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**A REVOLUTION IN GENDER AND
FAMILIAL LIFE: AN ANALYSIS OF
SOCIO-POLITICAL AND CULTURAL
FACTORS ON THE CONTEMPORARY
CHINESE FAMILY**

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fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to investigate gender relations and the family in contemporary China. More specifically it seeks to contextualise the contemporary Chinese family within a socio-historical, political and cultural analysis of China from the formation of the People's Republic of China in 1949. It uses a historical sociological methodology, on the basis of existing studies. It attempts to ascertain what has changed and what has stayed the same over the last fifty years, as well as to evaluate what Chinese families have gained and lost as a result of government reforms. With a different focus in each chapter, the study examines some of the ways the accelerated quest for modernity has impacted on the Chinese family and society. It explores family structure and the rapid changes currently taking place in dating, romance, and marriage, reproduction, child socialisation practices, and gender and family relationships. Far more than in most countries, the Chinese family plays a central role in economic relations and political ideology, which makes these changes especially consequential. One obvious impact of the government reforms on the Chinese family lifestyle was the preservation of traditional beliefs and practices, such as wedding and funeral ceremonies, ancestral worship and preferences for sons over daughters. Another impact discussed by this study has been the attempt to remake the Chinese family into an economic and social unit, depriving it of its traditional ideological, spiritual, and ritual significance. But the real challenge imposed by the current government, that may ultimately weaken or even fundamentally change the Chinese family, has been the birth control campaign. Socially and economically, this study shows that the well-being of many young couples especially rural couples, with only one daughter may be endangered when they could no longer carry out manual labour on their farm. The main conclusion from this analysis is that the family and its continuity still occupy the focal point in the lives of Chinese people.

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INTRODUCTION

The aim of this research is to investigate gender relations and the family in contemporary China. More specifically it seeks to contextualise the contemporary Chinese family within a socio-historical, political and cultural analysis of China from the formation of the People's Republic of China in 1949.

The study has the objectives of conducting research into gender relations and social changes within the Chinese family institution over the past 50 years, and of researching with a narrative mode in a historical sociological methodology, on the basis of existing studies. The research was conducted using this method, as it is useful for a critical study of the past, which looks for mechanisms through which societies change or reproduce themselves. Historical sociological studies highlight the particular and varying features of social structures and social change, which are extraordinarily difficult to capture solely through the use of empirical research methods.

This study deals with the question, of to what extent can the Chinese state change family structure, family relations, and conceptions of family behaviour? In order to answer this question this investigation starts by exploring the historical changes in the institution of the family and its place in the Chinese social framework. It also examines the impact of Communism on Chinese families and their way of life. This trend is understandable since, at the start of its power in 1949, the Communist Government claimed to be establishing new social organizations and a new social ideology, drastically different from those of previous ages in order to elicit social change. Certainly the organisational capacity of the Communist Party, together with its revolutionary ideology, enabled it to penetrate further into everyday life of both rural and urban families than any previous regime had done. Furthermore it traces the responses of contemporary Chinese families to the macro-political and economic changes of reforms deemed necessary by Deng Xiaoping in his attempt to modernise China. The micro-dimensions of the research are defined by the data associated with the family and the home. This is then set against

the backdrop of a macro level understanding of power relations, to aid in our understanding of how Chinese families have changed over time.

I have suggested using a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches as a means of achieving the aims and objectives in this study. To a great extent a qualitative perspective has played a major role in this study because it is inherently a multi-methodological focus involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject material (Handel, 1992). But using empirical data as a general parameter, the study follows a historical, sociological perspective for an analysis of the major changes of constraining and incentive components, both structural and ideological, and assesses their roles in the process of societal change in China.

A narrative technique has also been employed as a means of achieving aims and objectives in this qualitative socio-historical research. It would be used as a frame for constructing the history-theory relationship. Using a narrative approach involves concurrent construction and mutual adjustment of history and of theory. It requires that we build history to correspond to explicitly theoretical terms. It also requires that we build theory in a way that incorporates eventful as well as contextual time. Thus research framed by narrative constructs history as both "path-dependent" (defined as the contingent, yet cumulative and constraining effects of past action on future possibilities; Aminzade, 1992), action sequence and as institutional and cultural conjuncture shaping action. Indeed, a narrative provides an overarching central frame for combining, extending and precisely operationalising central extant narrative and comparative techniques.

To start this narrative I have used secondary sources to construct historical and sociological concepts and ideas against a general theoretical and comparative historical backdrop. Examining these concepts sets the stage for designing a broader research base to be executed in different themes of the study. Each theme combines examination of secondary sources with narrative and comparative logic to provide self-contained responses to specific theoretical questions. All phases together combine to respond to the full range of articulated theoretical issues that have been used to complete this study.

The socio-historical methodology used in this study supports the popularity of narrative as a term of art today because it signals the latest attempt to promote for sociology an explanatory form that follows Weber in seeking interpretive and sound understanding of historical happenings which are treated as valid objects of critical science inquiry. Narratives are sequential accounts. They organise material into chronological order to tell 'stories' about what happened (Stone, 1979). These accounts are conceptual wholes, built through selection and chronological linkage of other wise discrete parts, each of which then takes on meaning in light of the whole (Griffin, 1993).

Adopting a narrative form requires the narrator to focus on individual, institutional, or collective actors; the actions they take; and when, where, why, how, and with what consequences they take them. Thus, explicitly or implicitly, narratives not only tell us what happened but they explain why it happened as it did and not otherwise. Because explanations built on narrative become appropriate and useful to the content that temporal ordering is crucial, it is no accident that historical sociologists are responsible for importing the construct of narrative from the humanities and transforming it to serve as an analytical tool for social science (Griffin, 1993; Abbott, 1992; Quadagno and Knapp, 1992: 481-507).

HISTORICAL CHRONOLOGY

This section briefly explores some of the important dates, policies and phenomenon that have been important landmarks in Chinese history from Imperial times until the 1990s. These need explaining before the start of the study, in order to provide a historical landscape for the family changes that are being explored in this work.

Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, China experienced growing external pressure for change. Increased foreign trade, political intervention, urbanisation, and cultural contact pried open some parts of China's inward-looking social system and shifted the balance of power in different directions (Murphey, 1999: 55-59). Faced with imperialist expansion from Europe, America and Japan, which revealed China's military weakness, China was drawn into wider international processes of economic and political power on very unfavourable terms. (Fairbank, 1979 213-263). Defeats in war

resulted in loss of territory (Hong Kong), loss of jurisdiction over urban districts called ‘concessions,’ and loss of control over customs administration, over foreign trading companies operating through Treaty Ports, and over foreign investment in crucial modern industries such as textiles and railways. This went far to damage the prestige and legitimacy of the Imperial Chinese regime (or Qing Dynasty 1644-1911), encouraging opposition movements and stimulating conflicts with the state elite over how to reform the Chinese state, the better to cope with external challenges and internal divisions. Such humiliations were destined to continue and grow in scope for over a century (Murphey, 1999: 55-59).

The May Fourth, Movement is named after a climactic student demonstration at Tiananmen Square (the Gate of Heavenly Peace in front of the Forbidden City in Beijing) on that date in 1919, passionately opposing the weak Chinese government’s passive acceptance of humiliating concessions of Chinese territory to Japan in the Treaty of Versailles that concluded World War One. For students and writers, the demonstration represented the culmination of a groundswell of youthful anti-traditionalism represented by Chen Duxiu’s popular magazine *New Youth* (*Xin qingnian*), and the literary revolution sponsored by Hu Shi, by his promotion of writing forcefully and directly in the modern vernacular (Laughlin, 1999: 373-377). Many of these intellectuals developed forceful arguments in favour of women’s rights. They also waged an all-out war against the hierarchical notions of Confucianism and made bitter attacks on arranged marriage, restrictions on women’s education and rigid family structures.

Until the establishment in 1949 of the People’s Republic of China (hereafter PRC) and its subsequent consolidation, China was the site of almost continuous and often violent struggles for power. All forms of power, economic, political and ideological, were actively contested in recurrent situations of great instability and uncertainty. In societies with stable power structures, contestation is usually held within strict limits by the knowledge of all participants as to where power lies by varying degrees of acceptance of its legitimacy. The collapse of the Imperial political institutions, and the establishment of the new republic in 1912, the sharpening of economic antagonisms, the challenge of new social beliefs and values, and the threat and

reality of external aggression, especially Japanese expansionism, all rendered such knowledge uncertain and undetermined legitimacy. Power could not be assumed, it had to be proved in practice, ultimately by resort to armed force (Spence, 1990). In Mao Zedong's words (1967, II: 224) "political power grows out of the barrel of a gun."

After the collapse of the Imperial Empire, political power, the power to rule over the territory of China, dissolved. Attempts to establish coherent state institutions which could maintain control over the whole of the country failed. China fragmented into a large number of more or less fluid regimes dominated by military leaders, the so-called 'warlords' (Spence, 1990) warlord might dominate a whole province, but none had the resources to attempt the reunification of China under consolidated state rule. Two political movements, each with their own armed forces and their economic and social constituencies, competed with each other to achieve this task: the Guomindang (hereafter known as GMD), or the Nationalist Party, and the Chinese Communist Party (hereafter known as the CCP). Both were formed as revolutionary movements committed to revolutionary transformation of Chinese society. Like any large-scale social and political movement, they were composed of a large number of groupings with diverse views and goals, strategies and tactics (ibid).

Holding each of them together despite this diversity was a conception of socialism. The CCP's conception of socialism was essentially a Marxist one, as mediated through the Soviet Union and adapted to specific Chinese circumstances. The Nationalists' conception of socialism was enshrined in Sun Yat-sen's (he was the Provisional President of the Chinese Republic) 'Three Principles of the People,' one of which referred to the People's livelihood, jeopardised by the landlords' appropriation of rent, which the revolutionary state should restore to the people. In either case, revolutionary change would require the movement to wrest economic and political power from established classes and institutions. In both cases, however, their capacity to do this was restricted throughout the 1920s 1930s and 1940s, not only by the power of those established classes, but also by the competition and military confrontation between the revolutionary movements themselves, by the strength of local warlords, by the Japanese occupying forces in much of Eastern and Central China, and by

the leverage exercised by other foreign powers in return for aid in the struggle against the Japanese. Until the Communist victory in 1949, neither movement had the power to carry out a radical restructuring of society on more than a local scale (Gamer, 1999: 67-75).

The outcome of the unstable trilateral conflict between the Guomindang, the Communists and the Japanese and their diverse relationships with the economic power of propertied and un-propertied classes in urban and rural China, was settled by military force. The reasons for the Communist victory in the civil war (1946-1949) that followed the surrender of Japan are many and complex, and cannot be discussed here. Apart from the Nationalist retention of Taiwan, and the perpetuation of colonial rule in Hong Kong and Macao, the victory was total, and laid the political basis for a more thorough revolutionisation of the structure of power and social change than had been possible hitherto (ibid).

The Communist approach to the family was in many ways radical, but it was always a part of the wider programme of social change, the underlying philosophy of which did not accord very much significance to the institution of the family. The government was primarily concerned to develop the economy, and to this end the hierarchically structured traditional family could be a useful means. The explicit family policy for the PRC was expressed in the Marriage Law of 1950, which aimed to replace the 'feudal' patriarchal marriage system of the old society with the 'new democratic' marriage system 'based on free choice of partners, monogamy, equal rights for both sexes and protection of lawful interests of women and children' (Meijer, 1971). The power of the state was to be used to shift the basis of family relationships away from the hierarchies of generation, age and sex to a more egalitarian model.

The Land reform implemented in 1950 was intended to break the dominance of the landlord class in the countryside and to relieve rural poverty (Spence, 1990). At first, Mao returned lands to the peasants. Then he began forcing them to join production teams that became linked with larger communes to farm on a great scale. Mao Zedong envisioned communes as the basic cells of the People's Republic of China. Self containing and self sustaining complexes performing the roles of industry, agriculture, commerce, education, military and social life. What

happened during the brief period of the People's Commune Movement in the fall of 1958 came closest to destroying the Chinese family institution. Small children were put in nurseries. Older children were assigned to brigades of Little Red Soldiers. All able-bodied adults were mobilised to join the communes and work in production teams. They were encouraged to dismantle their kitchens and contribute their cooking utensils to the communes. Family members, young and old had their meals in commune mess halls (Rae Yang, 1997).

When Chu and Yannan Ju (1993: 276), paid a visit to one of the villages in Qingpu in 1987 to make preparations for some anthropological fieldwork, they passed a deserted ramshackle building. Painted on its broken door were the fading characters of "People's Commune Mess Hall." Upon inquiry, these researchers were told that this was where people from the village went for their meals during the first few months of the commune movement. That commune experience proved to be a colossal human disaster. Within a matter of three months, the Party had to retreat from its utopian ideals of communal life and restored the Chinese family to its time honoured functions.

The collectivisation of agriculture and rural industry began once land reform had been completed. Families were organised into larger and larger production groups to farm on a great scale. The height of this collectivisation came during the Great Leap Forward in 1958-1960, which called for simultaneous development of both agriculture and industry, both small and large industry –what Mao propagandists called "walking on two legs" (Jacka, 1997: 32). In rural areas, the "people's communes" mobilised peasants en masse for large-scale capital construction like building dams and irrigation systems as well as making iron and steel by indigenous methods (the so-called backyard furnaces) (Chang, 1991). Not just wasteful of resources these mass activities also resulted in a serious neglect of farming and cultivation.

The Great Leap Forward collapsed in 1959 with disastrous economic consequences, particularly a dive in agricultural production and widespread food shortages in the countryside. The other party leaders tried to return to more traditional production methods, making industrial goods in factories and producing food on collectivised farms, but Mao was undaunted and unconvinced (Gamer, 1999: 109). In 1966 he tried again by

starting the Great Proletarian Revolution, which he also used as a means of getting rid of his dissenting senior party colleagues, who he considered to be revisionist. Thus, millions of students were organised as Red Guards to attack the country's power structures, including government and party establishments. Virtually all senior party leaders except Zhou Enlai (senior member CCP) had been attacked or were purged at one time or another by the Red Guards (Rae Yang, 1997).

Unlike the Great Leap Forward, the Cultural Revolution was primarily political in nature. In the economic arena, it merely emphasised certain ideological attributes in the overall economic development strategy such as "self-reliance," "ideology and politics to take precedence over economics," or "ideological incentive to be substitute for material incentive." Consequently, the Cultural Revolution brought much less direct disruption to economic production, though it resulted in long-term economic damage to government administration and factory management (Murphey, 1999)

The Cultural Revolution was believed to have inflicted wide-ranging damage on the Chinese family. During the height of this phase there were many cases when children were incited to accuse and denounce parents who were branded as counter-revolutionaries. However according to Chu and Yunnan Yu (1993: 275), even the denunciation of parents by young ideologues proved to a transient phenomenon.

However, the Cultural Revolution did leave behind at least one positive legacy. Many old guards like Deng Xiaoping (senior member CCP) emerged from this nightmare to finally realise that politically and social stability is most crucial to economic development, where as incessant class struggle and ideological contention were inimical to economic growth. Thus, when Deng finally regained power, he was determined to open a new chapter in China's modern economic history, which he did by launching economic reform and the open-door policy in December 1978 (Wong, 1993).

Opening the door to external economic forces became official at the Third Plenum of the Eleventh Central Committee in December 1978. Since that time China has become increasingly incorporated into the international capitalist economy. Restrictions on foreign trade were relaxed by licensing several provinces and cities. To engage in foreign trade,

commercialising state trading agencies, and giving enterprises certain rights to retain foreign exchange earnings. China is now becoming one of the world's most important trading economies (Wong, 1999).

After Mao's era ended, China was free to pursue the added elements of economic strength that had eluded it before; foreign capital, technology, and markets (Naughton, 1995). To implement reform, Deng called for 'four modernisations' - of agriculture, industry, defence and science and technology - and initiated new economic policies.

The earliest transformations took place in agriculture. Between 1978 and 1984 agriculture was largely decollectivised. In place of the collective system of production teams fulfilling targets set by central planners and transmitted down through communes and brigades, there emerged the 'household responsibility system.' The land of the teams was divided up among households, which contracted with the collective to farm a certain amount of land and to deliver a certain quantity of crops as a fee for using the land and as a tax, beyond which output could be sold on the market. Households thus once again became autonomous units of production and investment. The ownership of the land remained with the collective, though the length of time specified in contracts (usually fifteen years or longer) enabled long-term planning by households. By the middle 1980s China had seen the re-emergence of a family-farming peasantry (Gamer, 1999: 110-112).

The second Marriage Law of China was adopted in 1980 and implemented on January 1 1981. It fixed the earliest marriage age for men at twenty-two and for women at twenty (it had been twenty and eighteen respectively in the 1950 Marriage Law). The laws recommended guidelines for women were first marriage at twenty-four, (and ideally last) childbirth at twenty-five. Effective enforcement of the 1980 Marriage Law was crucial, since in many cases husbands could be forced to stop beating, and even torturing, their spouses only when brought into court. With the laws reassertion of the right of women to obtain divorce rose to about 5.5 percent of all marriages for 1983 (in 1979 it had been 3.0 percent); over 70 percent of the divorce petitioners in 1983 were women. The 1980 Marriage Law also allowed divorced women greater chance to sue for the joint property one shared in marriage (Spence, 1990: 708).

One of the most profound ways in which the Chinese state has attempted to penetrate and police Chinese families, is in the sphere of fertility. The Communist regime headed by Deng Xiaoping in the late 1970s promised economic progress to the Chinese people, staking its legitimacy on its ability to achieve prosperity by century's end. Having seen rampant population growth eat up economic gains in the past, China's leaders were convinced that their economic project would fail if it could not staunch the growth of the population, especially the rural component of it, which made up three-quarters of the total. The one-child policy which commenced in 1979 provided the solution to this problem (Spence, 1990: 683-690).

CHAPTER OUTLINES

In this section we will consider the organization of the seven chapters, and the themes that have been discussed in this study.

Literature Review

In Chapter One I will explore the range of literature that has been used to analyse the changes found in the Chinese family to date.

Methodological Review

Chapter Two is a methodological review, which briefly describes the chosen methodology, collection of materials, and problems encountered along the way.

Changes in the Chinese Family

China has often been seen as a familial society (coined to characterise Chinese social values and organisation), and Confucian social theory placed special emphasis on family relationships as the core of a stable and harmonious society. Yet in modern times the structures and functions of the Chinese family have come under vigorous attack. From the nineteenth century, the Chinese family was seen as an obstacle to modernisation of Chinese society, a backward-looking brake on the energies of the young, holding them in patterns of behaviour which led China into decline and defeat. Since then, the reform of the family has been a central focus of modern state policy; republican regimes, both bourgeois and socialist, established programmes to transform family life by legislation, compulsion

and incentive, programmes to which masses of ordinary Chinese people have had somehow to respond. At the same time, economic and cultural developments have led people to reconstruct their family life. Many women have attempted to redefine their family relationships with men and many young people have sought to recast their relationships with their elders.

Chapter Three explores changes in the institution of the family and its place in the Chinese social framework. Its aim is to trace the changes experienced by the Chinese family from the beginning of the twentieth century until the 1990s. It is intended to provide a historical survey of the Chinese government's concrete reform programmes and how changes have affected the family during the period under consideration.

Love, Marriage and Divorce in China

As in most societies, marriage has always been an important institution in China and offers a unique window on social inequalities and change in any given historical period. In the past, the purposes of marriage were many and included the transfer of rights over the bride (Wolf and Huang, 1980: 73), continuance of a family line (Wolf, 1972: 72), a way to increase hands in the field (Croll, 1994), formation of alliances (Ebrey, 1991b: 5), a way to make a statement of class standing (Ebrey, 1991b), provision of old age support and security (Potter and Potter, 1990: 202), and the transfer of resources from one family to another (Gates, 1996). The emphasis on any of these processes might depend on a number of factors including religion, class, life cycle of the family, and economic and political circumstances (Watson and Ebrey, 1991).

The ethical basis for the establishment of a family in contemporary China is switching from the family to the individual. The family was formerly considered a societal cell, and it was widely believed that family stability was an indicator of overall social stability. This ideology is no longer common, as greater emphasis is placed on individual happiness, and marriage is considered more a private affair. People do not force themselves to maintain an unhappy marriage, and divorce is no longer the discrimination it once was in the past. Women are not merely their husband's attachments or tools, but demand more emotional and sexual satisfaction, as well as rights within their marriage, in particular the right to enjoy more freedom

generally. Partners in marriage lacking in passion are no longer considered virtuous, and there are those who are sympathetic to extramarital love which at least involves genuine emotion.

Chapter Four explores the husband and wife relationship, starting with the selection of a future spouse. It goes on to deal with this relationship in terms of what each partner expects of the other; how they interact in different domains of family life, and how marital conflicts are resolved.

Gender Issues in the Chinese Family and Society

The study of women in the Chinese family and society during the twentieth century must be viewed in the context of China's political movements and the challenge of transforming China from a disintegrating Imperial power into a modern nation. The most ambitious political transformations were introduced by the Communist Party when it took power in 1949. Unlike many other developing nations that have placed little or no priority on integrating women into development, China, under the leadership of the Communist Party, made explicit commitments to improving the status of women as part of its socialist agenda of promoting social and economic equality.

China's long historical tradition of male dominance and patriarchal authority is deeply embedded in its culture and institutions and not easily overturned. For two and a half decades of heavy state planning and promotion of revolutionary egalitarian goals, there was much talk about equality between the sexes. Since Mao Zedong's death in 1976, the emphasis on gender equality has subsided, and liberalising reforms have permitted a return of market forces and revival of earlier cultural practices. The reforms have provoked concerns that old patriarchal patterns and abuses of women would resurface, and indeed, a more open society has allowed gender inequalities to become more visible. At the close of the twentieth century, critics in China and abroad strongly lament China's persisting structural inequalities and the unequal treatment of women both in the family system and the state sector (Croll, 1983; Honig and Hershatter, 1988; Johnson, 1983; Stacey, 1983; Wolf, 1985). Moreover, China's strict family planning policies, discussed in Chapter's Six and Seven, target women for control and place heightened pressure on women to give birth to sons (Greenhalgh, Zhu and Li, 1994; Greenhalgh and Li, 1995). As a result of strict

family planning quotas, the sex ratio of reported births in the 1990s shows an increasing problem of “missing girls” – a clear sign that males and females are not treated equally. At the same time, increasing levels of female literacy, education, and urbanism, along with smaller families and greater economic autonomy, brings new benefits to women and may undermine patriarchal traditions even where earlier policies failed.

When reviewing the twentieth century as a whole, there are many reasons to consider it to have been a century of significant, if not always revolutionary, change for women as well as men. These changes, toward modernity and greater equality and opportunity for women, continue to be contested by entrenched interests. From the perspective of a single lifetime, they may appear to be slow and to fall short of the revolutionary claims of the Maoist period, but from the perspective of several centuries the achievements of the twentieth may indeed be revolutionary.

The aim in Chapter Five is to examine women’s lives and the ways that gender has shaped the Chinese family and society. It begins by setting the historical context, which is the key in understanding Chinese women’s lives today. It then describes women’s roles and position in contemporary social, political and economic life. The last half of the chapter is devoted to examining three aspects of Chinese society that reflect the shape of gender inequality in China in the 1990’s and suggest what might be expected in the future. Economic policies have been crucial in shaping key aspects of most women’s lives and have not only provided women with new opportunities but have also been a source of new forms of gender inequality. A second influence has been the commercialisation of women for sale – and abuse on the open market. This section seeks to explore the sex and sexuality discourses in reform era China. Finally, we will discuss forms of discriminatory actions against women, including infanticide, trafficking of women and domestic abuse.

