ones started to crop up in the domain of health care services and supply of agricultural inputs such as fertilisers and pesticides. Rising health care cost can become a heavy burden on rural families if a family member suffers from a serious disease. This was the case for the young woman interviewee Wang Lifan. She reckoned that her family's economic status declined from the upper middle level in the village to the medium level in the course of the past few years. During these years, a large portion of the family's income had been spent on her medical care after she

fell seriously ill and was later diagnosed as suffering from a very rare immune system condition. Health insurance or prepayment schemes introduced in other parts of rural China on a trial basis, as reported by Bloom and Tang, and Carrin, *et al.*,²³ were not yet tried in Lüzhuangzi Xiang and Dongdatun. Thus universal access to health care, particularly sexual and reproductive health services, may emerge as problematic, especially for less well-off families and women within them. Furthermore, mounting healthcare cost may form a heavy financial burden for rural households, as suggested in Lifan's experiences, or even lead to destitution.

In the interviews quite a few women mentioned rising charges for medical treatment in hospitals and malpractices of the medical staff, as well as the problem of fake drugs. All this reflected inadequate government actions in effectively regulating a partly privatised health system, establishing a fee exemption scheme to ensure universal access and guaranteeing quality of care for service users, including women:

“ ... But drugs are becoming more and more expensive. If your health problem isn't serious, it's OK. But if it's unexpectedly serious, it'll become a financial burden on your family. A visit by an aged parent to the hospital would cost the family hundreds of *yuan* for slight illness, and thousands of *yuan* for a more serious problem. If you aren't in a lucrative business, ... you wouldn't be able to afford it. Society is riddled with unhealthy attitudes nowadays, and patients have to buy gifts for doctors, otherwise they won't receive good service.” (Interview with Li Yufen, 33)

“People can afford slight illness, but they may fall in debt if they have big health problems. There are also more bogus drugs now. Some people are without any conscience. They'd do anything to make money without considering the pain and sufferings they bring to the patients and their families.” (Interview with Qi Sulan, 49)

Analogous problems arose in connection with the price and quality of producers' goods for agriculture, where more rural women than men were currently employed. These included phoney fertilisers and pesticides, and the increase in production cost but decrease in prices for farm produce, and hence shrinking profit margins for

women working in family farms, sidelines and other small private undertakings. This was indicated in the following comments:

“Cash crops need more fertilisers, but the price of fertilisers is rising rapidly. We’re also charged more for water and electricity used in vegetable cultivation ... However, the prices of vegetables are declining. If things go on like this, growing cash crops would make less and less money, and improvement in our lives would slow down.” (Interview with Jia Chunying, 38, cash crop grower)

“You can make money from growing fruit trees. But the purchasing price for fruit is decreasing and the cost is rising. Moreover, there are often fake insecticides on the market. We bought such products from the Xiang’s insecticide factory. We discovered the truth only after noticing the ineffectiveness of the products, and thus suffered considerable loss.” (Interview with Yang Zhiying, 37, orchard contractor)

These problems were calling for more effective official measures to protect the interests of rural women and ensure the sustainability of rural development. These may include improved government regulation of the market, establishment of rural consumer watchdog bodies with closer checks on price rises and the quality of public services and welfare projects. A greater emphasis on professional ethics among medical personnel, and a quickened pace in relevant legislation, disseminating legal knowledge and strengthening law-enforcement mechanisms are also needed.

11-4 Feminisation of Agriculture

China is geographically divided into three major economic zones: the eastern coastal zone, the middle zone and the western inland zone, and an inter-regional development imbalance has been a prolonged problem owing to the considerable differences between the regions in natural endowment. The post-Mao economic reform, instead of narrowing the regional disparity, has witnessed an expanded gap between the regions. According to official statistics, in terms of rural gross social production, consisting of agriculture, rural industry, rural construction, transportation, commerce and services, the ratio between the eastern, middle and western zones in 1980 was 1:0.667:0.348. By 1991, it grew to 1:0.439:0.224 (with the eastern zone designated 1).

Closely related to this is the difference in income levels and living standards. The ratio of the rural *per capita* net income in the three zones was 1.28:1.06:1 (with the western zone designated 1) in 1980, and by 1991, the ratio rose to 1.61:1.10:1²⁴

This widened inter-regional discrepancy combined with a relaxed state control over migration has prompted a large-scale rural out-migration. Meanwhile, a new phenomenon of the so-called “feminisation of agriculture” has emerged in parts of the Chinese countryside, which was suggested by Huang’s report cited earlier.²⁵ In comparison with men, more women have been kept in low-level, unskilled agricultural work while men have left the land for the cities and more developed regions in search of better opportunities and more rewarding jobs.²⁶ This is particularly the case in the less developed north-western region, where 90 percent of the 30 counties officially categorised as “poor” (*pinkun xian*) are located and rural industry is underdeveloped.²⁷ It is worth noting, however, that women, especially single young women, have been actively involved in the more recent migration wave (women’s experiences in rural-urban migration will be analysed in chapter 14), and the phenomenon discussed here should be viewed as significantly varied regionally and locally.

In Dongdatun and its surrounding area, the problem was less prominent owing to the locality’s proximity to the cities, and the better developed transportation and rural industry, although a noticeable sexual division of labour existed (I shall elaborate on this in chapter 15). Still, during my visits to the Women’s Federation in Tianjin, women officials there often used the special terms, or “metaphors”, -- “*liuyi*” (June the First, which is designated the Children’s Day in China), “*sanba*” (March the Eighth, the International Women’s Day), “*jiujiu*” (September the Ninth, which, in the Chinese lunar calendar, is Chongyang Festival. It is also a traditional festival when rituals and expressions of respect for the elderly are expected.) -- to draw a picture in which the demographic composition in the countryside changed during the reform years. As the three terms, *liuyi*, *sanba* and *jiujiu*, are popular representations in society for children, women and the old, their usage in the context indicated that males significantly outnumbered females in either rural-urban or rural-rural labour movement, and that in some villages, the population left to live and work on land were mainly the young, women and the elderly.

According to a report on a 1990 survey of 23 poor counties carried out by the Institute of Demography, Beijing School of Economics, the proportion of women in agricultural employment grew since the reform, whereas that of men declined.²⁸ Fieldwork conducted by the anthropologist Bao Guisen in a village in central China in 1989 revealed that 71 percent of women in the village were engaged in full-time agricultural employment as against 21 percent of men in the same occupation.²⁹ All this suggested a lower level of occupational mobility and diversity for women than for men. Data collected at the national level by the All China Women's Federation and the State Statistical Bureau from 1990-92 also pointed to such a tendency as shown in the following table:

Table 11-1 A comparison of people's initial and current occupations by sex in China (%)

Category	Female		Male	
	Initial occupation	Current occupation	Initial occupation	Current occupation
Non-manual	5.7	8.0	7.8	12.1
Manual (Agricultural)	78.8	74.0	74.9	66.9

Source: ZFSDDK, 1993: 119.

The official response to this phenomenon has been to highlight the active role that rural women have played in agricultural production and the contributions they have made to rural development.³⁰ In the meantime, it has played down the fact that the trend has also shown women's disadvantaged position in transferring from agricultural to non-agricultural and industrial occupations. There are many reasons for this disadvantage, but the Chinese official press has been more likely to stress the "low quality" (*di suzhi*) of the female labour force, that is, women's lower literacy level and inferior training and skills, as the principal cause than to explain the real roots. The above-mentioned survey report expresses this attitude in a typical way:

"The development of female human resources has been far short of meeting the requirements of the economy, ... The majority of the illiterate and semi-literate in the poverty-stricken region are women ... Therefore, in the occupational rivalry, women of low quality cannot contend with men. *Naturally* [emphasis added], men have become

dominant in off-farm economic sectors, whereas women have been held back in the traditional agricultural occupation.”³¹

From a women’s perspective, however, the existing unfair familial and sexual arrangements that favour men with greater freedom and mobility are the main reasons why women have lagged behind men in current occupational transfers. Heavy family responsibilities, which are still shouldered almost exclusively by women, have deprived many women of the emerging economic opportunities away from home. At the root of women’s “lower competitiveness” in the labour market is the social and cultural prejudice against women, which has led to, among other things, high rates of female illiteracy and semi-literacy.

Circumstantial evidence shows that the patriarchal concepts and cultural values of the parents and society at large which regard men as superior to women (*nanzunnübei*) and value men over women (*zhongnanqingnü*) have rendered men and male children preferential treatment in education and training. A survey by Tianjin Women’s Federation covering the city’s 12 suburban counties in 1990 revealed that 70 percent, or 16,770, of the 24,124 illiterates and semi-literates between the age of 15 and 45 were women. Probing into the reasons underlying the phenomenon, the survey showed that parental attitudes of favouring sons over daughters ranked the second amongst the factors contributing to the lack of education of these rural women.³²

In Dongdatun, the majority of the women interviewees in the two older cohorts above the age of 25 were either illiterate (with no schooling at all) or semi-literate (with less than three-year schooling). Many of these women said that their parents did not treat daughters and sons equally in terms of education. The perception of the sexual bias as a major reason for women’s inadequate schooling was reflected in the recollections of 36-year-old Lu Suping:

“In our household, parents were partial (*pianxinyan*) and valued sons more than daughters. They said that boys would become the supporter and mainstay of the family, hence needed more schooling, but to be able to read their own names would be quite enough for girls. I would have liked to study at school, but my parents asked me to bring my younger brother and sister with me and to look after them at school. As

a result, I could not study well in class, and had to drop out at primary three.” (Interview with Lu Suping)

Clearly, the official attribution of rural women’s disadvantaged position in the current occupational transition to women’s so-called “low quality”, effectively blames the victims of sexual prejudice themselves for their social disadvantages and discrimination. In so doing, authorities at varied levels are able to avoid facing up to their responsibilities to tackle the root causes of the problem, and to create pretexts for not designing more gender-sensitive policies to redress the balance.

12-1 Reproduction and Family Planning

Wang Guiying was 14 years old when she got married on arrangements made by her relatives and a match-maker (*meiren*) in the early 1960s. At the time of her marriage, her father had suffered from a severe disability incurred while working for the rural collective, and her mother died owing to overwork and illness. Born in a three-daughter family with an older sister already marrying out, and a younger sister and disabled father to look after, Guiying had to marry in order to bring in a male labourer to jointly shoulder the responsibilities of supporting the family. The marriage was forced by circumstances and, obviously, was not her own decision. Nevertheless, it was an unorthodox matrilocal marriage (*zhaoxu*) as her parents did not have a son. As such, it was strongly objected by a cousin brother of Guiying on the grounds that according to the prevailing custom of patrilocal post-nuptial residence, daughters must marry out of their natal families. And if that had happened, all the family property left over by Guiying's parents, mainly the house at the time, would have gone to the male cousin rather than to Guiying.

Guiying had been married for over 30 years when I interviewed her. While she was of childbearing age, she had five live births, and three of them survived. The first two births were both daughters, so she kept trying. The subsequent two were both boys, but, to Guiying's great agony, they both died shortly after birth as a result of the inadequate health-care services in the 1970s. Guiying was determined to go on until she gave birth to another son in 1982, who finally survived. In the interview, Guiying frankly admitted that she preferred boys to girls in her reproductive expectation:

“My parents only got three daughters. I wished I could have sons ... I've been in a *zhaoxu* marriage, and when I got married, I was faced with huge social pressures and obstacles. It wasn't easy for me. Thus I've felt my daughters won't follow my course and experience what I have been through. That's why I wished to have a son.” (Interview with Wang Guiying, 46).

The experience of Guiying illustrates how multiparity, especially among the village women in the older age cohorts, formed the characteristic rural fertility pattern. In the 45 or above cohort, the average number of births per woman was 5.8; and this reduced to 2.2 for the 26 -- 44 cohort. In the youngest cohort of 18 -- 25, the average birth per woman stood at 0.2 at the time of the interviewing. It was also revealed in the interviews that the mothers of most women in the middle cohort had had six or more children. Two women in the youngest group mentioned that there were seven children respectively in their mothers' natal households. If we consider the much higher infant mortality rate in the older women's childbearing years, the difference between the older and younger generation in the fertility rate would be even larger. My interviews with village women suggested that older women who gave birth to many children were either driven by the desire to produce at least one son, or unaware of/inaccessible to any birth control measures. All this reflected a reproductive culture and decision-making process, which have been subject to a set of ideological, socio-economic and political forces.

The historical and cultural legacy of Confucianism with its emphasis on sons and devaluation of daughters is still visible in present day rural households. Such attitudes are partly rooted in the traditional perception of women as possessions and reproductive instruments for the men and their families, and of marriage as fulfilling the couple's familial obligations to perpetuate the ancestor's lineage by producing male heirs. In fact, in spite of the traditional moral prohibition on, hence rarity of divorce in pre-modern China, one of the culturally acceptable grounds on which a man held exclusive right to repudiate his wife (*xiqui*) or to have concubines (*naqie*) was the wife's failure to produce a son. According to the Confucian moral prescriptions, among the traditional charges against an unfilial son, his failure to produce a male child is the gravest sin against filial piety (*buxiaoyousan wuhouweida*).

Influence of this Confucian concept on rural couples' sex preference in their reproductive cycles can be sensed in the following remarks of 37-year-old Yang Zhiying:

'The idea of a boy being able to continue the family line (*chuanzongjiedai*) is still prevalent in the countryside. Moreover, boys

are more capable than girls of doing the heavy physical work in farming. But the greater consideration here is to continue the family line.”
(Interview with Yang Zhiying)

For people living outside the village community, the symbolic meaning of a son as the exclusive carrier of the family's name along the paternal line and the overwhelming importance attached to it do not seem to make much sense. However, for those who have led their lives in that community, the significance of the symbol and the experiences in connection with it are quite different. Women who are unsuccessful in producing a son for their husbands' families often have to bear the bitter fruit of being disrespected. This was particularly true in subsistence agriculture experienced both prior to and during the collective years, when the boundaries between towns and villages were sharpened, and the village's linkages with the external market cut or considerably weakened. The closure of the village community tended to limit opportunities and alternatives in women's lives. This situation then rendered paramount importance to reproduction for a village woman, and reproduction here, as a woman's most meaningful career, implied giving birth to at least one son. In Dongdatun, young women who were born into all-daughter families were likely to describe their mothers' position within the household as low. Coming from such a household, Gu Weimin explained:

“After the division of the big household (*fenjia*), mother alone did most of the work in the contracted land. No relatives on my father's side paid much attention to her because she'd born three girls but no boy. My grandparents were dissatisfied with that.” (Interview with Gu Weimin, 22)

The discriminations against women who have given birth to female children are sometimes less direct and noticeable but the intended effects on these women are equally frustrating. Women may not be maltreated physically for bearing girls, but the happiness or disappointment expressed by their husbands or parents-in-law on learning the sex of the new-born baby would constitute invisible psychological pressures on them. This was illustrated in the following recollections by Di Cuiping, aged 62:

“My parents-in-law wanted to have grandsons. My first few births were all girls. There wasn’t any birth control then, and you knew you had to give more births anyway. I knew my parents-in-law were unhappy, but they didn’t show it much.” (Interview with Di Cuiping)

The stress and plight experienced by girl-bearing women were not confined within individual households. As a matter of fact, there was discrimination and prejudice, to varied degrees, against all-daughter households in the wider rural society owing to the emphasis on male and belittling of female children. Among the village women interviewees, quite a few mentioned pressures coming from the village and society at large on women to bear, at least, one son. The following were remarks made by some women in the older cohorts:

“You’d be held in good repute for having sons. If you’re sonless, you’d be disrespected. And if you’re involved in some neighbourhood dispute, people would use this to attack you, saying your ill-naturedness has made you sonless.” (Interview with Lu Suping, 36)

“In the countryside, you have to consider the public opinion. A sonless family is known as ‘*juehu*’, (a derogatory term, meaning childless and the last of a family line), and looked down upon in the village. Such a couple would feel inferior themselves as well.” (Interview with Wang Guiying, 46)

The reproductive pattern of multiparity among the older women in the village can be interpreted as a traditional counteractive strategy assumed by women themselves in order to improve their positions in the family and the local community, as the experience of Wang Guiying showed. Meanwhile, it was also a result of psychological and social pressures coming from inside and outside the household. In either case, village women’s high fertility often took a toll on their health. In the interviews, the older women tended to describe their child-bearing experience as exhausting. Di Cuiping, aged 62 and suffering from poor health, related:

“I have given birth to nine children ... There wasn’t any contraceptive before. So even though you didn’t want any more pregnancy, you couldn’t avoid it. I didn’t want to have so many children, it was very

tiring ... For the last one [child], we actually used condom, but failed. I didn't want to have any more child, but my husband still hoped for another boy. So he didn't let me get an abortion." (Interview with Di Cuiping)

Rural women's reproductive experiences suggest that while individual women have children, society may have made the final decision for them. When the village women talked about their preference for sons, their attitudes were more likely to be shaped by and reflect the familial pressures and the economic and social constraints that they had experienced. On the other hand, such attitudes can be deemed as an unconscious response to a social reality, in which being a male or a son had been associated with advantages in almost every aspect of rural lives.

Official actions to bring about changes in attitudes and values related to women's status in the Maoist era were either confined to ideological propagation or largely through administrative means. Examples in the former approach included legitimating matrilocal marriages in the name of transforming the old customs and traditions (*yifengyisu*), which had been campaigned for in the 1960s. The latter often included banning local customs and practices officially defined as "backward" and "superstitious" during the GPCR, such as elaborate wedding ceremonies and rituals of ancestral worship. The effects of such ideological and administrative efforts, however, proved to be limited owing to other central policies in economic, educational and demographic domains, which paradoxically impeded changes that were supportive for the attainment of the ideologically promoted goals.¹ The reform period has seen a major readjustment to this approach, characterised by greater emphasis on formal legislation, economic development and family planning.

Starting from the early 1980s, a birth control programme known as the "one child per couple" (*dusheng ziniu*) policy has been implemented by Chinese authorities to check the country's rapidly expanding population. This policy has been designed largely from a perspective of economic development.² Reversing the Maoist demographic stance, the one-child programme, however, has been in a head-on clash with traditional pronatalist, male-centred reproductive culture in the countryside. This conflict, combined with lagged changes in the necessary socio-economic conditions, especially at the earlier stage of policy implementation, created a so-called

“sandwich effect” for women of child-bearing age, that is, women came under pressure from both sides. One source of the pressure was from the state represented by its family planning programme, and the other was traditional forces mirrored in the attitudes of the village community, kinship, husbands and parents-in-law. Obsessed with having at least one boy to “continue the family and lineal line”, families and lineages often blamed the women if the allowed only birth turned out to be a girl.

There was considerable press coverage in China in the 1980s of the problems arising from this situation. It was reported that women were maltreated by their husbands and in-laws for giving birth to girls. There were also increased cases of men divorcing their wives on the grounds of their failure to produce a son, and occasionally there was a revival of the custom of female infanticide, abandonment and neglect in rural communities despite legislation rendering severe punishment for such practices. Moreover, notwithstanding the legal prohibition on sex selection, both urban and rural couples often used the newly available modern technology to make prenatal sex identification followed by gender-specific induced abortion. Under-reporting of new-born baby girls in order to obtain extra birth quotas was noted by scholars as well. All this has given rise to the consequence of an increase in the imbalance of the reported sex ratio at birth in China.³

It is worth noting, however, that the increase in such incidents in the Chinese press does not always point to their acceleration in reality since, until recent reforms, any coverage of events and practices of this kind, which had been officially considered the “dark side of a socialist society”, would mean high political risk for a journalist. This political reality may have deterred most attempts to expose such possible incidents to the public. On the other hand, in practice, women, particularly female professionals, have taken advantage of such reports as well as of the officially proclaimed objectives of the family planning programme to negotiate with authorities at varied levels on issues concerning women’s interests and reproductive health needs in the policy delivery process. Women’s influence in the area is discernible from the nation-wide publicity and propagation of the value of daughters and the basic reproductive knowledge such as the husband’s role in determining the sex of the child. Women have also bargained with policy makers on such issues as increased research and application of male contraceptives, greater safety for abortion,

and better provisions of child care facilities and education for children, especially for girls.

In response to the emerging problems, particularly to the resistance displayed in the course of policy implementation in rural areas, the central authority has, since the mid-1980s, readjusted the birth control programme by allowing more flexible demographic regulations to be set by rural local authorities. One particularly significant modification concerning rural population has been the permission granted to all rural couples whose first child is a daughter to have a second child since the late 1980s.⁴ In 1994 regulations to that effect were observed in Lüzhuangzi Xiang and Dongdatun, where the theme of the local birth control policy was publicised in the form of slogans printed on the outside walls of different courtyards along the village's main streets. They read, "If the first birth is a boy, make sure he is the only child. If the first birth is a girl, make sure of the 4-year spacing before the second birth." (*toutai nanhai bao yige, toutai nühai bao jiange*).

Such local readjustment to the national family planning programme was made, according to Sun Hongmei, a young female official in the Xiang's family planning office, in the light of the labour needs in rural areas, particularly in the mountainous and semi-mountainous regions, to which Dongdatun belonged by classification. However, bearing in mind the rural reproductive culture exhibited in the fertility behaviour and attitudes of the village community, the modification, by allowing the only-daughter family alone to have a second try, instead of granting universal permission for two children per couple, can be construed as an official compromise to the local ingrained norms and values of male supremacy and son preference.

In the meantime, as many scholars argue, the official relaxation in its birth control requirements for rural couples was more of a product produced through negotiations and bargaining between the central government, regional and local authorities and rural individual households including women.⁵ The final policy and fertility outcomes tend to be shaped and reshaped in a complex process of interactions and mutual compromises between all the parties involved. The central government's attempts to bring village fertility patterns in line with its national goals have been mediated by local cadres, who have increasingly been absorbed into rural society and functioned as an interface between the state and village community. The result has

been not merely submission of rural households' and women's reproductive desire to state birth control regulations, but informal policies at the local level readjusting the state inflexible, universal requirements. This has been followed by the assimilation of the local informal regulations into the national policy in accord with rural societal realities and valued norms.⁶ As Greenhalgh aptly puts it, if village women's desire to have more children, including at least one son, is interpreted as women's reproductive self-decision-making, then struggles over the control of reproduction "may end up empowering women, perpetuating the status quo, exacerbating existing inequalities, or some combination of the three."⁷

My interviews with the village women pointed to a division among women themselves in their perception and assessment of the implications of the official policy readjustment for gender equality in rural society. On the one hand, some women may have found somewhat alleviated social and familial pressures on them owing to the official grant of a second chance to produce a son. On the other hand, others, especially younger women, doubted the logic and principle embodied in the readjusted policy. This is shown in the comments by Li Yufen, aged 33:

"I've got some different opinion on the family planning policy. The current policy is if the first birth is a girl, you are allowed to have a second try; but if the first birth is a boy, you cannot have the second birth. I think such a policy still discriminates against girls, against women ... Now we women think that men and women are equal, but society doesn't think so. Even the government policy has sometimes treated men and women differently." (Interview with Li Yufen)

12-2 Changes in Family and Marriage Patterns

The belief that only sons can carry on a family's surname, hence the line of a lineage, from generation to generation has been closely related to a traditional practice of virilocal marriage in the countryside. Although changes have occurred to rural household patterns during the past few decades with the traditional, extended family gradually giving way to either the stem or nuclear form of families,⁸ the predominance of virilocal post-marital residence has, by and large, maintained. In present day Dongdatun, a rural young couple usually set up their own nuclear family by moving into a newly-built, separate courtyard from the man's parents either on or

a few years after their marriage depending on the financial conditions of the parental household.

Among the female informants, only two single women and another two younger women who had uxori-local marriages still stayed in their parents' houses. All the others lived in their own conjugal households in separate courtyards from those of their parents-in-law's or married sons', although very close economic and emotional ties were observed to have existed between the households of the different generations. These close ties were shown in economic co-operation, such as pooling of household finances in order to, say, initiate a private or contract a collectively owned business, physical care and emotional support between parents and grown-up children, as well as among grown-up siblings. It should be noted, however, the pooling of funds from parents and their grown-up sons living in separate courtyards did not mean unconditional contribution, especially on the side of the younger generation. The relative economic independence of the young, who often formed their conjugal households, was evidenced in the interviews. Forty-nine-year-old Qi Sulan, for instance, mentioned that they (the parents) could obtain more funds through borrowing from their married sons, both of whom had moved out of the parental house and engaged in quite lucrative transportation businesses.

Scholars in the field of family studies, such as Cohen and Yan, have reported a marked increase in conjugal households in rural China during the post-Mao years.⁹ The trend was noted in Dongdatun as well. The improvement in living conditions in the village together with increased exposure of the young to external, especially urban cultural influences for the past decade and more advanced the process of family division. It was revealed in the interviews that the extended family form may well be an extra oppression on rural women. As the following recollection of her mother's experiences by 64-year-old Zhou Shuying shows:

“My mother had very low position in the family. She lived in the old society (*lao shehui*), and never attended school. At that time, there wasn't any promotion of equal rights between men and women. My mother was confined to the household (*damen buchū ermen bumai*). With bound feet, she didn't participate in productive labour outside home. She stayed at home, doing domestic chores and looking after the kids. Therefore, she

didn't have any status in the family. Besides, she lived with her parents-in-law. She had to obey either the husband or the parents-in-law. She had to ask father for money when she needed any." (Interview with Zhou Shuying)

Another woman, 36-year-old Lu Suping, described her mother's status in the family as low even if her mother did not experience the "old society" much. Rather, it was during the collective years and most women were no longer confined to the household:

"... She lived with her parents-in-law as well as the brothers and sisters of her husband. She was the person in the household who always got blamed. Moreover, she gave birth to eight kids [with one death]. Too many children made life particularly hard for the family. On top of the heavy domestic chores because of the many kids to look after, she had to work in the collective fields. Otherwise, she and us kids wouldn't have enough to eat." (Interview with Lu Suping)

Early family division and the popularisation of conjugal households, however, are still different from the neolocal marriage in its strict sense, since the bride has to leave her natal village upon marriage and move into a village where the groom, his parents and agnate relations have resided. The traditional rationalisation of this type of post-marital residence as the established proper pattern can be discerned even from the use of language. A young man getting married is expressed in Chinese as "*quqin*", or "bringing in a wife"; whereas a young woman in the same situation is said to be "*chujia*", or "marrying out".

The patrilocal marriage pattern in the countryside worked to the disadvantage of women in various ways. Together with passing on the family's surname through male offspring, the practice functioned to ensure the convenient succession of the patrilineage and propagation along the agnate line. As sons seldom married out of their native village, the concept of sons as the root of the patrilineage and hence the emphasis of the family was reinforced. In contrast, daughters were looked on as temporary members of the household, who would depart to other villages sooner or later and have children bearing surnames of other families. Moreover, sons were

deemed as being able to bring in wives as extra hands into the household, whereas daughters on their marriage would incur “losses” in terms of labour to their natal households.¹⁰

Based on such reasoning, a negative and discriminative term “*peiqianhuo*” meaning “goods on which one loses money” was sometimes used in Chinese language to refer to new-born baby girls. Such traditional attitudes towards girls continued during the collectivisation period. In spite of the government ideological propagation of sexual equality, rural collectives would not be inclined to “invest” in young, single women, e.g. training them for agricultural technology, skills or local political leadership. The reality was partly beneath the parental partiality in treating sons and daughters in terms of their education, which tilted in favour of sons but against daughters. In the eyes of some rural folks, “investing” in daughters through education provision would be as foolish as “fertilising another man’s land” (*feishui buliu wairen tian*). 64-year-old Zhou Shuying recalled:

“My parents valued sons only and stressed them over daughters. They believed it useless for girls to have schooling, and hence wouldn’t provide for my education.” (Interview with Zhou Shuying)

The different values attached to education for a son and a daughter perceived instrumentally by the parents, in effect, reflected the cultural definition and social construction of gender roles in village society. The parental and social conceptualisation of boys as the future “supporter of the family”, hence demanding more schooling, but girls as subordinates to their future husbands, whose education could therefore be put into little use, as mentioned by a few women informants, was partly related to the availability of alternatives in rural women’s lives. It is in the area of generating more possibilities and alternatives for women, i.e. an enabling environment, through official efforts and policy processes that the government should be able to better influence the behaviour, values and norms of village communities.

12-3 Alternative Opportunities and the Changing Attitude to Women's Education

In the city of Tianjin, I interviewed 10 female migrant workers aged between 18-22, five of whom were employed in factories of joint ventures located in Tanggu economic development zone, and the rest in domestic or catering services in the city proper. Most of the girls working in the former sector had junior high school education with only one exception; whereas most in the latter group did not finish primary school. The variation in the educational level of the two sub-groups of the female migrants was found to have been due to the different recruitment policies in the two sectors. For the former sector, which offered better benefits in terms of income and working and living conditions, the minimum educational requirement was junior high school graduation; whereas for the latter, there was not any requirement for education.

This indicated a new emphasis on education and training in the job market, particularly for urban and off-farm employment opportunities. This, combined with greater mobility of rural women in recent decades, suggests that there has been an increased possibility for rural young women with better education to find non-agricultural, better-paid jobs, although the occupational arena recently opened to rural girls is still inferior to that occupied by rural men and urbanites. This new possibility has created some positive effects on women's own perception of education, and on their roles outside the family, which is demonstrated by the experiences of the girls working in the city and in the off-farm sectors of the village.

During my interviews, almost all the women migrant workers in the city who had limited schooling expressed regret over their earlier attitudes towards education. One of these women, 19-year-old Wang Yuhua, worked in domestic service in Tianjin for a couple of years since she left her native village in Anhui Province in east central China in 1992. She told me that she had hated school, and although her parents registered her at the local primary school, she was reluctant to go. She finally dropped out before finishing primary one. Since Yuhua came to work in Tianjin, she started realising the importance of literacy and knowledge. Accordingly, she took steps to make up the lessons she had missed as a child by watching and following educational programmes for school-aged children on television in her spare time. By the time of the interviewing, she was able to speak good standard Chinese¹¹ and her

ability to read and write improved significantly. When being asked about her future plans, Yuhua replied,

“I’d like to learn more skills, like tailoring and dressmaking. If I grasp a skill, it’d be easier for me to find a good job either in the city or in my native place. Moreover, I’d like to have some opportunity to improve my literacy. Only with a higher ability to read and write, will I be able to learn skills well.” (Interview with Wang Yuhua)

Among the women interviewees in Dongdatun, 22-year-old Zhao Yuchun had the highest education as a senior high school graduate and worked as a teacher at the village’s nursery school. In the interview she commented on the different educational policies and their impact on the parental attitudes towards daughters’ education:

“Senior high school graduates today are different from their counterparts in the past. Before, the only occupation you could enter was agriculture, but now you have the chance and opportunity to find a more appropriate job. Qualifications and education are more stressed today. It’ll be easier for people to find desirable jobs if they have senior high school graduation certificates. In the ads for employment or training programmes, it’s often indicated that people with senior high school education are preferred. This has prompted society to emphasise education and parents to pay more attention to their daughters’ education. Now [off-farm] employment opportunities for girls have grown.” (Interview with Zhao Yuchun)

Increased attention paid to daughters’ education so as to prepare them for possible better-rewarding, non-agricultural occupations in response to the more recent changes in the structure and composition of the local economy in Dongdatun and its surrounding areas was visible from the higher level of education enjoyed by women in the youngest cohort in comparison with their older sisters and mothers. Among the five youngest women, one had the highest level of education as a senior high school graduate, another three were junior high school graduates, and only one received four-year schooling. This was in contrast with the older cohorts, of whom the majority were either illiterate or semi-literate. In terms of employment, the majority

in the youngest cohort worked in non-farm sectors outside the household, such as local government, education, and rural industry and services; whereas the majority in the two older cohorts were employed in the agricultural sector comprising diversified farming, sidelines and specialised production. The different life chances for women afforded by the Mao and post-Mao eras affected the orientations and aspirations of village women. While older women were more likely to express hopes for their families and children, younger women tended to defy traditional gender expectations and entertain high aspirations for themselves with respect to learning, work, and career and political ambitions. This was clearly shown in the following remarks:

“I’ve got high aspirations for myself. I hope I can do whatever the boys do, do it well, and on an equal footing with them. In rural society, girls aren’t traditionally encouraged to work outside home. They are expected to find a good husband, and then be tied to the kitchen sink (*weizhe guotai zhuan*) and take good care of their men and children. If they long to work away from home, or find a job in the city, they then won’t be seen as doing or wanting something appropriate. I expect myself to break with this age-old tradition in the countryside, a tradition that has discouraged women to have own goals and achievements. I also hope I can learn more practical skills, such as accountancy, public relations, secretarial skills and a foreign language, so that I’ll be able to find a better job in the future. I’ve kept on studying on my own in spare time. Currently, what I desire most is to have the opportunity to work in a company and earn a higher income. I hope I can have a good career prospect.” (Interview with Zhang Jinxia, 18, switchboard operator in the Xiang government)

“I’ve got the ideas and intend to take part in the village affairs more actively ... Our village is quite big, and there are many young people. I think we should form a club or some sort of literary and art group to enrich our off-work lives. If possible, I’d like to take the lead to organise such a group ... I think rural people should change their traditional life style of labouring in the fields for life with their faces towards the yellow earth, and backs towards the sky (*mianchaohuangtu beichaotian*). We should have more entertainment in our spare time and lead a more

colourful and social life. I have liked singing since childhood, and am quite good at it. So if there's the opportunity, I'd like to play a leading role in enriching our cultural lives in the village." (Interview with Gu Weimin, 22, barbershop owner)

For older women interviewees, their schooling and literacy level displayed a pattern indicating that the older a woman was, the less likely she received any education. For example, there were two women informants above the age of 60 among all the interviewees, and both were illiterate (*mei wenhua*). One of them, Mrs. Di Cuiping said that she was at school for only a week before the Japanese invasion forced the school to close. The other, Mrs. Zhou Shuying, attributed her illiteracy mainly to her parents' "old ideas" of stressing boys over girls, as her brother, who was only a couple of years younger than she, attained primary education at a private school.¹² It was revealed in the interviews as well that none of the mothers of the women informants in the oldest cohort (aged 45 or above) received any schooling. However, these women's younger siblings and their own children often had more schooling than themselves and their mother's generation.