Childbirth and Reproduction in China

‘May you have many sons’ has long been a common felicitation and reference to sons or a son as ‘the greatest of blessings’ punctuate everyday language and ceremonial occasions, such as weddings. Customarily each generation of Chinese couples have been exhorted anew to have a son and continue the family line,

so that the greatest of unfilial acts has been the failure to produce a son and the most venomous of curses has been: 'May you die without sons.' Although such phrases are less likely to be openly articulated in present-day China, prestige and stature are still linked to sons and it is often said that the birth of a son causes a house 'to grow by three feet. (Croll, 2000: 71)' In contemporary China, with its stringent birth-control and single-child policies, the quest for sons has been magnified with the result that, in the absence of sons, the birth of a daughter not only remains a disappointment but more than ever before means a lost opportunity for a son.

In China it is without doubt the importance of the family line and the permanent bonding of sons into chains of generations and networks of male kin which still underlies the unique status of sons, positioned as they are between ancestors and descendants (Baker, 1979). It has long been and still is according to Huang Shu-min (1998) the expectation that sons will worship and care for the ancestors of previous generations as only they can do while, in turn, sons have been exhorted since ancient times to have many sons to fulfil their own obligations to their father and their father's lineage. Each new generation of sons is expected to continue the line of descent and, simply put, without sons signifying the unbroken continuity of the family line, there is said to be no bridge between family past and family future. It is sons as sole performers of ancestral rites, who are responsible for the welfare of their departed forebears in the spirit world (*ibid*).

But it was not just beliefs about the family line or the ritual support of the dead that underlay son preference, for parents also remain almost entirely reliant on a son's support in old age, both in the countryside and to a lesser but still important degree in the cities. Sons are not only for dreaming and descendants, for in very practical ways they represent prosperity, future security and even survival in old age. This has been so in ages past and is still so, despite a minimal safety net for the very poorest and the remnants of an urban pension scheme. The absence of a pension system in China's rural villages and the uneven distribution and declining pension support in cities have meant that today sons are still perceived to be the most important source of support in old age by both men and women (Potter and Potter, 1990).

In Chapter Six the aim is to focus on the socio-cultural meaning of reproduction in Chinese society, in order to explore the importance of the preferred male child. To explain this preference, I will deal with the concern about security of old age as well as a characteristic of Chinese culture that seems at first unrelated to reproduction – ancestor worship. In a way, this means I have to deal with the opposite of birth, i.e., death. This is an essential task, if we are to grasp the meaning of reproduction to Chinese people, and to understand its changed as well as unchanged traits.

Impact of the One-Child Policy in China

It is well known that China is the most populous country of the world. On February 15 1995, the government announced that its population had reached 1.2 billion – about one fifth of the total world's population which stood a 5.5 billion in 1993 (Ma Rong, 1999: 210). As the population pressure on land, urban jobs, housing and social spending became more serious, it was clear that a rapidly growing population would make the “four modernisations (the goal of which was to transform China into a powerful and modern socialist society by developing four sectors of the economy: agriculture, industry, the military, science and technology) announced in 1978 an impossible dream. So in 1979 the Chinese government finally set up a more restrictive birth control policy, the one-child campaign (Greenhalgh, 1994).

The importance of family planning becomes even clearer if we carefully examine the connection between natural resources in China and population growth. Arable land in China covers less than 250 million acres (101.2 hectares) and has continually decreased because of urban expansion and construction of dams, roads, bridges and new factories. The arable land per capita in 1991 was 0.27 acres (0.11 hectares) in China, one-ninth that of the United States, one-thirty-fourth that in Australia (Edmonds, 1999: 237-266). The Chinese government argues that, with 7 percent of the world's arable land and the need to feed 22 percent of the world's population, there was no other choice for China to maintain its social stability and proceed into modernisation except practicing family planning.

The outlook for other natural resources in China is equally grim. Only 13 percent of China's territory has forest cover, the

indicator of area per capita is even lower. Water is one of the most important natural resources. The per capita surface run off – the amount of water that flows on the surface to use for drinking, agriculture, sanitation, and industry is only one-fourth the world average. Furthermore, China's water resources are unequally distributed. Most of the cities in Northern China experience serious water shortages, whereas South-eastern China is often threatened by floods (Edmonds, 1999: 237-266).

With such shortages and imbalanced geographic distribution between population and natural resources, birth control and family planning are necessary measures. Wong (1999: 103-140) discusses Brown's concerns that China will be unable to feed itself and the growing consensus that although Brown's fears may be overblown, the difficulties of increasing food production for a growing population are substantial. Though ample food does not automatically bring population increases (Harris and Ross, 1987; Gates 1996: 54-60), history has shown that when the Chinese have enough to eat, their population grows. If it keeps growing, food supply might not be able to keep up with the population, and money would have to be diverted from other projects to import food.

Chapter Seven examines the impact of family policy on family structure and socialisation processes in China. The aim is to examine the factors leading to overpopulation in China, describe the governments strenuous efforts to solve the problem by issuing a one-child mandate, and analyse its immediate impact on individual family life, the developing child, the family structure and parental practices. Clearly, a revolution in family life and parental practices is taking place in China. The after effects echo throughout the political and social structure of the earth's most populous nation, with enormous impact on the Chinese people's economic and well-being and quality of life. This revolution even influences the quality of the armed forces. In effect, development of the one-child policy has created the need for consequent policy shifts in areas earlier thought unrelated to the policy as originally construed.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has outlined the aims and objectives of this research, briefly explored some of the important dates, policies

and phenomenon in Chinese history and considered the organization and themes of the study.

1

LITERATURE REVIEW

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The aim of this chapter is to discuss the body of research literature that addresses the topic of the Chinese family and gender research in Chinese society. More specifically the study has the objective of tracing the literature on both areas back to the nineteenth century and up until the present time. This is necessary to form an understanding of the characteristics of historically specific gender and family arrangements and suggest why such systems have the characteristics they do. More abstractly such historical comparison progresses to advance our general understanding of social processes, the way societies work and how they change. The chapter will be structured within a typology framework, beginning with historical/sociological work, sociological surveys, anthropological studies, feminist research and demographic studies.

HISTORICAL STUDIES OF THE CHINESE FAMILY

To investigate the social change which has occurred within the Chinese family over the last fifty years it is necessary to start with a historical approach. Historical studies investigate or reconstruct the past, by using residues of the past that have survived into the present (e.g., literary sources, biographies, inscriptions, photographs etc) (Stedman Jones, 1976: 295-305).

The proper evaluation and use of these residues in order to make historical statements are the technical skills of the historian. Historical studies are drawn on in this study because they help to highlight the peculiarities of the historically specific family arrangements and suggest why such family systems have the characteristics they do. The following literature surveys the historical material used in this study.

Using a feminist historical analysis Stacey (1983) examines themes that have dominated Chinese history from the late Imperial era to the present day, in an attempt to analyse the revolutionary reconstruction of the rural Chinese family and social life. She points out that the collapse of the Chinese

economy and the Confucian state in the early twentieth century meant also the collapse of the Chinese family. The attempts of the Nationalist government (GMD) to promote a neo-Confucian family system through the New Life Movement in the 1930s was doomed to failure because of the inadequacies of their fiscal, military and agrarian policies. By contrast the Communists “rescued peasant family life from the precipice of destruction” (p 108) and set up a new family system which they called “the new democratic family.” Without doubt this system was different from the old Confucian values and prejudices. Stacey’s argument is that women remained so heavily disadvantaged that it would be more accurate to describe the early Communist family as “the new democratic patriarchy;” and in due course the blindness of the Communist Party to the effects of the system led to the enshrinement of essentially anti-feminist policies in “patrilineal-socialism.” The work of Stacey (1983) is drawn on in this study because it examines the weakness and short-lived quality of the CCP’s commitment to family reform, and the subsequent difficulty women have had in using state institutions to either protect their interests and rights or improve their situation in the family; hopes generated by the Communist revolution were ultimately dashed by the forces of peasant conservatism. Stacey suggests that the Communists intentionally reinstated rural “patriarchy” during the 1950s and that Communist Party puritanism is rooted in peasant culture.

Johnson juxtaposes a historical and feminist argument in *Women, the Family and Peasant Revolution in China* (1983), which has since become the “conventional wisdom” about the Marriage Law despite the passing of many years since the book’s publication. The argument has been that once the party retreated from a full-blown commitment to family reform through law, rural Chinese women were not in a position to question or resist the new Communist/patriarchal order. At issue here for the present study is an argument about the nature of the Chinese state: because the Chinese revolution was peasant-based, the regime at no point could afford to alienate poor peasant men, local officials, or soldiers, all of whom were threatened by the prospect of losing village women who married into their communities. In other words, central state officials acted in the interest of peasant men, and this was enough to stop in its tracks the movement toward progressive change in the

family. After 1953, she argues, “the Party...quickly retreated in the face of the inevitable conflict and traditionalist resistance that arose.

As we have just discussed one of the major goals of the Communist government in China was to reform the tradition of marriage and place it on a new egalitarian basis. Diamant (2000) in his political historical study, *Revolutionising the Family: Politics, Love and Divorce in Urban and Rural China 1949-1968*, has been a valuable resource in this study because he takes a dramatic new look at the impact of the 1950 Marriage Law on family structure and relations after the CCP took over power in China in 1949. In the process he challenges much conventional wisdom including that of Stacey (1983) and Johnson (1983) concerning family and gender politics in urban and rural areas, the role of class in Maoist China, the inner workings of the Chinese state, the meaning of marriage and divorce among different populations, the role of the community in social change, and the sources of conflict manifested during the Cultural Revolution. He argues not only that the Marriage Law continued to shape family dynamics well after the early 1950s, but also that throughout the 1950s and the 1960s it was rural areas and among “rural educated” people in cities that its effects – intended and unintended – were felt most intensely. He also suggests that rural family relations were not nearly as stable as suggested in the literature and there were significant power shifts between generations and between men and women.

In China, as in many other societies, marriage traditionally marked the social and/or economic alliance between the families involved rather than on emotional alliance between two people (Riley, 1994: 791-803). Lang (1946) and Pruitt (1949) have included some discussion of marriage and emotional affinity in detail. Yet little attention has been given to the ways marriage mediated inequality or inequalities structured by marriage. The volume by Watson and Ebrey (1991) in their historical work entitled *Marriage and Inequality in Chinese Society*, investigates these processes and mechanisms by focusing on how marriage relates to three forms of inequality: the political power of rulers; the social and economic differences among families; and the inequalities between men and women and among women. The authors’ examined in a wide range of social settings from very early to recent times. Their goal is to discover the broad outlines

of these processes, they examine marriage in a wide range of social settings from early and recent times. This work has been especially important in the present study because it promotes historical change as a major factor of analysis. For example Ebrey (1991) questions the primacy granted cultural continuity in social science investigation of marriage. To counter this tendency, Ebrey states that she has “tried to remain open to the possibility that marriage institutions changed in some fundamental ways from early to modern times as they did in the West” (Ebrey, 1991: 6 my emphasis). The very fact that even a historian such as Ebrey would feel a need to justify such a view indicates the strength of models of cultural change. Rather than categorise China in static terms such as a dowry society, Ebrey argues that marriage practices in China have changed historically in response to social and economic differentiation as well as Confucian ideology and the practices of the state.

The historical works of Roberts (1998), Spence (1990), Baker (1979) and Eastman (1988) have shown how the Chinese family of the past had its roots partly in the kinship structure and partly in the nuclear locus of spouses and children. While Chu and Yanan Ju (1993) using a socio-historical approach have revealed that the disbanding of the kinship network has apparently left no crippling impact on the contemporary nuclear family, which used to be a small unit within the kinship boundary. A number of factors appear to have contributed to the survival of the Chinese family according to Chu and Yanan Ju. First and foremost, they think, its resilient strength developed through age-old traditions. The family has been the single most important cornerstone of Chinese society. Family life is the core of Chinese life. In addition to the traditional roots of the Chinese family, they see four relevant factors: psychological, economic, political and social as necessary variables in keeping family ties strong, even in today’s Chinese family.

Generally speaking, sex was a taboo in China before 1980. Any materials relating to sex, even nude works of art, were strictly forbidden. Even marital sex was not discussed. Evans (1997) is pivotal in this research combining a historical framework with a feminist analysis, she explains how issues related to sex and sexuality have been an object of concern and a major target for governmental programmes of intervention since 1949. She illustrates this by detailing the various ways in which

practices such as pre-marital and extramarital sex, reproduction, marriage, prostitution and homosexuality have been categorised in China, and also by describing how monogamy, celibacy, motherhood, abortion and menopause have been represented in discourses on sex education and sexual health. In doing so, she mobilises a wide range of new source materials relevant issues to offer insights into similarities surrounding the discursive construction of female sexuality during and ostensibly in different periods in Chinese history – the 1950s and the 1980s-1990s.

Evans's main contention is that the "official discourses" of the Chinese state and Party have consistently utilised 'scientific knowledge' to legitimate the imposition of restrictive sexual moral imperatives on Chinese women. She maintains that during the "constrained ideological atmosphere" of the pre-economic reform era, women were enjoined to be good wives and mothers through the routine conflation of a "Woman" with biological sex as reproduction. She readily admits that in the more consumer-oriented environment of the 1980s the state no longer exerts a monolithic control over discourse and Chinese women now have more room to define themselves in alternative terms. Nevertheless, Evans insists that this difference should not be overstated because of the range of perspectives open to women continues to be circumscribed by the parameters which were established in the 1950s. She notes for instance, the newly available advice on female sexual pleasure is largely framed in terms of improving conjugal harmony rather than in terms of the recognition that the female body constitutes a site for autonomous pleasure (p. 142-143). In consequence, Evans concludes that the "liberation" promised by the recent allegedly more open discussion of issues of sex and sexuality in China is something of an illusion.

Henriot (2001) uses a historical approach to explore prostitution in Shanghai from the mid-nineteenth century until the victory of the Chinese Communist Party. He relates the activity of prostitution itself and the various forms of prostitution, from the kind practiced in the most notorious brothels to that of the upper class houses. He also attempts to find out who the prostitutes were, how they came to prostitution, and how they get out of it, and what their working and living quarters were. The work of Henriot (2001) is relevant to this

study because it provides a unique vantage point from which to observe society, even if the view that it offers might appear to be a singular one. Of all the so-called fringe groups, the prostitutes are the closest to the point of linkage between “respectable society” and its deviant communities. Prostitutes straddle the shifting boundaries between the world of the cast-offs and the society that rejects them of that they have rejected. Prostitution is also related to sexuality. Sexuality is an essential dimension of human society. Besides the prostitutes’ world is eminently sensitive to economic and social change, to which it responds and adopts more readily than do other groups in society.

SOCIOLOGICAL SURVEY STUDIES

A primary goal of sociology is the transformation or understanding of social reality into theoretical language(s). That transformation requires close connections between theory and research – theorists who do research and researchers who theorise (Giddens, 1976). Many sociological surveys employ statistical methods and measures to test hypotheses within a large population. Emphasis is placed on the discovery and verification of theories. These studies seek a nomothetic or etic science based on probabilities derived from the study of large numbers of randomly selected cases. These statements stand above and outside the constraint of everyday life (ibid). These studies have helped to provide insight into such areas as family structure in the context of family change, family relations, women’s family roles and parent-child relations, the influence being on parental socialisation practices. The following literature is a brief survey of sociological surveys used in the present study.

The work of Wenfang Tang and Parish (2000), looks at how the social, and to a lesser extent, the political aspects of the economic reform has altered life in urban areas in China. A set of social surveys conducted between 1987 and 1992, included semi-annual surveys, which allowed the researchers to monitor changing responses to reform. Wenfang Tang and Parish (2000) examined whether socialist and market social contracts have a host of systematic consequences for a number of themes in Chinese urban society, such as attitudes and values, life chances, work, family life, gender relations. This research is relevant to the present study particularly in the area of how market reforms

have influenced family life, and gender relations. Other survey studies such as Unger (1993: 25-49) Davis (1993: 50-76) and Whyte (1993) have explored the changes in Chinese urban family life after the implementation of the new economic reform. These works are important for this study because they show how the market forces have affected family lives in Post-Mao China. Unger (1993) and Whyte (1993) for instance have found that family structure differs by class position. Nevertheless, they reveal that family structures and local culture also affect wider processes.

China's recent economic reforms have reinstated the household as the basic unit of production. Short and Fengying (1996: 691-716) investigate the relationship between household production activities and household size and extension in rural and urban areas in eight Chinese provinces. Drawing upon data from two waves (1989 and 1991) of the China Health and Nutrition Survey, they see households with more working aged members in 1989 are more likely to be engaged in household production activities in 1991. The researchers say there is no evidence that the inverse is true. There is some indication that these results hold whether production activities are agricultural or non-agricultural. Short and Fengying (1996) contribute to this research by revealing how decollectivisation and the general shifts from a socialist redistributive economy to a more market based economy has returned the focus of economic production activities to the household. Additionally, these specialised households are an indication that there may be more likelihood of a large multigenerational household being created.

Chairman Mao Zedong was not gone two years when his successors jettisoned core principles of the Communist Revolution and assigned entrepreneurship and consumer demand central roles in a new blueprint for economic growth. Davis is the editor of *The Consumer Revolution in China*, (2000), which is a collection of sociological surveys that analyse the implication of new consumer behaviour surrounding domestic spending, the everyday purchases of food, clothing, and transportation and the more unusual expenditures for wedding finery and a special vacation. This research is especially valuable for the present study because it reveals how changing consumer behaviour can enlarge the social space for urban residents in non-official initiatives. Millions of daily commercial exchanges

not only calibrated the flow of material goods; they also nurtured individual desires and social networks that challenged the official discourse and conventions.

The National Women's Federation and the National Statistics Bureau jointly conducted a survey (WF survey) on women's situation and status in 1990. The first volume of the survey findings at the national level was published in 1993. Concurrently another large-scale survey "Women's Status in Contemporary China" (hereafter known as CASS) was conducted by the Population Institute, Chinese Academy of Social Science. These surveys were drawn on in the present study because they explored the problems that Chinese women were facing in contemporary Chinese society. Both surveys examined the distinctive social functions of the two genders, the sex division of labour, the gender expectation attached to the division, and the two genders' different social circumstances, all of which are impediments to the self-development of women.

ANTHROPOLOGICAL STUDIES

Anthropology is the study of culture and cultural change. A major approach to the study of culture has been through the fieldwork of participant observation. By living among people whose culture one wants to study, the researcher can participate in the different facets of their daily life, make observations in an unobtrusive manner, and collect additional data from selected informants to aid in interpretation. This method has been used extensively by anthropologists with fruitful results (Spradley, 1980). The studies included in this approach are valuable resources for the present study because they explore such areas as family relations in particular and social relations in general, economic relations and cultural values, religious beliefs, and social attitudes. The following is a brief survey of anthropological literature.

Gao (1999) uses a case study approach in order to gain a better understanding of the rural way of life. He examines the political institutions, the economic system, the legal framework, and the cultural values of the People's Republic of China that have discriminated against rural residents who are generally referred to as "peasants" (p.3). Gao's work is relevant to the themes in this study, particularly in his attempt to demonstrate how the radical politics of the CCP have brought about visible

changes to rural development and family life. It is also a first step in understanding differences (between rural and urban life), how people in anyone context actually live their lives. Much of what he argues in theoretical approaches is applicable to this study because in essence the adequate theories of China are based on intensive, first-hand knowledge of Gao village and of Chinese society itself. Like Gao (1999), other work's on rural family life and social change, such as Croll (1994) Huang Shumin (1998), Potter and Potter (1990) and Ruf (1998), have influenced this study by exploring how China's peasant households have received and responded to startling and shifting policies which challenged pre-existing village institutions, relations, customs and beliefs and norms – some inherited or centuries old and others in place for only a few months or years.

Jacka (1997) examines rural gender relations using structured interviews to assess in particular the changes to women's work and the gender division of labour since the reforms were introduced. She identifies the structural and cultural disadvantages women encounter in the rural workforce. Jacka's (1997) work is relevant to the themes of this study, particularly the extent to which women have benefited from the reforms. By examining the impact of new gender divisions of labour on the nature of work undertaken by women, women's participation in family decision-making, political affairs, education, and on values and assumptions about women's identity, and their position in society, much of what she argues in theoretical approaches to women's work and gender and division of labour is applicable to this study. Other research which explores rural women's work, identity and position in the Chinese family, such as Croll (1994), Diamond (1975), Judd (1994a), and Wolf (1985) have influenced this study by understanding resistance and change in the everyday lives of rural Chinese women.

Wolf (1985) is one of several large-scale anthropological projects that have aimed at recovering the history of social change in China. It is one of several landmark studies built on contemporary interviews and documentary research of periods that still have force within the living memory of people throughout China (Parish and Whyte, 1984, Potter and Potter, 1990). The present study assumes this research and places its emphasis on the micro-dynamics of social and cultural

transformation that is aimed at recovering the history of social change in China.

Could men and women have sharply different ideas about what makes the ideal partner? Wu Naitao (1995: 4) in the book *Mother Wife Daughter* notes the criteria for spouse selection in contemporary China has changed from the past. Women consider the following aspects in a potential husband: career prospects, wealth, family, looks etc. Men consider physical appearance, age and gentle behaviour to be the main consideration when choosing a mate. Jankowiak's (1993) ethnographic research reports that Chinese mothers are often a deciding force in their children's choice of marital partner. While Whyte and Parish (1984) and Whyte, (1990) discovered that introductions by friends and co-workers are important for young people to find prospective spouses. These studies were drawn on by the present research because they highlight how spousal selection has changed over time in rural and urban China.

Croll (1981) is primarily concerned with the process of change within the institutions of marriage in the People's Republic of China, which is a central theme in this study. She explores the economic and ideological factors responsible for differing degrees of change, and the contest between the generations, and between kin or neighbourhood groups which projected changes have occasioned. Croll (1981) was drawn on for her examination of marriage practices, and because she explains the experiences of contemporary China in introducing new marriage reforms as a conscious and planned nature of social change.

Studies that examine the expenditure of contemporary Chinese weddings and marriage are examined by Hall (1997), Wolf, (1985) and Honig and Hershatter (1988), who say that these ceremonies are still regarded as the biggest event in anyone's life. Nowadays it costs several thousand yuan to have a decent wedding day in China. From an economic point of view, these studies reveal, the horrendous expenditure involved in planning Chinese weddings today, but that is the price not just of the wedding itself, but also the involved families' status and prestige (Yunxiang Yan, 2000). Maris Gillette, (2000a: 192-227) in her ethnographic study of Xi'an brides in China reveals that in the 1990s, a new trend in wedding gowns and bridal appearance

swept the People's Republic of China (PRC). Dresses that imitated Western gowns became fashions as the PRCs urbanites followed trends that had begun a decade or more earlier in Hong Kong, Taiwan and Japan. This chapter is a useful resource for this study because it provides a short historical reconstruction of wedding attire whose fashion trends have followed the changes in governmental policies for modernising China. It also reveals that the increasing incomes and access to consumer goods characteristic of the 1990s gave Chinese citizens the tools to create and maintain social relationships outside the government's purview.

WRITINGS ON WOMEN AND GENDER IN CHINA: A FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE

A feminist perspective aims to document women's lives and activities, understand women from their perspective and understand women within a social context (Osmond and Thorne, 1994: 651-675). These goals allow feminist researchers to emphasise methodological perspectives, which cohere in a way that is instrumental in understanding the experiences and situation of women. The publication on Chinese women's family roles and family status may be categorised into three basic issues; the constraints of women's dual roles and their adjustments to them; sex-role attitudes (or attitudes toward family and work), and the relationship between employment and family roles (and family power structure). The linkage of work and family is the basic concern revealed in discussions of women's various roles and their changing status.