Part of the reasons for this, as perceived by the women themselves, was that they "had been born and grown up in bad times" (*mei ganshang hao shihou*). This, indeed, may suggest certain achievements by the Maoist regime after 1949 in popularising and spreading basic literacy from the privileged class to workers and peasants, and from the advantaged urban areas to the vast countryside, as well as in its ideological promotion of female education. However, and interestingly, the "bad times" as mentioned by the older village women were not confined to the pre-1949 period. These were also referred to certain official policies implemented in the Mao era, such as the so-called "up to the mountains and down to the countryside" (*shangshan xiaxiang*) movement, i.e. the rustication of educated urban and rural youth, lasting from the late 1950s till the early 1980s, and the Cultural Revolution years. This was especially the case when the women informants in the older cohorts talked about their children's education or their own experiences if they were then at school age, as evidenced in 49-year-old Qi Sulan's recollection:

"When I was young, I aimed high and worked hard. I was eager to do well in everything and wouldn't like to lag behind others. At that time, I

was at high school in the town. In 1960, we were asked to return to and settle in the village. Prior to that moment, I had ideals and aspirations. I wanted to have more schooling, find a job in the town and marry a nice young man. I never wanted to become a peasant woman. I envied urban women a lot. How desirable it would be to have one's own occupation and hold a formal job like them! Who would like to stay at home all day long like a peasant woman if one had the choice? I'd be fed up with cooking, doing housework and looking after the kids at home every day. However, I happened to graduate from school at a bad time ... I thought of carrying on with my schooling after junior high, but I couldn't. We were required to go down to the countryside without exception."

(Interview with Qi Sulan)

This showed the destructive and devastating effects of certain Maoist policies and the Cultural Revolution on China's education in general, and women's schooling and education attainment in particular.

The interplay between women's education and the waged employment opportunities induced changes in the convention of post-marital residence. Instead of moving into their husbands' households upon marriage as expected, many young village women with non-agricultural jobs now preferred staying in their natal villages, if the grooms' villages were located in rather remote hilly regions, or less developed in rural industry and local economy. In this way, these women could keep their waged jobs in the non-farm sectors or continue enjoying the relative advantages of the village provided by its closer link with the city and the greater opportunities associated with it.¹³

This outcome of the economic and societal change, however, did not receive much encouragement from the local arms of the state apparatus. According to the xiang and village officials, current local policies in this respect allowed young women from non-all-daughter households who had decided not to move out of their natal villages at marriage to stay and keep their jobs in the village- or xiang-run enterprises. (I shall discuss the situation of married women in all-daughter households in a later section) However, these women did not have equal entitlements to the material benefits enjoyed by their fellow villagers, particularly married brothers, in the local

redistribution of resources. It is worth noting that the local officials providing the information did not see such regulations as discriminative against women. Rather, this was cited as an example of their achievements in developing the local economy, hence the attraction of their locality.

Cases where staying-on married daughters from non-all-daughter households suffered from such institutional discriminations were many. One aspect concerned with the staying-on married daughter's land use rights. The local practice in land division was that at the initial stage of decollectivisation, land distribution was carried out largely on the basis of household size. Later, in order to keep pace with demographic changes in each household, local policies stipulated that readjustment to the division of land was to be made once every five years or so. Between the years of readjustments, the households that had their sizes reduced should sell some of the grains at lower than market price to the households that had new members added. Compared with the situations reported by some Western and Chinese scholars, where married-in daughters-in-law or divorced women tended to experience at least a few years of landlessness after either marriage or divorce,¹⁴ the locally designed policy in Dongdatun seemed to offer a better option through proper compensations to the enlarged households.

However, the equity consideration of the local authorities in land allocation and readjustment excluded households with staying-on married daughters based on the accepted custom of virilocal marriage. For instance, irrespective of a daughter's post-nuptial residence, her family would certainly lose the portion of land to the married daughter's name when the village government re-divided the land once every few years. Moreover, the staying-on married daughter was not allowed to share the cash and other benefits, on top of her wages, distributed by local authorities from, say, the village's collective income from varied sources, including those obtained from the profits of local enterprises and some one-off deals. One example was that the village sold some land in recent years to a Tianjin-based company seeking to explore local tourist resources, and part of the gains from the deal were distributed to the villagers. The staying-on married daughters from non-all-daughter households, however, were excluded from this type of local redistribution. Furthermore, the parents of a staying-on married daughter were denied extra courtyard space (*fangjidi*) necessary for them to build a new house for the married daughter as they would be allowed for their

married sons, whether or not the sons still worked and lived in the village. The discriminative local policy against young staying-on married women in terms of allocation of courtyard space was highlighted by the contrasting favourable treatment granted to a household with five married sons. Although four of the sons had permanently migrated away from the village, the village authority still allocated sufficient courtyard spaces to allow the family to build one house in five separate courtyards for each of the sons.

Rapid economic and societal changes were taking place in Dongdatun, evidenced in such phenomena as increased number of marrying-in sons-in-law in all-daughter households (will be dealt with later), staying-on married daughters, or moving-out migrant sons in households with both daughters and sons. However, the previous rules for the distribution of rights and entitlements of men and women, which had evolved on the basis of the conventional post-nuptial arrangements, seemed to stay intact. Negotiation over the rules and contestation about the norms and practices did occur, as suggested by the young women's unconventional marriage arrangements and their ability to retain their waged jobs in their natal village. Nonetheless, the gendered nature of exclusion, deprivation and vulnerability remained in the local community as a result of the unbalanced gender power relations interacted with the existing structural constraints.

Studies conducted in other parts of the country have reported more serious problems concerning infringement on the rights and interests of rural married women who have refused to follow the conventions of virilocality. In her investigation into women's land use rights in connection with population mobility and demographic changes, such as marriages and births, in rural Sichuan Province, Xu notes that although the legally recognised uxorilocal marriage has experienced a notable growth in number in recent decades, local authorities have tended to view the phenomenon as an unwelcome competition from women for scarce local land resources.¹⁵ She finds that such a view is often shared and backed by the traditional customs and beliefs of the village community. As a result, various local regulations and policies have been laid down to restrict uxorilocal marriages in the name of protecting the interests of the native villagers. In many localities, restrictions are put in place stipulating that only one daughter of a sonless household is allowed uxorilocal marriage. Other locally adopted constraints include prolonged delays in

reallocating land to or even denial of land use rights of the marrying-in husband, and attempts to drive the staying-on married daughters out of their natal villages by demanding that they cancel their household registration there shortly after marriage.¹⁶ Such local policies have effectively produced and encouraged discriminations against uxorilocal marriages, or daughter-centred households.

Although faced with discriminations, the young women in Dongdatun did not react strongly to the discriminative practices contained in local regulations. This does not mean that they were unaware of them, as Gu Weimin made clear when describing the unequal treatment by the Dongdatun village authority of married daughters and sons in the assignment of courtyard spaces: "This is unfair. The person in charge of the courtyard space allocation has taken a double standard in treating men and women." I felt from my conversations with the village women that their lack of action may well be a realistic response to the resistance from the community and reluctance on the part of the political leadership, who deemed their post-marital residence in their natal village as exceptional rather than accepted norms. Their immediate consideration may well be to inch ahead and consolidate their perceived gains in keeping the waged jobs and refusing to move out of their natal village before carrying out negotiations for further gains.

12-4 The Women's Federation: Strengths and Weaknesses in Representing Women's Interests

The relative inertia of the young staying-on married women may also be attributed, however, to lack of support from the Women's Federation. The Women's Federation, as a national network reaching from the central to the village level, is a quasi-governmental organisation officially defined as being led by the Communist Party and functioning as a bridge linking the Party and women at the grass roots. The central tasks of the Women's Federation are accordingly designated as "operating at the interface between the current focus of the Party's work and the benefits and interests of the women masses".¹⁷

This definition of the nature and function of the Women's Federation has found its expression in the federation's many recent initiatives to integrate women into the mainstream rural development in the reform era, like the Double Learning and Double Competition programme discussed earlier. These initiatives, while involving

women, have simultaneously been in support of the Party's paradigmatic shift towards open markets and economic growth. Similarly, the increased funding for and notable improvement in child care and health services for women and the education for the young in Dongdatun were effectively brought about through promotions by the Women's Federation in the name of facilitating the official birth control programme.

With decentralisation of power, and greater pluralism in expressions of interests and needs in the post-Mao era, the Women's Federation has gained more autonomy and independence in its representation of women's interests. Wang Jinming, head of Department of Women's Rights and Interests (*quanyibu*) in Tianjin Women's Federation, said that at the initial stage of implementing the birth control policy in the early 1980s, there were quite a few reported incidents where women's rights and interests were seriously infringed. Girl-bearing women were mistreated by their husbands and in-laws, and female infants abandoned. To address the problem, a new department, that is, the department that Mrs. Wang led now, was set up by the Women's Federation of Tianjin Municipality. The Department plays a similar role to that of the Citizens' Rights Bureau in Britain, except that the Chinese system is intended exclusively for women. Since its creation, women lawyers have been trained especially for the Department. These female legal personnel have provided free legal advice and counselling for women clients, and sometimes represented them in court. Both the Department and the Women's Federation have made unremitting efforts to appeal for public and governmental attention to issues affecting women's status in society against a visible tendency of an official *laissez-faire* attitude towards such issues in the transition period. The issues and problems dealt with by the Women's Federation have ranged from sexual discrimination displayed in education, employment and housing policies in the city to inadequate public provision of welfare such as the cost of children's rearing and old-age support in the countryside. It has also advised women on how to protect the rights and interests of themselves and their children in a variety of circumstances, such as separation and divorce, which have risen sharply in recent years. In the last case, the new stance of the Women's Federation is in sharp contrast with its pre-reform, tenacious opposition against any divorce attempt, which was strictly in line with the typical conservatism displayed in formal and informal institutions of the time.¹⁸ It was partly thanks to the

pressures from women's interest groups that the authorities have begun to tackle the issues concerning women's well-being in the process of policy implementation regarding family planning.

In addition, the Tianjin Women's Federation called for the wider society to share women's reproductive cost as well as the costs of health care and supporting the elderly. The relative success of these efforts by the Women's Federation was in evidence from the gradual establishment of a preliminary social security system in the city in the 1990s, which consisted of medical and old-age insurance schemes, and reproductive and child care funds.¹⁹

This indicates that although the official definition of the Women's Federation is an assumed identity of goals and interests between the government and women's work, the actual representation of women's distinctive interests by the organisation has been partly realised through finding a way to connect women's needs and demand with officially designed programmes. This is a process in which the convergences between the two are played up and divergences played down. In other words, the Women's Federation, rather than taking a confrontational approach, is more likely to assume a co-operative stance towards macro-level official policies and programmes. Meanwhile, negotiations and bargaining have taken place at various levels, from reproductive health services at the local level to legislation at the national level. The increased influence of the Women's Federation is represented in the latest version of the Marriage Law revised and adopted by the People's Congress on 30 April 2001. Due to the insistence of the Women's Federation, which has called for more legislative actions to check the trend of having *de facto* concubines (*bao ernai*) by men and domestic violence, which have exacerbated the encroachment of women's interests and rights, the revised law has incorporated new stipulations illegalising *de facto* concubinage and domestic violence. It seems that the strategy taken by the Women's Federation allows the organisation to justify and legitimate women's demands under the official rhetoric. Moreover, it has facilitated its efforts to persuade and pressure the local state apparatus to meet these demands on the grounds of a demonstrated logical association between the government and women's projects and objectives.

However, the weakness of such an approach by the Women's Federation is that it is not always possible to find ready connections between the officially pronounced goals and women's needs; and that there is the problem of lagged awareness owing to the likely indirectness and complexity of the associations. In Dongdatun, lack of support from the Women's Federation for the staying-on married daughters from non-all-daughter households may have partly resulted from the failure on the part of the organisation to fully perceive the significance of the phenomenon of the "staying-on daughters". These young women's action had the potential of challenging and altering the predominant custom of patrilocal marriage, which, in turn, would affect son preference and the related reproductive norms, making it easier to implement the official family planning programme.

In addition, such an approach often fails to effectively address issues which are not readily reinterpretable from the perspective of the interests of each individual family unit as in the case of children's education, and mother and child care. Such issues involve clashes of interests between men and women as distinct social groups, as in the case of unequal treatment of married sons and daughters in the local redistribution of resources in Dongdatun. Furthermore, there has always been the question to what extent the Women's Federation as a quasi-representative of the state is willing to confront and challenge policies made by the state apparatus which reify male prejudice against women and reflect the entrenched traditional forces working to the detriment of women's interests.

13-1 Inheritance: Legislation and Reality

Daughters' inheritance rights: national and local scenarios

A national survey on Chinese women's status carried out jointly by the All-China Women's Federation and the State Statistical Bureau covering 11 provinces and major cities throughout the country in the early 1990s showed the Chinese public attitudes towards married daughters' inheritance to their parental property. The following table presents the survey result:

Table 13-1 Attitudes towards Married Daughters' Inheritance to Parental Property in China (%)

Attitudes	Urban			Rural		
	T	F	M	T	F	M
Equal share with brothers (<i>yu xiongdi pingfen</i>)	40.6	36.4	45.5	13.8	11.4	16.5
Smaller share than brothers (<i>bi xiongdi shao xie</i>)	7.9	7.2	8.6	9.7	9.4	10.1
Larger share than brothers (<i>bi xiongdi duo xie</i>)	0.6	0.6	0.6	0.5	0.6	0.4
Better not claim share (<i>zuihao buyao</i>)	10.1	12.0	7.9	15.6	16.0	15.2
Should not claim share (<i>buyinggai yao</i>)	10.6	11.8	9.2	40.5	44.0	36.7
Don't care (<i>wusuowei</i>)	30.1	31.8	28.2	19.8	18.5	21.1

Source: ZFSDDK, 1993: 307.

Note: T – Total; F – Female; M – Male. The “don't care” attitudes refer to those that regard married daughters' entitlements to inheritance of parental property as “context-dependent” rather than universally eligible (*ibid.*: 307-08).

The survey results point to an acute gender asymmetry in attitudes held by the general public. A couple of other interesting findings in relation to this observable asymmetry are also revealed, which may or may not be expected. One is the salient urban-rural gap in respect of people's attitudes towards married daughters' inheritance rights to their parental estates, with rural areas displaying greater gender bias. The other is the puzzling fact that, apparently, more women than men think

unfavourably towards married daughters in terms of inheritance in their natal households. Important questions can be raised about the variables that have helped shape the different urban and rural perceptions of married daughters' equal inheritance rights, as well as about the complex factors behind the apparent female self-negating attitudes in respect of their own rights. To answer these questions requires an understanding of a set of institutions (e.g. urban-rural differences in household structure, post-nuptial residence, female education and employment opportunities, as well as the availability of public social provisions), relationships (familial ties and kinship networks), the subtle and intricate negotiation processes between the sexes and generations within the household, and the complicated interactions between the existing structure and the dynamics of societal change. Analysis of my field findings below are intended to shed some light on these aspects.

Inheritance practices in Dongdatun were in consistence with this general picture portrayed by the above Table. The dominant inheritance pattern in connection with the existing rural kinship organisation and marriage institution can be detected from the following accounts of the village women:

“My parents paid for the wedding expenses and building the houses for my brothers. After their deaths, the family property was divided among my brothers. I didn't get any share of it.” (Interview with Wang Guifen, 52)

“Daughters don't inherit property after they are married. If a family has a son, daughters lose their inheritance rights to the son. Only when a family is sonless, do daughters have a chance to inherit.” (Interview with Wang Lifan, 22)

The inheritance practice revealed here is in consistence with the findings of several studies on Chinese village life, the family and marriage. Gao, for instance, pointed out that in Gao Village in Jiangxi Province in Southeast China, a married daughter was not entitled to any inheritance from her parents.¹ Cohen's study on rural family management and family division in Hebei in the North, suburban Shanghai in the Southeast and Sichuan in the Southwest displayed a similar pattern.² In spite of the prevalent practice of excluding daughters from inheritance, spatial and temporal

variations, particularly in relation to all-daughter households, were observed during my fieldwork.

In former times, inheritance by daughters even in sonless households met with strong resistance from the agnatic kin, as was evidenced by Wang Guiying's experience in the 1960s. Furthermore, men marrying into women's households were traditionally called "*zhuixu*", which is a rather derogatory term. In Dongdatun, there was the old saying *xiaozi wuneng, gengming gaixing*, which means that only incompetent men would marry into women's households, and as a result, their offspring would lose the fathers' surnames, which was equivalent to having no progeny. Discrimination against marrying-in men was mainly from the strong lineage-based local community. Local male groups tended to reject outsider males, whose entrance into the community through marriage was often considered a new rivalry for limited resources and a potential threat to the existing power structure based on patrilineal relations. This tendency, as Judd notes, was reinforced in the commune years when the boundaries delineating the socio-economic and political lives of the Chinese village were institutionally sharpened.³ The rejection and exclusion by the local males together with discriminations expressed in villagers' attitudes against moving-in sons-in-law often rendered men in uxorilocal marriages centrifugal within their own married families, especially during the early years of their marriage. Wang Guiying, for example, mentioned that in the first few years of her marriage, her husband, whose natal family was in a mountainous village further beyond Dongdatun, tended to give his parents and siblings higher priority compared with his family by marriage.

My interviews with the village women showed that, owing to the strong male opposition and discriminations against those involved in uxorilocal marriage, inheritance by daughters combined with uxorilocal marriages was generally regarded undesirable, and hence rare before rural reforms. The adoption of a son from an agnate in the sonless household was often expected and practised compared with accepting a uxorilocal marriage of a daughter:

"In the past, if a family was sonless, its property would be passed over to a nephew of the husband rather than to his daughter. Nowadays, a

daughter from a sonless family can inherit property.” (Interview with Qi Sulan, 49)

“Before, if a family only had daughters, whether the couple wanted it or not, they were expected to have a son adopted from a brother of the husband. It had developed into a custom.” (Interview with Zhao Yuchun, 22)

Although matrilocal marriage (*zhaoxu*)⁴ and inheritance by a daughter in it had been promoted and, to some extent, practised thanks to the official ideological propagation between the 1960s and 1970s, it was during the past decade and more that the number of such marriages grew significantly and inheritance by daughters in sonless families gradually became accepted norms. This is partly due to the fact that with the enforcement of the official family planning programme, more households than ever before have turned into all-daughter households. This scenario, in turn, has prompted the authorities at various levels to lay down regulations and laws that are considered favourable to daughters in such households in order to push ahead with its birth-control programme. A revised Marriage Law was introduced in 1980, which has affirmed in legal terms the uxorilocal residence form (*congqiju*) and the unorthodox practice of adopting one's mother's surname (*suimuxing*).⁵ The laws on inheritance and on protecting women's rights and interests, enacted in 1985 and 1992, respectively, in response to the widened range of private property that has come into being with post-Mao reforms and the increased disputes in connection with it, both state that women have the equal rights to property and inheritance with men.⁶

Daughters' equal inheritance rights with sons are thus formally codified in the specific provisions of these laws. Such a legal framework plays an important role in empowering women through providing an instrument for women to claim their equal rights when faced with discriminations, and a basis for formal arbitration when property disputes involving a woman's rights arise. The influence of such legislation on the status of women in the family and the village community could be felt when the younger women in sonless families cited the laws and regulations to either justify their matrilocal marriages, or back their arguments for equal treatment of women and men with respect to inheritance:

“According to the law, a daughter has the same responsibility as a son does to support parents in their old age, therefore she should have the equal right to inherit the family’s property. In my case, as I’m in a *zhaoxu* marriage, which has been encouraged by the government, I’ve been treated equally with men by the village policy in obtaining courtyard space ...” (Interview with Gu Weimin, 22)

“I’ve got my husband to move into my family. In the past the husband as well as the wife’s family in a *zhaoxu* marriage would be looked down upon in the village. Nowadays such marriages are quite common. In recent years, there have been five girls in the village who have had their husbands married in ... Now you won’t be discriminated against for having a *zhaoxu* marriage.” (Interview with Zhao Yuchun, 22)

The young women in uxorilocal marriage in the village today suffered less discrimination than their older counterparts had experienced. This was partly attributable to the more recent extension of the legal framework to legitimate and protect their rights. In addition, certain local regulations gave incentives or positive discrimination to women in such households. According to the young village women and the Xiang’s family planning official Sun Hongmei, a range of encouraging measures had been formulated locally. These included equal allocation of the courtyard space, allowance of a second birth irrespective of the sex of the couple’s first child, and other special treatments offered to the all-daughter households which abided by the local birth control rules. Such treatments included preferences granted to all-daughter households in getting their contracted land watered during busy seasons, when electricity and water were in short supply, in entrance by their children to the village nursery school when the number of places was limited, and in their members’ being employed in the local rural enterprises. It is noteworthy, however, that the capacity of village authorities to deliver such beneficiary treatments varied considerably depending on the state of the village economy. The relative economic strength of Dongdatun was said to have enabled the village council to lend support for implementing such positively discriminative regulations.⁷

However, the practical recognition of daughters’ rights in this respect as a more recent development has not extended beyond the all-daughter households, where

intra-household competitions for resources between children of the opposite sexes are absent. When such competitions exist, most daughters then lose their rights to their vying brothers. As indicated in the interviews, daughters' loss in possible intra-household rivalries for inheritance is primarily due to the fact that the rural inheritance regime has been in the main sustained by the deep-ingrained concept of emphasising men as the very root of the patriline:

“It is the custom. It isn't absolutely on the ground that sons rather than daughters support their aged parents. For example, if a family has three sons, the three sons will divide among themselves the property left over by their parents. Even if a daughter lives in the same village after marriage and shares the responsibility of taking care of the aged parents, she cannot join the sons to inherit the property ... the practice is mainly based on the custom that value sons more than daughters.” (Interview with Wang Guiying, 46)

“It's old-fashioned ideas and tradition. A daughter's descendants wouldn't have the family's surname, and thus would be regarded as outsiders by the elderly. Now daughters can fulfil their duties to support parents as well. ... But people with old ideas still believe when daughters are married out, they are no longer members of the family, so they aren't entitled to inherit property.” (Interview with Qi Sulan, 49)

Virilocal marriage and daughters' loss of inheritance rights

The observations of the women informants, together with the fact that gender inequality in inheritance is most notable in households with both daughters and sons, suggest a close association between the current rural inheritance regime and the prevalent custom of post-marital virilocality. Several scholars studying Chinese marriage, family and laws have noted this association.⁸ The distinction between urban and rural practices of post-nuptial residence may partly explain the marked urban-rural gap in public attitudes towards married daughters' inheritance rights as demonstrated in Table 13-1. In Chinese cities, young couples usually establish their own neo-local, nuclear families after marriage, whereas in the countryside, virilocal marriage requiring a bride to move into the groom's village has been the predominant norm. The following remarks by the women interviewees reflected the

justification provided by the custom of virilocal marriage for the negation of daughters' inheritance rights:

"A daughter has to be married out, ... But a son will stay in the same village with his parents after marriage, so the son and his family inherit the parents' property." (Interview with Zhang Jinxia, 18)

"A married daughter is no longer seen as a member of her parents' family, but of her husband's family ... A son has the duty to support the parents in old age, ... A daughter usually moves out of her natal village after marriage ... The objective condition simply doesn't allow her to stay by her parents' side and look after them for long." (Interview with Wang Guifen, 52)

When digging beneath the surface of a seemingly plausible duty-beneficiary argument for sons' exclusive inheritance (I shall analyse this in detail shortly), we can see that the patrilocal marriage system has functioned to disadvantage women through its provision of a convenient justification for depriving women of their equal rights with their brothers. As sons stay in their natal village for life, it is seen as natural that the property of the parents is passed on to them. Moreover, the varied laws challenging the traditional practice in inheritance by emphasising equal inheritance rights of sons and daughters have simultaneously conditioned such rights with the fulfilment of the duties that adult children should support their ageing parents, which has been in line with a culture in which parents have traditionally relied on their grown-up children for old-age security.

The implicit contradiction built in the law, i.e., the non-traditional elements stipulating daughters' equal inheritance rights and the more convention-oriented conditions for realising such rights, combined with lack of an institutionalised old-age security scheme in most villages, may be partly responsible for the ineffectiveness of the law in real life. As Ocko pointed out, the premises prescribed by the law tended to be readily reinterpreted and accommodated in reality by the very custom of virilocality, since "... even some courts ... held that 'marrying out' should have the same effect [of forfeiting the obligation to care for one's elderly parents]."⁹ A daughter's departure from her natal village on marriage has then been

customarily perceived as tantamount to a desertion of her obligations to support the parents in old age. But few questions have ever been asked as to who or what forces have decided which family member should move out and which stay in at marriage. In effect, a tacit social and cultural selective process has been involved with the guarantee of preference for males as the outcome. Compared with moving out, staying in has greater advantages, and thus must be reserved for the male sex, or the sons.

Reverse flow of fortunes prior to inheritance

In addition to the problem of equating the fulfilment of one's duties with post-nuptial residence with parents, deprivation of daughters' rights to inheritance has been based on the assumption of a son as one-way supporter of the parents in old age. With close scrutiny, however, this assumption cannot hold water, since the rural intergenerational relations have been sustained on a more reciprocal than unilateral basis with respect to provisions of affection, assistance and finance. My interviews with village women revealed a stark gender bias in the intra-household allocation of resources marked by a "reversed flow of fortunes" from parents to sons both at and prior to inheritance. The village woman Wang Guifen pointed to this fact:

"As a daughter would finally marry out, the parents would tend to think less of her; whereas they care more about their sons, such as how to find wives and build new houses for them. It's the idea of stressing men over women (*zhongnanqingnü*). It's the custom and tradition." (Interview with Wang Guifen, 52)

The marriage of a son and having heirs by a son are among the most important events in a rural household.¹⁰ The parents often have to spend a major part of the household's pooled savings on the marriage, including paying for the increasingly expensive bride-wealth (*caili*),¹¹ engagement (*dingqin*) and wedding ceremonies and banquets, and building a new house for the son.¹² As one village woman commented:

"... But if I give you an itemised account, I wouldn't say with certainty that it [the practice of inheritance by sons only] is very fair. The parents build new houses and take care of the kids for the sons, but really don't

need their sons to do much for them in return ...” (Interview with Yang Zhiying, 37)

Sometimes economic contributions by daughters to the household would be used for such purposes as well by the parents. In my contact with female migrant workers in Tianjin, I noticed that although some of these young women showed a greater individualistic tendency by disposing their wages at their own will, others tended to act more in conformity with the traditional requirements of performing filial duties. The latter was achieved through remitting money (half to two thirds of their income) back to their parents in the natal villages. With the parents’ acting as the redistributor, this money could find its way to the brother’s pocket. The following account by Zhan Guifang, who worked in a joint venture factory producing cooking oil, is indicative:

“The money [the remainder of her wages that had been sent back home, which represented some two thirds of her income] will be used to build a new house for my younger brother in the future when he gets married. My dad says the priority is to build the house for my brother and after that, I’ll be able to keep the money for myself.” (Interview with Zhan Guifang, 21)

As the expenses born by the parents on bride-wealth, engagement and wedding ceremonies, as well as house construction for the son can constitute the bulk of a rural household’s pooled savings of the time, such expenditures are conceptualised by some scholars as a form of family partition before the deaths of parents, or “pre-mortem inheritance”.¹³ In such cases, the property of the family based on the pooled contributions of its members, including those by the daughters, would be divided among the sons in a serial manner. Although it can be argued that dowry to a daughter has had a similar function as bride-wealth to a son in the sense of “pre-mortem inheritance”, it is generally understood that the custom of dowry is less prevalent than that of bride-price in rural China. Moreover, the value of the former is often insignificant compared with that of the latter.

The parental support for the son usually continues after the son’s marriage, ranging from helping with housework and looking after the grandchildren, to attending

domestic animals and contracted land for the son's family, as I observed in Dongdatun. This is also evident from the remarks by Yang Xuehong,

“He [the brother] hasn't given much money to my parents, because my parents still work themselves, and they've got enough money. My brother's family live with my parents. Economically they don't separate. So my parents have to subsidise them. What he has done is to buy some gifts for my parents during traditional festivals and holidays. We daughters have done the same thing ... In fact, my younger sister is married into a household in the natal village. So when my parents get too old to work, my younger sister has to take care of them as well. But even if my sister fulfils her duty to look after the aged parents, she cannot share with my brother in inheritance ... I don't think this is fair.”
(Interview with Yang Xuehong, 25)

It was commonly acknowledged by the village women interviewees that daughters were closer to mothers, and compared with sons, they were more considerate, caring and thoughtful of their parents.¹⁴ Based on my understanding of the cultural heritage of a relatively competitive relationship between the mother-in-law and the daughter-in-law, I felt that the parents, particularly the mother, tended to view their daughter as more reliable than the married son as the possible source of emotional and material support in either need or old age. This perception of daughters as more “loyal” to parents may also result from the cultural expectation of daughters as the more selfless and self-sacrificing members of the household in familial and intergenerational relations compared with their brothers. Moreover, daughters, even after marriage, tend to maintain strong emotional ties with their parents in natal families and continue providing care and financial support when needed.¹⁵ It has become particularly the case during the past decade and more when the daughter's economic contribution to her natal household has grown with the increasing possibility of her getting a paid job in either the rural enterprise or the urban industrial and tertiary sectors. For instance, my field findings show that some young female migrant workers in Tianjin remitted a large part (from half to two thirds) of their income to their parents in rural areas.

In addition, it is highly likely for a married daughter whose family by marriage is better-off to make greater contributions, in terms of both cash and kind, than her brothers to the well-being of the parents.¹⁶ This point was illustrated by some personal experiences: In both my mother's and mother-in-law's natal families, it was the daughter instead of the several sons who singly shouldered the responsibilities of supporting the aged parents physically and financially even without much prospect of sharing any inheritance. All these facts undermine the generalisation of a son as the sole supporter of the parents in old age. And the roots of the prevailing inheritance regime in rural society were thus viewed by many women informants as the ideological centralisation of sons but marginalisation of daughters:

"It's old-fashioned ideas and tradition. A daughter's descendants wouldn't have the family's surname, and thus would be regarded as outsiders by the elderly. Now daughters can fulfil their duties to support parents as well. When the parents fall ill or are hospitalised, the daughter and the son-in-law also come to visit and take care of the parents as a son and his family do. Some of them also provide parents with an allowance. But people with old ideas still believe when daughters are married out, they are no longer members of the family, so they aren't entitled to inherit property." (Interview with Qi Sulan, 49)

Although many of the village women interviewees saw the current inheritance arrangements as the workings of a patriarchal ideology of valuing men but debasing women, and some showed disapproval, most of the women from families with sons neither did nor intended to claim their equal rights with their brothers to inheritance. Part of the reason for this seems to be associated with the cultural and social demand on women and the general socialisation process internalising the traditional criteria and expectations of a "virtuous" (*xianhui*) woman. Women were, and still are expected not to assert their own interests in domestic settings, but to avoid intra-household disputes through persistently exercising forbearance and self-sacrifice.¹⁷ As daughters and sisters in the natal household, women have been socially and culturally discouraged from claiming their statutory rights to inheritance by such traditional values and requirements. At the same time, there might be stakes for women in forfeiting their inheritance rights in their natal families. Indeed, despite the contestation of and challenge to the traditional lineage organisations posed by the

rapid industrialisation and increased population mobility in rural China after reforms, patrilineages still hold considerable power in present-day village lives.¹⁸ Thus, it is vital for a woman to develop and forge strong linkage with her natal household including parents, brothers and lineal kin, in order to enhance her “fallback position” in case that her own marriage fails to work. In view of this, asserting her equal inheritance rights in the natal household may weaken the potential support that a woman expects to elicit from her natal lineage.

The general conceptualisation of the interests of a married woman as identical with those of her husband’s and his family’s, based largely on the traditional family as both an economic corporate unit and main social welfare agency, as well as women’s subordinate position within it, also had a bearing upon the awareness of the village women about their own rights and interests. This was indicative in the comments of a few women interviewees that although they do not enjoy equal inheritance rights with their brothers, they will inherit the property of their parents-in-laws’ through their husbands. At the first glance, there seems to be a balance, in terms of material benefits, between the inheritance rights that a woman loses to her brothers in the natal household and the property that her conjugal family may inherit from her husband’s parents. However, a closer inspection reveals that the greater uncertainty and instability in marital relationships in the context of rapid socio-economic changes and population mobility in today’s rural China has rendered more and more insecure women’s indirect link to inheritance through conjugal ties.¹⁹ Furthermore, the practice by which women gain access to inheritance only through their relationship with men has worked to deny women’s equal inheritance rights in other ways, amongst which is remarried widow’s property and inheritance rights in her previous conjugal household. The existing inheritance regime stressing women’s dependence on and subordination to men has had negative social and cultural implications for the position of women in the family and society. One such effect is on the consciousness of women as independent rights-bearing individuals, an effect that is discernible from the puzzling self-negating responses of rural women with respect to their own inheritance rights in the natal household as displayed in Table 13-1.

It seems that the internalised constraints (through socialisation) that women carry with them combined with the external structural barriers may provide a partial

explanation for the largely negative attitudes of women themselves towards daughters' inheritance rights as shown earlier. Other explanations may be found in yet another set of structural constraints – the salient urban-rural gaps, which are often related to state social policy making. These include, among other things, the division between urban and rural areas in welfare provision, particularly social security and support for the elderly. Unlike most people living in the cities who are entitled to basic state pensions and some old age support services, rural people have long relied on themselves and their families, particularly sons in the dominant virilocal marital arrangement, for old age security and support. Although during the past decade and more, pilot social security schemes jointly financed by local authorities and individual farmers, such as medical and old-age insurance schemes, have emerged in the countryside, these have largely been confined to a minority of relatively better-off areas.²⁰

Lack of statutory mechanisms for old age security has interacted with and reinforced the traditional emphasis on sons and patrilineage, customary denial of daughters' inheritance rights, as well as lineage organisations and their functions in providing security and protection within the structure. However, the traditional "safety-net" built with extended and closely-woven familial structures and kinship ties in subsistence agriculture is now faced with an imminent threat from greater rural industrialisation, population mobility and the implementation of the official family planning programme. In this context, an active role of the government at varied levels in introducing and extending rural social security programmes is deemed as a necessary and vital step to promote welfare for all, encourage alternative references as against traditional norms and practices, and realise women's equal rights in inheritance in rural China.

13-2 The Power Structure within the Rural Household

The same national survey on women's social status in China carried out in 1992 as mentioned in section 13-1 also shows that although the intra-household gender relation is moving in the direction of greater democracy and equality, the equilibrium of the decision-making power still tilts towards men. This is illustrated in the following tables:

Table 13-2 Decision-making in the household everyday life in China (%)

Decision makers	Husband mainly	Husband and wife together	Wife mainly	Other members of household	Total
National	21.5	49.6	13.2	15.7	100
Urban	10.9	57.7	20.2	11.1	100
Rural	23.6	48.1	11.8	16.4	99.9

Source: ZFSDDK, 1993: 202.

Table 13-3 Decision-making concerning important matters in the household in China (%)²¹

Decisions made on	Decision maker	Husband and wife together	Husband mainly	Wife mainly	Other members of household	Total
Orientation of production	National	41.2	33.2	8.9	16.5	99.8
	Urban	58.4	20.8	9.9	10.6	99.8
	Rural	40.1	34.1	9.1	16.7	100.0
Housing (selection/building)	National	52.1	28.1	3.7	16.1	100.0
	Urban	56.3	25.7	7.3	10.6	99.9
	Rural	51.8	28.3	3.1	16.8	100.0
Major purchases	National	58.1	21.2	6.0	14.7	100.0
	Urban	69.2	11.5	8.9	9.7	99.3
	Rural	42.9	29.2	11.7	16.2	100.0
Making investments/taking loans	National	46.3	34.2	4.2	15.2	99.9
	Urban	66.1	17.4	7.1	8.8	99.4
	Rural	55.5	23.5	5.4	15.6	100.0

Source: ZFSDDK, 1993: 208.

The above tables display not only an urban-rural gap but also a general pattern in terms of women's decision-making power within the household. They show that despite a greater sexual equality in household decision-making, women still have a much smaller say than men in either urban or rural domestic settings. Furthermore, when the two tables are compared with each other through using the various data groups of the national average, women's lack of power in domestic decision-making relative to men is even more evident, as displayed in Figure 13-1 below.

The diagram, through comparing the two groups of data, that is, the percentages of the husband's having a major say in household decisions and those of the wife's, reveals that the more important a decision is for the family, such as the construction of new houses, orientation or reorientation of production, and taking loans or making investments, the more reserved the decision-making power is for the man, and the more unlikely that the woman plays a leading role in it. In other words, women do

not have much genuine power in the operation of their households. This result is confirmed by my field study.



Figure 13-1 Decision-making within households by national average (%)

In Dongdatun, the majority of the women informants claimed that their husbands and themselves, or for unmarried girls both their parents, together decided the family budget, and that they knew the family’s financial situation. This may well be true considering village women’s increased role in market-related economic activities and their greater contribution to the household income. Nevertheless, further questioning about how family budgets were managed and decisions reached, gender asymmetry in the household decision-making was revealed. It appeared that most women were only in charge of the small amount of money for daily expenses, and that the joint decision-making on major matters in regards to production or investment was often in the form of the husband’s taking the initiative followed by the wife’s agreement.

Exceptions to this general pattern were the few strong-willed women, such as Li Yufen and Gu Weimin, who tended to have a greater say in all the matters concerning the household compared with their husbands. In addition, women’s power in the household seemed to vary with the post-nuptial residence arrangement. A pattern revealed in the interviews indicated that women in uxori-local marriages often had more power than those in viri-local ones. Even for older women, uxori-local marriage tended to enable them to enjoy a higher status in the family. Forty-six-year-

old Wang Guiying is a typical case. Guiying mentioned in the interview that her husband had insisted on buying a washing machine for the family mainly out of concerns with her health condition (she was undergoing a rather difficult period of menopause) and intended to reduce her domestic burden. Although she was much less educated (semi-literate with two-year schooling) than her husband (with junior high school education), the shifting of the household production from growing grain alone to cash crops was initiated and decided by Guiying.

Despite the variations with marriage arrangements in terms of gender equality in household decision-making, women in general made fewer decisions in domestic settings compared with men. This was partly displayed in the banking practices of the villagers. When being asked in whose names the family bank accounts were, only three out of the 15 women interviewees said that the family bank accounts were in their names. One of the three women was an elderly widow, another was Gu Weimin who had a matrilineal marriage. It is worth noting that in Weimin's case, the practice of having the bank accounts of her conjugal family in her name seemed to be more out of safety consideration than anything else. In a relatively small community like Dongdatun, locally-based bank clerks knew most of the villagers and could identify their family members. According to Weimin, this added extra security to the villagers' savings since in the case that villagers lost their passbooks, it would be difficult for non-family members to make withdrawals by using these passbooks. As Weimin's husband was a newcomer and relatively unknown to the bank clerks, it was safer for the family to hold the accounts under her name.

Apart from the above few exceptions, all the other women said that the family bank accounts were in their husbands' or fathers' names. This did not necessarily mean that women could not gain access to the family accounts. Under a relatively less developed banking system, anybody in the family, such as the wife, the parents or the grown-up children, could make withdrawals from the accounts in the man's name, and only occasionally they would be asked to present the man's identification card as well as their own. Individual variability regarding the reasons for the banking practice observed in rural households was significant. For instance, Li Yufen said that she dealt with the bank for her family before 1993 when, working in the family farm, she enjoyed a more flexible timetable. Thereafter, she held a job in the village brickyard, which required fixed working hours. Since then, her husband, who ran a

family business in transportation, took over the family's banking tasks. In Yang Xiurong's case, her husband handled the family accounts because the bank branch where the money was deposited was close to his work place. Judging from all these specific circumstances, the above-observed practice did not seem to have caused tensions between spouses. As indicated in the interviews, almost all the women informants said that they were able to use the family bank accounts as long as they wanted, and many claimed that these accounts were kept in their hands. The village women also mentioned that their husbands consulted them on matters concerning the use of the family savings.

Nevertheless, this taken-for-granted practice did reflect the continuity of pooling household savings, though more often than not for conjugal families rather than extended households, in a corporate family unit. Meanwhile, it displayed ambiguities in intra-household power relations. On the one hand, it may suggest women's tactic to seek gains in informal power within the domestic context through making concessions rather than resorting to head-on confrontation with a deep-rooted patriarchal tradition; and, on the other hand, women's lower position in both the family and society. This could be discerned from the remarks made by Lu Suping,

“My husband engages in transportation and usually works away from home during the day. So I go to the bank most often in the family to save or withdraw money. Of course, it would be more convenient for me if the accounts were kept in my name since sometimes I have to bring two identification cards (both the husband's and the wife's) with me to get the money out. I think it is still feudal influence that we are used to putting the husbands' names first as if they were always the heads of the family.” (Interview with Lu Suping, 36)

Another woman, 52-year-old Wang Guifen who never visited the bank expressed the belief that going to the bank was a “big matter” (*dashi*), and therefore she would let her husband and the grown-up son deal with it. However, when probed further, it was found that the real reason for her reluctance to handle the family bank accounts was her lack of education. She started school at the age of 16 for just a couple of years during the GLF. And by the time of the interview, she admitted, she had almost forgotten everything she had learned. This was also true for several other older

women who never went to the bank, such as 62-year-old Di Cuiping, who never attended school, and 46-year-old Wang Guiying, who received only two years of schooling. It is safe to conclude then, that the spread of female education, along with the increase of all-daughter households, will lead to more women having, or wanting to have bank accounts in their own names or jointly with their husbands.

13-3 The Gendered Operation of Political Power

As argued above, reshaping gender relations in rural society depends not only on the changes in economic conditions, which would offer the potentiality of eroding the traditionally-defined gender roles and marriage and inheritance patterns, but also on the making of public and social policies promoting gender equity and equality. However, as analysed earlier, contradictions and inconsistencies have characterised policy-making processes at various levels for the past decade and more. This, in a sense, has reflected a reality marked by a salient gender asymmetry in the control and exercise of political power. Such an asymmetry has been manifest in many aspects of rural political life ranging from low benefits and career prospects for women officials and underrepresentation of women in politics.

A case in point is the hierarchy and sexism expressed in the current social security provision in the area of Lüzhuanzi Xiang. Findings from my field research indicated that the slow and lagged changes in rural fertility expectations and inheritance patterns were partly attributable to the general inadequate social provision of welfare in the countryside. Unlike in the cities where employees in the formal economic or government sectors have enjoyed basic welfare benefits (*fuli daiyu*) and labour insurance (*laodong baozhang*) provided by the state, country people have largely depended on their families and kinship for support and protection against all sorts of contingencies in life. It is true that there have been some welfare schemes backed by the rural collectives in the past, and village and xiang governments at present, such as the *wubao* scheme, or the five guarantees (guarantees of food, clothing, shelter, and costs of health care and burial), and special relief or benefits for the rural poor. But these locally supported schemes have only targeted either those without family and relatives to rely on as in the former case, or a very small minority as in the latter.

The inadequate social provisions of care and support in ill health or old age has been identified as one of the economic roots for continued son preference displayed in rural fertility patterns.²² This was confirmed by my field findings: one of the major reasons given by the village informants for rural people's preference for sons was "guarantee for old age" (*yangerfanglao*). This, together with the relative success demonstrated in enforcing the national family planning policy in urban, compared with rural areas, has underscored the importance of this socio-economic reality in influencing people's fertility behaviour.

Lack of official attention to the issue of social security in rural China can be attributed to popular assumptions about the roles, functions and stability of the traditional family and kinship networks. However, such a policy has, in recent years, increasingly contradicted an emerging rural reality, which has been marked by growing risk and uncertainty in connection with the market economy. Furthermore, the possibility of children as future security providers has been considerably reduced with the implementation of the birth control programme. These contradictions and their ramifications have generated increasing pressures on the government to respond to the changing circumstances and lives of the rural population by establishing and financing a rural welfare system.

In Dongdatun and Lüzhuangzi Xiang, owing to the relative strength of the local economy, a pilot social security scheme known as old-age insurance (*yanglao baoxian*) was introduced in the early 1990s. According to the local officials, the insurance was financed by both the government at the village level and individuals, with the former making the bulk, or 70 per cent, and the latter the remaining 30 per cent of the contributions. However, the coverage of this preliminary social security scheme was, so far, highly selective, that is, being confined mainly to village cadres. From my interviews with Liu Cuixia, head of the Xiang's Women's Federation, I learned, rather surprisingly, that the criteria of selection for inclusion in the scheme was not only hierarchical but also gender-based. Women representatives of the Xiang's 22 villages, although being categorised as "village cadres", were excluded from the coverage of this insurance scheme! As these women were frequently the only female members of village councils, the coverage of the insurance scheme was actually confined to male village cadres.

According to Mrs. Liu, women representatives were always part of the rural government at the grass roots level during both collectivisation and decollectivisation periods. Since the initiation of rural reforms, which went hand in hand with the introduction of the birth control programme, one of the added duties for these women officials was to help deliver and implement the family planning policy. They have performed tasks directly related with the programme, such as organising campaigns disseminating and enforcing the policy, ideological promotions of gender equality to tackle the ingrained son preference and related high fertility, and helping carry out the incentive and disincentive measures to ensure greater public compliance. In addition, women representatives have assumed major responsibilities for the general well-being of women and children in their villages, such as health care services for women and children and special projects like the "Double Learning and Double Competition" one.

However, as Mrs. Liu pointed out, although women representatives on the village level did jobs featured by long periods of service and heavy workloads, the rewards and benefits that they received were poor. It was very common for them to have been in the post for more than one or two decades, and some of them for even longer; their responsibilities were wide and diverse and often required their full-time attention and devotion. In the meantime, as mothers, wives, and daughters-in-law as well as agricultural producers, they had to shoulder the bulk of family responsibilities on top of productive work in family farms. But all this extra work at home could only be done in their spare time. Such triple burdens, all demanding time and energy, kept them very busy all day long and all year round, and even adversely affected their health.

When they grew old and their physical conditions declined, however, they would be asked to retire from their position with no pension or any other kind of benefits. While they were working, their annual salaries represented only 60 -- 80 percent of those earned by the predominantly male village heads, the average of which was equivalent to the *per capita* income of the village.²³ But following retirement, unlike their male colleagues in the village council, who would receive benefits from the locally-funded old-age insurance scheme, they got nothing for their life-long commitment to the public service in the village. And unlike their fellow villagers, who had spent most of their time and energy on accumulating wealth for their own

families, and thus may be better-off and more secured in old age, the lives of the women representatives in their later years were far from being guaranteed.

It seemed that the specific local regulations rendering discriminatory treatments to male and female cadres at the village level functioned to punish women for active public involvement and political participation. Mrs. Liu commented,

“The question of material benefits, such as pay and pension, for the veteran women cadres at the grass-roots level hasn’t been solved for a long time in spite of the repeated appeals from the women’s federation. I feel it’s necessary to call once again for more governmental attention to women’s work and women cadres’ concerns, and for gender equality within the government bodies. I believe the veteran women representatives should be treated, at least, the same as the veteran Party members (*lao dangyuan*),²⁴ or be included in the old-age insurance scheme as the village male cadres.” (Interview with Liu Cuixia, head of the Women’s Department in Lüzhuangzi Xiang Council)

The question of remuneration and benefit for women cadres at the grass-roots level has pointed to another important gender issue in national and local politics, that is, the gendered control and operation of political power. This is manifest in the low and peripheral representation of women in the formal power structure. Departments concentrating on women’s work in central and local governments and official or semi-official organisations representing women’s interests, like the network of the All China Women’s Federation, are most often composed of women officials. For both the focus of their work and the sexual composition of their personnel, these departments and organisations have been consistently regarded as token and of less account than other governmental departments. Consequently, they simply do not have genuine influence on the key decision-making process. On the other hand, as long as a department is deemed as of vital importance, it is almost unexceptionally found to be led by a man and consisting largely of male functionaries.

An interesting case in point was the hosting by China of the Fourth World Conference on Women, which was held in Beijing in autumn 1995. As this conference would be the first time when China ever hosted a major UN event, and,

accordingly, was officially considered significant and influential, a high-ranking male official was initially designated as the chairperson of the preparatory committee for the Conference on Women. It was only with strong objections from women's organisations both at home and abroad that a female chairperson was finally chosen to replace the male one.

The same inclination to belittle both female work and women officials in government bodies was observed in the operation of local politics. Mrs. Liu related that female cadres in the Xiang's women's federation had little chance of either receiving promotion or being admitted into the core decision-making body of the local government owing to some gender-discriminative rules. Relevant documents issued by the upper-level authority explicitly stipulated that heads of certain departments of the xiang government must be included in the Party Committee, the nucleus of the local political power. These included divisions in charge of the propagational, organisational, disciplinary and public security work, excluding the women's department. Such regulations not only limited the career prospect of many women cadres, but also reduced the possibility of having women's voice heard and interests represented in the vital local policy-making processes.

Mrs. Liu told me about her own political career in the local government. She acted as the head of the Women's Department in Lüzhuangzi Xiang government for over two decades. Notwithstanding her outstanding leadership ability, her familiarity with the local circumstances, her long-term dedicated service and her popularity amongst her colleagues,²⁵ she was asked not to seek competitively a seat on the Xiang's Party Committee. The grounds given by her superiors was that the head of the Women's Department should not be included in the Committee in accord with the relevant higher-level directives, and thus she "should not make things difficult" for the authority by competing for the seat. The authorities feared that Mrs. Liu, who enjoyed high respect from her colleagues, may well defeat other candidates from the departments designated by the upper-level regulations. And this would be a great embarrassment for the Committee, which had already made the pre-decision not to include any candidate from the Women's Department.

The very fact that any department led by women, working for women or composed largely of women is likely to be regarded as trivial and treated as marginal, in turn,

affects many other aspects of the political career and material benefits of women officials working in such a department, such as rank and remuneration including basic salaries and duty-related benefits. According to Mrs. Liu, the rank of a government functionary sitting on the Party Committee would be automatically readjusted to that of a section head (*zheng chuji*) irrespective of the length of service. However, for female functionaries as heads of women's departments, the minimum requirement was 15-year public service before they could possibly be ranked at one level lower than that of a section head, i.e. a deputy head (*fu chuji*). Mrs. Liu said:

“Working in the Women's Department has had disadvantages in many aspects with respect to both position and material benefits ... In all the previous and current Party Committees there has been no one from the Women's Department. The rank and monthly salary of its head have thus been kept consistently lower than other departments' heads designatively included in the Party Committee ... Often, a less able male cadre with shorter or same terms of service than the head of the Women's Department can enjoy better seniority and salary. This indicates that there has not been much importance attached to women's work, and women cadres haven't gained much real power. As they've been excluded from the Party Committee, the women's departments have been unable to exert much influence on the decision-making process.”

(Interview with Liu Cuixia)

The structural exclusion of female officials of the women's departments at the xiang level from genuine political influence raises the issue of the representation of women in the nucleus of formal political power. A close look at the gender composition of the local government at the village and xiang level from the perspective of sexual equality revealed serious underrepresentation of women. Usually, on the village level, only one woman, or the women representative, was admitted into the five- or six-member village council. On the xiang level, as mentioned above, the core of power lay in the nine-member Party Committee of the xiang government. However, only one woman, at most, was seated at this local decision-making centre.

One of my interviewees, the young woman Li Yufen, was a political activist in Dongdatun. Working as a cashier and checker in the village's brickyard, she was

conscientious in her job, and concerned with the village's public affairs. She often exchanged ideas with or aired the villagers' opinions to the village officials on issues and decisions regarding the interests of the villagers. In the interview, she showed confidence in her ability and expressed interest in participating in local politics. However, she believed that a combination of the traditional forces and the official policy, informed by male perception and social assumptions about a woman's appropriate role, worked to impede the progress in women's greater and more active participation in local public affairs:

"In the countryside, elderly people tend to frown upon young women who work outside home. This has become a social pressure. When you are working outside home, you are prone to gossips and rumours. Women, particularly young women, cannot appear or speak in public -- you'd be gossiped about ... There are even more pressures on married women with children who work outside home. If you come off work late, so the meal is late, the husband would suspect, and pull a straight face at you. It's all right for a man to come home late, no matter how late he is, but it won't be all right for a woman. One day a woman comes home late, the second day gossips spread wide. Working women are in constant fear of these gossips ... In the village election, all the officials, except the women representative, have been men. Few efforts have been made to train and promote women cadres. As a woman, you won't be appointed as a cadre no matter how able you are." (Interview with Li Yufen, 33)

My visit to Dongdatun and Lüzhuangzi Xiang in mid-1994 coincided with the official preparations for the UN's Fourth World Conference on Women to be held in Beijing. As part of the preparations, some steps to recruit more women into the leading decision-making bodies at varied levels were officially announced. However, targets set by such an official campaign for women's greater political representation were rather conservative. In this case, it was to make sure that each of the 41 xiang in Jixian County should have a woman seated on its Party Committee by the end of the year. Achievement of the target would render women's representation on this local leadership level reaching 11 percent. By mid-1994, only less than half of the 41 xiangs had actually met this officially-set objective, with a proportion of women in the local decision-making centre standing at about three percent.

Like in the domain of informal power, the attempts by some capable women to gain a larger and fairer share of the formal power may have been considered an imminent threat to the traditional male domination and monopoly of political power. Circumstantial evidence from my fieldwork suggested that traditional forces and male resistance lay as the principal source of impediment to progress in women's greater political participation and representation. This is reflected in Mrs. Liu's observation:

“The obstruction to the selection of women cadres into the Xiang's Party Committee has, in the main, come from traditional prejudice against women. The appointment and promotion of women officials are dependent on the wider political climate. Without this condition, the urges and appeals made separately by a few departments like the branches of the women's federation can only produce limited effects. They [the male-dominated leadership] have always held the impression and stereotype of women officials as being incompetent, no matter how well these women have done their jobs. They'd always be able to find faults with women cadres for whatever these women do and however they perform their jobs. If a woman official works with ardour and vigour, they'd say she's over enthusiastic; if the woman is modest and prudent, they'd criticise her as being too cautious and indecisive. In fact, except for drinking, women cadres match their men counterparts in every aspect in terms of ability and performance. So, the last resort for men to discredit a woman is to make her drunk, then see where her position is [in this male-dominated power structure]!” (Interview with Liu Cuixia, head of the Women's Department in Lüzhuangzi Xiang Council)

It is clear that traditional and male resistance to women's greater political representation, particularly in the nuclear of the real power exercise, significantly restricted the influence of women on local policy making. This may partially explain how and why local regulations detrimental to the interests of both women and female officials, as illustrated above, could continue to be made and go unchallenged for years.

CHAPTER 14 FEMALE MIGRANTS IN THE URBAN LABOUR MARKET

The only images of rural women in the city left in my mind before the post-Mao reforms were of middle-aged women carrying a big basket of eggs, or pulling a bicycle with a basket-load of *doufu* (bean curd) on either side. Wearing simple, patchy clothes, such women had weathered faces and hands, and were usually found moving quietly through *hutongs* (small lanes), occasionally crying out their wares in distinctive rural accents.

My encounter with these rural women came on occasions when my mother, on hearing their cries, rushed out of the house with some cash or *liangpiao* (food coupons) in her hand.¹ I would follow my mother while she tried to catch the woman before she disappeared in the many small lanes of the city, imagining the delicious dishes made of eggs and bean curd which could be on our dining table for the next few days. With luck, my mother would be able to make a swift and quiet deal with the rural trader, who needed the cash or food coupons, perhaps, for her hungry kids at home. However, more often than not, I saw my mother and the woman being both spotted by a member of the *juweihui* (neighbourhood committee)² monitoring the area for officially alleged “illegal activities”.³ On such occasions, the woman would be driven away or her goods confiscated depending on whether the neighbourhood official was “highly principled”. My mother would be criticised for her lack of “class struggle” consciousness, and warned against any repetition of her behaviour in the future.

These images of female migrants in the city changed with the inception of the rural reforms, as the official representation of them as “illegal petty profiteers” gradually faded with the rapid expansion of the rural and urban markets and the relaxation of rural-urban migration. Initially, most rural female peddlers and traders of various ages from the outskirts of the city came to sell agricultural produce along the urban streets or in the newly opened urban *ziyou shichang* (free markets). Later, rural women were spotted in the urban wholesale market, bargaining and making deals just as shrewdly as their male counterparts.⁴

Starting from the mid-1980s, new terms such as *xiao baomu* (young nannies) and *dagong mei* (migrant working girls) came into wide use in the cities. These terms

referred to young female migrant workers from the major agricultural provinces of the country like Sichuan, Shandong, Hunan and Hubei. These women were concentrated in the burgeoning manufacturing and tertiary sectors of the urban economy. In big cities like Beijing and Tianjin, the local urbanites classified the young nannies in the light of their origins. They were called Sichuan Bang, Henan Bang and Anhui Bang,⁵ the major densely-populated agricultural provinces where most of the young girls in domestic service came from. In the fast-expanding and prospering cities along China's southern coast, such as Guangzhou, Shenzhen and Zhuhai, the migrant working girls (*dagong mei*) formed the majority of the workforce in the rapidly developing export-oriented industries, including textile and clothing, footwear, electronic assembly, and food and beverages.⁶

The female migrant workers have formed an essential part of the spontaneous, large-scale population movement, the so-called "*mingong chao*" (the tides of migrant workers), or "*liudong renkou*" (the floating population) in China's cities,⁷ contributing to a gradual erosion of the institutionalised economic barriers and social stratification characterised by a unique urban-rural dichotomy with respect to residence and occupation. The Chinese economist Zhong Yongyi writes in a recent article that in China's big cities the number of *mingong* (migrant labourers) has reached 50-60 million, of whom about one third, or 12.5-15 million, are females.⁸

There is no doubt that these figures support my earlier argument of women falling behind men in the more recent occupational transfer in rural China. Nevertheless, they also suggest that more women than ever before have experienced a profound change in their lives with respect to geographical and social mobility. This is especially the case for younger women. This greater mobility of rural women can be viewed as partly attributable to the official policy relaxation in rural-urban migration since the reform. In the meantime, and more importantly, it represents a battle gradually won by rural women against the state control over their lives and state restrictions on their economic opportunities and freedom in movement.

14-1 Reasons for Women's Rural Out-migration

For a rural girl, the decision to leave her parents for the city and seek a job and independent life itself constitutes a challenge to the traditional expectations of young women as timid and reserved in front of men, confined to either the household or the

village and dependent on their fathers or husbands. In making this choice, rural women have defied both the structurally-set artificial boundaries separating urban and rural lives through the household registration system and the traditional gender roles and expectations.

In my interviews with the migrant working girls in Tianjin, I was struck by the adaptability and resilience they displayed when settling in the urban environment. Within a few months of their arrival in the city, they readjusted themselves and integrated into urban life. With little effort, they picked up *putonghua* or the standard Chinese (Mandarin) in their daily contact with the urbanites and adopted the life style of the urban young women. Migrant females today, many of whom wear trendy clothes, are active in the urban labour market and speak with visible boldness and confidence, present an entirely different image to that of their older sisters and mothers, whose presence in urban settings was hardly tolerated under the previous rigid regime with its severe bias against rural people.

The two sub-groups of the female migrants whom I interviewed, that is, those working in the city itself in either domestic or catering service, and those contracted as workers in enterprises with sole overseas investments in Tanggu Economic Development Zone, were not from impoverished households in poverty-stricken regions. In fact, the incomes of their parental households as perceived by the girls themselves ranged from the middle to the high level by local standards. The female migrants came from the leading agricultural provinces extending from Heilongjiang in the far north-east to Anhui in the east-central China. The economy of the native villages of the girls in the first sub-group, or the urban tertiary sector, tended to be characterised by less developed rural industry and severe demographic pressure resulting in surplus of labour. In the interviews, quite a few girls gave this as an objective factor affecting their decision on migration:

“There wasn’t a factory in my native village, and I had to stay at home with no wage.” (Interview with Zhan Guifang, 21)

“The busy season in farming is for 3-4 months a year. When I was at home, I didn’t have much to do except during the busy season.” (Interview with Li Ning, 19)

“I was in farming at home. There were too many people but too little land. So there wasn’t much work to do during the slack seasons ... The total family income wouldn’t change much whether I’m at home or not ... The average income per person for my parents has increased since I left home.” (Interview with Lu Na, 20)

With better education, the majority of the female migrants in the second sub-group, the contract workers in Tangu District, were either employees in rural enterprises or at school prior to their migration to the city.⁹ They came to Tianjin in search for more and better opportunities and higher financial rewards.

In spite of this distinction in working experiences between the two sub-groups of the female migrants, there was a shared push factor conducive to their rural-urban migration: the desire to step out of the narrow circle of their native villages, see the wider world and gain new knowledge and experience in the city. Their discontent with things as they were in the countryside and their longing for change in their material, cultural and social lives acted as a driving force for their leaving the land to compete in the urban labour market. This was reflected in the responses of the female migrants to my question “Why did you leave the village and work in the city?”:

“Mainly to experience life and toughen myself. I also want to earn more money. It makes me feel better to earn my own income than to ask parents for money. Moreover, I intend to make the most of the opportunity by reading more and improving my literacy.” (Interview with Li Ning, 19, a domestic assistant)

“Mainly to gain new experiences. Working in the city is like opening my eyes to a new, bigger world. Making more money is also a consideration.” (Interview with Lu Na, 20, a waitress in a small restaurant)

“Firstly, I want to see the world and experience life. Secondly, I try to seek opportunities to leave the countryside forever and live in the city for the rest of my life.” (Interview with Sun Li, 22, an assembly worker in a factory producing instant noodles)

"I'd like to gain some urban experience and see a bigger world. I don't want to spend my lifetime in the countryside. I'd like to come out and see the world on my own." (Interview with Yu Jingzhi, 22, a contract worker in a factory producing cooking oil)

14-2 Information Channels for Women's Rural Out-migration

Most of the migrant working girls obtained information on the urban labour market through their relations residing in the cities, like relatives and *laoxiang* (people sharing the same birthplace).¹⁰ This implied that the traditional kinship network assumed a new role in linking rural females with the emerging urban labour market. More importantly, female migrants themselves acted as vital sources of information for their rural sisters in the native places, as illustrated in the following answer to my question "How did you find work outside the village?":

"Through the introduction of a *laoxiang* friend. A girl from the same village had worked in Tianjin in domestic service, and she introduced me to an employer here." (Interview with Wang Yuhua, 19)

Since the early 1980s, China's urban economy has undergone substantial changes. The state-provided social services like child and medical care are either shrinking or fall far short of demand as a result of the industrial and health care reforms and the increased number of urban young women entering employment. Furthermore, with the flourishing of the non-state job market, more urban people than ever before have fallen outside the welfare benefit cover provided by the state for state employees only. On top of this, the relative success of the birth control programme and decreased fertility rates in the urban areas have produced an ageing population.¹¹

Such changes have created a demand for labour in domestic and personal services, such as looking after the young, the elderly or the sick, and helping the urban working or retired couples with domestic chores. As charges for such services are quite low, ordinary urban families have little difficulty in affording them.