The interest in writing on "women in China" came mainly from missionaries and ethnologists in China at the end of the nineteenth century many of whom were interested in domestic life or female education (Fielde, 1884; Burton, 1911). These accounts are significant in the present study because they are useful as sources of data on "traditional Chinese women's roles" especially as they have continued to be used well into the 1980s (see, e.g., Wolf, 1985, 1-27). Most of these accounts can be roughly classed in three categories: eyewitness or anecdotal accounts, biographies of prominent women, and descriptions of the "ideals of womanhood" derived from readings of the Confucian Classics. These are not rigid boundaries, of course, and there is a great deal of overlap among them. The following

literature is a brief survey of women's research into gender and Chinese women.

The oppression of women was linked by Western scholars to the notions of Chinese womanhood as expounded in the Classics, and writings on this subject emerged in the late nineteenth century as translations of these works became available. This precedent of using the Classics as an authoritative source for "Chinese" views about women's status established a trend that continued in the study of Chinese women for most of the twentieth century. The Confucian ideology of the Classics has been regarded as the basis of female subordinations, and precepts such as the Three Obedience's and Four Virtues have often been cited by feminist researchers such as Johnson, (1983: 15-65) and Croll (1995: 13) as evidence for women's lowly status. The Reverend Albert O'Hara's *The Position of Woman in Early China according to the "Lieh Nu Chuan," "The Biographies of Eminent Chinese Women"* (1945) have been useful in this study because it has provided a translation of this Han dynasty's (206 B.C – A.D. 220) history of women as well as a discussion of "data" on women's position drawn from the Classics.

Many recent autobiographical and biographical works, depict, the weight of tradition forced on women especially if they refused to bow to the hitherto inevitable or predestined Confucian code and to be married out by the families of their birth. For instance the biographical work of Pang Mei Natasha Chang (1996) tells the story of family loyalty, heartbreak and wisdom. The author writes about her great-aunt, whose traditional Chinese marriage and untraditional Western divorce marked a watershed in Chinese history. While autobiographies from authors, Wong Su-ling, (1953), Chung-chen, (1961) and Chow Ching Li (1978) recount the gender-specific experiences that were compulsory *en route* to Chinese womanhood in pre-revolutionary China. Such moments they argue (include naming, kinship rituals, the birth of siblings and marriage) all had the effect of estranging girls from their own families of birth. All of these autobiographical and biographical works are useful sources of information for this study because they place women's experience at the centre of textual attention during the times of rapid and radical social change in Chinese society. Most wanted to remind readers that, in becoming women, theirs had not been

an easy journey and had involved struggle and defiance and rebellion.

Croll (1995) has been pivotal to this research, combining a historical and feminist understanding juxtaposed with Chinese women's narratives. She investigates the social and gender identities of Chinese women in both the domestic and public worlds historically and in contemporary China. Chinese women she argues have lived with an all-pervasive rhetoric daily prescribing correct thought and behaviour; in the first half of the twentieth century before the Revolution (1911-1949) they lived with a state-supported Confucian rhetoric that emphasised their subordinate position as daughters, wives and mothers. During the Revolution (1949-1978) a new and pervasive revolutionary rhetoric of gender was generated not only to erode Confucian rhetoric but also to exclude the language of experience, despite the obvious discrepancies between rhetoric and lived experience. The new rhetoric prescribed male and female equality but also denied gender difference altogether or reduced it by collapsing male and female categories. What this meant in both rhetorical and practical terms was that women were invited to assume male qualities and enter male spaces, whether temporal or spatial, including work, and the public sphere, the revolution as the male landscape of the future, They were invited to enter on terms that were the same as or equal to men's with very few concessions to females specific qualities. It was as if the female body did not exist; reproduction was ignored and the continuing female-specific inheritance of the Confucian bound family and society negated. Following on from the Revolutionary era (1978-) which is characterised by a plurality of state-sponsored female images inclusive of consumer and cherished infant daughter. Much of the new debate has centred around what 'being a woman' or 'a modern woman' mean; definitions of female as opposed to male and what are the female images and sources of self-esteem appropriate to the new woman in China today.

Critiques of the "woman-as-victim" approach developed in the 1970s, and early 1980s, was generally characterised by victimisation, a condition seen to be universal and timeless for Chinese women. Johnson for example, begins her historical book *Women, the Family and Peasant Revolution in China*, with the words "Few societies in history have prescribed for women a more lowly status or treated them in a more routinely brutal way

than traditional Confucian China (1983: 1) Wolf's ground-breaking feminist/anthropological work *Women and the Family in Rural Taiwan* (1972), has been useful in this research because it offered a radical challenge to the idea that women were wholly subordinated in the Confucian patriarchal family. Wolf's notion of the "uterine family," centred around the mother, opened the way for an investigation into an alternative women's view of Chinese society that contrasted with the official Confucian view. Wolf's work was critical for the development of research on women in China as she demonstrated that women could wield power in ways that were not recognised in a patriarchal gender ideology. She also showed that women's status varied at different points of their life-cycle: elderly mothers, in particular, were empowered by the Confucian family structure and thus had a vested interest in its perpetuation. Wolf's work, which stressed informal networks and unofficial channels of influence, as well as notions such as women's community, strongly influenced this research because it provided analytic devices to study subordinated groups, or informal groups such as women's networks.

Engendering China is a social history anthology by Gilmartin (Hershatter, Rofel and White, 1994) and pursues twin goals of investigating gender relations and the older agenda of making "women visible" (Gilmartin et al 1994: 3). The authors argue that by viewing Chinese history through a lens of gender, one could decenter the dominant paradigms for interpreting China. This anthology has been valuable to this study because it examines not only issues related to women in Chinese society but also how gender, a key means of representing power relations, has been central to notions of modernity in China. The editors thus engage theoretically with some of the most radical epistemological challenges posed by gender theories.

Wang Zheng's (2000: 62-82) chapter entitled "Gender, Employment and Women's Resistance," is a contemporary feminist view which examines the impact and economic transformation on the lives of Chinese women by delineating changes in urban women's employment. She concludes that the reform era has brought accelerated gender discrimination and gender conflicts. This chapter is an important source for this study because it reveals the conflicting gender interests that are prominently expressed over women's employment. Gendered

layoffs expose women's disadvantage and subordinate status. Yet the ability of some women to seize diverse opportunities to rise in important sectors of the economy have been noted.

DEMOGRAPHY OF REPRODUCTION IN CHINA

A demographic approach is devoted to quantifying a trend and describing its spatial and temporal patterning. The main focus of demographic studies is family planning and fertility behaviour. The following literature surveys the various demographic research used in the present study.

Analysis of fertility decline by Lively and Freedman (1991) cite as direct evidence that decline was under way in some Chinese population subgroups before the introduction of government programmes. This research is drawn upon because it presents marital fertility rates specific to urban and educational strata for China nationally. This demographic data indicates that birth control was first adopted by the better educated couples in urban China. Only after the onset of government sponsored fertility control programmes did the strong relationship between education and fertility weaken, undermined by policy goals and bureaucratic regulations tailored to specific urban levels. What began as a "classic" story of the early and spontaneous adoption of conscious control among educated elites became an extraordinary story of social engineering. The idea that social changes in China, other than the official programme, may have facilitated the rapid fertility decline under that programme is not new. Bannister (1987) suggested that the rapid decline in China's fertility rate from 5.8 in 1970 to 2.8 in 1979 was, by and large, acceptable to the Chinese people, presumably because of prior changes in family and society.

The demographic phenomenon of high sex ratios at birth in modern China, with its implications of "missing" baby girls, has been discussed by such demographic researchers as Bannister (1987) Greenhalgh (1994), Greenhalgh and Zhu Chuzhu and Nan Li (1994), Johansson and Nygren (1991), and Johnson (1996), Riley (1997b), and more recently by Croll (2000). Croll (2000) contributes to this study by examining the economic, political and cultural factors underlying discrimination against female children in Asian communities. She combines ethnographic, historical documentation and demographic approaches in her examination of the rising

discrimination suffered by the female child. She explores how female children suffer from excessive child mortality, to the withholding of healthcare and education on the basis of gender. She argues that daughters still cannot substitute for sons and that the increasing availability of sex-identification technologies will serve only to supplement older forms of infanticide and neglect, thus contributing to the increasing imbalance among the sexes.

The recent demographic research by Johnson, Huang Banghan and Wang Liyao (1998) examine the trend of abandoning female children in China. These researchers believe the issue of adoption is crucial to date for the ten's of thousands of foundlings in China today. This research contributes to the present study by revealing the underlying causes that result in the abandonment of so many girls in China today. Other researchers who explore such issues such as Johnson (1996), Riley (1997b), and Whyte (2000) have been drawn on in the present study because they explore the reasons why parents might abandon a daughter in China today. They believe the reasons are rooted in current political, cultural and social structures. These include the role of the family in Chinese family, the importance of sons to families, the ideology for motherhood, gender inequalities, and the recent fertility restrictions imposed by the recent government.

Mu Aiping (1999) examines recent changes in rural women's attitude towards childbearing, using data from a demographic survey collected from 25 villages in two counties (namely, Wujiang and Chongqing) during 1991-1992. She explains that while the number of children desired by women was very low, the preference for sons, in some areas has still retained its significance. The work by Aiping (1999) is valuable in examining changes in women's attitudes towards childbearing, the relationship between women's current desire for children and the implementation of the one-child policy.

In recent years a growing demographic literature has dissected the effects of the state reforms on the population policy (Croll, Davin and Kane 1985a; Kane, 1987, 1999; and White 2000). With few exceptions the literature is based on secondary sources where it draws on first hand research. The bulk of these studies deal with peasant fertility aspirations. The few that discuss the effects on policy implementation tend to concentrate on disruptions of economic mechanisms, paying little heed to the

use of administrative tools. Furthermore, virtually all the literature on implementation problems focuses on the difference of enforcing the rules on the number of children (Croll, et al 1985a); little has been written about the consequences of the economic reforms, from enforcement of late marriage, late child-bearing and spacing rules.

Greenhalgh (1993: 219-250) is drawn on in this study because she examines the effect of the reforms on both economic and administrative enforcement mechanisms, and on each of these policy elements, in number of children, late marriage, late childbearing – spacing. The work of Greenhalgh (1993) informs this study because it examines how much control the state wields over family formation, especially in the villages in China; and to what extent did the locus of reproduction control shift from the state to society during the economic revolution.

CONCLUSION

The review of literature on Chinese families shows that various disciplines were involved and some interdisciplinary approaches were applied. The number of publications included is not comprehensive. Data on these publications on Chinese families show that sociologists, historians, anthropologists and demographers differ somewhat in their research focuses. Except for family organization, sociology and anthropology (or others) share few research areas. The finding may have been expected because of the different theoretical backgrounds within various disciplines. Even researchers with similar interests may raise different questions or examine the same issues with different approaches guided by their different training. Publications on family structure, family relations and women's family status stand out as the most studied sub-areas in family research. Family relations emphasise interactions among different pairs of family members and are mostly confined to two generations. Reports on women's family status centre largely around work and family life of employed women with more emphasis on dual-role conflicts than structural impacts on women's role. In terms of methodological approaches, quantitative data are preferred and, as a consequence, statistical analyses at various levels of sophistication dominate family research reports in China.

2

HISTORICAL SOCIOLOGICAL METHODOLOGY, RESEARCH METHODS, AND THE METHOD OF THIS STUDY

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The aim of this chapter is to give an overview of the historical sociological perspective and how it pertains to this research. I will start by surveying this approach to delineate the methodological foundations of the discipline. In examining this issue I will focus on selected by works by Ebrey (1991) and Diamant (2000) to enhance our understanding and appreciation of the sociological study of history as it pertains to the Chinese family. I will then incorporate a discussion of the differences between qualitative and quantitative research methods and how they relate to the study of family continuity and change. The narrative technique as a historical sociological research method will then be explored as a way of organising a continuous and productive interplay of history and theory. The chapter will close with an explanation of the research method employed to undertake this study, and emerging problems discussed.

HISTORICAL SOCIOLOGICAL METHODOLOGY

The sociological study of history has only recently achieved recognition. Although historical research occupied an important place in the nineteenth century European sociological tradition, scholars long accepted a disciplinary division relegating the study of the past to historians, while reserving contemporary subjects for sociological investigation (Bock, 1956). The field of historical sociology first witnessed a revival in the 1950's with the publication of Benix's *Work and Authority in Industry* (1956) and Smelser's *Social Change in the Industrial Revolution* (1959). During these years, a small chorus of voices called for a more historical approach to sociological problems and closer cooperation between the two disciplines (Lipsett, 1958; Thrupp, cited in Grew and Steneck, 1977).

The interest in historical-sociological research increased steadily in the 1960's, a decade that marked the appearance of Bendix's *Nation Building and Citizenship* (1964), Tilly's *The Vendee* (1964) and Moore's *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* (1966). Yet, it was not until the 1970's that the sociological study of history achieved full status within the discipline, symbolised by the awarding of the prestigious Sorokin prize to sociologists with an historical orientation in 1976 and again in 1977 (Bonnell, 1980: 157).

Historical sociology according to Smith (1991: 1-3) is the critical study of the past which looks for mechanisms through which societies change or reproduce themselves. Historical sociological studies highlight the particular and varying features of specific kinds of social structures and patterns of change. Gottschalk (1947: 8) defines the historical method in social research as the process of examining the records and survivals of the past. Three steps are associated with this method: (1) collection of probable sources of information; (2) examination of these sources for authenticity, either in whole or in part; and (3) analysis of the data collected through this process. The reconstruction of the past from the data derived in the above process is called historiography. Historical sociology then is an approach to historical data, a style of historiography that seeks to explain and understand the past in terms of sociological models and theories. Sociological concepts and principles may be used to describe and analyse actual historical situations on a higher level of abstraction and generalisation. Alternatively, historical data may be used to illustrate and test the validity of sociological concepts, principles and theories (Cahman and Boskoff, 1964: 8; Hughes, 1960: 20-46).

However, there are sometimes facile distinctions drawn between the methodology of sociologists and historians. Ebrey's (1991) historical survey on 'Women, marriage, and the family in Chinese history' discusses the evolving patterns of family life and the status of women in China not as mere functions of Confucian and Neo-Confucian thought, but rather as resulting from the complex interplay of social, political, legal and economic, and cultural forces. Lieberman (1985: 229-231) believes we need a theory of the data, a theory that deals not only with the web of relationships within the data but also with

the process by which data are generated. Ebrey's historical work does not do this, it appears to be atheoretical.

Why then has history been so theoretically empty to so many of its practitioners. Historians are concerned with 'facts and objectivity' and 'truth' reached through the proper handling of evidence, residues of the past which have survived into the present (literary sources, diaries, letters, newspapers etc). The proper evaluation and use of these residues in order to make historical statements are the technical skills of the historian. For Ranke one of the 'founding fathers' of the historical profession, history must relate things the way they actually happened (*wie es eigentlich gewesen*). Generations of historians, in Germany and elsewhere, have grown up to that motto and 'learned to babble the words' (Novick, 1988: 132; Carr 1990: 8; Braudel, 1980: 11). The publication of Diamant's work *Revolutionising the Family: Politics of Loves and Divorce in Urban and Rural China 1949-1968* (2000) is no exception he describes the implementation of the 1950 Marriage Law in China as 'it actually happened,' not only that the Marriage Law continued to shape family dynamics well after the early 1950s, but also throughout the 1950s and 1960s it was in rural areas and among rural educated people in cities he argues that its effects – intended and *unintended* – were felt most intensely.

"Knowledge of all sources and competent criticism of them – these are the basic requirements of a reliable historiography" (Elton, 1967: 73-83; Bloch, 1953: 48-137). Using private and official papers, newspapers and various other sources Diamant (2000) was able to take a dramatically new look at the impact of the Marriage Law (and, in a larger sense, the state) on family structure and relations after the Chinese Communist Party took over power in China. In the process he was able to challenge much of the conventional wisdom concerning family and gender politics in urban and rural areas, the role of class in Maoist China, the inner workings of the Chinese state, the meaning of marriage and divorce among different populations, the role of community in social change, and the sources of conflict manifested during the Cultural Revolution.

Elton (1983: 117) insists on the importance of understanding "historical circumstances behind their [documents] production" and argues that "the historians primary

task will always consist in discovering the circumstances in which their evidence came to be born – the circumstances, intensions, influences attending occasion of its creation.” Two features need special mention. The first according to Diamant (2000: 3-4) is that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), for its part, promoted its own version of a family law based in part upon Marx and Engles’ notion that the family was an oppressive institution at odds with individual freedom and happiness, enslaving women in particular. That was why immediately after the 1949 revolution, and later decrees laid the foundation for changing the family, first of all by outlawing polygamy and forced marriages, and replacing them with more modern ones based on principles of monogamy, love, free choice in marriage partners, easier access to divorce, and extensive courtship between two individuals. The other feature according to Diamant (2000) was the states efforts to promote a new vision of the family whilst encountering resistance among the population. The new Marriage Law affected each family, and in much of China new practices were introduced that were totally at odds with the long experience of generations of the majority of the population. Panic and resentment towards the state reflected these generalised anxieties. While some older men and women were afraid the state would unduly empower the younger generation, the younger working class males also had grounds to object to the Marriage Law, in particular, many resented the power the state granted to women by liberalising divorce and promising them legal protection.

Sociologists in comparison have been less concerned with issues of evidence and criticism. Their ‘noble dream’ has been theory building not fact building. That dream goes back to the ‘founding fathers.’ Durkheim firmly believes in the possibility of discovering “general laws” of human behaviour for example in his book on *Suicide*, (1951 (1897): 37). Indeed, the mission of sociology is that of discovering laws through the systematic and methodological comparison of facts. To the sociologist, the historians ‘facts’ are important only to the extent that they can be explained. “Only comparison affords explanation. A scientific investigation can thus be achieved only if it deals with comparable facts” (Durkheim, 1951 (1897): 4). Weber (1978 (1922): 19) echoed in *Economy and Society*, “We have taken for granted that sociology seeks to formulate type concepts and

generalised uniformity's of empirical processes. This distinguishes it from history, which is oriented to the causal analysis and explanation of individual actions, structures and personalities possessing cultural significance."

Historians' 'noble dream' may have slowly sunk into the quicksand of philosophical debates (Novick, 1988). However, even the purest of narrative accounts cannot be entirely devoid of analysis and interpretation. For history, is like any other subject, an entirely intellectual exercise which designates which information possesses historical significance, and what significance it possess. The historian in other words, constructs historical problems on the basis of an argued case of relevance to historical analysis, and then through the critical use of extant resources (or even a search for new ones), attempts to provide a solution to them. The criteria by which the construction of a problem will be judged of historical significance will ultimately be dependent upon some explicit or implicit theory of causation. In this sense, there is no distinction in principle between history and any other social science. The distinction is not that between theory and non-theory, but between the adequacy or inadequacy of the theory brought to bear.

The trend toward original historical research undoubtedly has a salutary effect on the field of historical sociology as a whole. It upgrades the standard and techniques of research, instils a more sensitive attitude towards empirical material, and, what is more important, ensures a closer correspondence between the sociological imagination and historical evidence. Nevertheless, one should not mistake this trend for a metamorphosis of sociologists into historians. There is still the intrinsic methodological divergences of sociology and history. It is striking that historical sociologists, while shifting to new sources and evidence, have continued to employ specific types of explicit, abstract generalising concepts and theories in historical analysis. Even though sociologists have adopted some of the historians tools, they show little sign of relinquishing their own methods of approaching history and comparison. For the foreseeable future, a preoccupation with theories and concepts will continue to dominate and shape research strategies in the sociological study of history. The contribution of historical sociological research lies precisely in this distinctive

commitment to an analysis of structures and events across temporal and national boundaries.

THE FAMILY: AND RESEARCH METHODS

Qualitative and Quantitative Research Methods

In attempting to understand qualitative research, and how it relates to family studies it is critical to delineate its foci and its goals. First qualitative research seeks depth rather than breadth. Instead of drawing from a large, representative sample of an entire population of interest, using statistical techniques as is the way of the quantitative methods of social science, qualitative researchers seek to acquire in-depth and intimate information about a smaller group of persons. Second the aim of qualitative research is to learn about how and why people behave, think, and make meaning as they do, rather than focusing on what people do or believe on a large scale, which is a quantitative approach. Third, the goals of qualitative research can be situated on several levels. Qualitative research spans the micro-macro spectrum and both structural and processual issues. (Maines, 1977: 75-95, 1983: 267-279). It is particularly well suited to the study of historical family processes on several levels of analysis, avoiding the traditional micro-macro dichotomy in sociology as well as the equally untenable objective-subjective polarity in North American research (for review, see Alexander, Giesen, Munch, and Smelser, 1987; Ritzer, 1992), and perhaps also the polarity between agency and structure in European traditions (for attempts at integration, see Archer, 1982: 455-483, Bernstein, 1989: 141-163; Giddens, 1984). Moreover, the family is an ideal locus of research for the integration of these levels of analysis.

Fourth, in addition to its critiquing function, qualitative research frequently falls within the context of discovery rather than of verification, as is the case with quantitative research. New information may reflect new practices or behaviours, new forms of social organization or social structure, and/or new ways of thinking or interpreting processes of socialisation or change. It may involve complete redirection, or modification of, or additions to, existing ideas. This does not mean that qualitative research occurs within a literature vacuum, unconcerned with the contributions of previous research. Yet it does mean that qualitative research is not necessarily guided by "traditional"

perspectives, nor is it necessarily propelled by literature-driven questions and hypotheses, although it can accommodate hypothesis testing. The primary commitment is to the empirical worlds, to convey its workings in its phenomenological integrity. Researchers therefore often pursue an inductive approach (Becker and Geer, 1960: 267-289), shifting their focus according to the elements of the world that family members find important, rather than those dictated primarily by extant research. A final goal of qualitative research is to redefine the process of theory emergence through a continual 'double fitting' where researchers generate conceptual images of their settings, and then shape and reshape them according to their ongoing observations, thus enhancing the validity of their developing conceptualisation.

Following this brief overview of goals, we now ask: What is qualitative research? I will simply address this question by offering a list of the many forms of qualitative research used in this study from the analysis of secondary texts. The many methods include open-ended questionnaires, in-depth interviews, ethnographic studies, participation observation and demographic research. But these broad categories do not do justice to the diversity of procedures in qualitative research. My presentation in this study focuses mainly on qualitative research which includes as its base (a) written words in journals, autobiographies, scripts, texts, books, official reports and (b) life histories and narrative stories in the written form. Above all, qualitative research emphasises meanings, the multiplicity of realities in a family, and the general socio-psychological context. Qualitative research is contextual research.

HISTORICAL SOCIOLOGICAL RESEARCH METHODS A NARRATIVE APPROACH

Qualitative research methods, specifically, a narrative perspective, is used within this research to explore social changes within the Chinese family and gender relations. A socio-historical narrative perspective was chosen because it helps to explore the temporality of social change and historical events. The aim is to look for mechanisms through which the Chinese family and society has changed and reproduced itself. Historical sociology offers a "unique explanatory frame" concerned not with "pastness" of the phenomenon being analysed and

explained but the “representation of events” (Griffin, 1992: 405; Smith, 1991:3).