Through their urban relations, a few pioneering female migrants reacted to this need by trading their services for cash and urban life. Before long, information about the demand and supply of this market and the benefits for urban jobs was trickling back to their native places, catching the attention of other rural women. The early comers

often served as job-introducing agents, and sometimes offered stop-over bases, for the late comers. In this way, the working women's rural-urban migration snowballed in the 1980s and 1990s. A typical "chain migration" can be discerned from the earlier-mentioned phenomenon of the Sichuan Bang, Henan Bang and Anhui Bang, the large groups of nannies named after their native places by the urbanites in Beijing and Tianjin.

It is worth noting that from the perspective of the migrant working girls in domestic service, the identification with their native places has offered them certain advantages. It has played an important role in their lives in a new, and sometimes unfriendly, urban environment. As revealed in my interviews, visits to and chats with *laoxiang* (girls from the same birthplace) were among the major leisure activities of the female migrants. Such activities offered these girls not only a source of leisure, friendship and warmth in their individual readjustment to the new urban life, but also provided mutual aid and information exchange about the market, such as vacancies and labour rates.

Some of the women migrant interviewees mentioned that when they met with difficulties, they would go to *laoxiang* for advice and comfort. Others, like 20-year-old Lu Na said that when she returned to the city from home leave and found herself jobless, it was her *laoxiang* who helped her get a new job. Since my retired parents had some domestic help for a couple of days each week, I noticed during my visits to them that the *laoxiangs* also helped each other in matters like covering for sick leaves.

The close, but informal, associations of the migrant working girls based on their native places, moreover, equipped them with an extra collective bargaining power with their urban employers. From my parents, relatives and neighbours, I learned that the hourly rate for domestic service in Tianjin had risen markedly in recent years. It grew from some 0.5 *yuan* in the mid-1980s to some 3 *yuan* in 1994, a six-fold increase. Once the news of the rise of a nanny's wage or hourly rate paid by a particular employer spread among the native-place group, other girls in the group would follow suit by demanding a higher payment. Sometimes migrant nannies simply asked for pay rises because of inflation in the city. The urban domestic service market favoured the supply side, placing migrant nannies in a strong position

in this collective action. And finally, nannies not only won the fight for improved payment, but also gained the knowledge and skills of collective negotiation and bargaining with the urbanites for their own interests.

14-3 Labour Market Broker -- A New Role of the Women's Federation

Another phenomenon caught my attention during my interviews with female migrants. This was the role played by the women's federations in both the origin (the native place) and the destination (Tianjin City) of the women migrants. As aforementioned, the women's federation, organised as a nation-wide network extending from the national to the village level has been a marginalised, para-governmental organisation in China's formal political structure. With the deepening of the financial reform of the government since the mid-1980s, the central authority significantly cut down the allocation of funding to local government. This severely hit the women's federation in particular, for, as a peripheral body of the local authority, it had to bear a disproportionately large part of this reduction.

This situation forced the Tianjin Municipal Women's Federation to take measures to save itself and the jobs of its female functionaries. One measure was to set up labour service companies (*laodong fuwu gongsi*) linking the supply and demand of the urban labour market, especially the domestic labour market. Many labour service companies operated by the women's federation, the youth league, the trade unions,¹² or individual business people have mushroomed in the city, amongst which those run by the women's federation seemed, in 1994, to be the most flourishing.

Facing up to the challenge posed by urban and governmental reforms, the women's federation took advantage of its long-standing rural and urban connections with both the local authorities and ordinary women through its established national and local networks. Its service companies sent agents to remote or populous agricultural provinces such as Gansu, Shaanxi, Henan and Shandong to recruit rural women either for Tianjin's suburban township and village enterprises, or for domestic service in the city proper.¹³

Many local authorities in the areas of origin adopted a labour-exporting policy, viewing their large surplus of cheap labour as a potential resource and a comparative advantage. At the destination, a labour shortage was keenly felt in both rural industry

in the outskirts and the city's service sector.¹⁴ The women's federation seized its opportunity by gathering information on both ends -- the supply (the sending) and the demand (the receiving) -- of the market. With good business sense, it was able to meet the need of both sides and make a handsome profit by charging commissions for services.¹⁵

Today when many governmental bodies suffer from reduced funding, resulting in diminishing state benefits for their functionaries, the success of women's federation stands out. The revenues earned from its varied profitable businesses in the rapidly developing non-state market have not only subsidised the operation of the organisation, but also financed enviable material benefits for its functionaries. The city's women's federation, though still lying at the periphery of the formal power structure, has gained informal power through its financial success. When I mentioned to friends and relatives my plans to interview the officials and businesswomen either of or affiliated to the women's federation in Tianjin, the most common reaction I got was, "They've had money-making businesses. You cannot imagine how rich they've become in the past few years!"

The economic attractions of the women's federation and of the service companies attached to it were manifested in the surprising discovery during my visits there that even some young men had started working for the organisation. This may suggest that with reduced state interference, women were capable of achieving financial success and competing with men in a market shrugging off the state monopoly and restrictions. On the other hand, it showed how quick men were to take advantage of the fruit of women's business success by squeezing into the institutionally-defined "women's territory", while not too long ago, they would spare no pains to dodge away from it because of its feminine image and its non-core position in the formal political structure.

In my interviews, several female migrant informants mentioned that the women's federation had been a source of information in their job-hunting efforts in the city. For rural women who lacked personal relations in urban areas, the service company run by the women's federation acted as an impersonal labour market broker.¹⁶ Moreover, its connection with the women's federation carried an official background implication. This, together with its relatively standard practice of requiring both the

employer and the employee to sign legally-binding contracts, provided a sense of guarantee for the female migrant workers. The following answer to my question "How did you find work outside the village?", given by a female domestic assistant, indicates the measure of trust put by the rural female migrants in the City's Women's Federation:

"I had an introduction from our county Women's Federation which has contact with the Women's Federation in Tianjin. I thought the Women's Federation was a reliable, trustworthy organisation, and believed it would be safer for me to find a job through it." (Interview with Tian Shunping, 18)

14-4 Urban Income and Labour Market Experience

City jobs meant increased incomes for most migrant working girls. The adverse land/person ratio in the densely-populated agricultural provinces in combination with the custom of a pooled income for family farming meant that the majority of the girls working on the land prior to migration did not get an independent wage, and their contributions to the household income were not distinguished from those made by other family members. They had to ask their parents for money when they needed any, which tended to obscure the real picture that they were simply withdrawing their own money saved in the "joint account" of the household. This practice also negatively affected the development of an independent consciousness in the girls. In addition, living under the same roof with the family's seniors, their every act was supervised. Increased income and freedom from parental supervision, therefore, were among the advantages perceived by the migrant girls for working in the city:

"When I was at home, the produce from the land would be consumed by all the family members. It didn't bring me any wage. Working in the city has increased my cash income." (Interview with Zhan Guifang, 21)

"My income has increased ... I've worn better and prettier clothes than before. Now I spend money earned by myself, and don't have to ask my parents for money. It makes me feel good." (Interview with Wang Yuhua, 19)

"I feel freer and more independent working away from home."

(Interview with Sun Li, 22)

Most of the female migrant informants spent part of their wages on personal consumption, buying items such as make-up and fashionable clothes, and some even spent money on hobby and leisure activities like cameras, films and cinemas. Their social circle was enlarged, and some of the girls even preferred the modern, urban term "*pengyou*" (friends) to the term "*laoxiang*" (people sharing the same birthplace) when mentioning such relations. Unlike their grandmothers and mothers, who customarily got married as teenagers, most of the female migrants intended to delay their marriages in an attempt to work for longer periods or even settle in the city.¹⁷ From the way they dressed and talked, I could sense the subtle influence exerted by urban culture on the thinking and behaviour of these country girls. One female migrant, 20-year-old An Fuyun, an assembly line worker in an automotive parts factory, described the changes in herself thus:

"I've come into greater contact with society. My world isn't so narrow and I'm no longer so simple as before. I've become adapted to the urban work and life. My income is higher as well. People say I look like an urban girl from top to toe now. I've got my knowledge and horizon broadened. I've become less timid, more daring and confident."

(Interview with An Fuyun)

However, migrant working girls, who came to the city without personal contacts like relatives or *laoxiang* and took jobs in the informal sectors such as the small-scale, family- or collectively-run businesses and enterprises, often found themselves vulnerable to exploitation, especially as "new comers" to the city. This situation is partly attributable to the current state of China's labour market which is immature and insufficiently regulated by labour protection legislation, particularly in the unorganised and informal sectors. As a result, the jobs of many female migrant informants in such sectors were frequently characterised by long working hours, their urban dwellings marked by poor conditions, and their wages were low in comparison with either the urbanites' or men's. This was illustrated by the experience of 19-year-old Li Ning of her first city job:

“Thirteen of us, all from the countryside, were recruited by the factory [a handicraft factory in Hedong District of Tianjin]. The youngest was 16 and oldest 28. We knew very little about life and work in the city. Before we started work, the factory promised to pay us 150 *yuan* per person per month. But soon after we began working in the factory, we were asked to sign a so-called ‘contract’. It was written on the ‘contract’ that our monthly wage was 80 *yuan*, plus one *yuan* an hour for overtime work. But in the end, the factory didn’t live up to either promise. For the two months I worked there, I only received 10 *yuan* pocket money each month. Nine of us shared a big, hard bed in a small crowded room, without heating [It was in winter], and at the beginning, even without hot water to drink. Food was terrible in the factory ... We worked from 8.00 in the morning till 9.00 in the evening, with half an hour’s break for lunch and another half for supper ... We were very tired and unhappy . . .” (Interview with Li Ning)

However, even as “complete strangers” to the city, the rural girls did not behave as submissively as they were expected to by their urban employer. They rebelled, initially by demanding shorter working hours, then by claiming their rights to payments. When the employer failed to meet their demands after the second month, most of the women left. With the aid of some sympathetic people in the neighbourhood, they went to the service company managed by the Women’s Federation, and, through it, found new employers.

This episode shows an increasing awareness in the female migrants of their own interests, although their action in this case was limited by inadequate legislation and lack of an institutional acknowledgement of the rights of the female migrant workers. Nevertheless, the existence and development of alternative options, in conjunction with the wide variety of information channels and labour needs in the dynamic non-state labour market, gave the women strength. That may partially explain the fact that, on an individual basis, migrant working girls tended to perceive their experiences in the city in a positive light. To quote Li Ning again:

“When I was at home, I was very shy and timid. I neither travelled nor handled affairs outside home on my own ... I’ve become bolder now. I

dare to take a journey and hunt for a job by myself ... I feel more mature and independent now. I've tempered myself in a broader world. I've strengthened my ability and independence . . ." (Interview with Li Ning)

The immature status of the labour market and the underdevelopment of legislation also meant that the welfare of the female migrants was largely dependent on the rather contingent factor of a particular employer's "quality". This was especially evident in the domestic service sector, where the rural girls expressed their cares and worries like this:

"I've got the feeling of uncertainty when working in the city. When I complete this contract, I don't know how long I have to wait before finding another employer, or what the next employer will be like, or whether he or she will be nice and treat me well. I worry about all this."

(Interview with Li Ning)

In the relatively formal industrial sectors like the enterprises with foreign investment in Tanggu economic development zone in manufacturing, food and beverages, the working environment and public facilities, including toilets, shower-rooms, canteens, and sports and entertainment facilities, were better and payments to workers were higher compared with the conditions and wages in rural enterprises and the informal urban sector. However, housing was a problem for girls staying in the company-provided dormitories. Interviewed outside a five-storied dormitory building owned by Dingyi Corporation,¹⁸ a Taiwanese company producing instant noodles, migrant girls complained about their housing conditions:

"Over 200 of us share it [the big dormitory] ... [It] occupies the entire floor of the building rather than being divided into small rooms, and the workers are not on the same shift. It is noisy, and sometimes I simply cannot fall asleep when I have come off a night shift because other girls are getting up for their day work." (Interview with Sun Li, 22)

Scenarios such as this, where the Taiwanese employer attempted to minimise his costs at the expense of the well-being of the migrant working girls, were facilitated by China's structural urban-rural division.¹⁹ The existence of significant urban-rural inequality in almost every aspect of life led to a patronising and discriminating

attitude by the urban employers towards the female migrants, assuming that these “poor women” would accept any conditions in the city. Moreover, legislation protecting the rights and interests of urban female workers was incomplete and out-dated, having been laid down in the 1950s and 1960s within a centrally-planned economic framework. Dating from a time when rural women were not allowed to leave the land, it was especially weak in protecting female migrants.

Until 1994, China had no comprehensive labour law. Regulation was provided by out-dated laws and Party policy documents, such as the 1953 Labour Insurance Regulations of the PRC and the 1960 Report on the Work of Female Labour Protection by the All China Women’s Federation, the All-China Federation of Trade Unions and the Ministry of Labour Ratified by the CCP Central Committee.²⁰ Inadequate legislation has disadvantaged labour in general, and female migrant workers in particular in industrial disputes. Cases of such disputes have been reported, for instance, in the area of the Pearl River Delta, whose export-oriented industries have been dominated by female migrants in recent decades. The industrial disputes between female migrant workers and their overseas employers there have often ended without definite settlement owing to an inadequate legal base for arbitration.²¹

Structural urban-rural barriers lie behind many discriminatory “enterprise policies” (*changgui*) against the female migrant workers, affecting job assignments, remuneration, entitlements to material and welfare benefits, career prospects, and so on. A clear intersection of urban-rural, manager-worker and gender relations and interests was revealed in the interviews:

“We rural girls don’t enjoy such benefits [maternity leaves]. Only people like city residents, permanent workers, and managerial or professional staff with high qualifications such as university and college degrees have the right to maternity leave.”²² (Interview with Xu Xixia, 20, working in the Taiwanese-owned Tianjin Dingyi Corporation)

“The better educated, non-migrant urbanites are much more likely to be promoted than we temporary workers from the countryside, ... ”

(Interview with Yu Jingzhi, 22, employed in the Thai-owned Tianjin Yue Thai Industrial Corporation)

Gender inequalities were more subtly incorporated into this structure of urban-rural dichotomy. Nevertheless, the female migrant informants did not fail to realise that their positions in the job hierarchy within the industrial enterprise lay at the bottom:

“Men and urbanites are more likely to get promotions ... Moreover, men are more likely than women to get promoted to higher positions. Women are likely to be promoted to small group leaders, and the highest they can reach is the assistant section chief. But men occupy the more important positions. Almost all the section chiefs and production managers are men ... A rural girl can become a team leader, but that doesn't even put her on the level of a permanent staff member.” (Interview with Xu Xixia)

In consequence, migrant working girls suffered dual discrimination. Although there were variations in degree from company to company, a common pattern emerged in which the female migrant workers were found doing the repetitive, unskilled jobs for lower pay, while the urbanites and men either held the managerial posts or performed the skilled tasks:

“There are more women workers ... It isn't skilled work, and the payment isn't so good. The company has mainly recruited women ... Men workers are city residents, and do skilled work like machine operation and maintenance; whereas we women workers attend the assembly line by hand ... Women's wages are about half of men's. (Interview with Sun Li, 22)

“[In the workshop] Women's work is to fill bottles with oil, attach trade marks to these bottles, put them into boxes and seal the boxes, that is, the entire process of packaging. Men then pull the boxes away and load them into trucks ... On the surface, men's work is heavier than women's. However, women's work isn't so light as it appears to be. In fact, women's work isn't light at all. You fill each bottle with oil and move it to the box continuously, and your hand and arm never stop working for a

moment. At the end of the day, your arms are sore, and day by day, your hands become calloused ... There are only two male workers, ... [but] there are quite a many women workers ... Women are paid less than men.” (Interview with Yu Jingzhi, 22)

“It’s mainly manual work in the factory ... There are more women workers ... Most men workers are permanent staff. They are mainly responsible for technical work, acting as technicians and quality controllers ... Women are responsible for the entire process of packing, and work on assembly lines ... They [men] usually have university education, and are more senior in position. So they’ve got higher salaries.” (Interview with Xu Xixia, 20)

14-5 Changing Gender Expectations

The dual discrimination experienced by the female working girls as demonstrated above may suggest that their urban jobs are “dead-end”. They may have little prospect for advancement in terms of occupation, income and status. However, in the interviews, few of the female migrants saw their urban experiences in such a light. On the contrary, they were more likely to view their urban jobs as means than goals, and as an opportunity to obtain upward mobility geographically and socially, which was indicated by some of the girls who wished to find urban boyfriends and finally settle in the city. On the whole, the migrant working girls tended to hold high aspirations for themselves, which not only went beyond their current employment status, but also defied the traditionally defined gender roles and cultural expectations for rural women. The following extracts from the interviews are a good illustration:

“I’ve just started this job [a temporary factory worker]. When I worked in a restaurant [earlier], I was trying to earn and save more in order to achieve my other goals. I saw the waitress work as temporary and expedient. It should serve as means only for making my other wishes come true ... I want to save more money so that I can have the capital to start my own business like a small private enterprise in the future ... I want to make contributions to society.” (Interview with Yu Jingzhi, 22)

"I hope I can marry and settle in the city if possible, and have a happy, stable marriage. I want to achieve something meaningful in my life. If I fail to find a Mr. Right in the city, I'll return to my native place. Even if I do that I'll feel more confident and hold higher hope for myself. I've thought of using my savings to start up my own business, so that I can do something for the people back home by creating more employment opportunities for the rural youth." (Interview with An Fuyun, 20)

"I've got some ideas for the future, but don't have enough money to realise them now. So I want to earn more money and save more ... I'd like to become a 'strong woman' [*nüqiangren*, a Chinese term for career-minded women]. When I get more money, I'll return to my native place, and start a business in trade, or set up a garment factory or other kind of enterprise. There's also the possibility of building a house as a base in the county town, so that I can look for more profitable business opportunities there." (Interview with Tian Shunping, 18)

Culturally, rural youth in general and rural women in particular have been expected to know and accept their "fate" and identity: born as peasants they were expected to remain peasants for life, and to be content with this. These expectations have discouraged the aspirations and efforts of peasants to bring about changes and betterment in their own lives. The value known in Chinese as *renming* (accepting one's fate) was reinforced by the institutionalisation of a rigid urban-rural dichotomy prior to the rural reform, and have been partly maintained during the post-Mao years when the household registration system underpinning the dichotomy has been retained as an available official mechanism to control spontaneous rural-urban migration.²³

With this understanding, it is not difficult to see that the above-quoted aspirations of migrant working girls would not gain much cultural approval, nor would they be welcomed by the urbanites, who still tend to view the rural migrants as a source of "chaos", and hence expect the "uncontrollable" "floating population" to return to their native places and resume their peasant identity in time. Seeing from their viewpoint, the aspirations of the female migrants may be deemed as "over-ambitious" or "unrealistic daydreams".

14-6 What Rural Migrant Women Do with Their Money

It was revealed in the interviews, however, that the dreams and goals of the women migrants were based on their down-to-earth attitudes towards work and learning, and careful accumulation of resources and calculation of the future. Although most of the young women still remitted part of their urban wages to their parents in the countryside, some of them kept a share for themselves by depositing it in the bank.²⁴ They were thus able either to enjoy a new freedom to spend and purchasing power, or to save in order to realise their ambitions for the future. I asked, "What do you intend to do with your savings?"

"I don't have any specific plan for the money saved. I'll spend it whenever I want." (Interview with Wang Yuhua, 19)

"I'm planning to start my own small business in trade in the future." (Interview with Tian Shunping, 18)

"I've saved the money for future use, either in the city -- if I can find a Mr. Right and settle here; or in my native place -- if I decide to return home. In the latter case, I'd use my savings for something beneficial to my home village." (Interview with An Fuyun, 20)

This emerging trend for female migrants to keep the wages for their own use represents a separation of the women's incomes from the pooled accounts of their rural households, suggesting a new economic independence and a greater sense of self and individualism developed by migrant working girls through their urban experiences, challenging the culturally-stressed concept of the "family" and household income.

Although all the girls who remitted money to their rural parents appeared, on the surface, to act in compliance with the cultural expectation of "filial piety" (*xiaoshun*) for adult children of both male and female sexes, in fact, their situations were very varied. Some said that their parents had opened bank accounts in their daughters' names and saved the money for them in the villages. Several girls from Shandong Province thought that their parents would use the money for a variety of purposes, including buying fertilisers, pesticides and daily necessities, but believed that, in return, the parents would provide a decent dowry (*jiazhuang*) and wedding for them

in the future.²⁵ Yet another girl told me that her father was in poor health and therefore the money was used for his medical care. A few girls who lived in accommodation shared with many others feared that their money, in the form of either cash or bank passbooks, would be at risk if kept in the dormitories; based on the experiences of some fellow workers, they felt that it was safer to sent the money home.²⁶

In spite of variations, all women sending money back to their rural parents were demonstrating the increased economic contributions that daughters can now make to the incomes of their parental households. The fact that the women were reluctant to challenge traditional moral standards and the distribution of power and resources in the domestic settings suggested not only a process of socialisation and internalisation of cultural values and norms, but also that living and working among people with whom they had few emotional ties, and faced with institutional and social discrimination plus uncertainties of various kinds in the urban environment, young female migrants tended to view their natal families in the countryside as a major source of affection and security.

On the other hand, the variations in the parental handling of the remittances exhibited not only differences and changes in the financial situation of the rural households, but also the changes in the daughter's position and bargaining power within the parental and, in the future, the husband's households as a result of her increased access to paid work. Twenty-two-year-old Sun Li reflected such changes as she talked about her prospect of going into a satisfactory marriage:

"I'm not worried about finding a satisfactory partner. Compared with other rural girls, I've got greater economic strength with years of work in the city." (Interview with Sun Li)

The heterogeneity of the disposal of migrant women's wages by either the village parents or the female migrants themselves called for a cautious, rather than a generalised analysis of the phenomenon. It directs attention to a highly dynamic process, in which female migrants undergo material and psychological changes. As rural daughters and urban workers, they feel both family obligations and growing individualism and consciousness of self needs and interests. Access to paid jobs

away from the parental households gained the migrant working girls a measure of personal freedom and independence, weakening parental control over their lives and changing familial values and norms in society at large.

Living independently in the city and in the face of discrimination of all sorts from the urban authorities or residents, migrant working girls had to rely on themselves to learn to deal with people of different kinds, to find jobs and earn money. They had varied working experiences, and some of them changed jobs several times. It was clear that these were new rural girls, who, in their spontaneous, independent pursuit of improvement in their material, cultural and social existence, challenged the traditionally-defined female roles as “insiders”, wives and mothers. They challenged also the narrow boundary delimited by the state for their lives and experiences of their natal village and the village into which they married, and their structurally-designated rural identity and low status. In so doing, they were throwing off the shackles put on them by men, tradition, and the state. The shared perception of the female migrant interviewees of their greatest gains from working in the city reflected the significant differences they themselves made in their own lives and destiny:

“I’ve been tempered in a greater world, and succeeded in overcoming various difficulties. Economically, I’ve earned a higher income ... I’ve learned how to live and work independently and gained a lot of social knowledge. I know better now how to handle complicated interpersonal relations, ...” (Interview with Xu Xixia, 20)

“I’ve got a higher income than before ... But what is more important is I’ve become tougher and more daring. I was very shy and would blush when talking to strangers before. Now I feel I’ve broadened my horizon and had more self-confidence. I’m more familiar with the labour market, and can hunt for jobs on my own. I’m able to make my own choice now.” (Interview with Tian Shunping, 18)

CHAPTER 15 THE SEXUAL DIVISION OF LABOUR

As demonstrated above, the incomes of rural women, either in the village or in towns and cities as migrant workers, rose significantly in the reform years. However, in spite of this rise, women's income relative to men's is still low. The nation-wide survey conducted by the All China Women's Federation and the State Statistical Bureau in 1992 reported that the average *per capita* yearly income of rural women accounted for 81.4 percent of that of rural men.¹ Findings from my fieldwork displayed a similar pattern in which men, on the whole, were paid higher than women.

In Dongdatun, most women working in village enterprises earned less than their fellow men workers. Twenty-two-year-old Wang Lifan, who worked as a checker in the village-run brickyard, said that male workers' monthly wages ranged from 320 to 500 *yuan*, while female workers' from 180 to 300 *yuan*, with women's maximum wage even below men's minimum. I learnt from the village officials that private enterprises and businesses in the village employed more women than men, and the reason given: women's labour was cheaper than men's. In line with the pattern of gendered remuneration observed in rural industry, most female migrant informants working in factories of overseas investments in Tianjin believed that their wages were lower than those of men's, although the discrepancy did not appear to be anything like as great as in the village. Zhan Guifang, who worked in the Packing Department of Tianjin Yue Thai Industrial Corporation, said, "We women earn 340-350 *yuan* per person per month, and the men earn some 370 *yuan* per month." (Interview with Zhan Guifang, 21)

Why do women earn less than men and where is the "equal pay for equal work" principle stated in China's Constitution?² A closer examination reveals that the discrepancy in income between the sexes stems more from a gendered segregation of jobs than from inequality in remuneration for same work. In other words, the sexual differentiation in earnings reflects a reality in which women and men are channelled into different and separate types of jobs.

This phenomenon, known as the gender division of labour, is multi-layered. In Dongdatun, young and middle-aged men, usually the husbands, were more likely to engage in such economic activities as short- or long-distance transportation by

tractors, commerce and trade requiring either frequent travelling or handling large amount of cash, and construction work as long-term contract workers or temporary labourers away from home. Unlike rural migrant workers in cities, Dongdatun males who worked away from home preferred commuting because of the closeness of the village either to the cities of Beijing and Tianjin or to the county seat. On the whole, these activities were more lucrative than those performed by married village women, or the wives. Married women were more often found in sidelines, specialised production, small trade in the nearby rural fairs or along the highway outside the village, and the daily management of family farms. To a smaller degree, older men performed similar productive tasks in the family business but with less domestic burden compared with married women. They may help look after grandchildren or domestic animals, but seldom share other aspects of housework with their wives. In addition, during the busy seasons, such as the ploughing and harvest, husbands who worked away from home often came back to join their wives in farm work.

As observed in the village, this division of labour between men and women in the household produced complex and ambiguous effects on women's roles, lives and their perceptions of their own work. On the one hand, women took more responsibilities on the managerial and decision-making processes in relation to the family farm. This was clearly demonstrated by the women informants' familiarity with production procedures, labour inputs, profits and costs involved in running the farm business, as well as other related aspects, such as supply and demand of farm products in the market, and their market prices. Women working in the family farm and sidelines often had to grasp new knowledge and skills required in running the business, including cultivation techniques employed in cash crop growing or pomiculture and modern breeding knowledge used, say in chicken or pig farming or pisciculture. This involved a process of learning while experimenting and doing the job through overcoming difficulties including the low literacy level for the older women, who had had limited experiences in doing business prior to rural reforms. It seemed that women's new roles and responsibilities in the family farm increased their self-confidence. In the interviews, almost all the married women with children were assertive in claiming that either half or a larger part of the income from farming was their contributions. This confirmed the findings by other researchers, such as Judd, who has shown that women working in the family farm often have greater job

satisfaction than their younger sisters employed in rural industry owing largely to the autonomy that the former group have enjoyed.³

Another aspect of the effects on village women, especially the middle-age with young children, however, was that they were often kept very busy and enjoyed little spare or leisure time, as indicated in the women's remarks presented in chapter 11. This is also shown in the following description of a typical day's activities in busy seasons by 38-year-old Jia Chunying, who had two young children aged seven and eight:

“During the busy season, such as when we pick the cucumbers or harvest the wheat in summer, I get up at about 3.00 in the early hours, go to work in the fields till around 6.00. I then come back home, preparing the children for school, feeding the chickens and briefly cleaning the house. I then go to work in the fields from 7.30 till about 10.00. I return home to cook the lunch for the family, which takes about one and a half hours. At about 1.00, we finish lunch. I take a nap after lunch and get up after 3.00 in the afternoon. I then rush to the fields and work there until 7.00-8.00 in the evening. When I return home, I spend about an hour on cooking the meal. Around 9.00, the family have finished supper, and I go to bed at about 10.00. Altogether, I work about 5 and a half hours in the morning, 4 hours in the afternoon and early evening, plus some 4 hours' housework.”

(Interview with Jia Chunying)

Although in slack seasons, Chunying may not be so busy, she would not be “idle” in any sense. She did some temporary work and engaged in small-scale pig farming raising about six pigs during slack seasons. Interestingly, women in the older cohorts were more likely to be assertive about the value of domestic tasks, claiming that their households would not be able to operate without their shouldering almost all the housework. In the meantime, they acknowledged that society did not see the value of women's work in this light, as commented by 49-year-old Qi Sulan:

“I myself believe they [the different jobs done by her husband, her two sons and herself] are equally important. But other people and society wouldn't think so. They see my husband's and sons' jobs more important

than mine for the money the men earned outside home.” (Interview with Qi Sulan)

Greater participation in income-earning activities by women has not simultaneously led to reduction in women’s domestic responsibilities, nor men’s willingness to share and thus lessen women’s burdens. Most women interviewees in the two older cohorts above the age of 25 said that they were doing most of the housework but this type of their contributions to the family “cannot be measured”. The fact that women’s contributions to the household through domestic labour were intangible and that most married women with children were agricultural labourers engaging in sidelines, other family ventures and the farming business often led these women to describe their role in the household economy as “minor” (*weifu*) as opposed to the “major” (*weizhu*) role played by their husbands.

More and more younger women nowadays worked outside the household in village and township enterprises, or the local state sector such as the village school/nursery and the Xiang government. This suggests an increase in and broadening of women’s employment opportunities. Because of Dongdatun’s proximity to large cities and its relatively developed township and village industry, young women’s transfer from agricultural to non-agricultural employment mostly fell into the category of “leaving agriculture without moving residence” (*litu bu lixiang*). The impact of non-agricultural jobs, which brought with them independent waged incomes, on young village women was visible from the women’s greater self-confidence and higher aspirations for themselves. This finding backed Li’s argument that “it was a giant step forward” for rural women “to change their status from housewife to farmer, it is an even bigger step for a farmer to become a factory worker.”⁴ Despite this change, my interviews with village women proved another finding of Li, that is, the shift in young rural women’s identity tended to be temporary, or before childbirth, especially when the young woman could not find help with childcare from her mother-in-law.

The temporary nature of young village women’s occupational transfer from agricultural to non-agricultural jobs may also be explained from the current gender division of labour within and among rural enterprises, and the related differentiation in income. I noticed that most of the village women were employed in the less lucrative garment and textile factories, which were prone to market fluctuations and

suffered from profit decline in recent years because of intensified competition and the low technological level of these enterprises. In contrast, the township and village enterprises dominated by male workers enjoyed better returns because their products or services either were in greater demand or required more skills. With improvement in the standards of living, more and more households in the village and its surrounding areas were having new houses built. Moreover, more rural households were able to afford and thus bought vehicles, like tractors and trucks, as an investment in the more lucrative transportation business. This development stipulated local demand for such services and enterprises as the iron works, the garage, the construction team and the brickyard, all of which were dominated by men (the relations between the type of work predominated by males with gender stereotyping will be analysed shortly). The sexual segregation in rural enterprises is discernible from the following remarks by the female informants:

“Earlier, I worked in the garment factory. Wages for men and women were equal there. But there were few men, only four or five at the most in the whole factory.” (Interview with Gu Weimin, 22)

“In construction, men usually do the skilled work, so their wages are higher. Women would earn the same wages as men do in the construction team, but there are few women there. Even if you wanted to work in the construction team, they wouldn’t accept you as a woman.” (Interview with Li Yufen, 33)

Not only were enterprises sexually segregated, but also jobs within an enterprise were often sexually divided. This sexual division of labour was largely accountable for the gender inequalities in remuneration, which was reflected in the following accounts of the village women:

“In construction, there are few women workers. In rare cases when women employees are found there, they often work as unskilled labourers (*xiaogong*, which literally means “small” or “minor” labour) whereas men as skilled workers (*dagong*, which literally means “big” or “major” labour). Men usually perform jobs, which require more skills, such as building the wall with bricks, while women do the assisting work such as

mixing the cement, pulling handcarts, and handing over the tools or bricks. The daily pay for a *dagong* is more than 20 *yuan*, whereas that for a *xiaogong* ranges between 12-13 *yuan*." (Interview with Zhao Yuchun, 22)

"... in the brickyard, it [pay to men and women] is unequal. The work done by men is seen as more physically demanding than that done by women, but women work for longer hours than men. Usually men do such jobs as carrying bricks with handcarts out of the kilns soon after they are fired, shuttling wet or dry unburned bricks in wheelbarrows between different locations of the brick-field, banking up the kilns, and so on. Women do work such as piling up bricks in blocks, filling the wheelbarrows pulled by men with wet or dry bricks, checking the number of bricks to be taken away by vehicles, and settling accounts at the end of each day. It's true that men's jobs are harder and dirtier, ... and women's work seems to be lighter. But men can simply finish their jobs within much shorter time than women can. For example, it needs more time for a woman to fill a handcart with bricks than for a man to just pull the handcart away to a spot and empty it. And men can take some rest while women are filling their handcarts. At the end of a day, it's hard to tell whose job is more strenuous indeed. However, men earn more for shorter working time while women earn less for longer time." (Interview with Wang Lifen, 22)

Men in Dongdatun also contracted small-scale enterprises from the village authority. And in such cases, they became directors of these factories. In other words, men turned into bosses while women tended to work as employees. In family businesses like the farm or other family ventures, women were more likely to act as men's junior partners than as leading figures. This general division of labour between men and women, however, should not obscure the fact that many women did play a significant role in family-run businesses. Twenty-two-year-old Gu Weimin, for instance, ran her own barbershop. Another woman, 36-year-old Lu Suping, mentioned that her husband was engaged in transportation business, and she, good at networking and social contact compared with her husband, was responsible for finding customers and jobs

for her husband, daily maintenance of the vehicle, and initially borrowing money to buy the tractor. Without her effort, Suping reckoned, the family business would not be managed well or make much profit.

In spite of the important part that women played in the household economy, villagers, sometimes, still used the saying “Men are the commanders (*siling*), but women the field soldiers (*shibing*)” to describe a scenario, where men’s work was considered more important than women’s due to the gender division of labour. Despite the changing roles of women within the household after rural reforms, particularly the closer association of women’s work with cash and market, man was still seen as the breadwinner of a family. This was reflected in another local saying, “Men are like rakes (*pazi*), whereas women caskets (*xiazi*).” This figurative speech used by local people means that men are responsible for earning income for the family (a rake is used in an inward manner, hence implies bringing money in), while women are mainly responsible for reducing expenditure or saving the money earned by men – the “small box” image). Of course, village women nowadays can contract enterprises and even travel around the country as purchasing agents for family businesses as shown in the above chapters. However, such women were usually exceptionally capable and daring, and often enjoyed sufficient capital and resources from successful family businesses, and hence only represented a minority of the female population. Most women in the village seemed to have been left behind men in terms of occupation advancement and income rise.

They were dragged back by heavy family responsibilities, and their inroads into male-dominated jobs were hindered by traditionally informed gender stereotypes. Villagers in Dongdatun also used the old saying *nanzhuwai nüzhunei* meaning that men are in charge of the affairs outside of home and women inside to illustrate how division of labour within the household was performed between the sexes. Even though women participated in the external (*wai*) affairs concerning the household, their roles tended to be viewed as “minor” compared with the “major” role of the men, such as husband and grown-up sons. Women’s “major” domain was seen as affairs in connection with management of the household, thus mainly “inside” (*nei*). This finding supports Jacka’s argument that the public/private dichotomy, though considerably blurred with respect to the spheres of work designated for men and women respectively in recent

years, has continued operating as “a set of norms governing the work opportunities and choices of women and men and the ways in which work is to be recognised.”⁵

What emerged from my interviews with village women was a general picture in which women’s new role in the commodity and labour markets and their greater contribution to the household economy did not change much their culturally-defined role as major bearers of family responsibilities and household chores.

In addition, the gender division of labour within the household was found to be differentiated by age and post-marital residence types. Younger women, particularly those in matrilocal marriages, often enjoyed greater equality in conjugal relations, expressed, among other things, in the willingness of their husbands to share housework. Older women, on the other hand, tended to continue leading a life marked by heavy double burdens. One older woman, 49-year-old Qi Sulan, mentioned that her husband had not shared any domestic chores since marriage. While saying that her man did not know how to do housework like cooking, washing and cleaning, she used the term “full of old feudal ideas” (*lao fengjian*) to define this kind of behaviour by men. According to Sulan, “the tradition in rural society was that men don’t perform domestic tasks. These are all women’s work.” The different patterns of the sexual division of labour within the household are reflected as well in the following experiences as related by the female interviewees in the different cohorts and from households of different post-nuptial arrangements:

“My husband and I share work in the fields and in keeping the cow. The pigs are raised mainly by me. I’m also responsible for most of the housework ... He [the husband] doesn’t [share the household chores]. He hates doing housework. He sees it as a woman’s duty, and believes it’d be beneath him if he helps.” (Interview with Wang Guifen, 52)

“Matters outside home, such as affairs in the iron works and arrangements to buy insecticides for the orchard, are the responsibilities of my husband. I’m responsible for managing the orchard, doing housework and taking care of the children ... He [the husband] shares a little bit [of the housework] ... When the kids were very young, he often helped with child care or cooking when he was back home from work. Otherwise, we couldn’t have our meals on time.” (Interview with Yang Zhiying, 37)

“If my husband comes back from his work in the fields, and sees that the meal is not yet ready, he’d help with cooking. When I’m cooking, my husband would give me a hand. He also helps with feeding the pigs and washing the clothes. When we children were young, however, my dad never did any housework. All the housework was shouldered by my mom alone ... After decollectivisation, my dad worked for a few years as an electrician ... he didn’t do much to help mom with work either in the contracted land or at home. My mom was kept busy both inside and outside home ... In my generation, both my husband and I share the housework. But in my mother’s generation, my mother alone is responsible for it.” (Interview with Gu Weimin, 22, in a *zhaoxu* marriage)

Lack of education and skills has often prevented women from entering the male-dominated, better paid jobs. Although education and training in Dongdatun seemed to be provided in disregard of the recipients’ sex, women, in reality, did not enjoy equal access to them because they were frequently burdened by heavy family responsibilities. Yang Xiurong pointed this out:

“I think men and women are equally treated in these matters [grants of loans]. But it’s usually the man who represents the family to apply for a bank credit. This may also be the case for technical training. The reason is that in a family the man is often better educated and more experienced ... Moreover, women are often tied down by household chores and child care, thus cannot attend training courses.” (Interview with Yang Xiurong, 41)

Women’s inroads into male-dominated occupations and jobs, which require more education and better training, are impeded as well by the structural urban-rural cleavage. Compared with urban students, rural students are generally disadvantaged in terms of institutional facilities, and educational quality and conditions in both the community and domestic settings.⁶ Such disadvantages are sometimes exacerbated by local education policies discriminating against rural young people. My interviews with village women revealed that there were restrictions imposed by the county education authorities on the range of application choice available to rural junior high school graduates. One of these was that graduates residing in rural areas were not

allowed to apply for the more sought-after vocational and technical schools, which guaranteed urban jobs and higher income potentials. Apart from this, rural young people who intended to carry on with senior high school education after junior high had to meet higher requirements for academic performance: the admission line was set about 30 marks higher for rural students than for the urbanites.

Senior high schools usually enjoy higher education quality, and are most likely situated in the county seats, which are classified as urban areas. As Dongdatun and Lüzhuanzi Xiang are located near both Jixian County and other major cities, their high school graduates tended to be viewed as potential rivals of urban graduates for city jobs. Although the discriminative policies disadvantaged rural young people in general, they were particularly harmful to girls in the village. These official restrictions placed, on top of the economic and social constraints including possible financial difficulties of a household and parental preference granted to boys in education provision, further limits on rural young women with respect to their educational attainments and occupational prospects. The experiences of the women in Gu Weimin's family were indicative. Weimin's mother, though outstanding in academic performance at school, was forced to discontinue schooling owing to the straitened financial situation of the household. Weimin recalled:

“She [mother] was the eldest of the seven children ... She had to start working at an early age, and earned work-points in the fields. In fact, she did so well at school that the teachers promised her an exemption of the tuition and other miscellaneous fees for her high school education. But because of the economic hardships at home she couldn't carry on.”

(Interview with Gu Weimin, 22)

My interviews with village women indicated that for the older generation including women in the older cohorts and mothers of the younger women, poverty ranked the top among the reasons for those women's lack of education, with gender inequality expressed in parental preferential treatments to sons second to it. Nowadays, with improved living conditions as well as reduced number of children in rural families, almost all the young women could go to school. This was the case for Weimin and her sister. They were both able to attend and finish junior high school, and would like to carry on to senior high. Finishing senior high school would provide them with more

opportunities and life chances, such as tertiary education and better employment prospect away from home. However, despite the fact that they both passed the general admission line, they were thwarted by the higher demand set for rural students.

Weimin recollected:

“Students from urban areas got preferential treatment, and because of that, many rural students, including my sister and me, failed to pass the higher mark-line particularly set for us ... However, in my graduation year, I actually got some choice, that is, people were allowed to self-finance their studies in senior high schools. But our family wasn't so well-off, and my father wasn't very supportive either. He still had the idea that there wouldn't be of much use for a girl to have lots of education -- a few years would be quite enough. So he wouldn't spend more money on my further schooling.” (Interview with Gu Weimin)

Instead of offering preferential treatment to the disadvantaged groups like the rural students, so as to redress the existing development imbalance between urban and rural areas, the local educational policies made the situation worse for the disadvantaged. They effectively reserved more senior high school spaces for the already privileged urban students and ensured the urbanites' exclusive eligibility for the sought-after technical schools. For young rural women, once again, gender asymmetry was reinforced in the process of state allocation of rights and resources, which effectively blocked rural women's access to education and employment opportunities. Evidence from my fieldwork points to a process of redistributing rights and interests that has continuously been shaped by the institutionalised urban-rural dualism with its built-in discrimination against rural residents.

The accepted notions of women's and men's work based on gender stereotypes are another factor lying behind women's inadequate training and skills in certain areas, which, in turn, has adversely affected their earning ability and potential. This process often serves to trap women in a vicious circle: owing to their lack of training and skills, women are more likely to be channelled into the unskilled, poorly-paid jobs with limited prospect of making career advancement. With increased rural industrialisation, the importance of physical strength, which was highly valued in the agrarian and subsistence economy as the yardstick of ability and symbol of

masculinity, starts losing its force to the power of knowledge, information and skills in Chinese villages. In spite of this change, many villagers in Dongdatun still believed that driving a tractor required a lot of physical strength, and was therefore “appropriate” only for men. Mirroring this belief was the reality in which “more women attended the training courses for breeding domestic animals and growing cash crops, and more men for tractor driving.” (Interview with Zhou Shuying, 64)

Here the ideas of skills specific to each sex and of the different aptitudes of men and women with regard to technology were at play. Such beliefs were also linked to the socially and culturally defined gender roles in the public and private spheres. It is true that the roles of rural women have considerably changed and patterns of the gender division of labour altered with women doing market-related work that was beyond their reach in the past. Nonetheless, most of the jobs and positions that women held, as observed in Dongdatun, fell into the domains easily defined by the existing gender stereotypes, such as the notion of the “courtyard economy” and the gender division of labour in rural enterprises. This showed that the sexual division of labour together with gender stereotyping was not fundamentally contested by the more recent economic and cultural changes. With women playing an increasing role in the local as well as regional and national socio-economic and political life, gender stereotyping and its related division of labour, if kept unchallenged, would hinder women’s advance into the occupations and senior positions dominated by men, and hence women’s further status enhancement and empowerment.

CHAPTER 16 CONCLUSION

The principal concern of this study has been to examine the implications of the development strategies in the Mao and post-Mao eras for the status of rural women in China. It has employed a historical, contextual and interdisciplinary approach to the analysis of the gender dimensions of the CCP's socio-economic transformations and, later, the reform programme since the founding of the PRC. Based on women's own perspectives, the research has presented the perceptions and definitions of Chinese women themselves with respect to their own needs, priorities and interests as against those frequently defined for them by the state. It has also allowed women to speak about a wide range of the issues affecting their lives, such as those involved in marriage, family, reproduction, education, migration and work. Women's lives and experiences emerging from the research have displayed patterns reflecting complicated realities involving a mixture of gains and losses, benefits and costs for women under the influences of the government policies.

In this chapter, I synthesise the major findings of this study focusing on the post-Mao period. The following discussions are presented against a backdrop of a growing volume of scholarship on gender and rural development in China. It is hoped that the patterns of change in gender relations as revealed in this research will be able to not only contribute to this scholarship, but also provide insights into the complex interactions and sets of relationships amongst and between state, market, society and women.

The first two parts of the thesis examine the effects of the Maoist mobilisational approach assumed in its socio-economic development programmes on gender relations and women's status. They focus on the most influential movements of the Mao era embodying Mao's ideas of national development and maintaining the momentum of the revolution: agricultural collectivisation and the GPCR. The findings of these parts have affirmed most of the conclusions drawn by Western feminist scholars in terms of the limitations of the Maoist approach to the "woman question". These limits entail the subordinate status granted to women's emancipation in the Maoist socio-economic transformation programmes,¹ the reinforcement of lineage power based on the organisational structure of the rural collective (male-centred neighbourhood ties or natural villages),² the continued

practice of remunerating the household as a unit instead of individual members,³ as well as gender inequality in remuneration built in the collective's work-point payment scheme.⁴ All this suggests that agricultural collectivisation failed to fundamentally challenge the organisational, social and familial structures underlying the existing gender hierarchy in rural society.

Apart from such limitations, I have paid special attention to the urban-rural divide exacerbated by the Maoist rural collectivisation programme, and the detrimental effects that this had produced on rural women. My study demonstrates that collectivisation was an integral part of a multi-level, multi-dimensional policy package based on the Soviet-style, highly centralised economic and political model. The problems with this development strategy in terms of its implications for rural women were not merely subordination of women's emancipation to the cause of "socialist construction". They involved as well broader, macro-level and structural issues. My research draws attention to this aspect of relations between the state-launched collectivisation and rural women by pointing to the importance of the stark urban-rural cleavage, according to which benefits and costs, privileges and disadvantages were institutionally allocated, and the boundaries between urban and rural societies sharpened following agricultural collectivisation.

Collectivisation served the ultimate purpose of introducing and consolidating a centrally planned economic structure, which facilitated the state to maximally squeeze out rural surplus in order to feed the expansion of heavy industry concentrated in urban centres. As such, it was severely biased against the agricultural sector, and fundamentally in collision with the interests of rural people. Furthermore, in order to attain this goal, the state removed autonomy from agricultural landholders and tightened its control over rural production and market. In this study, I have tried to link such adverse outcomes of collectivisation for rural people, which have been discussed by researchers focusing on agricultural development in China, to analysis on gender issues, including the relationships between women and men, and between women and the state.

As pointed out by Western and Chinese scholars, rural women before 1949 participated in both agricultural production and "subsidiary" activities, although this participation was differentiated by region, class, farm produce, and so on.⁵ Increased

number of women started taking part in agricultural production outside of home after the Communist national victory, and thus gained, to some extent, an enlarged role and autonomy in farm management. On enforcement of the 1950 Land Reform Law, women also received an equal portion of land, and became, at least on paper, landholders.⁶ The highly generalised and universalised approach of collectivisation, therefore, helped transfer decision-making power, however limited, in production, management and disposal of agricultural produce from rural women, as well as their families, to the state-controlled collectives. The macro-level changes brought by agricultural collectivisation represented in the state urban-biased development plans and the loss of autonomy on the part of rural households, including women, may largely explain why rural women, who, after all, are rural residents and agricultural producers, prefer decollectivisation as revealed in my fieldwork. The prominent position of the urban-rural cleavage in our understanding of the policy shifts and their implications for rural women points to a greater complexity involved in the relationship between state and rural women. It suggests as well a complicated social reality affected by state policies, in which diverse alliances or divisions of needs and interests existed, intersecting different analytical categories and dualisms, such as gender and the unique urban-rural dichotomy structurally consolidated by collectivisation.

The severed urban-rural divide and the state monopolisation of market during the collective era adversely affected other aspects of rural women's lives. They imposed extra restraints on top of the social and cultural ones on women, limiting their autonomy, income-earning ability, alternative employment opportunities and mobility in spatial and social senses, as well as disassociating women's participation in "social production" from their welfare.

From a historical perspective, however, rural women's lot may have improved compared with the pre-1949 situation. This was largely due to the Communist initial legislative efforts, e.g. the 1950 Marriage Law and Land Law, whose promulgation delivered new rights, such as free marriage and divorce, and access to an equal share of land, to village women. The Communist forceful propagation and publicity campaigns on women's rights shortly after the founding of the PRC also helped spread modern ideas, including freedom in choosing marriage partners and equality between the sexes, from the cities to the vast countryside.⁷ In the early 1950s, such

campaigns seemed to have produced noticeable impact on the outlooks of many rural women, as indicated in the older women's tendency to claim "equal rights between men and women", which was observed in my fieldwork. Attempts were also made to improve other aspects of women's conditions, such as education, as mentioned by some older village women that they went to school at the age of 17-18 during the officially organised literacy campaigns in the 1950s. Women's position in the family may have also been strengthened through their massive participation in the collectivised agricultural production as pointed out by many feminist researchers.⁸

Balancing women's gains in these respects with the serious infringement upon their interests and the many restrictions imposed by the state on women through agricultural collectivisation, I have argued that from a macro perspective, the gains for women were considerably reduced. This conclusion is also based on the fact that with economic stagnation and a tightened state control over market and mobility, rural society tended to become static and closed rather than dynamic and open. Boundaries defining lineage based local communities were sharpened. This encouraged traditional social institutions and conservative forces, and restrained women in terms of resources, sexual freedom, choice and consciousness of self as individuals. This finding would be consistent with Judd's research, which demonstrates that collectivisation consolidated and closed the patrilineally, territorially and residentially based rural communities through turning them into fundamental political and economic units, as well as social ones.⁹ Viewing in this light, the effects of the official ideological promotion of gender equality and women's liberation were significantly undermined, paradoxically, by an official development strategy which prevented rural society from moving ahead and thus maintained the very foundation for the age-old patriarchal ideology.

My analysis of the implications of the GPCR for women points to a similar trend of tightened state control over women's bodies and lives, which extended from the economic and social realms into the cultural and political spheres. The prevalent practices of the GPCR, such as the "class struggle" and "blood lineage" themes, the fanatical personality cult, and the extreme asceticism witnessed in both the official discourses and social life were manifestations of this omnipresent state control and power. My study has traced the typical GPCR ideology and practices to the pre-modern concepts and practices dictated by orthodox Confucianism and its political

thinking and morality. The major distinctions from traditional Chinese society was that during the GPCR, political power was more forcefully employed by the state to, firstly mask the restorational trend with an official revolutionary rhetoric, and then shore it up. Such processes rendered the gender implications of the movement implicit and indirect. Nonetheless, closer looks at these aspects suggest that while the restoration and enforcement of the traditional notions and practices by the state brought oppression and constraints to both the young and women, the latter bore the brunt of the consequences because of the existing gender hierarchy and unequal sexual arrangements.

The highly applauded "Iron Girl" model of the GPCR embodied the CCP's typical "sameness" approach to the issue of gender equality. Undeniably, the officially launched campaigns against gender stereotyping and to promote sexual equality produced some positive effects on gender relations, especially people's perceptions of gender roles and the sexual division of labour in the public domain. However, this model denied any difference in experiences between men and women, particularly women's dual role burden, as well as diversity among women themselves at different life stages. Neither did it challenge the sexual division of labour within the household. What is more, in the politically authoritarian and culturally intolerant GPCR atmosphere, it helped impose a state-defined identical image of the "revolutionary woman" on all women. Underneath the model, one can also sense the "defeminisation" of female appearance, as termed by Evans,¹⁰ represented in the GPCR asceticism reflecting the age-old Confucian moral codes, as well as men's fear and repression of female sexuality. This finding may confirm Evans' argument that the development of an official discourse of sexuality testified to the deployment of party-state power over individual and particularly female behaviour through the creation of uniform, normative standards prescribed by the state.¹¹

The GPCR, through its ultimate negation of individual differences and interests, led to the suppression of the ideas such as democracy, science and individual liberty. As such, it deviated from the trend of enlightenment and family revolution initiated by China's modern intelligentsia during the May 4th and New Culture Movements in the early 20th century. The restorational nature of the GPCR was, therefore, fundamentally at odds with the spirit of contemporary women's movement in China, which, as an independent social movement, had fought for women's rights

simultaneously with the emancipation of the individual. The GPCR, therefore, saw a *de facto* amalgamation of several oppressive authorities for women -- the patriarchal, the religious (e.g. the officially encouraged personality cult) and the state, and enabled the state to take over much of the power previously held by the family patriarch in restraining and controlling women.

The major (i.e., third) part of the thesis analyses changes in gender relations in rural China witnessed in the post-Mao era since the late 1970s. The most dramatic shift in the official development strategy has been agricultural decollectivisation together with rural industrialisation and livelihood diversification. Decollectivisation signalled an overall reorientation of the entire Maoist policies of rural development, and like the Maoist socio-economic transformation programme, has profoundly affected almost every aspect of rural life. Since post-Mao reforms, rural economic, social and political life has become less controlled and homogenised, but more diverse, decentralised, pluralistic and heterogeneous in both spatial and temporal senses. My findings as presented below, therefore, do not intend to generalise rural women's experiences across time and space, but to provide a perspective to bear on the growing body of knowledge and feminist scholarship built on a variety of localised studies situated and created in vastly different specific social settings.

One of the marked changes concerning women during the post-Mao era is the increased autonomy of rural women vis-à-vis state power. This could be partly attributable to the official policy shifts leading to relaxation in state control and greater tolerance for local initiatives. However, as demonstrated in my research, increased autonomy on the part of rural women vis-à-vis the state has derived more frequently from women's agency role. Rural women's agency has been manifested in their actions in pursuing self-perceived interests through engaging in market-related economic activities simultaneously with decollectivisation. In this process, women's actions have significantly undermined the state centrally planned regime. They have constituted constant contestation of the boundaries defined by the state for women's activities and lives. Women's challenge has gradually led to their broadened scope of economic activities, social contacts and enlarged roles, as well as helped reshape government policies at higher levels.

The interactive process of post-Mao policy formation and implementation as related to women's agency observed in my research seems to be in consistence with the study by Judd.¹² Judd argues that post-reform changes at the local level could not have happened without the fundamental shift in national policy. In the meantime, she demonstrates how greater variations, diversities and initiatives at the local level can be either responses or non-responses to upper-level policies, but readily integrated into the shifting national situation, dependent largely on local leadership's perceptions of the relationship between central policies and local political economy. Gender and power relations including relationships between women and the "formal" state are construed, in this context, as being mediated by a range of customary, practical, intermediary and informal organisations and everyday social relations, which have also represented permeation of state power.¹³ Such informal power expressed in customs and social practices can both condition the opportunities available to individual women, and be flexible, heterogeneous and readily adjustable in accord with the changing and specific local circumstances. Based on such a conceptualisation of state and gender power relations, Judd portrays rural women as agent of change, particularly in the more informal spheres of power operation within the household and local community.¹⁴

My study has shown that growing interactions between the state and society, especially at the village level, are one of the hallmarks of the policy processes in the post-Mao era. Village women, in this process, have not been passive recipients of official policies, and this finding is in contrast with the conventional understanding of policy processes in rural China as being dominated by typically top-down approaches. I have shown that, in terms of gender relations, negotiations and bargaining have been taking place at various levels: between women and the state, women and the communities or within the household. At all these levels, women have frequently defied both the remaining official restrictions and social constraints through their active pursuit of self-perceived interests in the emerging non-state markets. As genuine subjects of change, women have helped create conditions leading to their higher earning ability and greater access to domestic resources. This has, in turn, rendered them more independent and assertive in resisting possible parental or patriarchal control over their lives, and more confident in fulfilling their aspirations through their own efforts.

Women's greater autonomy in conjunction with the changing relations between women and the state has also been manifested in the shifting role of the Women's Federation. The Women's Federation is a national para-governmental network operating in the interface between the state and women at various levels. However, during the collective years, it, like many other "mass organisations", almost always acted as an organ and worked under the strict supervision and control of the party-state in both financial and political senses. In the reform era, the most noticeable change in this organisation, as observed in my fieldwork, has been its desperate attempts to gain greater independence and meet the diverse needs of women, as well as to accommodate itself to the changing situations, including significantly reduced funding from the government. The findings of my research suggest that the Women's Federation itself has undergone a reform process in recent years, through which it has gradually turned into an increasingly powerful lobbying body in negotiating and fighting for women's rights and interests. This has been illustrated in the "Double Learning and Double Competition" campaign organised for rural women, the establishment of a special department for protecting women's rights and interests within its organisational structure, its wide-ranging work in promoting reproductive and child health, and its new role as a labour market broker in providing services, particularly for female migrant workers in Chinese cities. In addition, the organisation has exerted greater influence over official legislation and social policy making concerning issues of gender equality and equity, including marriage and family, social security, female labour protection, women's rights to land use and housing, as well as other aspects of women's legal and social rights.

However, as a quasi-governmental organisation, the Women's Federation has tended to be non-confrontational in its promotion and struggling for women's rights and interests when central or local state apparatus and policies are involved. Co-operation and negotiations within the state structure seem to have been preferred to open critiques and challenge. The weakness in this approach, as revealed in my fieldwork, is that the organisation can sometimes fail to function as an effective representative of women's rights, and frequently less effective in challenging local policies and social practices, which are damaging to women's interests. This suggests that although "working from within" as termed by Jacka¹⁵ can have the advantages of functioning as a lobbying group for women's rights, the Women's Federation

simultaneously faces the dilemma of prioritising whose interests when those of the state and of women are at odds.¹⁶ Despite such weaknesses and limitations of the Women's Federation, its enlarged role in legislation and social policy making suggests that the changing political *milieu* marked by greater heterogeneity and plurality has enabled women's organisations to create an increasingly large space for themselves in expressing the needs and fighting for the interests of women. Women's actions as such have constituted a serious threat to traditional values and the existing political, social and sexual orders.

Women's market-related economic activities in the reform era has brought a fundamental change in their labour: it has now gained more exchange value on top of the use value that it possessed in the largely subsistence economy in the commune years. This has been closely in connection with the more recent diversification of rural livelihoods, especially the development and expansion of rural industry (village and township enterprises), as well as of the so-called "commodity production", including specialisation based on sidelines, or the "courtyard economy". Sideline production, however, is not something new in the post-Mao years. Rural women often performed domestic sidelines, such as rearing pigs, chickens and other domestic animals, growing vegetables and making handicrafts, under the collective system either in the limited private plot allocated to the household or in the family's courtyard. However, such activities, viewed as a "hotbed" of spontaneous capitalism, were strictly restricted by official policies of the time. In the reform years, domestic sidelines tend to be reclassified into a broader category of rural "off-farm", even though performed "on-farm", or "commodity" production, which is a catch-all phrase entailing a wide range of income-earning activities. These activities, compared with growing grain alone, can bring a household more cash income. Resembling the Mao era, women, especially older women, are largely responsible for such production, though older men also tend to be involved. The most significant distinction from the past practice is that such activities are encouraged rather than suppressed, so that rapid improvement has been witnessed in both quantity and quality, e.g. enlarged scale and specialisation. My study has found that rural women have been actively involved in the process of rural livelihood diversification, through which they are able to make growing contributions to both their households and the local community.

Encouragement of women's participation in domestic sidelines by government policies in developing countries has tended to draw heated debates in the international gender and development arena. Some feminist critiques have pointed to the possibility of isolation of women in domestic sidelines and handicrafts leading to marginalisation of women's work based on an older form of sexual segregation. This then may result in reinforcement of the existing sexual division of labour and a narrowed scope of employment and income for women.¹⁷ Others, such as Jacka, Judd and Li, on the other hand, have argued that rural women in China have, as a whole, benefited from the development of a "courtyard economy" or "commodity production" in the reform era.¹⁸ This is because, as Judd sees it, gender asymmetries displayed in the small-scale family-run business tend to be more subtle and complex, and the division of labour more flexible than those within rural enterprises. Women working in the former, therefore, are more likely to be able to negotiate for greater autonomy and decision-making power.¹⁹ Jacka, moreover, emphasises the dynamics of the "courtyard economy" in the recent decades, which offers village women more chances of earning high incomes and improving their authority and status in the family and the wider society.²⁰

My study, to some extent, confirms that village women have viewed positively their participation in sideline production as compared with growing grain alone, which is most likely to be used for domestic consumption than possessing exchange value. Village women's engagement in sidelines, or livelihood diversification, enables them to improve their income in cash leading to tangibility of their contributions to the family, as well as possible increase in their power and status within it. However, my findings show that although asymmetrical gender power relations clearly exist in rural industry, manifested particularly in the division of labour (different types of jobs performed by men and women, as well as women's low representation in management) and the related income differentials and potentials, stress on this factor alone has not been able to provide an adequate explanation for why some women have chosen to work mainly on family farms.

Indeed, a life-cycle approach may lead to a better understanding of the different patterns displayed in women's employment. Younger women, who are either unmarried or can obtain help from mother-in-law for childcare, often prefer working in non-farm sectors, such as local government and rural enterprises, at least, for a

few years. Older women, as well as women with young children who are unable to get much support from parents-in-law for childcare, on the other hand, tend to concentrate in diversified farming or other family-run ventures. This differentiated pattern of rural women's work is associated with the differences in their educational levels as well. As the majority of older women are either illiterate or semi-literate, they often fail to meet the literacy requirement for working in government sectors or rural enterprises. While being disadvantaged in this respect, they can still give full play to their comparative advantages in the family business, which usually do not have high demand on formal education, but value women's experiences and common sense knowledge. This shows that village women's work tends to be differentiated by, not only gender, but also a variety of other factors, such as age, marital and reproductive status, childcare arrangements, education and skills, as well as local development in and policies on rural industry and economic diversification. This finding of my research also suggests that the gender division of labour should not be treated or understood as a fixed dualism delineating inside-outside domains in conceptualising women's work and the meanings attached to it. As revealed in my fieldwork, some highly motivated village women have contested, either consciously or unconsciously, the socially constructed dichotomy that tends to limit the scope of their work and income prospect through their unconventional market activities. Women's actions as such have significantly blurred the boundaries of the public-private spheres, as well as the different values associated with such a divide.

That village women's work varies with their life cycle has also meant an intensified double role burden for middle-aged women, who are most likely to concentrate on diversified economic activities related to farm-work. Although greater flexibility provided by household-based small businesses has been viewed by many village women as an advantage allowing them to combine domestic work with income-generating activities, this has not constituted a serious challenge to the traditional division of labour within the household. Most husbands of the women in the older cohorts did and still do not share domestic chores, although women have now been able to bring in greater cash income to the family compared with the collective era. This shows that the benefits of "flexibility" for working on the family farm cannot be properly assessed without balancing them with the costs involved for village women. "Flexible arrangements" are actually made within a largely unchallenged sexual

division of labour in rural households instead of being based on a discernible or radical reform of the arrangements. Such a "flexibility", while making women's life easier through allowing readjustment and accommodation by women themselves, has failed to either challenge or alter male attitudes towards and cultural stereotypes of women's roles in the family and the wider society. The strategy of encouraging women to engage in "flexible" farm work, therefore, may strengthen women's status through offering them the possibility of better co-ordinating their double roles in order to engage in more income-earning activities, as well as simultaneously elaborate and perpetuate the existing sexual division of labour and gender hierarchy within the household.