According to Abbot (1991: 227), historical reality is conceptualised “not as time-bounded snapshots within which ‘causes’ affect one another... but as stories, cascades of events” in which “complex actors encounter complex structures.” Thus “there is never any level at which things are standing still. All is historical. Furthermore, there are no independent causes. Since no cause ever acts except in complex conjecture with others, it is chimerical to imagine the world in terms of independent causal properties acting in and through independent causes” (p. 227). A focus on social change and contingently related events therefore means “thinking about the social world “narratively” and “generalising not in terms of “causes” but in terms of narratives” (p.227).

The newest research in historical sociology has converged on a notion of causality based on narrative “and centrality of meaning, sequence, and contingency, rather than universality and predictive law” associated with conventional historiography (Aminzade, 1992: 457; Abbott, 1990; Sewell 1992). Narratives are sequential accounts. They organise material into chronological order to give an account about what happened. Maines (1993) identifies a number of necessary elements of narrative theory. First, historical events are identified and arranged into an account “through the use of a plot, setting, and characterisation that confer structure, meaning, and context on the events selected” (p.21). Next, “a temporal ordering of events must be created so that questions of how and why events happened can be established and the narrative elements can acquire features of tempo, duration and pace” (p. 21). According to Griffin (1993: 1089), “ To locate an action in the sequence of a narrative and link the action to the narratives previous actions, for example is one way to understand what ‘caused’ the action and thus to ‘explain’ its occurrence.”

Non-historical sociological explanations tend to be comparative and generalising but not temporal in their logic. They rely on comparisons of a few cases, analysis of statistical regularities of cases, or “logical subsumption of particular cases under broader historical generalisations and theoretically general laws” (Griffin, 1993: 1099). Narratives on the other hand, are intrinsically temporal in both construction and explanatory logic

and “take the form of an unfolding, open-ended story fraught with conjectures and contingency, where what happens, an action, in fact happens because of its order and position in the story” (p. 1099).

It is important to note that many historical sociologists are increasingly using narrative to support new forms of post-positivist causal inquiry and to redefine the role of theory and explanation in socio-history inquiry. Two examples are relevant. First narrative analysis engage in causal interpretation by answering factual and counterfactual questions about historical events and sequences (Griffin, 1993: 1992; Quadagno and Knapp, 1992). The causal significance of a historical event or sequence of events is assessed by asking the following question posed by Max Weber (1949: 180): “In the event of the exclusion of that fact from the complex factors which are taken into account as co-determinants, or in the event of its modification in a certain direction, could the course of events, in accordance with the general empirical rules, have taken a direction in any way different in any features which would be *decisive* for our interest?” Counterfactuals are an essential tool in analysis of sequences of events because specific events are too complex to subsume under causal generalisations or theoretical laws (Weber, 1949: 165; see also Abbott, 1990). Thus, when counterfactual “what if” questions are posed, the researcher conceptually isolates and abstracts facts from their historical contexts and asks “whether their absence or modification would have altered the course of the event as it was recorded. If the answer is yes, the fact is judged both essential to the historical configuration as it ‘actually’ happened and a significant historical cause of what followed” (Griffin, 1993: 1101; Weber 1949: 166, 171, 180).

Second, narrative analysts are increasingly using temporal connections (e.g., duration, pace trajectory, and cycle) to analyse sequences of events that take agency, large-scale change, and long-term processes seriously (Aminzade, 1992: 475). According to Smith, (1991) non-historical sociologists do not consider the time dimension of social life or the historicity of social structure; non-sociological historians neglect the way processes and structures vary between societies and their relationship to acts and events. In contrast, “genuinely historical” studies assume that the “time and place in which a structure or

process appears make a difference to its character, that the sequence in which similar events occur has a substantial impact on their outcomes” (Tilly, 1985: 79).

In sum, in recent years we have witnessed an analytical shift toward temporality and narrative analysis in socio-historical inquiry (Sewell, 1992: 480). Historical sociologists recognise that “narrative analysis is both essential to the sociological analysis of historical events and successful in providing certain kinds of explanations” (Griffin, 1993: 1097). The turn to narrative has been the subject of much discussion in history, sociology, and other social sciences (Burke, 1992: 163). While the move toward narrative is evident in both sociology and history, it is a fact that the role of meaning of a narrative is a source of much disagreement between historians and sociologists. For example, most of the very recent work in history employs narrative as an atheoretical convention of writing a description, an account of life experiences, or a category of human culture (Fox and Lears, 1993). However, an increasing number of historical sociologists are using narrative as a mode to analyse historical events and social change in processual, sequential ways (Abbott, 1992), as is the chosen approach of the present study.

INVESTIGATING CHINESE FAMILIES: HISTORICAL SOCIOLOGICAL METHODS

In this study I seek, on the basis of existing studies, to develop a historical sociological approach to understanding social continuity and social change within gender relations and the Chinese family.

The study has used a combination of qualitative and quantitative research approaches to aid in analysis of material. To a great extent a qualitative perspective has played a major role in this study because it is inherently a multi-method focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter (Handel, 1992). Quantitative studies in the form of empirical surveys have also been included because they report their findings in terms of the kinds of complex statistical measures or methods to which quantitative researchers are drawn (e.g., path, regression, or log-linear analyses) (Jick, 1979: 602-610).

Using the empirical data as a general parameter, the study then follows a sociological historical perspective for an analysis of the major changes constraining and incentive components, both structural and ideological, to assess their roles in the process of societal change in China. The implications of the changing social process are discussed on the major institutions such as the family and political institutions. The interpretation is aided by knowledge of major events that have taken place in the social, economic, and political domains in China since Imperial times, seen in perspective of modern Chinese history.

A narrative approach has been implemented to organise the material into chronological order. The accounts are conceptual wholes, built through selection and chronological linkage of otherwise discrete parts, each of which then takes on meaning in light of the whole (Griffin, 1993: 1094-1133). Comparison also plays a prominent role in this study, reflecting a variety of goals. Comparisons across time have, of course, long been a staple of historical research, part of the standard attempts to describe continuity and change (Quadagno and Knapp, 1992: 481-507). For example, the Inheritance Laws in nineteenth century China may be compared with those of the Communist period and these in turn, compared with contemporary time. This use of comparison is common enough in the following pages.

Using different historical periods as a kind of database, I hope to shed light on the peculiarities of historically specific family arrangements and suggest why the Chinese family systems have the characteristics they do. More abstractly, according to Smith (1991) such comparison – which treats historic cases together with, and in the same way as ethnographic comparison - process to advance our general understanding of social process, the way societies work and how they change.

Stacey (1983) believes that a history of family life should incorporate not simply a description of its features but also an understanding of how families interact with the wider environment. Only by examining the larger social and cultural context can we make sense of the course of change in the Chinese family life during the past 50 years. This study has paid attention to the economic and demographic forces that have shaped Chinese family practices over time. It has also explored

the historical institutional and ideological forces that have helped to shape gender relations within the Chinese family and society.

Problems arising in the research

Availability of data has been a determining factor in the focus of this study. I have been unable to locate any primary materials in this area of research. I have therefore based this study on secondary data such as books, journal articles, autobiographies, survey data and newspaper reports. Such data is problematic in that it is sporadic and perhaps not always typical of reality, making the information difficult to understand, and possibly hard to draw a complete and accurate picture of the continuities and changes that have occurred over time within the Chinese family and society. Another difficulty has been my inability to read mandarin, this has therefore limited my access to many materials that may have been appropriate for this study. Overall, the study took longer than expected, and really demanded much more than an analysis of relevant literature; it required more active participation on my part, perhaps using non-structured interviews might have been helpful in attaining an accurate understanding of the issue.

CONCLUSION

By outlining the method utilised by this study, it is hoped the simplicity of the research method will allow engagement with the material in a way that makes it more accessible and open. Any interpretation of the dynamics of societal change in this study is not one based on personal observations, but rather is grounded in concrete data from broad-based cross-sectional disciplines seen in a historical and sociological perspective.

3

CHINESE FAMILY: CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

This chapter explores changes in the institution of the Chinese family and its place in the social framework. It traces the changes experienced by the family from the beginning of the twentieth century to the present time. It is intended to provide a historical survey of the Chinese governments' concrete reform programmes and how the changes have affected the family during the period under consideration.

FAMILY AND KINSHIP IN PRE-REVOLUTIONARY CHINA

Chinese family life was traditionally structured as a series of hierarchical and reciprocal relationships, according to principles of generation, age, and sex (Baker, 1979; Roberts, 1998). Confucian social doctrine placed great emphasis on the cultural ideal of a large, extended family household, with several generations living under one roof. The man in the oldest generation was the head of the family household, holding authority within the family, promoting its well-being, and representing the family to the outside world. Younger generations were taught to respect and obey their elders. Within the group of men of the same generation, for example the sons of the head of the household, there was a hierarchy of age, with sons identified by their birth order and referred to by their parents as 'eldest son,' 'second son,' and so on. Daughters were similarly numbered (Chang, 1996).

Finally there was the hierarchy of sex. Women were theoretically subordinate to men in all family relationships, normatively expressed in the doctrine of 'three obediences': as a daughter a woman should obey her father, as a wife she should obey her husband, as a widow, she should obey her son who succeeded his father as head of the family (Croll, 1995: 13;

O'Hara, 1945). It was also expressed in the practice of foot-binding, which crippled women and restricted their mobility, and which also supposedly made them more attractive and marriageable into higher status families (Levy, 1966; Wang Ping, 2000).

Families and their members were closely identified with their surnames which designated descent in the male line. The members of a family household¹ as we will discuss in Chapter Six were seen as the living representatives of a line of descent stretching from the earliest remembered ancestors down to the present descendants and onwards to the future generations who would continue the family line (Huang Shu-min, 1998: 2-3; Roberts, 1998). Filial piety² extended to obligations to the ancestors, notably to provide the ancestors with descendants, hence the overriding necessity for a man to marry and have a son. Sons were much preferred to daughters, and the birth of a succession of daughters were no cause for rejoicing (Croll, 2000).

It will be notable in the following chapters that the primary purpose of marriage was to continue the family patriline (defined as inheritance through the male line). Marriage was considered to be a family rather than an individual matter and hence was arranged by parents, sometimes when the prospective spouses were in their infancy, using go-betweens and fortune tellers to check the suitability of the potential bride and groom and to negotiate terms and conditions of the alliance (Hayes, 1994: 49-50). Central to this arrangement was the injunction of exogamy, meaning that the bride and groom's families should not share the same surname or even come from the same village. The bride moved on marriage away from the village where she was raised to the village of her husband's family to take her place in their household; this pattern is referred as 'patrilocal' or 'virilocal' marriage. The responsibility of the new bride included service to her mother-in-law, who determined her duties within the household. The new member of the household had a very low status, which improved when she had fulfilled her primary function of producing a male successor (Wolf, 1985).

Patrilineal descent also involved patrilineal inheritance. The vast majority of family households in pre-revolutionary China were engaged in agriculture and many owned the land they worked. The custom was for all sons to inherit the family's

property in roughly equal shares. Daughters did not inherit, but did customarily receive dowries, a form of premortem inheritance by which daughters were allocated an appropriate share of the family patrimony (Ebrey 1991b). The division of a family's property, especially of land, between a number of sons tended to be associated with the division of the household, although ideally this would not happen until after the death of the older generation. The process of family division had a tendency to break up accumulations of land holdings and perpetuate small family farms as the basic unit of rural economy (Lavelly and Wong, 1992).

The elements of the Chinese family system mentioned so far, which may be summed up in the shorthand phrase 'patrilineal, patriarchal and patrilocal,' have been represented as the enduring or primordial nature of the 'traditional'³ family in China (Chang, 1996). An alternative view is that these are the core features of an ideological discourse of the family sustained by and for the powerful elements of Imperial China society, comprising in particular the central Imperial State, powerful and wealthy families in given localities, and men in general.

Ebrey (1991a), for example, argues that the 'Confucianisation'⁴ of the Chinese family took place over a long period of time and was heavily influenced by Imperial policies. The centrality of the surname in identifying patrilineal descent, the small family unit as a unit of production and consumption governed by a patriarchal family head, the tendency for small family farms to predominate in agriculture, and the stress on Confucian education as the dominant channel of social mobility, can all be traced back to governmental interests in social harmony and stability, in surveillance and taxation, and were actively encouraged by state policy.

Conformity to Confucianised 'rules' of family life was greater in the upper classes than in the lower. Wealthy men had larger families with more sons, either by their wife or by concubines. Poorer families were more likely to divide, and divide earlier than wealthy families. The 'normal' pattern of patrilocal marriage⁵ was less common among the poorer classes, although it was still normatively highly valued. Some marriages were in fact uxorilocal, where the groom moved to the household of a man who had daughters but no sons, and allowed at least one son to take the surname of his wife's father, thus

enabling the latter to fulfil his duty of continuing the family line (Wolf and Huang, 1980). Only a poor man, or possibly a disabled man who had no prospects of concluding a patrilocal marriage, would accept such an arrangement. The formation of lineages too was the result of deliberate strategies among the upper classes of late Imperial Chinese society to extend their power and influence, rather than a primordial aspect of kinship.

Generally speaking, marriage can be seen as one mechanism for preserving the structure of inequality and patrilineal societies. As in other patriarchal and patrilineal societies (Goode, 1990), marriage was a form of social placement. The choice of a spouse creates a relationship to that person's kin group and affiliates a person to the life chances of the kin group. Where, as typically is the case, there are considerable social inequalities of life chances, this affiliation is fateful indeed; if you marry into wealthy family, you yourself are likely to become or remain wealthy, while if you marry into a poor family, you yourself are likely to remain or become poor. Ebrey (1991b) focuses on the relationship between marriage and inequality in China, and confirms the tendency, at all levels of society, for marriage to take place, by arrangement of senior kin, between relatively equally situated families. Affinal links, (defined as relations with the wife's kin) therefore were more important than might appear in the Confucianised model of patrilineal kinship.

The Confucian model is also a male model which obscures women's conceptions of family relationships. Although patrilocal marriage entailed the departure of the bride from her natal family, much research had discovered the significance of continued relations between married daughters and their parental home. Not only did daughters maintain such relations to provide fall-back support for themselves in case of problems arising in their new conjugal family (Judd, 1992), they were also responsible for maintaining the strength of affinal ties which could be mobilised for mutual support, business ventures, and local political alliances (Watson, 1985). Furthermore, the wife's dowry provided her with some economic resources of her own, and in some cases a widow could take over the management of her late husband's estate (Johnson, 1983). In fact, without denying the general social subordination of women in Chinese

society, researchers have in many ways demonstrated the active role of women in their families and kinship networks.

In many ways, then the Confucian conception of the family must be seen as an ideological framework, deliberately disseminated to maintain the harmony of a hierarchical and unequal society. Its emphasis on patrilineal descent, on patriarchal rule and on patrilocal marriage arrangements provided the context in which various groups could pursue their interests and in which the privileged could preserve their advantages. It was an ideological framework which concealed from view alternative conceptions of family life and of the relations between old and young and male and female. Explicit criticism of it was rare until the twentieth century, but throughout that century the family and kinship have been central areas of conflict, social engineering and social change.

PRE-COMMUNIST CRITICISM OF THE CONFUCIAN FAMILY

Criticism of many aspects of the late Imperial Chinese society grew towards the end of the nineteenth century as China's weakness in the international arena became apparent through defeat in wars and the loss of control over treaty ports (Murphey, 1999: 56-57). Elements of the educated classes became convinced that major social and political change was necessary if China was to be successful in its search for wealth and power, and sought knowledge of the institutions of other societies (Schwartz 1969).

The traditional family system came under attack from the younger reformers and revolutionaries. Its emphasis on continuity and dominance of the older generations over the young was seen as an obstacle to change and to the assimilation of new ideas and practices. Educated young people sought freedom from their families and wanted to make their own decisions about marriage, education and careers (Johnson, 1983). Modern schools were started by missionaries and other agencies (Fielde, 1884; Burton, 1911), and propagated alternative views of family life, of the relationship of individuals to the family and of the provision of women in society. Feminist organizations were set up and campaigns mounted for such goals as the abolition of foot-binding (Croll, 1978); physical freedom was seen by many as fundamental to social emancipation (Hong,

1997). Pa Chin's novel *The Family*, set at the time of the May Fourth movement ⁶ and published in the 1930s, represented the struggle of the younger generation to free itself from the shackles of the Confucian family system and was a clarion call for change.

The cultural critique of the traditional family was primarily an urban phenomenon. Stacey (1983) argues that it also had a rural counterpart, brought on by the consequences of changes in the agricultural economy. Peasant families whose livelihood was threatened by population growth, landlord exploitation, rising taxes, foreign competition and other forces found it difficult to realise the values of Confucian familism. Marriage rates declined, household structure became simpler, family ceremonials could no longer be afforded. There is also evidence of resistance to patriarchal domination among young men and to some extent women, encouraged perhaps by teachers and campaigners bringing new ideas to the village from the cities. It is difficult to know how extensive and widespread developments were, but Stacey feels they justify the judgement that the peasant family was in crisis.

The Guomindang government⁷ introduced reforms in family law which modified Confucian patriarchy with elements of modern values. The Civil Code of 1931 established the principle of free-choice marriage and granted women rights in matters of divorce, inheritance and property more equal to those of men, though it maintained patriarchal authority in other respects (Meijer, 1971). The law expressed family values that had already influenced the practice of the urban middle classes, but had very little impact on family life in rural areas. In other respects the Guomindang abandoned its earlier revolutionary ethos and attempted to reinforce a conservative moral order based on a mixture of Confucian and Christian values.

COMMUNIST TRANSFORMATION: THE NEW DEMOCRATIC FAMILY

The rule of the Guomindang was always contested and its credentials as a revolutionary party was not borne out by its capacity to transform society. The Communist Party, by contrast, was able to experiment with a variety of policies of social change in the mainly rural areas where it gained control in the 1930s and 1940s, and then to embark on a radical course of

social transformation backed by state power from 1949. The Communist approach to the family was in many ways radical, but it was always a part of a wider programme of social change, the underlying philosophy of which did not accord very much significance to the institution of the family as such; Marxist theory allocated it to the superstructure, dependent on changes in the material base. The communist government was primarily concerned to develop the economy, and to this end the hierarchically structured family could at times be a useful means. The concern here is to understand not just the explicit family policy of the Communist regime, but also continuities as well as transformations of the place of the family in the wider social structure, some aspects of which may have been intended, others not (Therborn, 1990: 371-397).

The explicit family policy for the People's Republic of China (PRC) was expressed in the Marriage Law of 1950, which aimed to replace the 'feudal' patriarchal marriage system of the old society with the 'new democratic' marriage system, based on the free choice of partners, monogamy, equal rights for both sexes and protection of the lawful interests of women and children (Meijer, 1971). The law prohibited bigamy, concubinage, child betrothal, interference in the remarriage of widows, and the exaction of money or gifts in connection with marriages. Husband and wives had equal status, equal rights in family property, and the right to inherit each other's property. Divorce by mutual consent was made available by registration with the local government office; otherwise, both parties had equal right to sue for divorce. Appropriate relationships between husband and wife and between parents and children were specified, stressing equality, mutual respect, love and support, and the reciprocal obligations of each member for the welfare (Diamant, 2000).

The law envisaged a 'family revolution,' the main elements of which were the curtailment of patriarchal rights over women (Stacey, 1983). The power of the state was to be used to shift the basis of family relationships away from the hierarchies of generation, age, and sex to a more egalitarian model. The conjugal family of husband, wife and children was to be extracted from its embeddedness in patrilineal and patriarchal structures and made the basis for a new form of harmonious family life; the husband-wife relationship was to replace the

father-son relationship as the core dyad of the kinship system (ibid). Apart from a desire to reduce the power of patriarchs, the aim of the Communist leadership was to lay the foundation for a stable and happy family life which would enable family members to devote their efforts to the construction of a new socialist society.

However, the family policy of the Marriage Law has to be seen in the context of the wider dynamic of social change, Stacey (1983) argues, that when family policy is seen in conjunction with other elements of the Communist programme, especially land reform, it appears that the actual consequence was to create the conditions in rural China for a new, democratised form of patriarchy. Land reform transferred vast areas of land from landlords and rich farmers to poor peasants. This land, nominally allocated to all adults individually but in fact consolidated into family holdings, provided the material conditions in which poor peasant men who had hitherto been unable to marry and have children were now able to become head of a family household (Johnson, 1983; Spence, 1990). The 'rural family crisis' was thus solved, and the traditional family was rescued at the same time as it was being transformed. This is essentially what poor farmers had wanted when they gave their support to the Communist Party and fought for the Red Army, to gain the material basis necessary for living a proper family life as a respected family head.

The need to retain the support of the rural population, especially the poor peasantry, also led the party to back-pedal or go slow in the implementation of some provisions of the Marriage Law (Davin 1976). Divorce was a sensitive issue, as peasant men did not want to relinquish their hold over 'their' women. After a spate of divorces in the first two years of the law's existence, it became increasingly difficult for a woman to gain a divorce and the emphasis shifted towards conciliation procedures and pressures on couples to stay together. The rights of women over land were also curtailed in practice, with married women's names seldom appearing on title deeds and divorced women prevented from retaining rights over their share of the family's land. After 1953 the party deemed the law to have done the necessary work in constructing the new democratic family, and implementation of its provisions ceased to be a major priority of government agencies (Johnson, 1983).

Another combination of continuity and change can be seen in the role of lineage in rural China. The early phase of the land reform process distributed land to large numbers of family farms. The subsequent phases aimed to increase the degree of cooperation and coordination between farming families, at first through the formation of Mutual Aid Teams, then Agricultural Producers' Cooperatives, and eventually of the People's Communes. The family which was a property-owning unit in the MATs and APCs became an organisational, income-earning and consuming unit in the communes. In all of these larger levels of organization, kinship links between men of these families took on new functions. Land redistribution had ostensibly removed the material basis for lineage organization, since lineage corporations had been disposed of their land-holdings. But the men who had organised lineage activities remained in the hamlets, neighbourhoods and villages around which mutual aid teams, agricultural cooperatives and eventually production teams within communes were formed, and their kinship networks played a central role in the power structure of these organizations. Agnatic kinship ties thus re-formed around the new collectivised institutions in the countryside (Diamand, 1975; Parish and Whyte, 1978; Potter and Potter, 1990).

Kinship, however, was not the only social principle maintaining ties between groups of men resident in the same village; as we saw earlier, the stress on patrilineal kinship could at least in part be seen as an ideological framework legitimating a range of aspects of male domination of village life, which has led Judd (1992), to use the term 'androcentry' for the structure of social relationships preserved by patrilocal marriage customs.

It is striking therefore that the Communist authorities never mounted any campaign against the system of patrilocal marriage which, together with its counterpart of *de facto* (if no longer *de jure*) patrilineal inheritance, remained the basis of women's relative exclusion from control over economic and political affairs in rural China (Johnson, 1983; Stacey, 1983), which remained a powerful principle for decades after the revolution. The stabilisation of residence by the household registration regulations intensified the consequences of patrilocal marriage. Until the growth of mobility stimulated by the economic reforms of the 1980s, the vast majority of rural men remained in the village in which they were born, thus cementing

the networks of relationships between them. Men also inherited the most important component of family property remaining in private hands after collectivisation, namely housing, and this gave parents continuing influence over their sons and their marital plans (Parish and Whyte, 1978).

Stacey (1983) refers to the new family system in the countryside produced by this combination of factors for continuity and change as 'patriarchal-socialism.' The elements of this system – patrilocal marriage and residential stability of men, aspects of patrilineal inheritance and patriarchal authority, male networks in local power structures, and a continued sexual division of labour – made up a new and unique system of family and kinship, but one which resembled the pre-revolutionary system more than had perhaps been intended by the radical revolutionaries who led the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Peasant men, and many older women too, saw the new society as one in which they could attempt to realise traditional family values rather than those propagated by urban reformers, and they had a degree of power and leverage to mould the 'new democratic family' to their own ends.

The situation in the cities developed quite differently (Whyte and Parish, 1984). Family life among young educated urbanities had been moving towards a 'new democratic' conjugal pattern since the May Fourth period (Lang, 1968). Furthermore, unlike in rural areas, there was no structural or material basis for a reconstruction of patriarchal power. Most families ceased to be units of production; most urban inhabitants became income earners in state or collective work-units, and housing was provided either by the work-unit or by local government housing departments.

Such factors weakened the power that parents had over their children. Parents' influence over their children's marriages was considerably reduced, though as we will see in Chapter Four was by no means eliminated (Whyte, 1992). Nor could parents directly influence the placement of their offspring in jobs, once the system of state assignment of school leavers to work-units had become established (Bian, 1994). Increasingly, young married couples were able to live in accommodation allocated through their own work-units rather than with the parents of either bride or groom, although stem families (which means) remained common in the early years of married life.

There were also major changes in the nature of urban kinship. Lineage organization in cities had already been much weakened before the Communist Party came to power in 1949. In the early decades of the PRC, pressures for the elimination or simplification of life-cycle or calendrical rituals resulted in the attenuation of kinship ties, the need for support from kin was lessened by the extension of welfare services made available through work-units, and shortage of time together with poor urban transport made it difficult to visit kin. Extended kinship ceased to be an important basis for social organization. Kinship on a narrower scale shifted from patrilineal to a bilineal emphasis, as parental preference for sons declined and daughters became just as important as a source of support or of a home in old age (Davis-Friedmann, 1991).

As in the countryside, there were also elements of continuity in urban life, especially the high degree of cooperation and mutual support between generations, whether or not they resided together. Younger adults retained a sense of obligation to care for and support the elderly parents. So long as they were capable, the older generation expended great efforts for the welfare of the family as a whole, for example by doing the shopping or the cooking, or looking after grandchildren while their parents were at work (*ibid*).

In general, the family reforms of the Communist regime were more acceptable in urban areas. The model of the 'new democratic family' had long corresponded more closely to the values and practical constraints of urban dwellers than those of the peasants, and family life would have moved in that direction with or without the 1950 Marriage Law.

Despite the changes mentioned so far, in both rural and urban areas the family continued to be an institution central to people's lives. The Communist party-state had no intention of destroying the family as an institution or even removing its core functions. Rather, it attempted to gain some control over the way those functions were performed and co-opt family activities and family loyalties in the service of the revolution. Membership of a family continued to define who a person was and to place them in society, but in terms increasingly supervised by the state; family membership allocated people not only their name, and property, but also their residence classification (*hukou*), their

share of collective income and their ration coupons (Smith, 2000).

The family continued to be the only legitimate location for sexual activity, and any extra-marital or pre-marital sexual experience was seen as a threat to social order (Evans, 1997). Families continued to socialise their own children, and although childcare facilities were increasingly provided by urban work-units and neighbourhood organizations as younger married women were encouraged into the social labour force, parents interviewed by Whyte and Parish (1984: 169) in the early 1970s did not believe that collective childcare was subverting children or turning them against their families.

Only relatively short periods of intensely radical campaigns, such as during the Great Leap Forward⁸ and the Cultural Revolution,⁹ did the Communist party-state take major steps to remove basic social functions from the family. During the Great Leap Forward rural and urban communes were encouraged to take over almost all the functions of the family, including child-raising and the provision of domestic services, in order to achieve economies of scale and to intensify time and work discipline (Spence, 1990: 580-581).

This generated considerable resistance from both men, who saw their patriarchal power being eroded, and older women, who found themselves loaded with additional burdens just at the stage in life when they would normally have daughters-in-law to help them (Stacey, 1983: 231). The experiment was quickly brought to an end. The Cultural Revolution campaign to encourage children to resist their parents and their 'feudal' upbringing had consequences deemed by the party to be anarchic, requiring the reimposition of control by the army (Chu and Yanan Ju, 1993: 275-276). Thereafter, the authorities once more stressed the role of parents in helping to educate the new generations of socialist citizens and in maintaining discipline.

None the less, the boundaries around the private family were to some extent penetrated by the party-state, partly to mobilise family members for the building of a socialist society, but also to limit some aspects of patriarchal domination. This was especially the case in urban work-units, which created a markedly new context for those family activities (Stockman, Bomey and Sheng Xuewen, 1995: 26). Urban work-units (*gongzuo danwei*) in the 1960s and 1970s were multifunctional

organizations that, as well as undertaking a range of productive and political functions, also shared with families many reproductive activities which in capitalist societies are left to the preserve of the private family. They were heavily involved in the education of members and their children, in providing for the welfare and social security needs of members and their families from cradle to grave, in family planning and birth control, brokering, mediation in marital discord, and cultural provision for free time. This interpenetration of productive and reproductive spheres was one of the key conditions for the relative reduction in urban gender inequalities, for example in education and incomes, which was achieved in the Maoist period (Stockman, 1994).

FAMILY, STATE AND SOCIETY IN THE POST-MAO ERA

A number of elements of state policy in the post-Mao era have drastically altered the conditions of family life. Two aspects in particular will be the subject of the last part of this chapter: first the state's explicit family policy as expressed in law; second the restoration to many families of the economic functions removed by state planning. A third aspect the state's attempt to control one of the most basic functions of the family, that of biological reproduction, through what is usually referred to as the 'one child policy' will be discussed in later chapters.

Family Law

State policy in the post-Mao period has begun to operate more through the medium of codified laws than in previous decades, including in the sphere of family policy. There has been a proliferation of laws governing or affecting the family relationships (Palmer, 1995), beginning in 1980 when a considerably revised Marriage Law was introduced. The family has officially been designated the basic institution of Chinese society and is seen to be functional for social stability and harmony (Smith, 2000). The family is the only legitimate sphere for sexual relationships and childbearing (Evans, 1997). Parents are legally required to protect their children and socialise them appropriately into social values and behaviour, to educate them and to ensure that their right to attend school is respected. Parents are required to discipline their children and are

responsible for disturbance or damage they cause; no longer are children to be taught that 'to rebel is justified'. The family is responsible for the care of dependents, including the elderly; children have reciprocal obligations to their parents, to support them and care for them if needed in later in life (Ikels, 1993: 307-333, 1996). Family ownership of property, including the means of production, is legally guaranteed, and the Inheritance Law of 1985 regulates the disposition of such property.

Palmer (1995) identifies a number of points of tension between law and social practice. The state attempts to enforce clear procedures for the registration of marriage, which have run into conflict with customary weddings and with attempts to avoid registration, for example in order to marry below legal ages or evade birth control regulations. Access to divorce has been eased, with 'freedom to divorce' under the condition of 'breakdown of mutual affection' written into the 1980 Marriage Law, while there is considerable official apprehension about rising, though still low, (compared to Western countries) divorce rates. The state's attempt to enforce a one-child policy conflicts, especially in rural areas, with the desire of parents to have sons and the need of farming families for an adequate family labour force (discussed in Chapter 6). As in many other areas of state activity, the ambition of the state to mould family life through law has run ahead of its capacity to enforce that law.

The anti-patriarchal claims of the earlier communist movement have not been eliminated from the overt formulation of law and policy, and the state remains explicitly committed to the curtailment of patriarchal rights over women and children. For example, the state has become increasingly involved in questions of family abuse and sexual violence, attempting to provide legal protection for wives and children, and has expressed concern over the rise in 'trafficking in women' and prostitution (to be discussed in Chapter 5) (Keith, 1997). In 1980 the PRC signed the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and the 1992 Law for the Protection of Women's Rights and Interests consolidated and built on earlier legislation (Palmer, 1995). There is much discussion over the significance of the language of 'rights and interests' in newer Chinese legislation and doubts as to the existence of adequate procedures available to women to enforce their lawful rights. There remains a tension between the state's

attempt to use the family as a mechanism of social control and the commitment to extending to rights.

Family Farm and Family Business

By 1978, the economic activities of the vast majority of Chinese families had for twenty years or more been incorporated into larger forms of social organization, production teams in the case of rural families, work-units in the case of urban ones. Families and their members had few choices as to how they were going to make a living. The economic reforms brought in from 1978 had the effect of reallocating many economic functions to family households. In rural areas the dissolution of the commune structure led to family households once again becoming units of production (Short and Zhai Fengying, 1996: 691-716). To a lesser extent urban families have also regained some control over their economic activities, in particular where they have established private family businesses, but also where the growth of new employment opportunities has enabled families to pursue more diversified household work strategies (Wong, 1999: 110-117).

The restructuring of the rural economy prompted considerable diversification between peasant households (Croll, 1987: 469-499). Relatively few households are now completely reliant on crop agriculture. Many have diversified into various combinations of cropping and domestic sidelines or into branches of specialised production; alternatively, some members of a family household take the main responsibility for the families contracted land while others find employment in local industry, start a small business, or seek work in larger towns and cities (Smith, 2000: 355-356). Some families even sub-let their land to others and with draw from agricultural work. Each of these patterns, and the differential involvement of different family members in them, have different consequences for the structure of family relationships.

Families remain entirely dependent on agriculture only where no alternative economic opportunities are available. These families tend to revert most clearly to traditional patriarchal forms. Where both husband and wife work in the fields, the economic contribution of the wife, even if it is considerable, tends to be less apparent than when she was earning her own work-points under the commune system, with a consequent loss

of authority in the family (Davin, 1988). In other families, the traditional pattern of men working the land ('outside') while women take care of domestic duties ('inside') is reproduced (Jacka, 1997). However, both these types are uncommon. Far more widespread is the situation often referred to as the 'feminization of agriculture.' Across much of rural China, agricultural work in the fields is taken over for most of the year by women, (discussed in Chapter 5) as by children and the elderly, while men work in local industry or in cities (Smith, 2000: 356).

The consequences of this for family relationships are varied. Agricultural work may be seen as backward and less profitable, relegated to women as lower status 'inside' activity while men go 'out' to work in higher status, modern industrial branches. Alternatively, women may prefer to locate their activities within the household economy because it gives them greater autonomy and control over their lives. Judd (1994) argues that the household economy gives many women the best chance of escaping the wider patriarchy of male dominated structures beyond the household.

The post-Mao economic policies have also had consequences for relationships between generations. In some respects these resemble pre-revolutionary patriarchal forms. Children have in some circumstances become important to the household economy although, because employment of children is illegal, the extent of child labour is uncertain. Some children, especially girls, are removed from school in order to do farm work while their parents concentrate on earning money elsewhere, or even to be put to work in village enterprises (Riley, 1997a). In some cases, sons remain under the authority of their parents after marriage, since profitable family businesses provide fathers with the resources to hold sons within the enterprise and give the sons a reason to stay. The great investment in rural housing that was financed by rapid economic growth from the early 1980s was in part the construction or extension of houses intended to keep sons within stem or even joint households,¹⁰ and a rise in the number of such households has been noted among the most prosperous entrepreneurial families (Seldon, 1993: 139-164).

In some areas parents attempt to influence the marriage decisions of their children to fit in with what they see as the

corporate interests of the family, and pay high bride-prices to prevent their children moving away (marriage decisions to be discussed more fully in Chapter 4) (Siu, 1993). However, many researchers stress that these phenomena should not be seen merely as the restoration of traditional patterns. The younger generation has far greater autonomy than in pre-revolutionary times, the younger couple has greater control over its own finances, and is likely to bring pressure for earlier division of the family. If the older generation wish to maintain the multi-generation family business, they have to handle relationships carefully and go some way to satisfy the demands of the younger generation (Cohen, 1992b: 357-377). When the younger generation have alternative economic opportunities outside the family, they tend to form separate nuclear family households even before the birth of children (Cohen, 1992a; Seldon, 1993: 139-164).

However, to maintain family economic cooperation it is not necessary for the various conjugal units to live together in one household. Croll (1994: 172-177) has investigated a form of rural family that she calls the 'aggregate family.' This is an aggregation of ostensibly separate households who merge their economic activities to take advantage in income-generating opportunities. This could simply be the continuation of a joint venture operated by father and sons before the division of the family. However, it could also be formed by related families joining an already successful family enterprise. The participating households often live in close proximity, but sometimes more distant kin living in towns are brought into the operation, for example to handle the marketing of the produce of the village-based families. Such aggregate families can also become politically powerful groupings, able to bargain with local officials and to protect their component households from fees and other extractions.

One of the most visible signs of improved reform livelihood in rural areas has been the conspicuous consumption by farmers, who build houses, get married, buy electrical appliances, stage celebrations or make funeral arrangements and build temples and graves. Rural consumer attention has also focussed on clothes, jewellery, furniture, soft furnishings and floor and wall coverings. In suburban villages and even in far-off richer villages and markets, new clothes, sofas and elaborate

sideboards and televisions or cassette players are not uncommon. Adorning the body and the home has drawn attention to the person and immediate environments in a proliferation of lifestyles that is born of income generation and generates a sense of individual and family difference (Croll, 1994: 217).

At the end of the 1990s there is little consensus as to exactly what has been achieved in rural China after a decade of reform and almost universal enthusiasm for it. The urban-rural income gap has been rising, and peasants continue to feel they are falling farther and farther behind (Smith, 2000).

There have been some bold steps forward, often followed by swift steps backward. There are still some glaring contradictions, for example, in situations where state subsidies are working alongside market incentives. The clash between state and the peasants over grain and food production had caused some serious problems, as the state experimented, back and forth, with mandatory grain procurement, a process that has been characterised as a “shifting game of cat-and-mouse.” The attempts by the state to control what peasants grew and the peasants’ natural inclination to favour more lucrative (i.e., nongrain) crops have resulted in several manifestations of peasant resistance that fall short of actual protest, including simply ignoring the quotas; purchasing grain on the free market, then reselling it to the state to meet quotas; and lying to procurement officials about the sizes of harvest (Smith, 2000: 149).

During the Tiananmen Square demonstration in 1989 the peasants were largely quiescent, and the protests of the students and workers in the cities fell largely on deaf ears in the countryside. But in the 1990s there have been some significant changes, and in the event of another outburst peasant passivity cannot be guaranteed. When so many peasants act in a certain way at approximately the same time, the government tends to get nervous and pays close attention to what is going on. Centuries of inertia, embodied in the mentality of the “moral peasant” engaged in a grim but passive struggle for survival has come to an end. Today the state is much more likely to encounter the “rational peasant,” who can no longer be relied upon for support and acquiescence (Smith, 2000: 151).

The profits earned during the early years of the reform allowed rural households to mechanise production in the fields,

which meant that sons, daughters, and other members could search for work. Many set their sights on the booming cities along China's golden coastline. The relaxation of restrictions from the countryside into cities and towns in the early 1980s has resulted in large numbers of temporary migrants moving from villages into cities: these people are often referred to by long-time city dwellers as the floating population (*liu renkou*), a label describing those who are not permanently registered in their current place of residence (Smith, 2000: 351). Their presence in the cities is immediately obvious: They congregate conspicuously on the street, outside railway stations; in construction sites and factories; in the free markets; and in all other places where jobs are to be found and money is to be made (see Photo 3.1).

One of the reasons why many people want to live in the cities has been the prized status of having an urban residence card (*hukou*). Although the new employment patterns generated by the economic reforms are altering the picture considerably, until recently, at least an urban *hukou* brought with it the promise of employment, housing, medicine, and entertainment – usually at significantly subsidised prices.



Photo 3.1: Migrants waiting for work in a Guangzhou street market.

Source: Smith, 2000: 361.

The lure of the city acted as a strong magnet for peasants who had been made redundant or were desperate to leave the countryside, but until the regulations were changed in the mid-1980s the desire to move to the city was constrained by the need

to have an urban *hukou*. This presented a familiar catch-22. Peasants wanted to move to the city to try to make a decent living, but before they could do so they had to be rich enough, or have the connections needed, to obtain a resident permit (Gao, 1999; Smith, 2000: 329).

They are easily identified by their dialects, by their appearance, and by the jobs they are doing (usually characterised as the “three D’s” – dirty, dangerous and difficult). It is estimated that about three million migrants live in Beijing; Shanghai has about the same number (Ma Rong, 1999: 224). As the numbers of these migrants grew, so did urban anxiety and resentment. These “squatters” were blamed for all the emerging urban ills, including clogging transportation, rising crime, deteriorating sanitation, displacement of urban workers jobs, and excessive childbearing. Early migrants became conduits for others from other regions of origin, resulting in the growth of enclave “villages” that developed their own miniature bureaucracies and leadership (White, 2000: 108).

In the cities, the economic reforms started later in the 1980s and made less impact on the basic economic structures from which families derived their living. However, there appeared to be widespread corruption, bureaucratic “squeeze” and bribery as unscrupulous officials took advantage of the new reforms to line their own pockets (Smith, 2000). The traditional network of *guanxi* – the connections that open up the back door for people – would continue to play a central role in urban family life (Kipnis, 1997).

Most urban residents remain employees of state-owned and collective work-units, though some have found work in joint ventures and foreign companies, and a small proportion have started small businesses (Wong, 1999: 113-114). Many urban families have experienced a significant improvement in housing and living standards (Davis, 2000: 1-19; Hanlong Lu, 2000: 124-141; Wenfang Tang and Parish, 2000; Yunxiang Yan, 2000), and an increasing opportunity for younger people to find their own employment in a widening labour market (Kristof and WuDunn, 1994). One might have expected these conditions to be conducive to a continuing loosening of patriarchal domination in family relationships, but such expectations would only partially be borne out.

In general, the attitude of urban families concerning the purpose of living, was to create a better material life for others and society as well (Hanlong Lu, 2000: 124-141; Wenfang Tang and Parish, 2000). Within this society of relative well-being there was also the folk notion of the “relatively comfortable family” (*xiaokangzhijia*), which referred to a family of modest wealthy security above subsistence (Hanlong Lu, 2000: 124-141).

For instance savings of city households rose from \$1.85 billion in 1978 to \$62.5 billion in 1990 and to \$192 billion in 1994.¹¹ Consumer durable like televisions, washing machines and refrigerators that had previously been available to a minority with special connections became commonplace throughout urban China. In 1990, there were 20,000 cellular phones in China; by 1995 there were 3.4 million (Erwin, 2000: 145-170). English-Chinese dictionaries had no official translation for greeting cards, but by 1995 a street stall in Beijing reportedly sold 80,000 cards in one day (Erbaugh, 2000: 145-170). When within less than a decade millions of people gained access to new modes of communication, new vocabularies of social discourse, and novel forms of leisure through newly commercialised outlets, it does not seem an exaggeration to claim that there was a revolution in consumption.

In the vast majority of urban couples of working age as will be discussed in Chapter Four, both husband and wife are economically active. Conjugal relationships are relatively egalitarian, both compared with the past and with other urban societies (Stockman et al 1995). They tend to share family decision-making and control over family finances and husbands make significant contribution to domestic labour and child care, although the main responsibility for these falls on the woman. The marked equality of incomes in urban areas prior to the reforms meant that differences between husbands' and wives' economic contributions to the households were relatively small. In the 1990s this began to change. Income differentials have widened, and the greater autonomy given to enterprise management as we will discuss in Chapter Five has enabled them to put into practice their general prejudice against employing and promoting women (Riley, 1997a: 79-108).

This reduction in the relative economic standing of women reinforces the tendency for the older generation to seek

the support of sons rather than daughters. Despite a general trend towards a higher proportion of nuclear households in urban populations (Zang, 1993: 35-43, 1999: 267-292), there is still a large majority of stem family households, and of these most are virilocal rather than uxorilocal (Davis, 1993; Unger, 1993: 25-49; Ikels, 1996). Newly married couples, if they cannot find or afford housing of their own, are far more likely to move in with the groom's parents than with the bride's (Logan, Bian and Bian, 1998:872).

And when elderly couples decide that they need to reside with one of the married children, they are more likely to live with a son than with a daughter (*ibid*: 861), although even then women often prefer daughters as sources of emotional support (Milwertz 1998). Parents with one child do not have this choice, and are almost likely according to Tian Sen (1994: 14-17) to live with a daughter as a son, and this may become more the norm as one-child families reach that stage of the life-cycle.

However, as in rural areas, these stem families do not simply reproduce traditional patriarchal hierarchies. The younger couples have their own incomes and their own concerns, and even newly-wed brides do not accept the unbridled authority of mothers-in-law (Hall, 1997; Honig and Hershatter, 1988). The relationship between the generations is more in the nature of mutual aid and reciprocal support, or what Ikels (1993: 307-333) calls an 'intergenerational contract,' with the older generation taking over as much of the childcare and domestic work as they are able, in expectation that the younger couple will care for them as they become dependent. It is in fact a relationship for mutual dependency, as the younger generation recognises; Whyte (1997), in a survey of parents and their adult children carried out in the Northern city of Baoding in 1994, found that adult children had at least as strong a sense of filial piety and family obligation as their parents had, although in other respects the younger generation had more liberal views and cultural tastes. Whyte argues that adult children remain bound to their parents in many ways, for housing, jobs and other social resources, and that they therefore tend to see the relationship between generations as one of mutual obligation and support.

CONCLUSION

The Confucian family structure, with its patriarchal hierarchies of generation, age and sex, was an obstacle to China's modernisation and at the heart of its backwardness. After the somewhat feeble attempts of the Nationalist government to reform the family through the civil law, and the endeavours of younger members of urban elite to adopt what they saw as modern Western family patterns, the Communist regime seemed determined to rid China of a patriarchal heritage that weighed like a nightmare on the minds of the living. It turned out that for many supporters of the new regime, especially for men of the older generation, patriarchy was a dream and not a nightmare. For this and other reasons, family revolution has had ambiguous consequences. Certainly, younger generations and women have achieved a degree of liberation from the domination of old men, many of them have a measure of economic autonomy from family control, and legal statements of the rights of women and children have become more explicit. But the family as an institution has not only retained its function of socialising the younger generation and placing them in the social structure; it has also regained many economic and control functions that have underpinned patriarchal authority.

4

THE HUSBAND-WIFE RELATIONSHIP

In the previous chapter we have traced the social changes experienced by the Chinese family from the beginning of the twentieth century to the present time. In this chapter we shall explore in detail the single tie that is often said to make the backbone of the family relationships: the one between marital partners. The husband-wife relationship starts, naturally enough, from the initial encounter whether they know each other before marriage or not, which is linked to the method of spouse selection. This then is our starting point. Then we shall deal with this relationship in terms of what each partner expects of the other; how they interact in different domains of family life; and how marital conflicts are resolved.

SPOUSAL PARTNER SELECTION

In Imperial China, marriage was not based on love and romance. Young people had very little say in marriage, either about timing or about partners. Many marriages were arranged by parents and thus were “blind,” with the bride and the groom in many cases not even meeting each other until the wedding day. All this gave parents effective control over the marriages of their offspring (discussed in Chapter 3) (Chang, 1996; Ono, 1989; Parish and Whyte, 1978; Salaff, 1973: 704-717; Wolf, 1985).

Parental influence in the marriage institution was gradually eroded after the turn of the century as reformers and revolutionaries denounced the personal miseries and suicides. Especially in the cities, young people struggled to change traditional practices like Confucian ideals of filial piety, arranged marriage, and the subordinate role of women in the family. These struggles led to significant changes in the marriage institution, one of which was the age at which youths married (Levy, 1949; Pa, 1972; Witke, 1973).