Younger village women, on the other hand, have experienced more changes in the division of labour both within and outside the household. This is manifest in increased sharing of housework by men, greater blurring of the division of labour within the household and the more time spent by the young women on leisure and hobbies. For young single women, such change is also discernible in their stated criteria for future marriage partners, which include mutual affection and respect, being caring, willing to share domestic chores, and so on. This indicates that greater openness of the countryside since post-Mao reforms has helped bring growing influence of urban culture into village life. This has instilled a measure of modernity into the ideas and values of villagers, which is particularly evident in younger women, who are enjoying more democracy and equality in family life, and developing a greater awareness of self needs and interests. In addition, my research has shown a notable increase in female-centred uxorilocal marriages in the village in the past decade and more. Young women in such marriages seem to enjoy a higher position and a greater say in decision-making regarding the household. They also tend to have better education and employment, and be more assertive in claiming their equal rights with men.

The emergence of this trend has been related with the implementation of a national family planning programme and the new legislation on protecting women's rights and interests since the early 1980s. My research has demonstrated that the more recent changes in gender and power relations, however, have been interwoven with the many continuities of the pre-reform, as well as the pre-1949 past. The valued norms of son preference displayed in rural reproductive culture may serve as an

example of such a mixture of continuity and change. While younger women marry later and have fewer children, the predominant emphasis in the domain of reproduction is still on producing, at least, one son for a village family. This has created pressures on women, who are simultaneously required by the state to confine their family size to only one child. The tensions induced by all these contradictory forces, including the valued norms, the actual needs of the household due to a lack of institutionalised social provisions in the countryside, and the state policies, have rendered women disproportionately bearing the negative effects and social discriminations in the process of implementing the family planning programme. The later readjustment of the universal principles involved in this programme observed at the local level, which allows rural couples to have a second try if their first child is a girl, seems to confirm the findings of many scholars, such as Davin, Greenhalgh and Li, and Zhang.²¹ They have shown that policy and fertility outcomes in present day Chinese villages are frequently shaped and reshaped through a complex process of interactions and mutual compromises between the central state, regional and local officials, rural households and women themselves. This means that struggles over the control of reproduction may produce outcomes of either empowering women, or perpetuating the existing sexual hierarchy based partly on male-centred reproductive norms, or a mixture of the two.²²

My research points to a similar possibility induced from the current discourses, debates and practices in the domain of reproduction. It indicates that the different values attached to sons and daughters are becoming less and less monolithic and clear-cut, but more subtle and ambiguous with the markedly reduced size of rural families. This, together with the broadened employment opportunities for young women and the increased economic contributions of daughters to their natal households, tend to result in greater valuation of daughters by parents in village society. Traditional expectations on women to act selflessly and dutifully in domestic settings, particularly towards parents, combined with possible tensions existing between parents, especially the mother, and the daughter-in-law, also contribute to older women's perception of daughters as more caring and supportive when in need. This finding would be in consistence with Greenhalgh and Li's interpretation of rural women's reproductive aspiration of having both a son and a daughter to meet parents' "economic" and "emotional" needs.²³

Virilocal marriage is still the dominant post-nuptial residence arrangement in present day village society. In spite of this, diversified forms of arrangements have emerged since the inception of rural reforms. Thus the seemingly persistent customs and practices have now assumed greater flexibility and heterogeneity. The most conspicuous change in recent years has been the increase in uxorilocal marriage. Cohen, in his comprehensive study on family management and family division in contemporary village society, has distinguished ultimate family aspirations from practical family management, which are often contradictory with each other, particularly when a family does not have a son.²⁴ This has led to concessions and accommodation of the ultimate family ideals to the practical family managerial needs, as in the case of accepting uxorilocal marriages in both traditional and modern times.²⁵ Providing insights into a complex set of relations and contradictions involved in the Chinese family and marital practices, Cohen's analysis, at the same time, tends to construe rural people as passively responding to, or coping with, the conflicting demands of ideal familial ethics and standards on the one hand, and the imminent needs of everyday familial management on the other.

My research, while confirming Cohen's findings of the existence and acceptance of uxorilocal marriages in village society, has focused attention on the dynamics of both the ideals about family forms and the actual practices and arrangements, which have been subject to a range of socio-economic, political and cultural variables. It has identified new development involving different types of households, including the increase in uxorilocal marriages in all-daughter households, the newly emerging phenomenon of more and more staying-on married daughters, and migrant daughters and sons, who have temporarily or permanently moved away from their native villages. It also goes beyond identifying such developments to include an investigation into how these may affect gender relations at both household and community levels. My findings reveal that these changes have rendered gender issues more prominent in the local redistribution of resources, interests and rights, displayed partly in women's land use rights based on virilocal marriage, and the discriminative local policies in the redistribution of local resources against staying-on married daughters.

The increase in the number of uxorilocal marriages concomitant with the growth in the number of all-daughter households has seen a gradual change in customs and

practices concerning women's property and inheritance rights as well. It seems that local practices in this respect have gradually diverged from the predominant pattern of depriving women of their rights in such households. This divergence has been facilitated by the quickened pace of legislation on protecting women's rights and interests since the early 1980s, which has provided women, especially those from all-daughter households, with courage and assertiveness in claiming their equal rights in property and inheritance, and in fighting against possible discriminations from lineages and local communities. This would prove the conclusions drawn by Ocko and Palmer that the accelerating legislative activities since the 1980s have contributed to a greater dynamism in rural social relations and institutions, such as the marriage and inheritance regimes.²⁶ The preference for and establishment of smaller, conjugal families by both younger and older couples through family division in Chinese villages, as discussed by Cohen and Yan,²⁷ have also been observed in my fieldwork. However, distinct from Yan's study, which explores the complexity of the family institution in contemporary rural society, my research stresses the implications of this change, i.e., the gradual shift of emphasis from vertical, male-centred lineal ties towards horizontal, conjugal relations in the family for altering the existing gender power relations and women's status therein.

Nonetheless, a highly gendered pattern has emerged from my analysis of the processes of intergenerational transfer of resources in the form of inheritance in rural China. The contrast between official legal recognition of women's equal rights with men and the *de facto* disenfranchisement of most rural women in inheritance represents a gulf between legislation and social reality. My research shows that women have continued losing their inheritance rights to their brothers in households where competition for resources and inheritance exists between children of the opposite sexes, i.e. in households with both daughters and sons. This is partly pillared, as it was before, by the customary practice of virilocal marriage and reinforced in the absence of an institutional provision of old age security in rural areas. Although economic and societal changes, expressed particularly in young women's increased opportunities to have better education, waged jobs and greater mobility, have produced erosive effects on the entrenched customs and beliefs relegating women to unfavourable positions in marriage and inheritance, such changes will not be significant and widespread unless the state shoulders its

responsibilities of formulating and implementing appropriate social policies and introducing effective law enforcement mechanisms.

While the predominant norms and conventions of stressing men over women, virilocality and the customary denial of women's equal inheritance entitlements are being contested in varied ways, the possibility of fundamentally challenging the existing inheritance regime and the realisation of women's full citizenship rights have been hampered by limitations of the laws and asymmetrical gender power relations. This is exemplified by the continued distribution of rights, benefits and risks between men and women in accord with accepted patriarchal rules and conventions both within and outside the household. Furthermore, the conspicuous urban-rural differences in social provisions marked, among other things, by the state inadequate action in institutionalising universalised basic social security and support services in the countryside have reinforced the structural constraints on the realisation of women's equal entitlements to inheritance, as well as their membership and citizenship rights.

The traditional means by which women link to inheritance only indirectly through conjugal relations is now becoming less and less reliable insofar as women's welfare is concerned. This is largely due to increasingly unstable marriages in a rapidly changing and uncertain environment emerging under market reforms. The general conceptualisation of the interests of a married woman as identical with those of her husband's and his family's, expressed in common-sense understanding, relevant legislation and social policies has also affected the consciousness of rural women as independent individuals and bearers of legal and social rights. The current patrilineal inheritance regime has redistributed and transferred resources horizontally and vertically. Interplaying with other structural arrangements, it has led to the emergence of new patterns of gendered exclusion, deprivation and vulnerability. This has affected women adversely not only in terms of their welfare and security, but also their position and power in both the private and public domains. Whilst pluralist welfare provision is being advocated to promote wellbeing for all in rural China at the current development stage, the problem of unequal entitlements and rights of men and women calls for more effective government interventions in the form of social policy making to redress the balance and ensure gender-equitable welfare outcomes.

In spite of all these recent changes in relations between women, the state, and the market as observed in my fieldwork, most aspects of rural life -- political, socio-economic and cultural -- have retained a pattern of gender asymmetry in the post-Mao years. This picture is complicated again by the fact that rural women's experiences, particularly in their rural out-migration, are continuously shaped and conditioned by the legacy of the urban-rural dichotomy. The conspicuous urban-rural disparity in every sphere of life created and sustained by this dichotomy has been behind the many discriminatory attitudes and practices encountered by female migrant workers in urban settings, as well as by rural women in the village. The urban bias against rural residents underpinned by this dualism has been present as well in many public and social policies at central, regional and local levels, adding further constraints, on top of the cultural ones, on rural women in terms of their education, training, and career and earning prospects. The urban-rural cleavage has continuously disadvantaged rural women in an increasingly competitive labour market, and thus operated to hamper women in terms of their further occupational advancement and status enhancement.

My study also reveals that women do not enjoy equal status with men in either the domestic or the public realm. In domestic settings, although women have been perceived as the main bearer of the household responsibilities, their influence on domestic decision-making has been found less than that of their husbands'. In economic life, the sexual division of labour predicated on popular assumptions of gender roles, sexual stereotypes, as well as the deep-rooted sexual prejudice disadvantaging women in education and training, has channelled women largely into economic sectors and job categories of low skills and unsatisfactory pays. This is also reflected in the phenomenon of "feminised agriculture" in parts of China, where women, disadvantaged in education and skills and held back by heavy family responsibilities, have replaced men as the main operators in the less rewarding agricultural sector. The existing sexual arrangements have left women lagging behind men in the current occupational transfer from agricultural to non-agricultural jobs.

Political power has continuously remained largely in men's hands in the reform era. Women are found not only underrepresented in local politics, but also their position in the formal power structure is often marginalised. Efforts to recruit women political

activists are far from adequate. All this has led to women's limited influence on the decision-making process at the local, regional and central levels. Inevitably, assumptions based on the existing unequal gender relations and traditional ideas, male-centred motives and male attitudes towards women manifested in both the public and private spheres have informed many aspects of official legislation and policy making. Sexism has often assumed new forms in the changed economic and political context: the gendered allocation of rights, opportunities and resources. Inadequate state legislation and regulation of the market have also meant failures, or reluctance, on the part of the state to effectively protect women's rights and interests in the marketplace. This has led to an unbalanced share between men and women of the opportunities, returns, risks and costs associated with markets and economic growth.

The future of Chinese women's struggle for gender equality and equity in the family and society depends, therefore, on women's further strengthened ability to articulate and organise their independent interests and exert increased pressure on the authorities. Equally important, it calls for a more active role and effective actions of the government in market regulation, legislation and social policy making to promote welfare for all, encourage alternative references as against traditional norms and practices, institutionalise and protect women's rights and interests, as well as to mitigate possible negative effects of the current transition on women.

NOTES

Chapter 1 Introduction

¹ China Statistical Information Network: www.stats.gov.cn/information/zh1/c041a.

² See Lang, 1968 (1946); Wolf, 1985; Yang, 1968 (1959).

³ See Johnson, 1983; Lang, 1968 (1946); Yang, 1968 (1959).

⁴ See Croll, 1981; Lang, 1968 (1946), Wolf, 1985.

⁵ Johnson, 1983.

⁶ Sun, 1988: 34-36.

⁷ Meijer, 1978: 436-77.

⁸ Sun, 1988: 53-54.

⁹ Yang, 1968 (1959): 27-28.

¹⁰ Buxbaum, 1978: 217-60; Gamble, 1968; Johnson, 1983; Lang, 1968 (1946).

¹¹ Chen, 1990 [1937, 1928]: 59.

¹² Johnson, 1983: 29.

¹³ Traditional standards of a fair maiden included, among other things, smiling without showing her teeth, talking without raising her voice, never looking at men in the eyes, walking with “lotus feet”, i.e. bound feet, etc. etc.

¹⁴ Sun, 1988: 85-86.

¹⁵ See Da, 1993: 1-4; O'Hara, 1971. Sun, 1988: 192-94.

¹⁶ See Lang, 1968 (1946); Yang, 1968 (1959).

¹⁷ See Du, 1993: 154-81; Johnson, 1983; Lang, 1968 (1946); Wolf, 1985.

¹⁸ Sun, 1988: 195-96.

¹⁹ These included adultery, jealousy, failure to produce at least one son, chronic illness, laziness, disrespect to parents-in-law, or disobedience to in-laws, theft, which meant to put away money for her own use, chatty, etc. (see Da, 1993; Du, 1993: 154-81; Lang 1968 [1946]; Ocko, 1991: 313-46; Sun, 1988: chpt. 4).

²⁰ See Meijer, 1978: 436-77; Ocko, 1991: 313-46; Yang, 1968 (1959).

²¹ Sun, 1988: 140-42.

²² For instance, my grandmother was re-named "Liu Zhang Shi" after marrying my grandfather. Only after 1949 when the Communist government promulgated the new Marriage Law, did she have her own name restored.

²³ See Davin, 1976; Du, 1993: 154-81; Meijer, 1978: 436-77; Yang, 1968 (1959).

²⁴ Qiu Jin was a schoolteacher, poet and one of the early organisers of the Republican Revolutionary Movement. She was devoted to the revolutionary cause against the opposition of her husband, who served as a senior official of the Qing government. Qiu Jin was arrested and executed by the Qing government in 1907 for her revolutionary activities. See Sun, 1988: 224.

²⁵ See Davin, 1976: 12-13; Sun, 1988: 223-25; Stacey, 1983.

²⁶ The May 4th Movement was named after a student demonstration in Beijing on 4 May 1919. The students protested both Western imperialist territorial expansions in China and the diplomatic failure of the Chinese government at the Paris Peace Conference at the end of the First World War to negotiate a return to China of its Shandong Province from German occupation. To enrage the nation, the Paris Peace Treaty decided to transfer Shandong interests from Germany to Japan (see Chow, 1960 for details).

²⁷ Chow, 1960.

²⁸ See Johnson, 1983; Lang, 1968 (1946); Sun, 1988: 227-32; Stacey, 1983.

²⁹ See Davin, 1976; Johnson, 1983; Lang, 1968 (1946).

³⁰ Davin, 1976:15; Liu, 1988: 45-52; Sun, 1988: 235-37.

³¹ The code stipulated that a wife must reside in her husband's home and assume his surname placed before her own at marriage. Their children must take the father's surname. Although parents were both deemed as legal representatives of the child, the father's opinion was recognised as decisive in the case of disagreement. Furthermore, when joint property was established between husband and wife, only the former was considered as the legal owner and manager. See Lang, 1968 [1946]: 115-16; Sun, 1988: 235-37.

³² Stacey, 1983: 77-78.

³³ See Croll, 1979; Johnson, 1976: 62-103; Liu, 1988: 45-52; Witke, 1973.

³⁴ Yang, 1968 (1959).

³⁵ Chow, 1960; Lang, 1968 (1946), Sun, 1988: 228-35.

³⁶ Davin, 1976: 21-52; Meijer, 1978: 436-77; Sun, 1988: 233-35.

³⁷ Wolf, 1985: 17.

³⁸ Davin, 1976: 36-37; Snow, 1972.

³⁹ See Buxbaum, 1978: 217-60; Christiansen and Rai, 1996: chpt. 12; Davin, 1976: 84-89; Meijer, 1971; Wolf, 1985: 17-18.

⁴⁰ Buxbaum, 1978: 217-60.

⁴¹ Buxbaum, 1978: 217-60; Yang, 1968 (1959).

⁴² Buxbaum, 1978: 217-60; Meijer, 1978: 436-77.

⁴³ Croll, 1981: 20.

⁴⁴ See Croll, 1981: 6-7; Davin, 1976: 85-86; Meijer, 1978: 436-77; Yang, 1968 (1959): 32.

⁴⁵ Yang, 1968 (1959): 73.

⁴⁶ Croll, 1981: 2; Devin, 1976: 101; Meijer, 1971: 114.

⁴⁷ Croll, 1981: 24; Stacey, 1983: 177-78; Wolf, 1985: 17.

⁴⁸ Meijer, 1978: 436-77.

⁴⁹ Although the traditional moral code granted men exclusive rights to divorce, it discouraged repudiation of wives on three grounds, which offered women some protection. These included firstly, if the wife had mourned her husband's parents for three years. Secondly, if she had no family to take her in. And lastly, if her husband's family became wealthy after the wife shared a period of hardships with the family. See Lang, 1968 [1946]: 41, Sun, 1988: 51.

⁵⁰ Davin, 1976: 102-05.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*: 104.

⁵² Croll, 1981: 2; Meijer, 1978: 436-77.

⁵³ Davin, 1976: 104.

⁵⁴ Evans, 1997: 5-7.

⁵⁵ Meijer, 1978: 436-77.

⁵⁶ Croll, 1981: 6, Evans, 1997: 8.

⁵⁷ Yuan, 1993: 49-52.

⁵⁸ Davin, 1976: 138-39; Johnson, 1983: chpt. 8.

⁵⁹ Johnson, 1983: chpts 8, 9.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *Ibid.*: 111-12.

⁶² Buxbaum, 1978: 217-60; Meijer, 1978: 436-77.

⁶³ Johnson, 1983: 113; Meijer, 1978: 436-77; Wolf, 1985: 19.

⁶⁴ Exner, 1995: 68-102; Ocko, 1991: 313-46.

⁶⁵ Exner, 1995: 68-102; Keith, 1994.

⁶⁶ Yang, 1968 (1959).

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*: 161-65.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*: 192.

⁶⁹ See Andors, 1975: 33-38, 1983; Croll, 1978, 1979.

⁷⁰ Johnson, 1983: 173-76.

⁷¹ Diamond, 1975: 25-32.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ See Parish and Whyte, 1978: 238-39; Potter and Potter, 1990: 101-09; Thorborg, 1978; Wolf, 1985: 105.

⁷⁴ See Davin, 1976: chpt. 4; Howard, 1988; Stacey, 1983: 222; Thorborg, 1978; Wolf, 1985: 88.

⁷⁵ See Johnson, 1983: chpt. 11; Parish and Whyte, 1978: chpts 11, 12; Wolf, 1985: 84-85.

⁷⁶ Expressions such as "revolution postponed" (Wolf, 1985) and "the unfinished liberation of Chinese women" (Andors, 1983) may reflect such a sentiment.

⁷⁷ Stacey, 1983: 109, 227.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*: chpt. 6.

⁷⁹ See Andors, 1975: 33-38; Croll, 1979; Pepper, 1986: 704-13; Stacey, 1983: 213-16.

⁸⁰ Stacey, 1983: 203.

⁸¹ See Andors, 1981: 44-56; Davin, 1988: 137-46; Kelkar, 1990 [1988]: 121-50; Robinson, 1985: 32-57; Wolf, 1985: chpt. 11.

⁸² Diamond, 1975: 25-32; Stacey, 1983.

⁸³ Judd, 1992: 356.

⁸⁴ *ibid.*: 338-56.

⁸⁵ *ibid.*

⁸⁶ See Judd, 1992: 338-56, 1994; Li, 1999: 241-64; Xu, 1997: 29-34.

⁸⁷ Fei, 1993: 51-55.

⁸⁸ Exner, 1995: 68-102; Keith, 1997: 29-55; Palmer, 1995: 110-34.

⁸⁹ For full texts of these laws, see website: <http://www.beinet.net.cn/law>.

⁹⁰ Ocko, 1991: 313-46.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² Honig and Hershatter, 1988: 210; the website: <http://www.cwomen.ac.cn> for 1981-1997 Registered Marriage and Divorce.

⁹³ Ocko, 1991: 313-46.

⁹⁴ Fei, 1993: 51-55.

⁹⁵ Fei, 1993: 51-55; Li, 1999: 241-64.

⁹⁶ Some village governments have implemented a policy of land allocation readjustment at an interval of every four or five years, whereas others keep the original division of land unchanged. See Judd, 1992: 338-56, 1994; Li, 1999: 241-64; Xu, 1997: 29-34.

⁹⁷ See Cohen, 1992: 357-77; Fei, 1993: 51-55; Gao, 1999; Li, 1999: 241-64.

⁹⁸ Cohen, 1992: 357-77; Judd, 1992: 338-56.

⁹⁹ Cohen, 1992: 363.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ Cohen, 1992: 357-77; Yan, 1997: 191-212.

¹⁰² Cohen, 1992: 357-77.

¹⁰³ Greenhalgh and Li, 1995: 601-41.

¹⁰⁴ Yan, 1997: 191-212.

¹⁰⁵ See, for instance, Davis and Harrell, 1993: 1-22.

¹⁰⁶ Greenhalgh and Li, 1995: 601-41; Ma, 1996: 261-67.

¹⁰⁷ Ma, 1996: 261-68; Tien, 1973.

¹⁰⁸ See Correa and Reichmann, 1994; Dixon-Mueller, 1993; Hartmann, 1987.

¹⁰⁹ See Greenhalgh and Li, 1995: 601-41; Johnson, 1993: 61-87; Ocko, 1991: 313-46; Wen, 1993: 509-21.

¹¹⁰ See Milwertz, 1997.

¹¹¹ Davin, 1990: 81-91; Li and Cooney, 1993: 277-96; Ze and Ebanks, 1992: 22-46; Zhang, 1999: 202-30.

¹¹² Zhang, 1999: 202-30.

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- ¹¹³ Greenhalgh, 1993: 219-50; Greenhalgh and Li, 1995: 601-41.
- ¹¹⁴ See Greenhalgh, 1993: 219-50, 1994: 3-30; Tan, L., 1994: 2-9.
- ¹¹⁵ See Correa and Reichmann, 1994.
- ¹¹⁶ See Bloom and Gu 1997: 1-11; Bloom and Tang 1999: 951-60; Evans, 1997, chpt. 6; Greenhalgh, 1994: 3-30; Kaufman, Zhang and Fang, 1997: 61-65; Rai, 1992: 20-40; Tan, L., 1994: 2-9; Zhang, K., 1994: 20-25.
- ¹¹⁷ See Greenhalgh, 1994: 3-30; Wong, 1997: 509-25.
- ¹¹⁸ See Jin and Liu, 1998: Part 4; QFFSJX, 1993: 283-88; Yang, Yang and Tang, 1996.
- ¹¹⁹ See Davin, 1988: 137-46; book review by Zhou, 1998: 271-72.
- ¹²⁰ Li, 1999: 241-64.
- ¹²¹ *Ibid.*
- ¹²² Jacka, 1997.
- ¹²³ *Ibid.*
- ¹²⁴ Li, 1999: 241-64.
- ¹²⁵ *ibid*: 258-59.
- ¹²⁶ See, for instance, Li, 1991; Shi, 1991.
- ¹²⁷ See Croll, 1997(a): 22-26, 1997(b): 19-23; Davin, 1996: 24-30, 1999; Ding and Stockman, 1999: 119-33; Hoy, 1999: 134-55; Scharping, 1999: 73-102.
- ¹²⁸ Davin, 1999; Lavelly, 1991: 286-312.
- ¹²⁹ Davin and Messkoub, 1994.
- ¹³⁰ Hoy, 1999: 134-55.

¹³¹ Todaro, 1976.

¹³² Hoy, 1999: 134-55.

¹³³ Judd, 1989: 525-44; Li, 1999: 241-64.

¹³⁴ Croll, 1997 (a): 22-26, 1997 (b): 19-23; Davin, 1996: 24-30, 1999; Tan, 1998: 117-31.

¹³⁵ Firestone, 1987: 16.

¹³⁶ See Bartunek and Louis (1996) for a detailed discussion of the import of context from an insider's perspective, and the tendency of an "outsider" researcher to be acontextual and over-generalising. Hence the advantages of bridging the boundaries of or combining the roles of an "insider" and "outsider".

¹³⁷ A wide range of literature on the subject exists, offering historical and cross-cultural perspectives. See, for instance, the earlier works by Boserup, 1970; Huston, 1979; Tinker and Bramsen, 1976; and the more recent contributions by Anker, Buvinic and Youssef, 1982; Aslanbeigui, Pressman and Summerfield, 1994; Einhorn and Yeo, 1995; Goetz, 1995: 1-10; Horton, 1996; Kandiyoti, 1990: 5-22; O'Bannon, 1994: 247-67; Stockman, Bonney and Sheng, 1995; Tilly and Scott, 1989 [1987]; Wallace and Marsh, 1991; Wieringa, 1994: 829-48.

¹³⁸ Jin, 1990: 12.

¹³⁹ Young, 1989: 254-55.

¹⁴⁰ See, for example, studies by Chapkis and Enloe, 1983; Robinson, 1988.

Chapter 2 Methodology and Sources

¹ In contrast with the Mao era, the post-Mao period has witnessed a more relaxed political atmosphere with reduced emphasis on ideological propaganda and increased stress on "scientific attitudes". As Selden and Lippit (1982), and Stockman, Bonney

and Sheng (1995: chpt. 1) note, this change not only led to a rebirth of many, previously-banned disciplines in social sciences and a proliferation of non-governmental information, but also rendered the official government sources fairly reliable.

² Pepper, 1986: 704-13; Stockman, Bonney and Sheng, 1995: chpt. 1.

³ See Johnson, 1982: 919-33; Pye, 1986: 596-612; Wank, 1998: 205-27; Wilson, Greenblatt and Wilson, 1983.

⁴ See Burns, 1983: 143-72; Donnithorne, 1972: 605-19; MacFarquhar, 1983; Vermeer, 1982: 823-42; Yang, 1996; Zweig, 1985: 267-93; 1989.

⁵ Some researchers have argued that the GPCR was largely an urban phenomenon on the ground that a series of central government instructions were issued during the GPCR to contain the movement within the urban area. However, as indicated by other researchers, the GPCR as a national movement did affect rural society profoundly, producing a great deal of chaos and violence in villages in spite of the directives to curb such trend issued by the same authorities. See Chan, Madsen and Unger, 1992 [1984]; Hinton, 1984; Madsen, 1990: 175-201; Zhou, 1996.

⁶ Shi Fulian, 1990.

⁷ Glaser and Strauss, 1967, 1971.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ See Denscombe, 1998: 214-18; Layder, 1993: chpts 3, 4; Strauss and Corbin, 1998: 158-83.

¹⁰ Denscombe, 1998: 217.

¹¹ See Denscombe, 1998; Erlandson, *et al.*, 1993.

¹² Burgess, 1993 (1984): 55.

¹³ Harding, S., 1987; Warren, 1988.

¹⁴ For details on the notion of “theoretical saturation”, see Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Marshall and Rossman, 1989; Miles and Huberman, 1994; Patton, 1990.

¹⁵ For more discussions on the various types of interviews and their advantages and disadvantages, see Denscombe, 1998; Erlandson, et al., 1993; Strauss, 1987.

¹⁶ See, for instance, Anker, Buvinic and Youssef, 1982; Chapman, 1993; Giele and Smock, 1977; Huston, 1979; Momsen, 1991; Wallace and Marsh, 1992; Wang, J., 1992: 24-25; Wieringa, 1994: 829-48.

¹⁷ See Appendixes for full versions of these questionnaires.

¹⁸ Lüzhuangzi Xiang Council, 1992: 1.

¹⁹ The mean figure of the total income of the Xiang’s 22 villages (Lüzhuangzi Xiang Council, 1992: 13).

²⁰ Qin, 1993: 3.

²¹ Lüzhuangzixiang Council, 1992: 1, 4.

²² “Comrade” (*tongzhi*) was still used as a title for local people to formally address officials or somebody coming from outside the local area. The alternative titles such as Miss (*xiaojie*) and Mrs. (*furen/taitai*), though adopted in urban areas in recent years, was not used widely in rural areas. Even in the cities, the popularity of such titles is often limited by the confusion that they tend to cause: almost all the women in China keep their own family names after marriage, and people are often unsure about how to address a woman if they do not know her husband’s surname.

²³ She was the only female member of the village council although, as will be analysed in the chapters of Part III, the women’s representative in the village council had limited power in major decision-making regarding the public affairs of the village.

²⁴ See Burgess, 1993 (1984); Creswell, 1994; Denscombe, 1998; Erlandson, *et al.*, 1993.

²⁵ Denscombe, 1998.

PART I COLLECTIVISATION IN RETROSPECT: A RE-THINKING OF ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR RURAL WOMEN

¹ Yang, 1968 (1959).

Chapter 3 Collectivisation: Its Process, Aims and Outcomes

¹ For analysis of the various factors contributing to the Chinese leadership's decision-making in the 1950s, see Blecher, 1986; Crook, 1996 (1991, 1986): 485-90; Howard, 1988; Selden, 1988.

² For more focused discussions on the process and objectives of China's agricultural collectivisation, see Blecher, 1986; Perkins and Yusuf, 1984; Selden, 1988.

³ Zhu, 1991: 7.

⁴ ZNN, 1980: 4-5. A higher co-operative had an average of 158 peasant households in 1957. A people's commune averaged 4,000-5,000 households in 1958, in contrast with the size of 10-26 families for a lower-level co-operative in 1955.

⁵ One such example was that the reported grain output from the provincial level for 1958 reached the incredible figure of 500 million tons, which later turned out to be some two and a half times the actual figure (Peng, 1987: 652). The practice was later known as "launching production-increase satellites" (*fang weixing*).

⁶ Before the GLF, the government procurement was approximately 16 percent of the total grain output at the national level. While grain output in 1959 and 1960 was 25

and 51 million tons less than that of 1957, respectively, the state procurement for the two years increased by about 28 and 21 percent, respectively (Peng, 1987: 655). This practice was later to be known as “draining the pond to catch the fish” (*jiezeeryu*).

⁷ Such dining halls often ate up a commune’s grain reserve of a whole year within a few months. This was one of the main reasons for the many deaths during the ensuing great famine. For further discussions on this scenario witnessed in villages, see Chan, Madsen and Unger, 1992 (1984); Friedman, Pickowicz and Selden, 1991; Peng, 1987: 641-62.

⁸ Highlighting local and regional self sufficiency, the principle led to planning and implementation of policies without considering specific local conditions. Under the principle, industrial provinces were required to become self-sufficient in grain, whereas agricultural provinces that lacked raw materials and industrial bases were pressed to develop heavy industry at any cost (NYB, 1981: 12-14).

⁹ It was reported that Chinese peasants produced three million of the total 11 million tons of steel in 1958 (Blecher, 1986: 73).

¹⁰ Ma and Huang, 1989: 620.

¹¹ Selden, 1988: 19. See also Blecher, 1986; Ma and Huang, 1989; Peng, 1987: 641-62; for more focused discussions on this period.

¹² Some demographers believe that famine-related human loss should include both fertility loss and excess mortality. Based on such argument, Peng (1987: 641, 649) estimates that China’s total number of human loss for the period of 1958-62 amounted to about 48 million.

¹³ Ashton, 1984: 613-45; Blecher, 1986: 72; Cannon and Jenkins, 1990: 6.

¹⁴ From very young age, we were exposed to and believed in such media and educational materials that had blamed the natural disasters and the “evil, revisionist Soviets” for the food shortage and human deaths of the early 1960s. There was an element of truth in this anyway. The deterioration of the Sino-Soviet relations after

the death of Stalin led the Soviet to demand a quick repay of its loans by China during the early 1960s at a time of China's severe domestic scarcity.

¹⁵ Natural disasters are, in fact, frequent occurrences in China. The country's southern parts are particularly vulnerable to floods whereas its northern areas to draughts. However, except for the post-GLF period, few of such natural plagues have caused severe nation-wide famines since 1949.

¹⁶ The following table gives a temporal comparison of state investment in different economic sectors prior to and in the course of rural collectivisation:

Ratios of state investment (SI) and output value (OV) in different sectors before and during agricultural collectivisation.

Year	Agriculture		Light Industry		Heavy Industry	
	SI/OV	OV	SI/OV	OV	SI/OV	OV
1952	13.4%	56.9%	9.3%	27.8%	29.5%	15.3%
1957	8.3%	43.3%	7.7%	31.2%	42.8%	25.5%

Source: China Statistical Yearbook: 1984: 20.

¹⁷ For a more detailed analysis of the household registration system, and its operational and enforcement mechanisms in China since 1949, see Christiansen, 1990: 23-42.

¹⁸ The rates of primitive accumulation accelerated with rural collectivisation are shown in the following table:

Accumulation rates in China (1952-59)

Year	1952	1953	1954	1955	1956	1957	1958	1959
Accumulation Rate	18.2%	22.4%	23.5%	22.9%	26.1%	24.9%	33.9%	43.8%

Source: Selden, 1988: 117.

¹⁹ ZNN, 1980: 4-5.

²⁰ Deprivation of the peasants in the name of the country and people as a whole was taken for granted in both the development thinking and agenda setting of the government. This is displayed in the following extract from an official document:

“The economy of our country is less developed. The peasants, therefore, *are obliged to provide capital* for the country’s socialist industrialisation. This is *also in the fundamental interests of the peasants themselves.*”
(emphasis added) (ZNN, 1980: 14)

²¹ Agricultural productivity during the collective years is reflected in the following table:

Average annual growth rates of agricultural output (1957-1977)

Gross agricultural output	2.1
Grain output	1.8
Cotton and oils	0.5
Other crops	2.2
Animal husbandry and fisheries	3.3
Net agricultural output	1.6
Agricultural labour force	2.1
Gross per capita agricultural output	0.2
Net per capita agricultural output	-0.5

Source: World Bank, 1981: 51, 54, 73.

²² According to official statistics, in 1979, more than two decades following rural collectivisation, rural brigades with a per capita income of less than 50 *yuan* accounted for over 27 percent of the total seven million brigades nation-wide (ZNN, 1980: 13). This meant that more than one fourth of the rural population led a life that barely reached the subsistence level.

²³ In 1978, ratios of rural to urban income, consumption and savings stood alarmingly at 1:2.35, 1:2.90 and 1:12.8, respectively (ZJNFK, 1993: 78).

²⁴ The work-point system was introduced at an early stage of agricultural co-operation. It rewarded each agricultural labourer work-points by up to a maximum of ten per working day. The scheme covered a range of remuneration methods, including time rates, task rates, and standard rates. Following communisation, standard rates became dominant, whereby labourers were granted fixed work-points each day in line

with their classifications on the labour scale. For elaborate discussions on the scheme, see Howe, 1978; Potter and Potter, 1990; Whyte, 1996 (1991, 1986): 368-75.

²⁵ Harding, H., 1987; Selden, 1988.

²⁶ World Bank, 1986: 30.

²⁷ Jin, 1992: 40-41; *People's Daily*, 20 March 1980.

²⁸ The situation was exacerbated by the official demographic policy characterised by its pro-natalist theme, and the tight control over population movement, which prohibited most rural out-migration.

²⁹ Selden (1988: 23) points out that while the index of output per industrial worker in state enterprises increased from 159 to 277 during the period of 1957-1978 (1952=100), the index of the enterprises' fixed assets rose nearly tenfold from 226 to 2,222 for the same period. These figures indicated high production costs and poor investment returns.

³⁰ See Davin, 1999: 138; Lavelly, 1991: 286-312.

³¹ Achievements in this aspect, however, tended to be counteracted by problems with policy implementation. With low state investment in agriculture, rural collectives had to shoulder the bulk of such public expenditure. Rural labour was frequently expropriated for the infrastructural projects by the upper-level authorities without much compensation to either the peasants or lower-level collectives. This further depleted the local economy and diminished the peasants' enthusiasm for collective work. For further discussions, see Blecher, 1986; Leeming, 1985; Putterman, 1993.

³² NYB, 1981: 12.

Chapter 4 Collectivisation and Rural Women: The Great Leap Forward

¹ Article 2, 3, 13 of *Zhonghuarenmin gongheguo hunyinfa* (The Marriage Law of the PRC) passed in 1950, in QFFGX, 1983: 72-77.

² See discussions on the phenomenon of “cadre divorce” in Introduction.

³ Engels, 1972.

⁴ See, for instance, editorials carried in the official journals *Hongqi (Red Flag)*, No. 5, 1960, and *Peking Review*, 8 March 1960.

⁵ Li and Lin, 1989.

⁶ Recent Chinese films, such as *Blue Kite* directed by Tian Zhuangzhuang and *To Live* by Zhang Yimou, have reproduced the scenes of the GLF period more truthfully. They show that women had to leave their young children for prolonged period of time to participate in dam-building projects away from home, and that whole families including school-age children were mobilised to join the “steel-making army”. They did so because they feared that they would otherwise be deemed politically backward, which would render them prone to discrimination and even persecution directed by the “class struggle” doctrine.

⁷ Croll, 1985: 24. It should be noted that Croll’s figures were largely based on governmental sources, which often served official political and ideological purposes of the time. Other studies, however, acknowledge that there have been little quantitative data available on actual female labour force participation in rural China in the 1950s, and that there were considerable variations with regions and seasons (Andors, 1983; Whyte and Whyte, 1982; Yang, 1968 [1959]). Nevertheless, it has been widely held by both Chinese and Western scholars that agricultural collectivisation and the GLF assimilated more women than ever before into collectivised labour.

⁸ Andors, 1983: 52.

⁹ Peng, 1987: 641-62.

¹⁰ Coale, 1981: 85-97.

¹¹ Peng, 1987: 641-62.

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- ¹² Ashton, et al. 1984: 613-45.
- ¹³ Zeng, *et al.*, 1993: 283-302; Ze and Ebanks, 1992: 22-46.
- ¹⁴ Chan, Madsen and Unger, 1992 (1984).
- ¹⁵ Coale and Banister, 1994: 459-79.
- ¹⁶ Xiongren Gao, 1994: 24.
- ¹⁷ Friedman, Pickowicz and Selden, 1991: 241.
- ¹⁸ Yang, 1968 (1959).
- ¹⁹ See Croll, 1983; Yang, 1968 (1959).
- ²⁰ Buck, 1956 (1937); Fei and Chang, 1945.
- ²¹ Buck, 1956 (1937); Hsu, 1949.
- ²² Jacka, 1992: 123.
- ²³ Parish and Whyte, 1978; Potter and Potter, 1990.
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*
- ²⁵ The practice was that over a year if families needed money or goods, they usually took them from the collective where they belonged. The collective's accountant recorded all the advances made to each household. By the yearend, such advances would be deducted from the total income of a household based on the aggregated value of the work-points earned by all its members. The final balance for a labourer-short family, say with many young children, thus could be well in red.
- ²⁶ See Andors, 1983; Croll, 1983.
- ²⁷ Potter and Potter, 1990.
- ²⁸ *ibid.*

²⁹ Andors, 1983; Parish and Whyte, 1978.

³⁰ Howard, 1988.

³¹ Apart from the three hard years of 1959-61, the annual population growth rate in China between 1958 and 1979 stood at 21.71 per thousand. The majority of this increase occurred in the countryside. (Information Centre of the P. R. China: 1995). Another factor to this high fertility rate was the Maoist pro-natalist population policy, which largely blocked access by the public to knowledge and methods of birth control.

Chapter 5 Collectivisation and Rural Women: The Longer-term Implications

¹ Diamond, 1975: 25-32; Parish and Whyte, 1978; Potter and Potter, 1990.

² Diamond, 1975: 25-32.

³ Friedman, Pickowicz and Selden, 1991.

⁴ Gao, 1999.

⁵ For elaborate accounts of the principle and operation of the lineage system in the Chinese countryside, see Freedman, 1958; Gao, 1999; Watson, 1985; Potter and Potter, 1990.

⁶ Potter and Potter, 1990: 251.

⁷ Yang, 1968 (1959): 80.

⁸ Parish and Whyte, 1978.

⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁰ Judd, 1992: 356.

¹¹ See Parish and Whyte, 1978; Potter and Potter, 1990.

¹² This principle was represented in the “class struggle” approach, which classified people on the basis of their family background, and the household registration system, which effectively ascribed low status connected to rural identity for life to people born in the countryside.

¹³ See Yang, 1968 (1959).

¹⁴ Parish and Whyte, 1978.

¹⁵ Mao, 1991 (1951, 1927).

¹⁶ ZFF and SFY, 1991: 338.

¹⁷ Davin, 1976: 104.

¹⁸ ZFF and SFY, 1991: 10.

¹⁹ For instance, although arranged marriages were imposed on both young men and women in traditional society, the emotional and physical sufferings caused by the practice were much greater for women than for men. Men involved in loveless marriages were traditionally permitted to obtain “emotional and sexual compensations” from “complementary” institutions such as concubinage and prostitution.

²⁰ Potter and Potter, 1990.

²¹ *ibid.*

²² Military service was sought after by rural youth in the collective years because it could sometimes land the demobilised soldier in an urban industrial job, which would have otherwise been beyond their reach.

²³ Higher education achieved by people from “red” (poor peasant) family background often guaranteed professional urban employment.

²⁴ The preferential treatment granted to the male sex in education is reflected in the ratio of female to male illiteracy in China, which stood between 3.2:1 and 4.1:1 for those born during the 1950s and 1960s, respectively (World Bank, 1997: 48-49).

²⁵ See Lively, 1991: 286-312; Potter and Potter, 1990: 206.

²⁶ See Davin, 1999: chpt. 8.

²⁷ In the neighbourhood where I grew up in Tianjin, only one man married a woman from the countryside. The woman was young and pretty, but the man was mentally retarded.

²⁸ Jacka, 1992: 117-43, 1997: chpt. 2; Johnson, 1983: 173-76.

²⁹ Jacka, 1992: 123.

³⁰ Zhang and Ma, 1992: 77.

³¹ Jin, 1993: 34. The article is a recollection of the author's experience during the GPCR when she, like many other young people in her age, was sent down to Yan'an area for "re-education" by the poor peasants.

³² At the Seventh Plenum of the CCP Central Committee held in April 1959, Mao decided to step down as head of state, and the position was conferred on Mao's rival Liu Shaoqi shortly afterwards. However, Mao never relinquished the essentially more powerful posts as the Party Chief and the Chairman of the Military Commission.

³³ The Mao-initiated political campaigns, such as the Socialist Education Movement (*shejiao yundong*) and the Four Clean-ups (*siqing*), created many obstacles to the implementation of the readjustment policies in the early 1960s. For further discussions on the period and the effects of the economic readjustment and consolidation programme, see Dittmer, 1987; Dorrill, 1971; MacFarquhar, 1983; Schram, 1986: 613-24.

PART II PROGRESS OR RETROGRESSION FOR CHINESE WOMEN? -- THE GPCR REVISITED

¹ The GPCR has been defined differently in terms of its duration. Most earlier studies defined it as lasting from 1966 to late 1968 or early 1969, a period characterised by nation-wide chaos and destruction by the Red Guards and their violent attacks on prominent figures (Karnow, 1972; Karol, 1975 [1973]). More recent studies, such as those by Dittmer (1987), and Joseph, Wong and Zweig (1991), redefined the movement as formally beginning in mid-1966, when the first big character poster (*dazibao*) was put up in Beijing University, and ending with Mao's death in September 1976, which was followed by the arrest of the Gang of Four, the infamous GPCR Group.

Chapter 6 "Class Struggle" and Its Implications for Women

¹ The main theme of the "theory of continuous revolution" was that a massive conspiracy to restore capitalism was taking place in most communist countries including China. This conspiracy was formed by the joint forces of Western imperialists, the reactionary social classes in the communist countries and their representatives within the communist parties. Mao's prescriptions were to wage "class struggle" relentlessly and adhere to the proletarian dictatorship so as to keep alive the revolution. For further discussions, see Dittmer, 1987; Schram, 1986: 613-24.

² For more detailed analysis on the origin, theoretical basis, and objectives of the GPCR, see Joseph, Wong and Zweig: 1991; MacFarquhar: 1983; Pye: 1986: 596-612; Tsou: 1986.

³ These were the people labelled during the various officially-launched campaigns after 1949 as the "landlord", the "rich farmer" (both were classified according to the size of their land possession and the number of labourers they hired before the Land Reform in the early 1950s), the "counterrevolutionary", the "bad element" (which was a catch-all category including people seen as "promiscuous") and the "rightist" (a category that was created in the 1957 anti-rightist campaign against intellectuals).

Once labelled, they were subject to special surveillance and control by the local security personnel.

⁴ The Party and government power at various levels was seized quickly by the “revolutionary rebels” (*zaofanpai*), or the Red Guards, encouraged by Mao at the initial stage of the GPCR. Many Party and government officials then fell into the categories with their defeat in the central and local power struggles. The most notable example was President Liu Shaoqi, who was labelled the “biggest capitalist roader” in China and died of persecution during the GPCR.

⁵ The more independent-thinking intelligentsia had long been distrusted by the Party-state, as demonstrated in the 1957 anti-rightist campaign. Such distrust deepened during the GPCR when intellectuals and professionals were pilloried as “white experts” and “reactionary academic authorities”.

⁶ See Chan, Madsen and Unger, 1992 (1984); Gao, 1999: chpt. 9.

⁷ Estimates of the unnatural deaths induced by the GPCR vary. The official Chinese figure was about 20 million, reported by the Hong Kong newspaper *Ming Pao* (26 October 1981: 3), but it is unclear whether this figure was based on statistical evidence or just a casual guess. Shalom (1984) estimates that the political casualties in the early stage of the GPCR (1966-69) were around 400,000.

⁸ The patriarchal and patrilineal definition of class was typically expressed in a GPCR slogan: “The son of a hero father is always a great man; a reactionary father produces nothing but a bastard.” (*laozi yingxiong er haohan; laozi fandong er hundan*).

⁹ Chan, Madsen and Unger, 1992 (1984): chpt. 5.

¹⁰ See also Liang and Shapiro’s *After the Nightmare* (1986: chpt. 6), in which they recorded the traumatic experiences of three women affected by the official “class struggle” and “blood lineage” doctrines. Although the women’s individual experiences varied, the sauce of their plights was shared -- they were incriminated and held down at the bottom of society for their husbands or fathers.

¹¹ One influential literary school that recollects the experiences of ordinary Chinese in the period and arouses the most resonance in the general public is the so-called "school of wounded literature" (*shanghen wenxue*). Representative writings of this school can be found in Barme and Lee, 1979; and Link, 1983, 1984. See also recollections by the former Red Guards, such as Gao, 1987; and Liang and Shapiro, 1983.

¹² Chang, 1993 (1991). Chang's grandfather died when her mother was barely two.

¹³ Cheng's daughter was born in Australia. In those days, people with overseas associations were often suspected to be imperialist spies, and treated accordingly based on such speculations.

¹⁴ Cheng, 1987. The young woman's father, Cheng's husband, was an ex-Guomindang (the Nationalist) official who died before the GPCR; and her mother, Cheng, a pilloried "imperialist spy", was locked behind bars for more than six years during the GPCR.

¹⁵ Tsai, 1990 (1987). Tsai Chin learnt her family's plights from her brother, who stayed in China during the GPCR. See also Liang and Shapiro, 1983. They reported that one of Liang's aunts, a devoted scientist, was targeted, tortured and driven to suicide during the GPCR because she had relatives in Taiwan.

¹⁶ Tsai, 1990 (1987).

¹⁷ Thurston, 1984-85: 599-620; 1985: 5-27.

¹⁸ A cursing expression directed at the offspring of any category of the "class enemies", which literally means "son of a bitch".

¹⁹ Thurston, 1985: 14.

²⁰ Chang, 1993 (1991).

²¹ Chang, 1993 (1991): chpt. 16; Gao, 1987: chpt. 8.

²² Chang, 1993 (1991).

²³ The patriarchal, patrilineal basis of the term *zhulian jiuzu* is demonstrated by the very definition of the phrase *jiuzu* (*zhulian* means incrimination), which literally means nine generations of a patrilineage (Cihai Bianji Weiyuanhui 1980 [1979]: 64). For China's dynastic decree that held a whole family or lineage liable to execution for the alleged crimes of one member, see Cihai Bianji Weiyuanhui, 1980 [1979]: 644; Johnson, 1979.

²⁴ An ironic example which shows the shared origin of the Nationalist practice and the Communist "blood lineage" theme is the story about the Red Detachment of Women (*hongse niangzijun*) (Liu, 1991: 6-9). In the early 1930s, young women on the Hainan Island in South China joined the Communist revolution and formed the first female Red Army. The Guomindang government soon enforced an act stipulating that the families and lineages were to be accountable for any family member's revolutionary involvement. Consequently, some women soldiers were forced to marry members of the Guomindang army for the safety of their families and lineages. Ironically, as the Communist assumed a similar principle represented in its "class struggle" and "blood lineage" notions on its assumption of national power, the women soldiers, who had fought bravely for the Communist cause, were kept down in the new society for their forced marriages.

²⁵ I use the term in the sense of "born inferiority" implying "ascribed status", which is shared by sexism and racism.

²⁶ Both of the women were Mao's relatives who rocketed to leading positions in provincial and central governments during the GPCR.

Chapter 7 A New Cult versus an Old Worship and the Party-State vis-à-vis the Family Patriarch

¹ Two such typical cases are Zhang Zhixin and Yu Luohe. Zhang, a female Party official in a northern Chinese city, was executed in 1975 allegedly for her

"counterrevolutionary acts" because she openly questioned the GPCR and its politics. Yu was a young worker from Beijing. His alleged crime was his criticism of the CCP's "class struggle" and "blood lineage" themes. He was jailed and executed in 1970. For detailed reports of the two cases, see *Guangming Ribao*, 1980.

² Almost all the books carrying general knowledge were defined as "bourgeois", hence one of the Red Guards' first actions was to smash or set fire to schools' libraries. As, in those days, people's houses could be raided at any time by the Red Guards, those with personal collections of books tried every means to dispose of them for fear that these books would bring them serious trouble. For vivid descriptions of the book-burning scenes, or the nightmares experienced by book lovers during the GPCR, see Chan, Madsen and Unger, 1992 (1984): chpt. 4; Potter and Potter, 1990: chpt. 4; Zhang, 1993: 5.

³ For elaborate discussions of the GPCR's personality cult and the associated political rituals, see Chan, Madsen and Unger, 1992 (1984): chpts. 3-4; Parish and Whyte, 1978: chpt. 13; Potter and Potter, 1990: chpts. 4, 10.

⁴ Mao, 1991 (1951, 1927).

⁵ In traditional Chinese society, government officials were often referred to as "parent-officials" (*fumuguan*) and the people as "children people" (*zimin*).

⁶ If we consider the actual effect of rural collectivisation, the lineal authority, which was consolidated in a changed form as discussed in part I, should be added as well.

⁷ See Yuan, 1993: 49-52.

⁸ A *danwei* was the workshop or factory for a worker; the team, brigade or commune for a peasant; the department or university for a student; the school for a child; the neighbourhood committee or local police station for a retired person and a housewife, and so on.

⁹ I learnt in an interview with a Chinese demographer during fieldwork that the demand for a work-unit certificate from a woman who sought abortion was practically

abandoned since the early 1990s, although there was no explicit official regulation stipulating to that effect. Interestingly, the grounds for this abandonment was, once again, considerations of the policy outcome with respect to the government birth-control goals instead of women's rights and interests.

¹⁰ More recent studies and retrospective accounts of the GPCR have provided more examples of the arranged marriages and forced divorces by the Party-state. See, for instance, Liang and Shapiro, 1983; Yuan, 1993, 49-52.

Chapter 8 Ideological Purification and Cultural Asceticism

¹ See Evans, 1997.

² This asceticism was partly shown in the suspension during the GPCR of the two major popular magazines for the young and women, *Zhongguo Qingnian* (*Chinese Youth*) and *Zhongguo Funü* (*Chinese Women*), which dealt with concerns such as love and marriage. For further discussions of the GPCR's asceticism expressed in everyday life, see Chang, 1993 (1991); Cheng, 1987; Evans, 1997; Gao, 1987.

³ Davin, 1976. Such an official interpretation can be found in publications as recently as the 1990s (See Wu, 1980: 68-72; Gao, 1991), although in practice, the 1980 revised Marriage Law significantly has relaxed official restrictions on divorce.

⁴ Chang, 1993 (1991).

⁵ See Evans, 1997, for a further discussion of official control over information on reproduction and reproductive health during the Cultural Revolution.

⁶ Apart from abortion, the young unmarried woman did not have other options, as the consequence of having an illegitimate child was even more damaging, thus excluded from consideration.

⁷ A "worn-out shoe" (*poxie*) is a specific Chinese defamatory term meaning "too much used", which is usually utilised by males to refer to women who are considered

sexually promiscuous. However, there has never been an equivalent term in the Chinese language to depict a man seen in the same light.

⁸ Walder, 1986.

⁹ This usually meant receiving termination operations with the help of relatives or friends, such as visiting a clinic where the gynaecologist was a friend of a relative. Thanks to such connections, the gynaecologist would turn a blind eye to the cause of the woman's pregnancy.

¹⁰ Zhou, 1989: 279-88.

¹¹ Chang, 1993 (1991).

¹² Evans, 1997: 2.

¹³ Cheng, 1987: 64-65. For more examples of this enforced uniformity in appearance, see Chang, 1993 (1991): chpt. 16; Gao, 1987: chpt. 9; Liang and Shapiro, 1983: chpt. 5.

¹⁴ Gao, 1987: 75-76.

¹⁵ Walder, 1986.

Chapter 9 The "Sameness" Approach

¹ Dazhai was a poor village located in northern China's Shanxi Province. It first became known to the Chinese public in the early 1960s when Mao called the entire nation to learn from Dazhai, which was selected as an advanced example of upholding collectivisation. During the GPCR, Dazhai was boosted further to extraordinary national prominence as a model embodying Mao's ideas of rural development. Following Mao's death in 1976, the Dazhai model was initially downplayed, and then officially repudiated in 1981. It was revealed then that during the GPCR, Dazhai's presumably independently made achievements had, in fact, been obtained through heavy state subsidies, and that from 1973-77, Dazhai had continuously fabricated its

production figures. For further analyses of the Dazhai model, see Burns, 1983: 143-72; Meisner, 1983: 225-47; Unger, 1985: 122-39; Zweig, 1985: 267-93.

² ZF, 1965: 12-14.

³ Daqing was the national industrial model set by Mao.

⁴ Official media's publicity frequently attributed these women's deeds to the "glorious Mao Zedong Thought" and associated the "Iron Girls" with the "correct line of Chairman Mao" in opposition to the alleged "bourgeois reactionary line" represented by Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping. This, in combination with the fact that the members of the "Iron Girls" were almost unexceptionally poor peasants or manual labourers who were viewed as "red" and trustworthy by the authorities, tinged the "Iron Girl" model with strong GPCR political contents and purposes.

⁵ Most of the "Iron Girls" were young, single women. For instance, in the Dazhai case, of the 23 members of the Iron Girl Team, the oldest was 20 and the youngest 14 (SF, 1965: 12-14).

⁶ Jacka, 1997: 123.

⁷ For further discussions on the phenomenon, such as women officials "androgenising tendency" and the rejection of the category "women writers" by some prominent female writers in China in the post-Mao years, see Sheng, 1993: 5; Shi, 1992: 36; Ye, 1989: 71-78.

⁸ Evans, 1997: 13.

⁹ The only "eight models" allowed public performance during the GPCR were seven modern Beijing operas and one ballet, whose production was under direct supervision of Jiang Qing. These constituted the bulk of the "rich spiritual food" consumed by some one billion Chinese for over a decade.

¹⁰ The female protagonists in the model operas or the officially presented "Iron Girls" usually did not have husbands or families, or personal feelings of any sort. In addition, they often talked in a manner characterised by reciting Mao's quotations and

official slogans. For these reasons, the Chinese, both men and women, tend to view such female images as “unnatural” or “pretentious” (*buziran*).

¹¹ Evans, 1997: 2.

¹² See Verschuur-Basse (1996), whose truthful reports of Chinese women’s life stories told of women’s general attitudes towards the GPCR.

¹³ Evans, 1997: 11.

¹⁴ Due to the chaos and disruptions in statistical procedures during the earlier part of the GPCR, data for that period, that is, the second part of the 1960s were unavailable.

¹⁵ ZFF and SFY, 1991: 125.

¹⁶ Well-educated people were branded “stinking intellectuals” (*chou laojiu*) during the GPCR, and experienced discrimination in many aspects of life. One measure to punish intellectuals was to send the professionals and university staff down to the countryside to do manual labour and undergo “ideological remoulding” through learning from the poor peasants. The consequence was that the more education that one got, the more discrimination that one and one’s family would suffer from.

¹⁷ Information obtained in informal interviews with Chinese students in Strathclyde University, who came from Hunan Province in South China, where one of China’s two largest lakes Dongting is located. See also *China News Digest (Huaxia Wenzhai)*, supplement No. 22, July 11, 1993, for reports of such “remaking nature” (*gaitian huandi*) projects during the GPCR.

¹⁸ Chang, 1993 (1991): 624-25.

¹⁹ During the GPCR, the official documents or media reports on the successes of such efforts were invariably based on the quotas fulfilled in disregard of their actual outcomes and without deduction of their real costs. This “formalistic” tendency, coupled with the practices of inflating and fabricating production figures, was largely accountable for the unreliability of the official sources of the time.

²⁰ Andors, 1983: 122.

²¹ Thurston, 1985: 5-27.

²² *Ibid.* See also Verschuur-Basse, 1996, for more examples of this phenomenon.

²³ Thurston, 1984-85: 605-6.

PART III UNDERSTANDING CHANGES IN WOMEN'S STATUS IN THE CONTEXT OF THE POST-MAO REFORMS

¹ An explosive expression of this amalgamated social discontent was the April 5th movement in Beijing in 1976. The event saw hundreds of thousands of Beijing residents gathering in Tiananmen Square to protest against the GPCR Group and its policies. The movement was then officially labelled "counter-revolutionary", and thus bloodily suppressed.

² Mao died on 9 September 1976. Less than one month later on 7 October, Hua Guofeng became Chairman of the CCP. The factional fight for power within the Party soon turned white-hot, and Hua, in an attempt to consolidate his new position as the head of the Party, ordered the detention of the Gang of Four led by Mao's widow Jiang Qing.

Chapter 10 Major Policy Shifts in the Post-Mao Years

¹ From 16-21 July 1977, the CCP Tenth Central Committee convened its third plenary session, at which Deng Xiaoping staged his third political comeback and regained his post in early 1976 as the first vice premier. His previous falls from powerful positions in the Party occurred at the commencement of the GPCR in 1966 and on the explosion of the April 5th Incident in 1976. On the former occasion, he was branded as China's second biggest capitalist roader after President Liu Shaoqi. On the latter, he was charged with the Incident's backstage organisation and conspiracy, and

accordingly removed from office. With Deng's re-ascendance in 1977 came the official reversal of the verdict on the April 5th Tiananmen Incident.

² By early 1981, among Mao's close associates, only Hua Guofeng managed to remain in his leading position in the Party, but without commanding much real power and prestige. Hua was finally replaced by Deng's then close ally Hu Yaobang as the Party Chairman at the Sixth Plenary Session of the CCP's Eleventh Central Committee in June 1981.

³ CCP Central Committee, 1978.

⁴ Although in both the early 1960s and post-Mao periods, family farming was initiated at the grass-roots before being taken as an official policy, a crucial difference has existed in the political contexts. In the former period when Mao gained the upper hand over his political rivals, the rural economic readjustments were carried out with frequent high-level interruptions. Before long, these policies were repudiated and reversed. In contrast, during the latter period, similar measures have been taken more thoroughly and consistently. Another significant distinction is that during the former period, the economic readjustments were conceived within a largely unchallenged framework of centrally-planned economy, which perceived the increase in extractable rural surplus for the expansion of heavy industry as the ultimate goal for improving agricultural performance. In contrast, in the latter period, the rural reforms have posed a fundamental challenge to and negation of the urban-biased model of economic central planning, and hence a vital component of the overall strategic shift. For further discussions on the economic readjustment policies and their frustrated implementations at local and central levels, see Chan, Madsen and Unger, 1992 (1984); NYB, 1980: 12-14; Riskin, 1987; Siu, 1989; Xue, 1981; Yang and Li, 1980.

⁵ The effects of the readjustment policy in these respects are partly shown in the following table:

Growth of China's Major Economic Indexes in 1965 as against 1962

Item	Increase (%)
National Income	50.3
Public Revenue	51
Total of Foreign Trade	13
Total Circulation of Commodities	9
Grain	21.6
Cotton	173
Livestock	20
Pig	67

(Source: Ma and Huang, 1989: 621.)

⁶ For a historical account of how local peasants and cadres took the initiative to pursue self-defined economic interests against the state's systematic homogenisation of sectoral and local needs and interests, and how such local actions finally led to a comprehensive reform of the entrenched system, see Wang, 1989; Zhang, 1989.

⁷ ZNN, 1984: 69.

⁸ Chen and Zhong, 1988; NDZ, 1986: 9.

⁹ The information was obtained from informal interviews with Chinese students of rural background in Edinburgh and Glasgow.

¹⁰ See Li, 1999: 241-64.

¹¹ Local authorities also levy certain taxes on farm households either arbitrarily or for genuine public/collective good purposes.

¹² CCP Central Committee, 1978, 1981.

¹³ CCP Central Committee, 1978.

¹⁴ Contrary to the practices in the collective years of setting artificially lowered prices for state procurement of agricultural produce, the state has, since 1979, raised its purchasing prices for agricultural goods by considerable margins. Data detailing price rises for agricultural produce can be found in the various issues of the Chinese *Agricultural Yearbook* (ZNN) and *Statistical Yearbook of China* (ZTN).

¹⁵ In 1985, the government abandoned this 30-year-old system and replaced it with market mechanisms (CCP Central Committee, 1985: 1-3).

¹⁶ After 1979, the rationing scheme as a component of the household registration system (*hukou zhidu*) was greatly undermined with the gradual opening of the rural and urban markets and the considerable relaxation in rural-urban migration. In 1993, grain rationing was formally abandoned in most parts of the country as prices were further decontrolled in response to supply and demand in the market. However, despite these changes, the basic element of the household registration regime, the registration booklet (*hukoubu*), which has served as an internal passport and determined people's rural or urban identity at birth, has been retained.

¹⁷ Several factors have contributed to this. With decollectivisation and greater market activities, rural local authorities are no longer able to monitor the movement of the farmers. The revitalisation and opening of markets, the re-emergence of a labour market and the expansion of the private and non-state economy in the cities have produced erosive effects on the food rationing system and engendered more employment opportunities. All these have made it easier for rural migrants to survive and to find jobs in urban areas, hence setting the scene for the massive rural-urban migration later witnessed in Chinese cities.

¹⁸ The burgeoning of rural and urban markets came during the first half of the 1980s when the reform gradually removed the strict restraints on the frequency and scale of the rural fairs as well as the kinds of goods tradable therein, and the prohibition of non-state commodity and labour markets in both rural and urban areas. For specific policy changes, see CCP Central Committee, 1978: 1, 1983: 1-5, 1984: 1-4.

¹⁹ When a rural household expands its sideline production, which is either self-initiated or contracted, into operation on an enlarged scale involving the full-time labour of one or more family members, this household can then be defined as a specialised household. In a further development, there are several specialised households joining together to form a co-operative venture. Such a co-operative may then be classified as a rural enterprise. For further discussions on the development of

China's rural industry and its diversified forms, see Chen and Zhong, 1988; Odgaard, 1992; Ody, 1992; Zhang, 1990.

²⁰ For detailed analysis of this "bottom-up" aspect of policy formation, see Kelliher, 1992; Zhou, 1996.

²¹ Judd, 1994.

Chapter 11 Rural Reforms as Experienced by Women in the Village

¹ See Judd, 1992: 338-56.

² Zhou, 1996.

³ China's social security system under central economic planning operated in such a way that most of the welfare programmes were solely supported by enterprises rather than jointly financed by state, employers and individuals. This created a peculiar situation among state enterprises in which the higher the proportion of female employees it had, the higher the enterprise's operational costs. However, in the non-market economic structure, this did not constitute a problem in enterprise management, which included fulfilling state quotas rather than responding to market demands. Consequently, most of the state enterprises were operating at heavy losses, which were then filled by subsidies from state revenues. The industrial restructuring undertaken since the second half of the 1980s has gradually shifted state enterprises' attention towards efficiency and profits. One of the unwitting consequences of this reform has been the growing reluctance on the part of state enterprises to hire female workers, and disproportionately high female redundancy, as enterprises have tried to reduce operational costs. The issue has triggered heated debates in the Chinese press, women's magazines and academic circles since the late 1980s. For further discussions on the question, see Chen, 1990: 39-41; Lu, Z., 1994: 16-20; Sun, 1992: 24-26; Wang, J., 1992: 6-15; Xu, 1989: 31-35.