During the 1930's about 10 percent of urban brides surveyed were under fifteen years of age; by 1950 that practice

was reduced significantly. Early marriages of males decreased during the same period. According to the latest official statistics, in 1994 the average marriage age for women at first marriage was twenty-three years (Zang, 1993: 35-43; Whyte, 1990). Early marriage has not been eliminated under the communist regime, however. In 1990 China still had over 8 million marriages of girls under fifteen in rural areas; this figure was halved by 1994. By 1994, 71 percent were widows or widowers, and fewer than 1 percent were divorced. Twenty-two percent were still single (Beijing Review, 1995: 14-20).

Currently young people in China are now enjoying some freedoms that previous generations never had. Table 4.1 shows how freedom of choice in choosing one's mate has increased in urban China since 1900.

Table 4.1 Changes in Aspects of Freedom of Mate Choice
Year of Marriage

| Mate Choice Patterns | 1900-1939 | 1939-1945 | 1946-1949 | 1950-1953 | 1954-1957 | 1958-1965 | 1966-1976 | 1977-1982 |
|-------------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Parental arrangement (%) | 53.9 | 36.3 | 30.6 | 19.8 | 11.2 | 3.1 | 0.8 | 0.9 |
| Introduction by relatives (%) | 24.0 | 27.2 | 25.9 | 25.7 | 24.1 | 21.2 | 17.8 | 15.2 |
| Own effort (%) | 5.0 | 9.8 | 14.5 | 18.5 | 25.7 | 26.4 | 33.5 | 31.7 |
| Others (%) | 0.5 | 1.0 | 0.4 | 1.9 | 0.6 | 1.4 | 0.6 | 0.1 |
| N.A. (%) | 1.6 | 2.4 | 4.5 | 4.2 | 4.0 | 5.6 | 3.1 | 3.8 |
| Number of cases | 570 | 622 | 46668 | 475 | 498 | 641 | 877 | 889 |

Source: Zang, 1993: 39

Note: N.A. = no answer: respondents did not answer question.

Proceedings dominated by parents arranged more than half of all marriages between 1900 and 1938; by 1982, such practices have drastically diminished. By then, four in every five couples married of their own volition. Chinese women today enjoy much more freedom in selecting mates than their counterparts who married before 1949, as one young woman reveals:

We had seen each other at several meetings [in the factory], but hadn't really known each other. She began, I was looking for someone who was not going to be as strong as me, because, you know, I have a pretty fierce character (*Xingge*), she laughed. I'm not good at admitting when I'm wrong, even though I am wrong sometimes. So I needed someone who wasn't as fierce as me. So that's what I looked for. The she added, He's not very good looking. But that's fine (Rofel, 1999: 228).

Parents and older associates still play a major role in this process, however. As Table 4.1 shows, introduction by friends and co-workers are important for young people to find prospects. Studies indicate that workplace officials do their best to serve the needs of young people, including their marital concerns, in exchange for their political loyalty and obedience. Single young people are treated to frequent informal matchmaking activities by friends or colleagues. At times such matchmaking can become almost a project of the workplace, with the responsibility usually falling on the shoulder of official organizations such as the Communist Youth League, the trade union and Federation of Women (Honig and Hershatter, 1988: 85-90; Whyte and Parish, 1984; Whyte, 1990). Dating agencies which operate through magazines and television programmes are extremely popular, especially with people in towns and cities. In Beijing, there is even an agency which arranges marriages between people with disabilities (Corrigan, 1995: 150-212).

Second casual dating was rare prior to the 1990s; dating was viewed by the public as an ad hoc agreement to marry, rather than as a mechanism for selecting an eventual partner, as in the West (Hall, 1997: 73). A survey found that nine out of ten Chinese women never had another person they considered marrying besides their eventual husbands. Less than 30 percent had other boyfriends. Many women said they rarely or never dated their future husbands; even for those who did, the dates almost always came after the decision to marry, rather than prior to it (Xu Xiaohe and Whyte, 1990: 709-722).

Thus, many Chinese young people have to make a vital decision about their lives without being able to gain experience first via casual dating. Sometimes parents are able to exert considerable influence. William Jankowiak (1993) did field work in a city in Inner Mongolia in the 1980s and reports that Chinese mothers are often a deciding force in their choice of children's choice of marital partners. Other studies indicate that

urban mothers are often involved in many aspects of their daughters' lives; this involvement includes choosing and introducing their friends. Young women may prefer to find a husband without parental help, but it is often difficult in social context of the Chinese city, where places to date like dance halls, karaoke clubs, and fast food restaurants were rare and beyond most budgets before the 1990s. Instead they have to rely on the introductions of all those around them—parents, classmates, friends and relatives (Riley, 1994: 791-803). In the overwhelming majority of cases, the compromise between the arranged marriage and free one has been adopted. It takes the form of either the childrens' choice, parents' approval/disapproval, or parents' introduction and/or selection, childrens' say etc (Wolf, 1985).

Further, children usually live with their parents until they marry. This pattern is both expected by cultural norms and as discussed in Chapter Three reinforced by the shortage of housing and the government's rules that do not allow unmarried people to acquire housing easily. Young people live in close physical proximity to their parents during the time when they choose a spouse, thus giving their parents ample opportunity to meet, judge, and comment on their boyfriends or girlfriends. Young Chinese would not want their parents to arrange their marriages, and almost all parents agree. However, they show little obvious resistance to, and seem to genuinely accept, a certain amount of parental influence and involvement. A 1996 Hong Kong survey found that even there – dressed in the most advanced Western fashions and grunge clothing and surrounded by the latest Hollywood releases, and giant dance halls blaring the latest rock music – 75 percent of young respondents say they should obey their parents in their choice of friends, 91 percent say they should study hard, and 87 percent say their parents should determine how they get on with other family members (Elegant and Cohen, 1996: 52).

Similar changes in mate choice also occurred in rural China (Harrell, 1992: 331-336; Lavelly and Xinhua Ren, 1992: 378-391; Parish and Whyte, 1978; Stacey, 1983; Wolf, 1985). Working in a collective gave young peasants opportunities for daily contact unavailable to them in the past, which increased their freedom to marry someone of their own choosing. Recent decollectivisation has not changed this situation;¹² young

peasants still have the freedom of choice. A marriage may be arranged by the parents, but the son and daughter will be given an opportunity to meet and agree to the match, or a young couple may become acquainted on their own and ask parents to prepare the wedding. Ongoing economic reforms have allowed young peasants to migrate into urban areas (Zang Xiaowei, 1995) thus increasing their freedom of mate choice in the countryside.

Since the 1980s, young people have less need for introductions by parents and friends because ongoing economic reform has changed China's landscape significantly. Popular anecdotes emphasise an increasing materialism among youth in courtship. New housing, dance halls, movie theatres, fast food joints and discretionary income enabling young people to frequent them, combined with long distances travelled to work, help young men and women meet one another on their own. As Laughlin (1999: 355-387) explains, movies, novels and magazines are introducing Western ideas of love and marriage. The internet has become a catch phrase among the young generation, and dating and talking love on the internet may become a fashion (Kou Zhengling, 1998: 9). It can be reasonably predicted that more and more young people will get married of their own volition in the future, without introductions by friends and family.

CRITERIA FOR SPOUSE SELECTION

What makes for a prospective partner in marriage? Criteria differ. In the northeast, among the educated male students, girls are chosen for their connections, their gentle manners, their looks (white skin, Western eyes, big breasts), the location of their home village, their parents' wealth and their 'gentle and caring' behaviour. Wu Naitao (1995b: 4) in *Mother Wife Daughter* reckons that 'good-looking' and 'good at housework' are still men's main criteria. All men surveyed stated that women should be younger than them. Usually, the older the man, the younger the woman has to be to satisfy his criteria (Li Xia, 2000: 21).

The young women were likely to consider the following aspects in a potential husband (in order of importance): career prospects, family background (especially reputation and age of parents), education, wealth (his or his parent's), looks (especially height) (Li Xia, 2000: 21). Wu Naitao (1995b: 27) says women

want spouses to be well educated, enterprising and have a family with sound economic conditions. This fits anecdotal accounts of the role of financial considerations for women in marriage (Li Xia, 2000: 20-27).

In 1985 a matchmaking institute in Shanghai questioned 1,132 unmarried women and 891 men. They found that 78 percent of the women wanted their man to exceed their own education, professional status and income; 15.5 percent wanted the man's conditions to equal their own and only 4.7 percent were willing to take a man whose conditions were inferior. Just over three percent of the men preferred a superior woman, 32.3 percent preferred a partner of similar status and 64.4 percent wanted a woman of lesser status. These preferences were confirmed by reports from matchmaking institutes in other major cities (Wu Naitao 1995b: 27).

As a woman in one study puts it the couples must have stable jobs, it is only then that they can build a happy family. As we will note, this is especially required for men (Jankowiak, 1989: 63-83). Whereas some men say that for an ideal wife, the most important thing is to have beauty, not a job, i.e. they emphasise physical appearance as a prime criterion, the women continue to insist that the ideal husband should have a good education and a stable job with good revenue (Jankowiak, 1989: 63-83). This may remind us of the pre-1949 pattern in which the man was the main breadwinner in the family.

There have been some major changes. Before the new economic policy's, both spouses had to work in the state sector to earn enough income for their family (Bossen, 1999: 305), but this is no longer the case. As we will see in Chapter Five there has been a revival of the traditional gender roles. One woman said that the breadwinner, the man must be mature enough to support his family economically (Beijing Review, 1999: 33). The most important criterion for a woman is to be ready to take care of the family and to be able to assume the responsibility of being a mother (Rosen, 1994: 17.15-17.17). According to one respondent, it is better if a woman has a job, but if she does not, it is ok because the man must be the leader, so it is not necessary that his wife has revenue. Both of these respondents married at the age of (21), in the same year (1990). These attitudes may well reflect a reasonably high level of affluence. However, Rosen (1994: 17.17-17.21) reveals that some women insist that wives

should work not just because of economic necessity, but also for sexual equality.

CONJUGAL INTERACTION

What is the nature of contemporary conjugal relations in China in the 1990s? Does having a degree of freedom in the choice of spouse help to establish a close and intimate relationship with that person? We shall look at the ways couples interact: first at work, and then in other domains of family life.

Interaction at work

In rural areas the collectivisation of agriculture¹³ had the effect of a possible separation of marital couples while in cooperative production. They might belong to the same work group, but participate in different subgroups. In order to survive or to supplement their incomes, families would often involve themselves in domestic production activities (farming and animal rearing, etc) (Croll, 1983: 30-36; 1994). In this respect, as Jacka (1997) shows, women generally had a larger share of the work than men, especially the younger women, whose husbands were non-cultivators. As for the distribution of household chores the traditional patterns persisted, according to which women undertake all the household tasks. The men shared on average only 20 percent of all household tasks (including heavy ones such as drawing water from the well and transportation of materials) with their wives and children (Xiao Zhenyu, 1995: 112). We need to add that with the sharpest division that has been made is not between heavy and light work, but between male and female spheres of work. Everybody is expected to do his (her) work, no exchange is desirable. Gender identity is closely bound up with this gendered division of labour.

This situation does not seem to have improved after the open door policy.¹⁴ After decollectivisation in the early 1980s the family became an independent economic unit again and patriarchal domination still prevails therein. The migration of rural labour, which started in the mid-1980s, however, has made a big impact on the farmers' family life although the situation varies. In some areas, the men migrate, leaving the women to manage the family farm alone, thus agricultural work has become more "feminised" (Bossen, 1991: 47-67; Judd, 1992: 338-356, 1994). In Shandong village in 1994, 70 percent of men

were engaged in non-agricultural jobs for the whole year or seasonally. Women complained about the heavy burden they could hardly bear. From the perspective of family power, the cost of their new predominance in production may therefore be greater than the benefits (Liu Lang, 1994: 9-11).

In urban areas a survey conducted in 1991 leads to a similar conclusion: women do most of the household chores. In participation and time (see table 4.2), 98 percent and 96 percent of wives took part in cooking and washing, with an average 2.76 hours consumed. While only 69 percent and 6.56 percent of husband's took part in them, consuming 2.18 hours on average. To look after the children, the participation rate of wives was higher than husbands with ten percentage points margin. Only in tutoring the children, the participation rate of husbands is 66 percent, five percentage points higher than wives, with nearly equal time consumption (Shao Xiazhen, 1995: 253).

However, as we can see the shift to the market economy has put severe strains on gender relations: the women are really put under pressure from family members to follow the traditional gender roles (to assume the financial and caring responsibilities in the family) and to observe moral norms (Chong-chor Lau, 1993: 20.14).

Table 4.2 Participation Rate and Time Consumption

| Type of housework | Husband | | Wife | |
|-------------------|-------------------------|------------------|-------------------------|------------------|
| | Participation ratio (%) | Time consumption | Participation ratio (%) | Time consumption |
| Cooking | 68.92 | 1.37 | 97.60 | 1.76 |
| Washing | 64.91 | 0.81 | 96.04 | 1.00 |
| Child Caring | 54.47 | 1.53 | 65.33 | 1.88 |
| Tutoring Children | 65.93 | 1.07 | 60.93 | 1.06 |

Source: Sample Survey "A Study on Women's Status in Contemporary China," Population Research Institute of CASS, September 1992.

For example China's career women are still expected to carry the burden. Xu Xuehua, the youngest deputy director of the Economic and Trade Department of the Hebei Provincial Government is in charge of the province's import and export. In the book *Mother Wife Daughter* she is praised as a perfect example of a dutiful worker, wife and mother.

My husband is also in the foreign trade business. We share a common sense of responsibility and dedication. But at home we differ greatly in the sense of one's responsibilities. I manage all household affairs. Sometimes my husband would help in some simple housework, but I never ask more of him because I'm the woman of the house. I think this way and so does my husband (Wu Naitao, 1995b: 39-42).

The director and other deputies of Xu's department are men, all looked after and pampered by their wives. None of them are required to do housework.

Each time they travel, their wife will do the packing, and when they get back home, the bath water is run for them and a square meal ready. I, too, have to travel. But each time before I leave, I tidy the rooms, go shopping and cram the fridge with food. When I come back, the house is just like it has been broken into. I have to clean it up immediately and then cook a good meal for the whole family, feeling a bit guilty to have left the rest of the family to look after themselves. So this is the difference between me and my male colleagues (Wu Naitao, 1995b: 39-42).

To put it another way, market liberalisation does not change many gender relations within the family, but increases the burden that women have been carrying in accordance with the traditional gender roles. So with regard to husband/wife interaction, the rigidly demarcated roles still exist.

Interaction in family decision-making

Having examined how husbands and wives interact at work, we now move to a major issue in married life: decision making in the family. It is difficult to compare the present family to the traditional one because of the lack of evidence about past patterns. We are told, on the one hand, that women had little say in the important decisions in the upper-class families, but they played a greater part in making decisions affecting the whole family among the lower classes on the other hand.

Various agencies have sought to destroy the old pattern that favoured men, and helped to promote gender equality in all spheres. But have they succeeded? In rural areas what is the wife's role in making decisions about expenditure of the family income? In 1989 Tamara Jacka conducted interviews with rural women and confirmed that, as others have noted for earlier periods (Croll, 1981: 159), in most rural families the income generated by all members is pooled into a common fund. Cash

income is generally kept in a safe in the house or in a single bank account, or both.

Information in Table 4.3 outlines the information on family decision-making that was given to Jacka by rural Sichuanese women. Her findings suggest that women now play a more active role in family decision making than in the past. They indicate that women are commonly responsible for expenditure on items of basic necessity, such as food and clothing, and that the decisions involving larger expenditure, democracy and equality in family decision-making, are at least, recognised ideals.

Most women Jacka talked to claimed that, apart from those relating to daily consumption, decisions on family expenditures are made through discussion between family members. In only one family did a man appear to dominate decision making on issues involving substantial expenditure (Jacka, 1997: 66-67).

In urban areas one effect of socialist policies was bring women's levels of education and income near the levels of men. Given the rapid increases in women's education, work, occupational status, and income, one expects husband's and wives to have become equally matched in social characteristics (Pan, 1987). Empirical observation suggests

Table 4.3 Decision makers on expenditure in rural families in Sichuan

(percentages)

| The Main decision maker | Expenditure in the family economy | Purchase of expensive items | Daily living expenditure |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------|
| Husband | 13.3 | 9.7 | 2.5 |
| Wife | 30 | 9.7 | 70 |
| No single person | 56.7 | 80.6 | 27.5 |
| Total no. families | 30 | 31 | 40 |

Source: Interviews conducted in Xindu Wenjiang, Guan and Mianyang counties, October-December 1989. T Jacka, (1997) *Women's Work*, pp. 66-67.

that the urban wife is demanding and gaining more authority in the home. Educated, more competent, and independent, she tends to marry someone from the same social group, who is

more likely to accept the concepts of gender equality and has more confidence in his wife's capabilities. Therefore she is more likely to run the home, or at least be consulted and considered by the husband. Nevertheless we need to keep in mind that a society where sharply distinguished gender roles prevail, 'strong' and assertive women are viewed as highly undesirable (Rosen, 1994: 17.10-17.13). "Those women do not want husband's, they want to be husbands" – that is the way they are seen and evaluated. As disapprovingly as ferocious, a 'tigress,' while husbands are being henpecked by their career wives. Men who do whatever their wives tell them to do are the subject of hundreds of Chinese jokes and humorous anecdotes in which disapproval is quite strong (Yenna-wu, 1995: 43).

In brief, with the heralding of the modern marriage, (in which both partners are educated, experienced, and love each other), one might expect the wife to have a powerful place in the home, for her to be treated considerately by the husband, and for all the family decisions to be decided jointly by husband and wife. However, this is not made clear by the quantitative data.

SEX AND SEXUALITY

The sexual bond between husband and wife is part of the basis of marriage, which in turn is the basis of the family. Every society carefully regulates the sexual behaviour of its members, channelling their biological potential into legitimate outlets that are socially regarded as natural and moral. In China before the 1980s, an extremely high premium was placed on premarital virginity and conjugal fidelity. If an individual was caught in premarital sex or adultery, he or she would face serious punishments; mass criticisms, forced confessions, demotions or dismissal. Occasionally, an adulterer would be brought before court and sentenced to death or imprisonment on a verdict of hooliganism or rape (Anchee Min, 1994: 55-59; Cui, 1995: 15-18).

It could be said that the new economic policy marks a watershed: before that as Stacey (1983) has pointed out, the socialist image of women was that of a worker, fighter, and mother. The image of women as a sex object was roundly condemned. The disapproval reached the extent that it rejected not only the Western image of women as sex object, but also the indigenous traditional village festivals which are reported to be

rooted in pre-Chinese traditions and contain sexual license. Jiang explained that the indigenous traditional village festivals had been banned for many years because they were fertility rites (Jiang, 1992: 614). Here I think the socialist ideology in fact does not deny the Confucian traditions, which viewed sexuality as unworthy, but continues it. What it rejects is the cultural survival of ancient times.

The absence of any cult of sex is, in Fang Fu Ruan's (1991: 159) view, attributed to the fact that on the one hand, there is little public concern for sexuality, sexual relations, or sexiness. When Westerners raise the issue of sexual freedom, Chinese women invariably respond by recalling the sexual victimisation at the hands of landlords or foreign soldiers and polygamists. For this reason the discourse of monogamy seems to be considered by the state as the cornerstone of the women's liberation of China, not a source of repression (Evans, 1992: 150). In other words, monogamy seems to be understood as an end in itself; it does not include any problem in terms of sexuality. We shall see later whether or not this simplified conception corresponds with the reality even on sexual terms. On the other hand, it appears to me the lack of concern with sexuality results from the fact that the socialist morality rewards people not for immediate gratification, but for devotion to work for the benefit of society. No wonder the issues of sexuality and sexual relations appear to be obscured. As a result, all the media concentrated on mobilising people to meet the demands of national defence and construction. Even popular weekly magazines to which readers turned and asked for advice about love, marriage, the family and so on, just encouraged people to follow the socialist moral principles as if there were no such thing as sexuality, and couples were asexual (Evans, 1997: 88-95).

There were also in practice many obstacles to harmonious sexual relationships between husband and wife. For one thing as in the past many Chinese families were living in over crowded houses, and could not mystify sexual relations. One survey found that 43 percent of the males and 49.4 percent of the female respondents slept in the same bedroom as their children, of these 50 percent of the couples, had to sleep with their children in the same bed. Moreover, 7.2 percent of the males, and 27.8 of the females reported they had to sleep in the same bedroom as

parents or parents-in-law because of the lack of space. In such circumstances, it is difficult to imagine that couples would engage in sexual activities frequently (Zha Bo and Geng Wenxiu, 1992: 1-20).

For another thing, the double standard continued to exist. Many people still insist on the traditional requirement that women be a virgin on the wedding night (Evans, 1997: 10-13). Of course that put a lot of pressure on young girls who faced different, even opposite expectations: their lovers insisted on premarital sex, while future grooms demanded their virginity at the time of marriage. The double standard was applicable not only until the wedding night, but also for the whole family life (Evans, 1997: 194). Married men might be forgiven if they had an affair, but wives never enjoyed the same *laissez-faire* attitude (ibid: 195-202). I will suggest that the double standard also meant that women's sexuality was supposed to serve men; men continued to take the initiative in sexuality for their own pleasure only. Of course the mere fact that the double standard continued to exist did not preclude the possibility that some women were no longer tolerant of the view.

Between the 1950s and the late 1970s – early decades after the Communist Revolution – the official ideology of gender equality demanded almost complete removal from the public eye of conventional signs of femininity and female eroticism. Women appeared as steelworkers, parachutists, and cottonworkers, or militant Red Guards,¹⁵ often in contexts where production for the good of society was the dominant theme (China Reconstructs, 1971: 2-9; Rae Yang, 1997). With shining eyes gazing into the distance, strong hands, and robust bodies, they symbolised energy, hard work, and passionate commitment to a revolutionary ideal. “External beauty” became a metaphor for sexual licentiousness and ideological impurity. “Internal beauty” illuminated the frugal appearance of the true revolutionary. That clothing should be gender neutral in the drab greys, greens and blues of the Mao suit became an automatic corollary of the rhetoric of gender equality. It also effectively obscured the female body from the public perusal (Rae Yang 1997: 1999-213).

The post-Mao era has seen the recreation of ‘femininity’ in all the manifestations described by Evans (1997), including the construction of distinctive female characteristics, ranging

from body, hair and clothing to voice, skin and movement. This has included not just official statements about 'innate female characteristics' but, more visibly, the development in the media and especially in the consumer market of feminine representations. Marketisation has meant a great increase in open discussion of sexuality and in sexual representation in the media, especially sexual representations of women (Doelling, 1993; Kon and Riordan, 1993).

Newspapers are full of pictures of women wearing swimsuits and Pierre Cardin fashions (Hooper, 1994: 73-84; Ling, 1994: 16-18). From street billboards and shop windows, especially in the cities, erotic and prosperous young beauties look out invitingly at their spectators. Image after image of the fashionable woman directs her gaze at passers-by, promising romantic fulfilment. She shows off fine jewellery, silks and sunglasses, and lounges in luxuriously upholstered sofas, basking in wealth and glamour. The beautiful young woman is a composite of the flirtatious coquette, the satisfied sexual partner, the desirous romantic, and the contented homemaker. Feminine beauty, romance, and consumer capacity are visually enmeshed in public display of desire (Evans, 2000: 217-224).