⁴ One could argue, of course, that the reform, instead of removing or reducing the existing benefits in the cities, should extend the urban social security system to cover the countryside. But an examination of the system reveals that as a product of the centrally planned economy, it no longer fits into the changed circumstances of an emerging market economy. Responses to this situation have been growing social and political pressures to reform the system in urban areas in order to find solutions to the difficulties recently faced by women and other groups, such as those made redundant or unemployed, and to introduce a basic social security programme in the countryside. See Li, D., 1995: 4; Wang, Q, 1992: 21-23; Yu, 1995: 4; Zhang, 1995: 4, for elaborate discussions on the system and proposed prescriptions.

⁵ A "big pot" is used to describe the kind of distribution system that sought absolute equalisation: just as people had the same food from a large pot in the mess hall, they had the same portion of grain from the collective as everyone else.

⁶ For an analysis of the project from a different perspective, see Rai and Zhang, 1994: 51-66.

⁷ Miao Jianping, an official from the Ministry of Agriculture, expressed this consideration in a 1991 report on rural economic development and women's role in it (Miao, 1992: 14-26). See also discussions by Judd (1990: 23-42) on the development of "commodity economy" as an alternative strategy adopted by rural women to promote their own interests and enhance their status in the family and local community.

⁸ Zhao, 1994: 3.

⁹ Both calculations deducted the production cost, and the information was provided by Dongdatun village officials.

¹⁰ See Chen, 1990 [1937, 1928].

¹¹ See Jin and Liu, 1998: part 4; QFFSJX, 1993: 283-88; Yang, Yang and Tang, 1996.

¹² Huang, 1992: 2-5.

¹³ See, for example, Howard, 1988; Watson, 1984: 98.

¹⁴ Detailed data and information at the national level on the rising living standards, measured by agricultural output, rural *per capita* income and saving, housing, the level of rural poverty, and so on, can be found in Lu, Y., 1994: 8; Pu: 1994: 3; Qin, 1993: 3; Ren, 1994: 3; World Bank, 1997; XNA, 1994: 1; ZTN, 1985; ZTZ, 1991.

¹⁵ Lüzhuangzi Xiang Council, 1982: 9, 11; 1992: 11, 13.

¹⁶ Information provided by Mr. Hou Fa, the village head.

¹⁷ Information provided by village officials.

¹⁸ *Kang* is a heatable brick bed occupying an entire side of a bedroom built in rural houses.

¹⁹ During the GPCR, pupils and students were encouraged to “rebel” against teachers and educational authorities.

²⁰ Information provided by Zhao Cai, deputy head of the village.

²¹ See analysis by Witter (1997: 105-09), who has cautioned about the “golden ageing the past” assumptions and pointed out that the myth may be attributable to the lack of independent data from the period prior to reforms.

²² See Kaufman, Zhang and Fang, 1997: 61-65; Tan, L. 1994: 2-9; Zhang, K. 1994: 20-25.

²³ Bloom, Gerald and Shenglan Tang, 1999: 951-60; Carrin, Ron, and Yang, *et al.*, 1999: 961-72.

²⁴ ZJNFK, 1993: 113, 118.

²⁵ Huang, Q., 1992: 2-5.

²⁶ The official data about the average annual wages in different economic sectors of the country indicate that the labour reward in agriculture remained low in 1992 in comparison with other occupations, as shown in the following table:

Annual Wages for Varied Economic Sectors in China in 1992 (yuan)

Agriculture -- 1,725	Industry--2,774	Construction--3,087
Transportation--3,178	Commerce -- 2,168	Food services--2,257

Source: GTJ, 1994: 3.

²⁷ ZJNFK, 1993: 118. A “poor” county is classified on the basis of a *per capita* income of below 200 yuan.

²⁸ Wang, 1993: 4-8.

²⁹ Bao, 1991: 254.

³⁰ See, for example, an article entitled Women Becoming Mainstay of Agricultural Labour Force in China (Zheng and Wang, 1995: 4), and an official statement of the Chinese women’s status in *Renmin Ribao* (ZGXB, 1994: 3-4).

³¹ Wang, 1993: 8.

³² SF, 1990.

Chapter 12 Reproduction, Matrimonial Practices, Female Education and Employment

¹ See analyses in parts I and II.

² For further information and policy statements to that effect, see Gao, J. 1994: 6; GXB, 1995: 1; Peng, 1995: 5.

³ Greenhalgh and Li, 1995: 601-41; Johnson, 1993: 61-87; Ocko, 1991: 313-46; Wen, 1993: 509-21; Zeng, Tu and Gu *et al.*, 1993: 283-302.

⁴ Davin, 1990: 81-91; Li and Cooney, 1993: 277-96; Ze and Ebanks, 1992: 22-46.

⁵ See Greenhalgh, 1993: 219-50; Greenhalgh and Li, 1995: 601-41; Zhang, 1999: 202-30.

⁶ Greenhalgh, 1993: 219-50; Zhang, 1999: 202-30.

⁷ Greenhalgh, 1994: 4.

⁸ For an in-depth study on these changes, see Parish and Whyte, 1978.

⁹ Cohen, 1992: 357-77; Yan, 1997: 191-212.

¹⁰ See Davin, 1976, 1988: 137-46; Wolf, 1972, 1985.

¹¹ Many of the rural migrant workers could only talk in their local dialect or with strong local accent when they first arrived in the city, hence found it difficult to communicate effectively with urban residents, most of whom spoke Mandarin or standard Chinese.

¹² Schooling provided by private tutors was the main form of education in Chinese villages before 1949.

¹³ In his study of rural industrialisation and its effects on the socio-economic relations in rural Sichuan Province in Southwest China, Yang (1994: 159-79) observed a similar trend as discussed here. His focus, however, was on the expanded networks and social contact of the villagers with rural industrialisation, which extended beyond familial and lineage relations in a natural village to include affinal ties and external market linkages.

¹⁴ See Judd, 1992: 338-56; Li, 1999: 241-64.

¹⁵ Xu, 1997: 29-34.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Cao, 1994: 46.

¹⁸ See the website of the Institute of Women's Studies, the All China Women's Federation: <http://www.cwomen.ac.cn>.

¹⁹ Information provided by Mrs. Wang Jinming.

Chapter 13 Continuity and Change: The Interaction of Gender Relations with Legislation and Social Policy

¹ Gao, 1999: 237.

² Cohen, 1992: 368.

³ Judd, 1992: 338-56; 1994.

⁴ The expressions in Chinese of uxori-local marriage vary spatially as well as in different linguistic contexts. In some southern provinces such as Jiangxi, the term used is *zhaozhui* (Gao, 1999: 235), whereas in the area around Dongdatun, it is called *zhaoxu*, which literally means a marriage involving a moving-in son-in-law. A more colloquial expression is *dao cha men*, which means a reversal of the conventional practice by a man marrying into a woman's house. The traditional term is *ruzhuai* and that for the moving-in son-in-law is *zhuixu*. Historically, however, these terms had discriminative meanings for both the families and the men involved (Cihai Bianji Weiyuanhui, 1980 [1979]: 309, 1439). A written expression, which is adopted in academic writings and formal, legal documentation is *congqiju* (*congfuju* for virilocal marriage), which literally means that a man follows his wife in residence at marriage. In the thesis, I have adopted either the formal version of *congqiju* or the local expression of *zhaoxu* to refer to this type of post-marital arrangement.

⁵ Article 8 and Article 16 of the 1980 Marriage Law in ZHF, 1980: 64, 65.

⁶ Article 9 of the Inheritance Law and Chapter V of the Law on the Protection of Rights and Interests of Women. See also analyses by Keith, 1997: 29-55; Ocko, 1991: 313-46; Palmer, 1995: 110-34.

⁷ Information provided by Sun Hongmei, the Xiang's family planning official.

⁸ See Buxbaum, 1978: 217-16; Cohen, 1992: 357-77; Ocko, 1991: 313-46.

⁹ Ocko, 1991: 330.

¹⁰ Another routine major expenditure of rural households is on funerals for the older generation.

¹¹ Although bride wealth has occupied a prominent place in Chinese marriage practices (See Baker, 1979; Freedman, 1958), the importance of dowry (*jiazhuang*) for a daughter's marriage should not be neglected (See Harrell, 1992: 323-37; Ocko, 1991: 313-46; Watson, 1991: 347-68). Nevertheless, with respect to its significance as "pre-mortem inheritance", dowries received by daughters from parents at marriage are much lower in value than bride wealth provided by parents for their sons' marriages.

¹² This trend of mounting expenses on a son's marriage has also been reported by other researchers on social and cultural changes in rural China, See Gao, 1999: chpt. 12; Harrel, 1992: 323-37; Yan, 1997: 191-212.

¹³ Cohen, 1992: 357-77; Yan, 1997: 191-212.

¹⁴ Similar, subtle changes in the perception of daughters' value among rural women have been noticed by Greenhalgh and Li (1995: 601-41). Their interpretation of the "ideal family" preferred by village women in Shaanxi Province, which should include at least one son and if possible a daughter as well, is that "sons were expected to meet parents' economic needs, while daughters were to fulfil their emotional ones." (Greenhalgh and Li, 1995: 614)

¹⁵ See Judd, 1989: 525-44.

¹⁶ Since women generally marry up, they are often in a better position to help their parents than their brothers. See Lavelly, 1991: 286-312, for an analysis of women's upward mobility through marriage.

¹⁷ See Honig and Hershatter, 1988.

¹⁸ See Gao, 1999: chpt. 14.

¹⁹ This is partly manifest in the sharp rise in the divorce rate since the enactment of the 1980 Marriage Law from 3 percent recorded in 1979 to 13.18 percent in 1997. See Chen, 1993: 417-40; Honig and Hershatter, 1988: 210; Li, L., 1995: 34-39; the website: <http://www.cwomen.ac.cn>.

²⁰ See Ahmad and Hussain, 1991: 247-304; Feuchtwang, 1987: 173-210.

²¹ In this table, the figures of the national percentage in relation to the percentages of urban and rural areas, respectively, do not seem to be correct (the first should be the mean of the sum of the latter two). However, there has no explanation whatsoever in the original data source, and my inquiries to the editors of the book via writing and emails have received no response. These unmatched figures are, nonetheless, used here to gain a glimpse of an overall picture of the intra-household decision-making in the absence of better data.

²² See Greenhalgh, 1993: 219-50; Greenhalgh and Li, 1995: 601-41.

²³ Information obtained from the xiang and village officials.

²⁴ According to Mrs. Liu, in light of relevant official documents, the veteran Party members were entitled to subsidiary benefits from the state, the amount of which varied with their years of Party standing.

²⁵ My judgement about Mrs. Liu's competence and leadership quality was based on my contacts with her and the comments that I heard from her colleagues and the officials at the village level.

Chapter 14 Female Migrants in the Urban Labour Market

¹ Under food rationing, food coupons were allocated to each urban household in accordance with its size, guaranteeing the urbanites state subsidised staple food. Therefore, food coupons always had a monetary value, and were often used by the

urbanites to trade for non-staple foodstuffs such as eggs and cooking oil, which were also rationed, in the urban black market.

² This represented an official control mechanism at the grass roots level in urban areas.

³ Private economic activities such as this were branded “capitalist tendencies” before reforms, and hence deemed illegitimate.

⁴ There was a wholesale fruit market in north-eastern Beijing near the Department of Journalism of the Graduate School of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, where I studied in the mid-1980s. During my visits to the market with my school-mates in autumn season, I noticed that there were active female dealers in the male-dominated market.

⁵ Here the word “bang” conveys the meaning of a great quantity, or a large group of people.

⁶ Zhang Jianwei, a reporter from *Zhongguo Qingnian Bao* (*China Youth News*), reports that the ratios of male-female migrant workers in the Pearl River Delta in southern China in 1993 were: 1:3 in Shekou Industrial District; 1:5 in Longgang Industrial District; 1:7 in Buji Industrial District (Zhang, J., 1994: 44). The fact that female migrant workers have outnumbered males in these districts is closely related to the characteristics of the industrial and economic sectors of those areas. This, in turn, has mirrored a marked gender division of labour, which I shall analyse in detail later.

⁷ The Research Group on the Yearly Analysis of the Chinese Economy (ZJNFK) reported in 1993 that based on their rough estimates, the proportion of the mobile population to the non-agricultural population in China’s 23 medium and large cities grew from some six percent in 1980 to about 24 percent in 1992, of whom approximately 60 percent were rural migrant workers (ZJNFK, 1993: 144-46). These figures indicate an unprecedented geographical and social mobility of the rural population in the post-Mao years.

⁸ Zhong, 1994: 5.

⁹ Most of the girls in this sub-group had junior high school education, whereas the majority of those employed in the service sector did not finish primary school.

¹⁰ The definition of the “same birthplace” is highly flexible in the Chinese use of the term. It can refer to the same village, township, county or province, depending on circumstances. Regardless of the context, the term *laoxiang* always implies a closer relationship than general acquaintance and carries a sense of mutual obligation to help each other in need.

¹¹ According to a report by China Association of the Aged (*Zhongguo laonian xiehui*), the elderly population defined as above the age of 60 has grown at an annual rate of about 3.3 percent in the 1990s. In large cities such as Shanghai, Beijing and Tianjin, the aged accounted for over 10 percent of the total population of these cities at the end of 1994 (Li, 1996: 4).

¹² The youth league and the trade union share similar organisational features with the women’s federation, in that none of them are totally autonomous, independent organisations. Led by the Party and incorporated into the government, they can be deemed as branches of the local authorities. See White, Howell and Shang, 1996, for further discussions on such organisations and their shifting roles in Chinese society.

¹³ Sometimes, this process was reversed. The local women’s federations in the counties and provinces dispatched organised groups of female migrant workers led by a couple of local women activists, who were potential migrants themselves, to Tianjin. In such cases, the service company operated by the City Women’s Federation would be the designated contact venue and stop-over base on their arrival. (The information was provided by Yuan Zhihui, the accountant of the Tianjin Labour Service Company affiliated to the City Women’s Federation.)

¹⁴ Labour shortages in the city are usually at the lower end of the occupational spectrum with respect to skill requirements, payment and social status. Urbanites tend to disdain to take these jobs.

¹⁵ The information was gathered through my interviews with Fu Baozhen, the female managing director of the Tianjin Labour Service Company run by the City Women's Federation, and with Yuan Zhihui, the accountant of that company.

¹⁶ Other impersonal job-hunting avenues for female migrants include recruitment advertisements from joint ventures and foreign businesses carried by local television and newspapers. Female migrants working in Tanggu economic development zone were more likely to find factory jobs through such channels.

¹⁷ Most of the migrant working girls interviewed explicitly indicated that they would not consider marriage before their mid twenties.

¹⁸ As a stranger, I was not allowed to enter that guarded building in spite of my varied "tactics" and excuses. The reason given was the safety and security of the young women living inside. However, I learned from other sources that labour-capital relations in the special economic zones, particularly along China's southern coast, were a super-sensitive issue at the time of my visit. Earlier, there had been reports about the cruel exploitation of female migrant workers in foreign enterprises and labour-capital disputes therein in the region of the Pearl River Delta (Mao, 1994: 6-23). Such reports put the capital camp on the alert in other parts of the country, which might explain the kind of behaviour that I encountered in Tanggu development zone.

¹⁹ Although many of the institutionalised urban-rural blocks, such as the food-rationing system and the prohibition on rural out-migration, have been either washed away or considerably weakened by marketisation, the central barrier separating urban and rural lives -- the household registration system -- has been maintained. This meant that despite their current urban residence, the female migrant workers are viewed and treated as outsiders and country women by both urbanites and city authorities.

²⁰ See QFFGX, 1983: 305-10, for details of the regulations and policies.

²¹ Mao, 1994: 6-23.

²² This latter category also excluded the migrant working girls since almost none of them had such qualifications.

²³ For elaborate discussions of the more recent changes in the household registration system, and the institutional and social obstacles to further radical reforms of it, see Christiansen, 1990: 23-42; Mallee, 1995: 1-29.

²⁴ Three of the 10 female migrant interviewees told me that they kept their wages for themselves.

²⁵ The practice of bride price (*caili*) was reported to have occupied a central place in the Chinese custom of marrying out daughters in a predominantly patrilineal and patrilocal marriage regime (Baker, 1979; Freedman, 1958). More recent studies, however, point out the importance of dowry (*jiazhuang*) for a daughter's marriage in both historical and contemporary times, although the practice has received little official recognition (Harrell, 1992: 323-37; Ocko, 1991: 313-46; Watson, 1991: 347-68). In addition, regional and local variations in the custom are observed, with some areas emphasising bride price, whereas others stressing dowry (Ebrey, 1991: 1-24). My research supports those findings. It was unveiled in the interviews, for instance, that dowry was prevalent in parts of rural Shandong in East China.

²⁶ The banking regime in China was less developed when I did the fieldwork. For example, no signature or any other kind of identification certificate was required to withdraw money from current accounts. A non-account holder would have little difficulty getting money out of a savings account as long as the person displayed the holder's identification card.

Chapter 15 The Sexual Division of Labour

¹ ZFSDDK, 1993: 89.

² Article 48 of the 1982 Constitution of the PRC, in QFFGX, 1983.

³ Judd, 1994.

⁴ Li, 1999: 254.

⁵ Jacka, 1992: 117.

⁶ For instance, urban students enjoy more library facilities, and their parents are better educated, and hence can offer them more support.

Chapter 16 Conclusion

¹ Wolf, 1985: 17.

² Diamond, 1975: 25-32.

³ Thorborg, 1978; Wolf, 1985: 105.

⁴ Davin, 1976: chpt. 4; Howard, 1988; Stacey, 1983: 222; Thorborg, 1978; Wolf, 1985: 88.

⁵ Buck, 1956 (1937); Fei and Chang, 1945; Hsu, 1949.

⁶ See Davin, 1976: 138-39; Johnson, 1983: chpt. 8.

⁷ See Croll, 1981: 6-7; Davin, 1976: 85-86; Meijer, 1978: 436-77; Yang, 1968 (1959): 32.

⁸ See Andors, 1981: 44-56; Croll, 1979; Davin, 1976; Wolf, 1985.

⁹ Judd, 1992: 356.

¹⁰ Evans, 1997: 2.

¹¹ *Ibid.*: 7.

¹² Judd, 1994.

¹³ *Ibid.*: chpt. 7.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

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- ¹⁵ Jacka, 1996: 143-62.
- ¹⁶ See White, Howell and Shang, 1996: chpt. 4.
- ¹⁷ See Boserup, 1970; Mies, 1982.
- ¹⁸ Jacka, 1996: 143-62; Judd, 1994: chpt. 7; Li, 1999: 241-64.
- ¹⁹ Judd, 1994: 247-48.
- ²⁰ Jacka, 1996: 157.
- ²¹ Davin, 1990: 81-91; Greenhalgh and Li, 1995: 601-41; Zhang, 1999: 202-30.
- ²² Greenhalgh, 1994: 4.
- ²³ Greenhalgh and Li, 1995: 614.
- ²⁴ Cohen, 1992: 362.
- ²⁵ *Ibid*: 357-77.
- ²⁶ Palmer, 1995: 110-34; Ocko, 1991: 313-46.
- ²⁷ Cohen, 1992: 357-77; Yan, 1997: 191-212.

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APPENDIX 1 QUESTIONNAIRE FOR INTERVIEWING VILLAGE WOMEN

Basic information:

Name; Age; Marital status; Education; Number of children; Occupation; Household economic status in the village.

Section 1 Women's decision-making power within the family

1. Do you know how much money there is in your family's bank accounts?

(if yes) How?

(if no) Why?

2. In whose names are these accounts?

Do you have any other way of saving money besides putting it in banks?

Which members of the family can go to the bank and take the money out?

Who has often done so?

Why?

Do you have access to these accounts?

Have you ever done so?

Do you administer the housekeeping funds?

(if yes) How?

(if no) Why?

3. Has the household made any investments since the rural reform?

Any new purchases?

Any changes in production?

How have the decisions on these matters been made? (asking for detailed accounts for each case)

(if decisions have been made by males only in the household, then)

(a) Why do you think that you have not been consulted?

(b) Do you feel satisfied with the situation?

4. Has the family been in any financial difficulty for the past 10 years and more?

(if yes) Who is in charge of modifying the family budget? (including dealing with external relations like the state and internal management)

And how?

Section 2 Women's employment and income-earning ability

1. Are all the family incomes from farming?

(if no) What are the off-farm economic activities the family members are engaged in?

2. Who decides what happens to the money earned by the family members?

Then, how such decisions are made?

3. What do you do to contribute to the family's incomes?

4. How are your contributions measured?

5. Have you ever engaged in any economic activities other than farming?

How about your husband and adult children?

Do you think payments to women and men are equal and fair?

Why?

Do you think that the work you do has been regarded as important as that done by your husband or son?

What are your aspirations for your family and yourself?

6. In your opinion, do your economic contributions to the household affect your status within the family?

Why?

7. Compared with the collective years, does the rural reform increase or decrease your income-earning ability?

How?

8. Do you know about available means required for engaging in new or alternative productive activities (such as technical training, provision of loans and credit)

Have you ever attended any training course?

How about your husband or your son?

Why have you, or your husband or son, attended or not attended such courses?

Have you ever learnt about the provision of loans or credits by the bank for promoting productive activities?

(if yes) Have you ever applied for them?

How about your husband or son?

Do you think these means have been made equally accessible for women as for men?

Why?

Section 3 Division of labour within the peasant household

1. Is there any division of labour within the household?

How?

2. How many hours do you work each day (both outside and inside the household)?

How long does your husband work?

3. How many hours of leisure do you have each day?

What do you do for leisure?

How about your husband?

4. In your family, who is responsible for the housework such as cooking, washing, cleaning and taking care of the children?

(if you do) How are the children taken care of when you go to work outside the household?

5. Does your husband share the household chores with you?

(if yes) How?

(if no) Why?

6. How would you describe your status within the family?

Why do you think so?

7. How would you describe your mother's status in the family when she was in your current age (What did she do then and how many children did she have)?

Why do you think so?

Section 4 Women's basic needs

1. Are the basic needs of you and your family members met sufficiently (such as food, water, clothing, housing and health care)?

2. Has there been any improvement in your living standards since the inception of the rural reform?

(if yes) What is the degree?

How and why has the improvement been achieved?

How is the improvement indicated (such as changes in diet, increase in savings, consumption levels and household appliances, improvement in housing and children's education, etc.)

Which members of the family do you think have benefited most from the improvement in living standards?

(if no improvement) Why?

3. In your opinion, are such improvements important to you and your social status?

Why?

4. Is there any improvement or deterioration in health-care services for you since the reform?

(for either yes or no) What are the specific aspects?

Section 5 Sexual freedom and reproduction

1. Did (or will) you make the decision on whom to marry?

(for either yes or no) How did you get married?

How about your mother?

How about your daughters?

2. As far as you know, are there any divorces in the village?

What is the villagers' attitude towards divorce?

If the divorce is initiated by a woman, what would the villagers think of her?

3. What will happen if a girl loses her virginity before marriage?

4. Do you think there is any change in the traditional demand for girls' pre-marital virginity?

(if yes) In what way?

(if no) Why?

5. How many children would you like to have?

Did (do) you have any preference for their sexes?

(for either yes or no) Why?

6. Did (Do) you and your husband agree with each other on the number and sex of the children you would have?

Were there any other people or forces that affected your decision on the matter (such as parents-in-law, in-laws, lineage force, or village opinion)?

7. (Did) Do you feel free to take contraceptive measures?

8. Did you ever encounter any discrimination when you gave birth to female children?

(if yes) From whom?

In what way?

Section 6 Women's education and legal, political expression

1. How many years of formal education have you received?

How about your daughters and sons?

Your mother?

Your brothers and sisters?

2. Did (Do) you treat your children equally in terms of their education?

How were the household chores shared by you daughters and sons after school?

3. Did the daughters have the same access to education and reach the same educational attainment as the sons in your parental household?

(either yes or no) Why?

Have your parents treated you and your brothers equally in terms of the money spent on your education, and the household chores conducted after school?

4. Do you (or your daughters) have the equal right of inheritance with your brothers (or sons)?

(if no) In which way?

Why?

Do you think it is fair?

5. Have you been concerned with the village and community affairs?

(if yes) How have you made your voice heard?

(if no) Why?

How about your husband?

How about your sons and daughters?

6. Have you ever thought of taking any leadership role?

(if yes) In what way?

(if no) Why?

7. Have you ever been beaten by your husband?

Section 7 Women's attitudes towards the rural reform

1. What is your opinion of the reform, or which one do you think is more desirable, the collective or the responsibility system?

2. What do you like or dislike the new system as a woman?

3. From your perspective, what are the advantages and disadvantages of collectivisation and decollectivisation?

APPENDIX 2 QUESTIONNAIRE FOR INTERVIEWING FEMALE MIGRANT WORKERS

Basic information: Name; Age; Marital status; Native place; Education; Parents' occupations; Household income level in the local area.

Section 1 General questions

1. How long have you been working away from your native village?

What kinds of work have you done?

What are you doing now?

When did you start working in this place?

2. How did you find work outside the village?

Section 2 Economic independence

1. How many brothers and sisters do you have?

Their ages?

Their years of education?

Their marital status?

Their occupations?

Their incomes?

2. How much do you earn each month?

Do you have to pay for your board and lodging?

(if yes) How much do you pay?

(if no) If the board and lodging are perceived in terms of money, how much, do you think, your monthly wage would be?

3. Has the employer ever delayed in paying out your wages?

(if yes) Why? And what did you do then?

4. How is the wage calculated (time-rate, piece-rate, weekly or monthly, and so on)?

Does this wage include overtime payment and bonus?

(If no) How much is your income when the overtime pay and bonus are included?

5. What did you do before you left the native village?

(for those who were not at school) Did you have a wage then?

(if yes) How much was it?

(if no) How was your labour calculated in monetary terms?

6. Are you earning more or less than what you earned while working in the countryside?

Is your income higher or lower than that of other members of your family who stay in the village?

7. How much (percentage) do you spend of your income each month?

On what?

8. What do you usually do with the remaining part of your wage?

9. (For those who deposit their money in the bank) What do you intend to do with your savings?

10. (For those who send the money or part of the money back home) What percentage of your wage do you usually send home?

How much did you send home last year?

Why do you send money home?

How have your parents handled the money that you have sent them?

Are you satisfied with the way your money has been handled?

Why?

Section 3 Working and living conditions

1. How many days do you work each week?

Do you have a day off each week?

(if no) Why?

2. How many hours do you work each day?

Do you work in shifts?

(if yes) How do they operate?

Do you work for extra hours?

(if yes) Is it frequent?

How many hours do you work each day when the overtime is counted in?

How many days (hours) did you work overtime last year (or How many days/hours have you worked overtime since you took this job)?

3. Do you have holidays each year?

(if yes) What kind of holidays do you have?

Do you receive full pay during public holidays?

4. Do you have annual home leave?

(if yes) How many days should you have according to relevant regulations?

Do you take home leave each year?

(if yes) How long did you stay at home last time?

Who paid for your travel fares?

Did you receive full pay during your home leave?

Did you work for the original employer when you returned from home?

(if no) Was it easy for you to find another employer?

(if no) Why? and how did you find a new employer then?

5. Does the factory/company have the following facilities and organisations:

- a) Canteen; b) Public showers; c) Dormitories; d) Clinic;
e) Recreation room (or Reading room); f) Trade union;
g) Other (please explain)

(if unaware of the existence of any of the above) Why?

6. Your accommodation is:

- a) In the factory/company's dormitory; b) Rented from private landlord;
c) Provided by relatives; d) Other (please explain)

7. (if in private housing) How much is the rent?

8. (for both in dormitory and in private housing) How many of you share a room?

How big is the room?

Are you satisfied with the housing conditions?

Why?

9. Have you been living in this place since you left your native village?

(if no) What kind of accommodation did you have before?

10. Do you have time for leisure and entertainment each day after work?

(if no) Why?

(if yes) How many hours of leisure do you enjoy each day?

What do you usually do when you are off work?

11. Have you ever fallen ill since you began working in the city?

(if yes) Did you take sick leaves?

(if yes) Did you receive your wage in full?

(if no) Why?

(if no) Are you aware of any fellow worker who has fallen ill?

(if yes) What has happened to her?

12. Do you enjoy free medical service or have health insurance?

(if yes) How does the scheme work?

(if no) Who will pay for your medical expenses?

13. Do female workers have maternity leave?

(if yes) Do they receive full pay while on maternity leave?

(if no) Why?

14. How do you think of the factory/company's working conditions on the basis of the following:

- a) High temperature/heat; b) Industrial dust; c) Noise; d) Damp;
e) Low temperature/cold; f) Ventilation; g) Fire prevention
facilities; h) Crowdedness; i) Lighting

15. Are you satisfied with the working conditions?

Why?

16. Have you ever encountered difficulties since you came to work in the city?

(if yes) Could you give me an example?

To whom would you usually go for help in such situation?

Section 4 Labour protection, training and gender equality

1. Is the factory/company where you work:

- a) Publicly owned; b) Joint venture; c) Solely owned by overseas investors;
d) Privately owned

2. How many years of formal education have you had?

Do you think your education is important and useful for your current job?

(for both yes and no) Why?

3. What conditions did you have to meet when you applied for the current job:

- a) Education; b) Sex; c) Age; d) Marital status;
e) Other (please explain)

4. Were you required to present any documents before being recruited?

(if yes) What were they?

- a) Certificate provided by the local employment bureau;
b) Birth control certificate; c) Temporary resident certificate;
d) High school graduation certificate; e) Other (please explain)

5. Have you signed a contract with you employer?

(if yes) What kind of contract?

- a) Written contract; b) Oral contract

6. Have you been an apprentice or received some kind of training after you came to work in the factory?

(if yes) For how long?

If there is technical training at a more advanced level, do you want to get it?

Why?

7. Are you concerned with the performance and development of the enterprise where you are working now?

(for both yes and no) Why?

8. Have you thought of getting a promotion?

(if yes) What efforts have you made for the goal?

(if no) Why?

9. In your opinion, who, among your fellow workers, are most likely to get promoted?

Why do you think so?

10. Are there people among your fellow workers who have been promoted in recent years?

(if yes) Which, do you think, are the most determinant factors to their promotion in their specific cases?

(if no) Why?

11. Are there more female or male workers in the factory/company where you work?

Why?

12. Do the male and female workers do the same kind of job?

(if yes) How?

(if no) What do they do respectively?

13. Is there any difference in pay to male and female workers?

(if yes) What is it?

Are there any male workers who perform the same tasks as you do?

(if no) Why?

(if yes) Do you receive the same pay as your male co-workers?

(if no) Why?

14. Have you ever been dismissed?

(if yes) Why?

Was it easy for you to find another job?

15. How did your employer treat you when you made mistakes in your work or didn't know how to do a particular job?

Are you happy with it?

16. How do you describe the relation between you and your employer?

Why?

Section 5 Love and marriage

1. Are you married?

(if yes) Where is your husband?

What is he doing?

Do you have any children?

(if no) Do you have a boy friend?

(if yes) Where is he?

What is he doing?

How do you meet and fall in love?

(if no) Why?

2. Are there any differences in people's attitudes towards and practices in love and marriage between the city and the countryside?

(if yes) What are they?

Which way do you prefer, the city's or the countryside's?

Why?

3. What is your plan for the future in terms of marriage and settlement?

Section 6 Influence of urban life

1. Why did you leave the village and work in the city?

2. Do you intend to work in the city over a long period of time?

Why?

3. What do you think are the advantages and disadvantages of the urban work and life in comparison with the countryside?

4. Do you think there have been changes in you since you came to work in the city:

(if yes) In what way?

(if no) Why?

5. Which, do you think, is the most important change that has occurred to you?

6. What are your aspirations for yourself?