Looking pretty, women were told, was an important way to a man's heart. Love and romance were restored to their status as matters of the individual's personal life. The romantic and erotic images of the mass media and advertising have been – and continue to be – a crucial component of this process. Various women who were brought up to regard gender neutrality in dress as a sign of emancipation have commented to Evans, (2000: 231) that they feel antagonised by the images of the sexy and flirtatious female. They interpret them as demeaning to women, since they define women by their bodies and their looks. Corresponding with this view, the All-China Women's Federation, the official body responsible for women's affairs in China, continues to oppose women's beauty contests on the grounds that they "misguide" young women by encouraging an erroneous emphasis on "external beauty."

In spite of debate and criticism initially, female beauty contests have been promoted everywhere. It is noteworthy that beauty contests are organised to uphold the old value of chastity: for instance all the contestants have to be examined by medical doctors to make sure that they are virgins (Liu Hong, 1994: 41-

42; Hooper, 1994: 73-84). Sponsoring foreign companies have also been trying to promote their products, create a new market, and therefore help to create a new image of China's women. While manuals and handbooks on sex are still published in huge numbers (Evans, 2000: 217-244).

All this change is happening outside the home. Unfortunately, no study has ever been conducted to identify how those changes affect husband-wife relationships. To fill in the gap, we must turn to literary works. This scene is taken from the *Butcher's Wife*. It tells the story of Lin Shi who was married to an abusive husband, who degraded her any time he liked. She later murdered him, to be free of the brutal treatment he meted out to her:

Blessedly, no matter how much or how little time it took him, it always came to an end. He would roll off her, stretch out on the bed, and fall asleep immediately, snoring loudly. For Lin Shi, the most unendurable part of the day had passed, and by the time she got up straightened her clothes, the pain had already begun to subside. Past experience told her that it would soon go away altogether as long as Chen Jiangshai didn't assault her right away (Li Ang, 1995: 42).

The description shows nothing other than a marital rape viewed in the eyes of some Westerners. A sceptical reader may doubt the story's validity and whether it is representative of society at large, but one thing is certain: Chinese people take for granted that it is a wife's duty to satisfy her husband's sexual need whenever he wants, no matter whether she is willing or not. They consider it absolutely normal for a husband to make such demands (Evans, 1997: 115-117). This act may be defined as 'normal' male behaviour that women simply have to endure, and a wife has to supply her husband with sexual services. If she does not do it, it is she who will be blamed.

An overwhelming majority of Chinese women are not aware of women's rights in general, let alone their right to say 'no' when their husbands insist on sex if they are not willing to have it. For many of them sex is very often carried out 'dutifully' (Honig and Hershatter, 1988: 182). That is why those women perceive of sexuality as simply another burden in their daily life, especially if one keeps in mind that most rural women are overwhelmed with agricultural production and household chores from early morning until late at night.

Understandably, such sexuality serves mainly, if not solely, men's gratification. This is shown in one women's experience:

If one does not want to but has to please one's husband, one gets very angry, but he insists, he forces one, and afterwards one only feels angrier, one does not feel any pleasure at all (Gammeltoft, 1997: 180).

In other words, sexuality does not constitute as a 'prime means, as well as an expression of intimacy' (Giddens, 1991: 164), as happened in modern Western societies. In many cases in spite of becoming separated from procreation due to limited birth, sexuality still remains a means of repression. Again I do not exclude the possibility that educated and independent minded women in big cities may expect not only to provide, but also receive sexual pleasure within marriage. With the changes in the family, romantic love has become a basis of marital ties, and for those women, sexuality may be connected with love and pleasure (Evans, 1997: 117).

DIVORCE

While greater importance is still attached to marriage – this can be seen during the high marriage numbers (Kane, 1999: 193-203) – divorce is still consistently viewed as highly undesirable. The ideal of a lasting marriage 'till death do us part' is still the dream for many people. This also finds expression in the popular argument which people use to justify the expense of the wedding ceremony; it is a "one-in-a-lifetime" experience (Gillette, 2000a: 199). However, when marital conflicts erupt, and cannot be resolved, divorce is an option which many couples pursue.

For a long time, divorce was highly constrained in China by extensive legal barriers that tied couples to relationships (Whyte and Parish, 1984). However, since the new marriage law of 1980, rules for divorce have been liberalised, the right to divorce has been promoted in the media, and divorces have begun to increase.

Though divorce is driven by substantial problems within relationships, changing cultural frames have undoubtedly placed a role in the increase in divorce rates. I would suggest that one can associate the recent increase with factors such as the relative liberalisation of divorce laws and public opinion, and the

improved status of women: their education, increasing economic independence (this has been dealt with in Chapter 5), and the mounting expectations of an emotional bond between husband and wife.

These changes appear in statistics on the acceptability of divorce. In 1991, when presented with the question of what couples should do when they were emotionally incompatible, 84 percent of young wives said the couple should divorce or separate. Even among older wives, 67 percent said the couple should divorce or separate (Sha, Xiong and Gao, 1994: 374).¹⁶ In short across all age groups, most people thought divorce or separation was an appropriate response.

Divorce rates have shot up with the relaxation of changing cultural frames. Nationwide, including both urban and rural populations, divorce was previously rare.¹⁷ In 1980, for every 1,000 total population, there were only .35 divorces. By 1996, this rate had more than doubled to .82. This implies that about 10 percent of all marriages could eventually end in divorce. In cities, of course, rates were much higher. In Beijing and Shanghai, for example, the 1996 divorce rate per 1,000 population was about 1.7, implying that about one-fifth of all marriages could end in divorce (SSB, 1997: 739-40).¹⁸ Though unexceptional by U.S and Northern Eastern standards, these rates are exceptional by developing country standards. The average non-Muslim country at China's level of development has a divorce rate of .15 per 1,000 population (United Nations, 1991; Goode, 1993; Parish, 1995). Thus China, along with other socialist societies, now has a relatively high divorce rate.

Consistent with the increasing status of women, women file for perhaps two-thirds of all divorces.¹⁹ And in most regions, women also remarry at least as quickly as men.²⁰ Reputed reasons for males not remarrying any more quickly include the high level of male wedding expenditures that make remarriage too costly and the more frequent descent of males into drink, gambling, and other social maladies that make them unfit mates (Honig and Hershatter, 1988). Or in short, if this analysis is correct Chinese men are repeating patterns found among Russian men (Lapidus, 1978; Du Plessix Gray, 1990).

The market has greatly increased the space for autonomous activities, including leisure activities and social interactions in the workplace. The comparison-shopping

opportunities that mixed gender workplaces provide may increase divorce (Greenstein, 1990; South and Lloyd, 1995). Increased opportunities for mixed gender leisure activities such as dancing, and karaoke also provide additional opportunities to begin extramarital affairs, which are a frequent complaint in court cases, at least by husbands against wives (Croll, 1995: 160; Farrer, 1998). Also consistent with aggression by frustrated, underachieving men, physical abuse is a common complaint by women in divorce cases (Honig and Hershatter, 1988). Another reason, no less important, is if a couple has no children.

In the past, the Chinese family was merely an economic unit and a child producing tool, whereas now people seek more emotional, psychological and sexual fulfilment. They marry with expectations of intimacy, happiness and harmony in their lives, and if they are not satisfied with their marriage and cannot achieve compatibility, it is easy to get a divorce. Now there are expectations of marriage that may reduce marital satisfaction for many couples. Interestingly enough, in the traditional family, if a man was viewed as virtuous in the eyes of many people, particularly the significant eyes of a woman, he definitely would be the man of her dreams (Chang, 1996).

In the present family, such a man may win the sympathy of a lot of people, but that is no guarantee that he can conquer the heart of the woman he desires. This means that the image of the 'ideal' husband or wife is no longer generally agreed upon, as it was in the past; it now means different things to different people. In fact, even for one person, the image of the ideal husband or wife may vary according to the passage of time. Before, when a man was hard working, filially pious to his parents, and good to his children, he was the perfect man; no one else could have been better. That is not enough now; he must necessarily be a good husband and compatible to his wife in many respects (Croll, 1995: 157-162). I believe this serves to explain the many divorce cases in which women are not satisfied with men, even though the latter seems to be perfect husbands in the eyes of an overwhelming majority of people.

However, it would be an oversimplification to think it is only women who have considerably higher expectations from marriage. Men too have growing demands on their marital partners. One of the crucial reasons is that in the traditional family, if a man was not satisfied with his wife, he could take as

many wives as he could afford (Chang, 1996; Wang Zheng, 1999). That is no longer possible, at least not as a legal option. Therefore men demand and expect more from their wives. As the gender role has not changed accordingly, women are placed in a difficult situation *vis-à-vis* conflicting expectations. The remarkable increase in adulterous affairs in general, and those of men in particular, should be viewed in this context (Zang Xiaowei, 1999: 281).

With the government's recent economic policy, and the relaxation of control over people's personal life by the government, *nouveau riche* men think that having an affair is the way to satisfy their demands on women, and show off their wealth. Increased mobility and cell phones made it easier to cheat on mates (Wong, 1999: 269). While pursuing an affair, some of them still want to keep their family. To them, family life is one thing, an extramarital affair is another; the latter is like a necessary change in daily diet. As they put it in China, the family life (the wife) is considered to be like rice, whereas the affair is compared to elaborate food made of rice, but well processed, therefore more delicious (Wong, 1999). Of course a lot of women today no longer accept this view; this probably accounts for the growing number of divorces.

Some men turn to prostitutes or concubines for sexual satisfaction. Asked about his respective opinion of wife, lover and prostitute, a man said that the three kinds of people are completely different from one another. There is a husband-and-wife relationship between him and his wife; love with his lovers (in the sense that there is responsibility for his wife and lovers); but fun with prostitutes and concubines. In his words, "with the latter, we pay for fun, for all the love making games that we prefer" (Henriot, 2001; Hershatter, 1997). Another man said:

I think it's different to sleep with my wife and prostitutes. With prostitutes, it's like eating the cake we have paid for. So we can do whatever we like, provided we are satisfied. But with the wife, we must give happiness (Barry, 1996).

This seems to me to reveal that in Chinese marriages today the sense of responsibility is strong, probably even embodying the kind of sexuality in which men force themselves on their wives. In those marriages, men are not satisfied either; for the perceived

deficiencies in their marital life (the sense of being carefree, sexually playful and fun loving).

Meanwhile, the agents that once opposed divorce (government officials at workplaces, representatives of the trade unions, members of the neighbourhood reconciliation teams; the Women's Federation and so on, (Diamant, 2000); now more or less regard it as an acceptable alternative to an unhappy marriage. So if the traditional family was kept intact because of the low expectations from within as well as societal pressure, many families today rely principally on a continuing attraction between spouses for their existence.

Previously the family was stable, but the marital life was poor. Now the quality of the marital ties has been improved gradually, and the internal expectations have been raised significantly, while the external social pressures to keep people from separating have diminished. Consequently the family unit has become fragile. However, it is still mainly women who encounter difficulties after divorce, not least in facing public opinion (Honig and Hershatter, 1988: 224-242).

Though more and more women initiate divorce, a divorced woman is still seen in the eyes of many people as immoral, even though a divorced man is acceptable (Croll, 1995: 159-160; Gammeltoft, 1997: 195; Wong 1999: 267-268). This means that the double standard here also works in favour of men. Divorced women even have to face difficulties in remarriage.

The evidence presented in the Chinese press on the rate and causes of increasing marital disputes points to an accelerated shift in attitudes towards personal relationships in urban areas, especially among the young. It would be unwise to extrapolate these trends to the rural population where different attitudes and social mores prevail. Though the evidence is circumstantial, it would appear that the divorce process is being used less as a direct instrument of social control, and that the authorities are willing to accept a greater number of divorces as a by-product of rapid modernisation. There still remains the wider question of whether the new situation favours men or women. What little evidence there is on this important issue suggests, not surprisingly, that men are benefiting disproportionately from the new divorce provisions (Conroy, 1987: 75).

WEDDINGS: PAST AND PRESENT

In China, as in many other societies, marriage traditionally, marked the social and/or economic alliance between the families involved rather than an emotional alliance between two people (Baker, 1979; Croll, 1984; 1995: 11-68; Ebrey, 1991: 1-24). Within the marriage, even if emotional ties did evolve, traditional mores relegated the wife to a convention bound, subservient position within the husband's family (Chang, 1996). For a vast majority of families, changes in Chinese society from the turn of the century to liberation in 1949 had relatively little impact on the institution of marriage. The promulgation of a family code in 1931 by the Nationalist government was based on principles designed to promote social change and the greater good, although Meijer (1971: 25) has observed, the law was seen as 'an instrument' to attain political and economic aims, viewed exclusively from the point of view of authority.

This attitude was reinforced after 1949, the only difference being that laws were just one of a number of means to attain the social, political and economic objectives of the new state. Wedding practices have illuminated both theories and social processes regarding family change, development and state control, particularly within Asian context. Family practices in China, for instance, provide an informative foil to the Goode model (1963), which posits that the tendency towards household nucleation over the course of development would facilitate state control over the family. Following the Communist victory in 1949, China did not wait for exogenous developmental forces to happen but instead deliberately attempted a rapid modernisation of marriage and family patterns as part of a grander strategy for industrial development, social equity, and political consolidation (Johnson, 1983; Stacey, 1983). Many wedding practices were indeed transformed in China after 1949 (Croll, 1981; Davis and Harrell, 1993; Lavelly, 1991), particularly during the collectivisation era of the 1950s, when age at marriage rose and the proportion of arranged marriages fell sharply (Whyte, 1993). Both of these changes likely suggests a weakening, albeit not a total loss (Wolf, 1985), of gerontocratic control.

The revolutionary socialist agenda to reduce the size and importance of marital exchanges also intersects Goody's (1976) thesis, which held that such devaluations should be associated with reductions in social status differentiation. Evidence for

urban China lends support to this thesis – the prevalence of high bride-prices and lavish weddings decreased during the collectivisation era of the mid-1950s (Whyte, 1993: 189-216).

As CCP (Chinese Communist Party) policies grew increasingly leftist during the 1960s and the political climate grew harsh, brides traded their red garb for suits in more restrained hues. Several women who got married during the 1960s wore Mao suits of grey or blue, as did their grooms. These changes reveal the impact of propaganda, which characterised traditional wedding attire and marriage practices as feudal (Finnane, 1996: 99-131; Jung Chang, 1991: 177; Lu Yang, 1969). The changes in clothing paralleled changes in ritual: the switch from traditional clothing to Mao suits was mirrored by a greatly simplified wedding ceremony that focused on the state rather than on the families or couple (Jung Chang, 1991: 172-173; Whyte, 1993: 189-216).

Another instance, is that bride-prices tended to increase in rural China after the 1950s. I would suggest these findings have resulted from the increasing value of daughters, an unintended consequence of their greater participatory role in the collective labour force. Or it could have been due to the restrictions on social mobility imposed by revolutionary socialism, which unintentionally rendered traditional exchanges at major life course transitions as the best opportunity for improving family mobility (Lavelly, 1991; Wolf, 1985).

Nevertheless, all in all, China's revolutionary socialist agenda does appear to have altered material exchanges and practices, the traditional content of which reached a nadir by the beginning of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). Traditional wedding celebrations were lavish and costly, and the puritan communist regime banned them. Weddings became little more than an exchange of documents and signatures. Jung Chang (1991: 173-174) describes her mother's wedding in *Wild Swans*: waiting for permission to get married, then taking a bedroll to her husband's accommodation. The mother of the bride was appalled that her daughter was not having a magnificent traditional wedding and felt that for a woman to walk to her bridegroom's house instead of being carried in a sedan chair meant she was worthless and that her husband did not really want her.

Subsequently, however, following China's post-Mao free market reforms, the 1980s witnessed a greater tolerance for and resurgence of practices previously viewed as feudal. Siu (1993: 165-188) and Whyte (1993: 189-216), for instance, discovered a mushrooming of wedding expenditures in certain cities and townships in China during the 1980s along with recent increases in disposable incomes. However, neither parent-arranged marriages nor certain other wedding practices (such as delivering the bride to the groom's house in a sedan chair) have been revived (Croll, 1981; Kipnis, 1997: 92-93; Whyte, 1993).

Today's weddings in China are a "big deal" (*dashi*). The ceremonies are more varied and colourful than ever before (see photo 4.1). The Chinese regarded a marriage ceremony as a "once-in-a-lifetime" event that marked a young person's entry into social adulthood (Gillette, 2000a: 199). Weddings were a defining moment for a bride and groom, and their families, a critical time for them to create and present their public image to relatives, neighbours, and other people. Families conveyed messages about their level of prosperity and degree of modernisation through the consumption practices that they engaged in when a family member got married.

This social construct of consumption struck Yunxian Yun (2000: 179-180) deeply on one occasion during fieldwork in the summer of 1999. In the village of Heilongjiang province the cost of financing a son's marriage had gone up again in comparison with what had been recorded the previous year – the highest cost of 30,000 yuan recorded in 1998 had become a must in 1999. This heavy economic burden falls on the shoulders of parents who feel morally obligated to get their sons married in style. When the researcher asked why, all the village friends answered that they would lose face and social status, not to mention the very prospect of getting their sons married at all, if they failed to follow the trend.

That is one reason why I think parents have a decisive say in their children's marriage. So parents play a double role: as significant others, and as crucial players of the wedding expenses. If they disapprove of a child's marriage, they will refuse one or both roles. The child is unlikely to manage without parents playing this double role; his (her) marriage may be lawful, but a failure in the eyes of the public opinion. Before the new economic policy's, some young people married in spite of

their parents opposition; they relied on the Youth Organisation, or work place to arrange simplified weddings which the government encouraged, but such marriages without parents in the double role were an exception (Honig and Hershatter, 1988: 147-155).



Photo 4.1. Modern Chinese Wedding Photograph
Source: Lia Xia China Today (May, 2000) Vol 49 (5): 26.

As research reveals, if parents cannot afford the wedding, they seek financial assistance from different sources; and it is not the young people's social network, but mainly relatives that lend a hand (Croll, 1981). In such cases, the young people's opinions are insignificant compared to that of their parents. Everything is said to be done for the sake of the children, but it also, if not crucially serves the parents' interests.

From an economic point of view, the expenses are a horrendous expenditure (Kou Zhengling, 1998: 9-11), but that is the price not just of the wedding itself, but also the involved families' status and prestige. Teresa Poole writing for the *Independent* estimates that a wedding in Beijing cost '...about twice the average annual urban income, if you believe the official statistics' (Poole, 1994). Families are eager to demonstrate rank and status; a wedding has traditionally been a way of doing so. In cities, a whole new industry of wedding organization services has sprung up, similar to the ones in Western countries: Wedding cars, photographers, shopping, dressmaking, banquet planning and so on (Kou Zengling, 1998: 9-11).

While in rural areas weddings are considered great, happy events, and they are always celebrated on a large scale, sometimes turning into a village festival (Hall, 1997: 87). Rural weddings among ethnic minorities can be more colourful. Their traditions were hardly interrupted or changed by the communist regime. For instance among the Yi, the groom must pretend to kidnap his bride, to prove that she is wanted by both her old and her new family. While Mongolian brides perform traditional dances after the ceremony: a chopstick dance, a belt dance and a bowl dance (Liu Zhonglu, 1995: 37).

According to Maris Gillette (2000b: 80-106) the lavishness or paucity of weddings influenced the social standing of the families involved. The new wedding gowns were highly visible emblems of affluence, given the centrality of the bride's role during the ritual (see photo 4.2). How the bride's appearance affected the status of her natal and marital families is especially apparent in one young bride's case: what she wore for her wedding was too important to be left to her own whims. The prospect that she might fail to conform to community standards mobilised her female relatives to pressure her and insist that she have a wedding that demonstrated her knowledge of contemporary fashions and their ability to afford them.

For the bride's-in-laws, the attractiveness of the bride signified their success on the marriage market. The beauty and fashionableness of their new daughter-in-law demonstrated that a family could entice a worthy bride. The bride spent six or more hours on display to show off her appearance, a tradition that long predated the 1990s. Relatives' and guests' comments about the

beauty of the new daughter-in-law, such as the remarks made at the wedding, also show the power the bride had to make a groom's family look good (Gillette, 2000b: 101).



Photo 4.2. Modern Chinese bride made up for her wedding

Source: Gillette 2000a: 202.

Though perhaps to a lesser extent than in pre-revolutionary China, the evidence suggests that the bride was still a valuable commodity to her husband's family. So in this sense the wedding is first of all an occasion for the families' involved to show off their wealth and status, and only last a rite of passage for the young couple.

CONCLUSION

The most remarkable change in Chinese marriages is that emotions and opinions of young people today have been more or less recognised in the selection of a marriage partner. The legal requirements of free choice and egalitarian relations have led to a redefinition of marriage as a consensual union that should

bring some measure of personal fulfilment and which can be terminated if either partner so desires. More emphasis has been put by some groups, especially in cities, on the emotional gratification (and sexual one as well) of marriage. These people generally have higher expectations of marital partners, and demand more. Those expectations of companionship and romance, satisfactory domestic arrangements, and personal fulfilment through marriage abandon an unsatisfactory marriage that fails to meet all these criteria and look for fulfilment with another partner. The absence of pressure from the kin groups, and the loosened control by the workplaces have made the stability of a marriage far more dependent on the emotions of the couple. Thus the marital ties have in some ways become more fragile.

However, if we bear in mind that the urban population, is still small in proportion to the whole population, then it must be concluded that generally speaking, marital ties have become the central ones in the family; nor has the family transformed into the conjugal form yet, as in some Western societies. The other tie, that is between parents and children, remain paramount, as we shall see in Chapter six.

5

NOT QUITE EQUAL: GENDER ISSUES IN THE CHINESE FAMILY AND SOCIETY

In the last chapter we explored in detail the single tie that is often said to have made up the backbone of the family relationships: the one between marital partners. This chapter will examine women's lives and the ways that gender shapes the Chinese family and society. It begins by briefly setting the historical context, which is the key in understanding Chinese women's lives today. It then describes women's roles and position in contemporary social, political and economic life. The last half of the chapter is devoted to examining three aspects of Chinese society that reflects the shape of gender inequality in China in the 1990s and suggests what might be expected in the future. Economic policies have been crucial in shaping key aspects of most women's lives and have not only provided women with new opportunities but have also been the source of new forms of gender inequality. A second influence has been the commercialisation of women for sale – and abuse on the open market. This section seeks to explore the sex and sexuality discourses in reform- era China. Finally, we will discuss forms of discriminatory actions against women, including infanticide, trafficking of women and domestic abuse.

THE TRADITIONAL PORTRAIT OF CHINESE WOMEN

For centuries, the lives of Chinese women were circumscribed by ideas, ideology, and practices that resulted in gender inequality and female subordination. All individuals in Chinese society were bound by Confucian notions of hierarchy and practices of patriarchy, partilocality and patrilineage (inheritance through the male line). The family patriarch (usually the eldest male) wielded enormous power over the lives of those in his sphere of influence, determining who they married, whether and what kind of training they received, and what work they undertook (Croll, 1978: 12-22; 1983; Johnson, 1983: 6; Wolf, 1985). Marriage patterns, which mark a pivotal family and social event in all societies, reveal how Chinese females were

particularly disadvantaged in this system. At marriage, women moved from their homes to those of their husbands. This practice (called patrilocality) affected the lives of females from birth, long before marriage.

Because females would marry out of the family, they were not considered part of their natal, or birth families. Girls grew up knowing they were valued less than their brothers, since they would be gone before they could make any significant contribution to their families. They were seen mostly as potential drains on the resources of their natal families (Croll, 1995: 11-68; Johnson, 1983: 9). Parents also bound their daughter's feet, stunting their growth and hampering their mobility, to conform to an oppressive standard of female beauty and improve their daughters' chances in marriage (Chang, 1996: 89; Wang Ping, 2000).

Their parents arranged their marriages without their consent and transferred them as young girls or young women to the homes of husbands who were strangers and were required to submit to the authority of their husband's patrilineal kin group taking orders mainly from their husband and mother-in-law; also earning their keep by working obediently, and preserving respect through marital fidelity. The loneliness and hardships of new brides in this system is legendary. At marriage, they not only moved to a new household but usually to a new unfamiliar village as well. Thus as a total "stranger" a bride entered her new home, where she took her place at the bottom of the age and gender hierarchy (Chang, 1996; Croll 1995: 11-68; Johnson, 1983).

In this system, most women's lives were confined to the sphere of the family, where childbirth was a woman's *raison d'être*: a woman's central contribution to her husband's family was to provide the family with (male) heirs. A woman herself was usually eager to bear a son, for it made her place in her new household more secure. In addition, her children – her "uterine family" – were a woman's source of emotional and economic security, people she could forever count on amidst a group of strangers.²¹ Through childbearing, then, a woman found a way to make her own family; and as these children, especially her sons, grew up, a woman could count on them to guarantee her some status and comfort in old age.

China still permitted family heads to buy and sell lesser members: concubines, bondservants and slaves (Henriot, 2001; Jaschok, 1988; Jaschok and Miers, 1994; Watson, 1994). Women were duty-bound to produce a male heir; if all they could produce were daughters, a concubine might be brought in to perform this duty, especially if the husband had not sired a male heir by the age of forty (Wang Zheng 1999: 223-224). Occasionally, a wife was not only expected to accept the concubines, but also to tolerate her husband's dalliance with maidservants or even singsong girls (Watson, 1991: 231-255). Although children of both sexes could be sold by their parents, the preference for sons in a patrilineal kinship system meant that girls were more likely than boys to be wrenched from their natal homes at a tender age. When poverty threatened, infanticide, abandonment, the sale of girl children to servitude, or early marriage befell girls with much greater frequency than boys (Bossen, 1999: 295).

The state did little to protect the rights of women and girls as such; rather it vested men with considerable powers as heads of households and patrilineal kin groups to manage the affairs of subordinate household members. Women had to look to fathers, brothers, husbands, or sons for whatever protection these men might offer.

This portrait depicts women's experience in Chinese history as one of universal, unremitting oppression and victimisation. However, recent writings uncover considerable historical and regional variation in women's activities and rights and explore the degrees of flexibility within patriarchal structures (Cass, 2000; Gilmartin, Hershatter, Rofel, and White, 1994; Jaschok and Miers, 1994; Ko, 1994; Watson, 1994). Rather than a single, unchanging system of patriarchy, contemporary studies reveal that earlier centuries witnessed significant shifts in women's economic activities, dowry and property rights, forms of marriage, legal rights, and even suicide patterns as well as differences in women's condition according to class (Bernhardt, 1996; Ebrey, 1993; Gates, 1989, 1996; Gilmartin et al, 1994; Huang, 1990; Mann, 1991, 1994, 1997; T'ien, 1988).

These studies illustrate the difficulty of determining precisely whether women in general gained or lost ground during previous historical periods. For instance, during the Song

dynasty (960-1269), women gained the advantages of increased transmission of dowry property to daughters, of sustained ties to women's kin after marriage, of opportunities for elite daughters to learn to read and write, and of growing opportunities for women to earn money producing textiles. How does this progress weigh against the evidence of diminishing autonomy as indicated by the spread of foot-binding and a growing market in women sold into various forms of servitude during that period (Ebrey, 1993: 268).

Although historians can trace some of the ways that women's rights became more limited in the subsequent Ming and Qing dynasties (Bernhardt, 1996: 42-58; Watson and Ebrey, 1991), it is risky to apply descriptions written by and for privileged elites (usually from a male perspective) to the population as a whole. Indeed, the standard notion that rural Chinese women made minimal contributions to the agrarian economy is now challenged by recognition of their significant roles in commercial textile production over the centuries (Huang, 1990; Shih, 1992). The stereotype of women as domestic subordinates, politically powerless and economically burdensome, is increasingly modified by evidence that Chinese women were not easily restrained; they were productive, expressive, and found ways to pursue their own interests. Although historical studies do reveal recurrent patterns of patrilineal, patrilocal and patriarchal institutions, they are also shown to change over time. Because the evidence on the ways different classes of women behaved and responded to these institutions is so incomplete, the direction of change over long periods of Chinese history remains elusive (Ebrey, 1993; Chaffee, 1991: 133-169; Mann, 1991: 204-230).

WOMEN'S STATUS AFTER THE COMMUNIST REVOLUTION

The communist revolution set out to transform China by creating an egalitarian society and promoting rapid development. Shortly after taking over power in 1949, China's leaders as we discussed in Chapter Three began to transform the system of property rights, marriage rights and labour relations. The measures to produce social equality and to place women on a par with men were not thoroughly implemented; they left sufficient power

concentrated in male hands to vitiate the reforms designed to benefit women (Stacey, 1983).

The Marriage Law of 1950 aimed to abolish the legal standing of arranged marriage, child marriage, concubinage and polygamy and to establish marriage as a voluntary contract between two equal adults, as well as to permit them to divorce (see Chapter 3). However, women who sought to divorce faced strong opposition from their husband's family and the cadres. This led to considerable turmoil and violence against women – variously reported as violence by men who refused to accept divorce by their wives (Stacey, 1983: 181), or by men who wanted divorce and turned reluctant wives over to village militia for opposing the revolution (Ladany, 1992: 60).

Women had to fight their battles all alone, even under the threat of possible bloodshed. Many women were killed by their husband's or mothers-in-law, and many women chose to struggle to their deaths. During the year following the promulgation of the Marriage Law, more than 10,000 women were killed in South-Central China; in East China in 1950-52 the figure reached 11,5000. During the two or three years following the Law's enactment some 70,000-80,000 people per year were killed over marriage-related issues throughout the country (Ono, 1989: 181).

Stacey (1983: 178) similarly comments that “in a shocking number of cases women were murdered or driven to suicide when they attempted to gain their freedom”. The Marriage Law was intended to establish a more equitable basis for future marriages and to place the interests of the marriage partners above those of the parents. However, the Communist government, soon realising the difficulty of changing family structure and behaviour through law, capitulated to these forces of cultural and political conservatism and “placed marriage reform on a back burner” after the second Marriage Law campaign ended in 1953 (Diamant, 2000).

Following Marxist theory, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) held that women must work in the public sphere in order to achieve equality and contribute to socialist construction. Thus it became important symbolically to bring women out of the isolation of the household where they worked for their husbands and families and into production for society. Mass propaganda campaigns to raise awareness of women's issues, and the promotion of such simple slogans as “Women hold up half the

sky,” endorsed by Mao himself, played an important part in changing popular attitudes. Throughout the 1950s, women were increasingly pulled into non-domestic forms of labour that in theory would make them more productive (Rai, 1999: 187-188).

Communist theory took little account of the labour-intensive nature of housework in houses that lacked running water and modern stoves. In addition to hauling water, tending wood fires, and doing laundry by hand, rural women often engaged in a variety of home-based semicommercial activities like food processing, textile production, gardening, and raising courtyard livestock. All this was on top of the hours women spent working on the collective farm. The policies to bring women into agricultural work with status equal to men did not require men to take care of an equal share of the domestic work (Jacka, 1997).

Continuing a process that had begun in the early twentieth century, women became an increasingly important part of the urban industrial workforce during the revolutionary period. The participation of women in urban industrial work did not bring sexual equality, however. Under Communist Party planning, women largely remained in segregated industries with lower salaries (Ching Kwan Lee, 1998). Women were also less likely to be assigned to large state-run factories where health, pension, and housing benefits were provided. Rather, their jobs were concentrated in the lower-paying, less prestigious community – and neighbourhood-run industries that offered fewer benefits (Whyte and Parish, 1984; Wolf, 1985). They sometimes had access to day care facilities, but this benefit was never very widespread. Most urban women worked outside industry; their total package of wages and benefits remained significantly lower and less secure. Men continued to control the greater incomes and monopolise managerial positions. Unlike rural women, however, urban working women did collect their own wages.

Urban women faced another task that began to consume a great deal of time: standing in line at government stores for rationed products or locating scarce supplies on the black market. They also had to produce at home the goods they could not purchase (Smith, 2000: 321-324; Wong, 1997). The predominantly male bureaucratic planners in communist China did not place a high priority on inventing or producing labour-saving products to reduce housework. Women in revolutionary

China did not have access to washing machines or even to laundromats and commercial hand-laundry services. Rather, they faced traditional chores such as hand washing clothes for their family in a basin (Hall, 1997; Honig and Hershatter, 1988). Only in the reform period did appliances such as washing machines, electric rice cookers, in-home plumbing, refrigerators, stoves, fans and vacuum cleaners begin to reduce the heavy drudgery of housework, daily shopping and cooking that had fallen on women along with their obligation to perform “productive labour” (Hall, 1997; Smith, 2000: 321-324).

CHINESE WOMEN’S LIVES IN THE 1990s

What are the lives of Chinese women like in the 1990s? It is important to keep in mind the huge variations among different geographical areas and groups of women. The concerns of college graduates are not likely to be the same as those faced by women in remote rural areas. Where a woman lives, her access to particular jobs, her educational background, and other factors will all influence her life in significant ways.

A distinction must also be made between women’s experience in the public sphere and private spheres of their lives. It is not that these areas of women’s (or men’s) lives are always separable; indeed, they are interrelated in many complex ways. But particularly in China, this distinction remains important for several reasons. First, state efforts towards changing women’s lives have focused – heavily and, at times, exclusively – on women’s public roles, such as in the workplace or in politics. This emphasis on one rather than the other or both aspects of life comes from Marxist ideology about the central role of work and production in the organization of society (Rai, 1999: 181-191). But, as the May 4th radicals recognised, family organization and ideology are key factors in Chinese society; they understood that if the society was to undergo revolution, the family would have to be part of the change (Johnson, 1983: 27-35).

Although CCP leaders since then have sometimes recognised the key role that family life, organization, and ideology plays in women’s subordination, it has rarely been given priority. And yet, for women especially, the family has been absolutely central to the shape and direction of life, and, in turn, a source of gender inequality in China. Prohibited from the public arena for centuries, women have come to define their

position in Chinese society primarily through their role in the family, as daughters, wives and mothers (Croll, 1995; Johnson, 1983). Therefore, although it is important to examine the public lives of Chinese women today, their lives in families and households must be kept in mind.

Although Chinese women have a better record of political involvement than women in some societies, women's political representation still lags behind men's, especially at higher levels of the party and state. In the mid-1990s only 6 percent of ministerial positions are held by women, and they make up only 21 percent of the National People's Congress (United Nations 1995a: 1740). Many women do occupy many positions at the lowest levels of government; for example, in the cities neighbourhood-level officials are often women. Although these officials do important jobs, their duties are often unpopular with the people among whom they work. For example they are responsible for negotiations surrounding divorce and for monitoring the state's stringent family planning programmes (Milwertz, 1998; Potter and Potter, 1990).

One of the most visible, public aspects of Chinese women's lives is their extensive participation in the labour force. As the government promised in the early years of the People's Republic, women's representation in the labour force is nearly equal to men's. About 90 percent of working-age women in urban areas work full-time jobs. The rate for rural women is estimated to be lower, because rural women are more likely than urban women to work for their family, at home or in the fields (Jacka, 1997). Nevertheless, even given the lower estimates of their participation in paid labour in rural areas, women in China have one of the highest female labour force participation rates in the world. That participation is a key factor in women's efforts to gain a place equal to men in Chinese society. It means that most women are involved in public life on a daily basis and are visible in public arenas. As discussed in Chapter Four this public work has also affected women's family lives.

But as I suspect in many ways, the numbers of women working in China tell only part of the story. Examining more closely what is happening to women at work shows that they are not equal to men in anything except that they are working. Although a comparatively high percentage of Chinese women work, the reality of women's participation in the labour force is

not much different from that in many other societies, be they socialist, capitalist, or more or less industrialised. For example, in China and elsewhere, women are clustered in jobs that are considered appropriate for women, such as textiles or light industry (Rai, 1999: 187-189). In terms of ownership, industries and enterprises are categorised as state, collective (mostly government), private, or joint ventures by foreign and Chinese owners (Wong, 1999: 111-114).

Part of women's poor showing in high level jobs can be traced to their lower levels of education. Since 1949 Chinese women have made significant gains in schooling; the percentage of girls enrolled in school has risen at all levels in the last 15 to 20 years. But changing the lens of comparison from one that compares contemporary women with past women to one that compares current experiences of women and men reveals disparities, especially as one moves up the educational ladder. There are 95 girls per 100 boys enrolled in primary school, but this ratio declines to 78 girls to 100 boys in secondary school and 75 per 100 at the university level (United Nations, 1995b: 52).

Although women now have unprecedented opportunities in many areas of their lives, at the same time, gender inequality, which has been a part of Chinese society for centuries, remains and has been re-created in many of these structures, institutions, and even opportunities. The government recognises, many of these continuing inequalities. In mid-1995 it issues a "Programme for the Development of Chinese Women," which addressed issues such as the need to reduce dropout rates for female students and the problem of discrimination against girl children, although this resolution has not yet resulted in specific actions (Beijing Review 1995: 4). The next sections of the chapter, examine the impact of economic reform, sexuality discourse and violence, three important areas of women's lives to suggest just how difficult achieving gender equality will be.

THE GENDER CONSEQUENCES OF ECONOMIC REFORM

The welfare situation in urban areas has diversified during the last decade. But generally speaking, compared to the rural population, the urban employees benefit greatly from the bonuses of their work units in addition to the welfare system of

the government (Croll, 1999: 211-215; Leung, 1999: 216-223; Wu Naitao, 1995a: 12-14). Urban residents and farmers are actually living in two different societies.

For example, family reproduction in the cities is sponsored by the government. In addition to the medical care of mother and child, most women employees enjoy three months maternity leave, nurture break during working hours for mother and infants and other welfare amenities (Cecilia Lai-wan Chan, 1995: 193-194). Rural women, however, are excluded from these health care programmes. Compared to urban women, rural women are less independent economically, their income is not as stable as urban women employees and their old age is not secured by any welfare system (Wang Zheng 2000: 63-64).

We can see Table 5.1 illustrates comparative access to welfare as of 1990. The respondents were women 18 to 64 years old, some of whom would not have been employed. Hence, the actual rate of urban working women who had access to the welfare system was probably higher than the survey indicated. Also, a small percentage of rural women who had access to the welfare system actually belonged to the rural non-agricultural population rather than farm families. Among the benefits, retirement pensions matter most because the lifetime income frees both women and men from having to depend on their

Table 5. 1. Access to the Welfare System of the Rural and Urban Women

| | | (in %) | | | |
|-------------|--------|--------------------|--------------|------------|-----------------|
| | | Retirement pension | Medical care | Sick leave | Maternity leave |
| Urban women | yes/no | 82.6/17.3 | 71.0/29.0 | 79.9/20.0 | 85.3/14.7 |
| Rural women | yes/no | 5.6/94.2 | 8.0/91.9 | 9.2/90 | 12.1/87.7 |

Source: The National Women's Federation and the National Statistics Bureau jointly conducted a survey (hereafter, WF survey) p. 90

children for support in old age. Thus, for the first time ever, pensions eliminated in the cities marriage's function of producing sons for old-age protection.

But rural women have remained throughout responsible for giving birth to sons in order to provide security, and women are still blamed if they fail to give birth to a son (Croll 1994:201;

Honig and Hershatter 1988: 232-234; Jacka 1997). A tragic case was reported in which a husband, who disappointed and angry when his wife bore a daughter, inserted a firecracker in her vagina (Yayori Matsu 1999: 68). The pressure on women has also become greater under the government's compulsory birth control programme (Greenhalgh, Zhu, and Li 1994: 365-395; Greenhalgh and Li 1995: 601-641; Johnson 1996:77-98).

Rural women's family status is also negatively influenced by the fact that farming is the least rewarding job in China. Due to unfair terms of trade between industry and agriculture, the farmers are at a great disadvantage economically. The economic reforms unleashed a mass exodus of men from farming to more lucrative occupations, leaving many women to manage the farms and land allocated to their households (see Chapter's 3 and 4). It has been estimated that women now account for 70 percent of the total agricultural labour force since only women perform agricultural labour in more than one-third of all farm families. In such families, husbands are engaged in more economically rewarding non-agricultural occupations. Hence, the wife usually works longer hours and does heavier work than her husband but earns less money than him (Bossen 1991: 47-67; Judd 1994a; 1994b: 202-222; Wolf 1985). It is also true that the movement of men off the farms has given women who are assuming responsibility for farming more decision making power and independence, but it also means that women struggle alone to manage the family agricultural pursuits as well as keep the household running.

The more open economy does give some rural women more occupational choice and control over money, however. Ellen Judd (1994b: 204) outlines two strategies pursued by rural women in response to China's new policies toward economic development, household commodity production and employment in village industry. Those who live in rural communities with good commercial locations (near towns and cities or good transportation) can grow and sell crops and surplus produce above and beyond those required by state quotas. There are 14 million self-employed people in rural areas, engaging in commerce and service trades, and two-thirds of them are women (Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China 1994:13).

In addition, many villages and townships have established rural industries that employ women from their own and outside villages. Generally, they hire women at low wages and offer few benefits. There, they work in sweatshops and on assembly lines producing items such as clothing or electronic products in a more competitive capitalist fashion. These industries often pay their casual women workers higher wages than money-losing state industries, but the women have few protections in terms of safe working conditions or job security (Riley 1997a: 97-98).

Unlike the former collective system that paid women's work points to the household head, the market economy allows women to receive individual wages (Woon 1990: 153-159). This lets them accumulate their own personal savings and gain a greater degree of economic independence- especially when they have left home or the out-migration of males has left them with greater control over the household income. In some areas of China, such as the Pear River Delta where a large proportion of males have migrated overseas, wives who collect remittances from abroad have enjoyed prosperity and higher status by withdrawing from agriculture and other local forms of production and investing in higher education for their sons and daughters (Woon 1990: 163).

In urban China, the effects of the economic reforms on women have been mixed. The relatively small proportion of women workers who were once privileged to have access to state jobs found that in the more competitive reform economy, state industries were more likely to discharge their female employees and to demand male employees when hiring new workers or university graduates (Hall 1997: 56). Although the constitution of 1982 and a Women's Rights Protective Law of 1992 pledge to protect the rights of women, some observers argue that protective regulations requiring women to retire five years earlier than men and clauses prohibiting them from doing certain kinds of work (such as night shifts, work at high altitudes or in cold temperatures, and work that exposes women to industrial poisons or is physically strenuous) during menstruation, pregnancy, and the postpartum period and while nursing have the effect of fostering biological discrimination. Margaret Woo (1994: 281-282) observes that "when faced with providing benefits, some factory managers simply chose not to hire women workers, or to dismiss them. Thus in the city of Nantong, women

constituted 70 percent of the total number of workers fired from their jobs in 1988.”

Official statistics reveal that by the end of 1997 there were 11.51 million laid-off workers (of which 7.87 million were from state owned enterprises) in China's cities, with 3.5 million more projected for 1998. A survey by the State Statistical Bureau of 15,600 households in 71 cities across the country reveals that women constitute 62.8 percent of the laid-off workers, while they account for less than 39 percent of the total urban workforce. In other words, women have been singled out as special targets of the massive layoffs of the 1990s (Wang Zheng 2000: 65).

More than any other issue, gendered layoffs reveal the disproportionate burden borne by women as consequences of the economic reform. ‘Women return home’ was openly advocated in official journals and newspapers (Wang Zheng 2000: 65). Many groups favoured what they called the “new virtuous wife and good mother” formula, whereby the woman basically relinquishes her efforts to achieve career success and places her energies, responsibilities and pleasures in her home. Those opting for this choice argued that this is “new” because such virtuous wives and good mothers make choices of their own volition because of their stronger educational background, rather than submit passively, as in the past, to establish norms. (Rosen 1994: 17.14-17.5).

However, the “virtuous wife” and “good mother” model reveals a reversal back to the traditional role of women (Borthwick 1985: 63-91). The most representative viewpoint among male college students was their desire for a virtuous wife and good mother of the new era. This included not just the familiar solicitude and care for their husband and support for his career but also direct and active participation in social activities which would bring honour to their husband and have an effect on society.

But the reality of the situation for many urban women after being laid off from work, was that their family relationships and living standards obviously declined. Many of them felt disappointed, helpless and lost confidence in their life. The Tianjin Women's Federation investigated 34,000 laid off women workers and found that 10 percent of them lived in poverty, a majority of them (78.8%) reported a sharp drop in their living

standard, and there were increasing conflicts in the family (Rosen, 1994: 17.6-17.10). According to a survey in Nanjing, 25 percent of the laid off women were looked down upon by their husbands and relatives, 22 percent of them had a tense marital relationship (*ibid*).

However, the expansion of commercial activities in urban centres has offered women alternatives to state and private factory employment. Many of the new businesses in the informal sector have been established by successful women entrepreneurs or by family enterprises (Bruun 1993; Wang Zheng 2000: 72-73). The Women's Federation and government for both their business success and their social contributions hail these entrepreneurs as models, thus enhancing their social status and that of their family (China Today 2001: 18-19; Li Fugen 1999: 29-31; Wang Zheng 2000: 72).

A recently launched programme in Guangzhou, which is one of China's richest cities and has about 5 million inhabitants, aims to train women in work-related skills which are currently in demand. These courses appear to be popular, with 170,000 female workers learning computing, accounting, cooking, electrical engineering, sewing, driving and other skills. The programme is run by trade unions, branches of the state labour department, employment agencies, and work units (China Daily/Xinhua 1996). Consequently, many unskilled women will have better marketable skills to enable them to find employment in their chosen courses. In this way women might literally earn more power in their families and family decision-making and can increase their power as consumers as well.

In sum, economic reform has had mixed effects on the lives of Chinese women and their families. Far from being a panacea, or a completely positive change that might push women towards equality with men, it holds both positive and negative possibilities for women. Opportunities have increased, but they often exist within structures such as family that have themselves developed on the basis of gender inequality. China's new economy is still unfolding and how women fare within it remains to be seen.

SEX AND SEXUALITY DISCOURSES IN REFORM-ERA CHINA

We will now explore the dominant discourses of sexuality

produced in China since the advent of the new reforms in 1978. As Evans (1997) has observed in *Women and Sexuality in China*, sex as a topic of conversation and as a commodity, has literally taken off since reform began in 1978. As she noted, “Romantic scenes with erotic imagery are a recurring feature of literature and film, despite the watchful eye of censors” (ibid: 1). The contrast with the Maoist era is startling, bearing in mind that for the most part sex had been a taboo subject; the only concern of men and women was hard work and frugality and to demonstrate a collective enthusiasm for the future of the “new China.”²² This produced a kind of androgyny, in which female appearance was made to match that of males; all thoughts of sexual activity were supposed to be sublimated and transformed into enthusiasm for the revolution (Anchee Min, 1994).

Once the free market started to impact the business of selling and representing sexuality, the picture changed. Major social and cultural changes are visible in advertising, literature, music and film. Within the media women now speak openly about their own sexuality, sexual preferences, and sexual pleasure. Still, most of the public discourses on sex and sexuality still strongly identify the traditional model of sexuality that is based on biological fundamentals. The male is seen as the traditionally strong and active partner, the one with all the urges and drives; the female is considered to be interested in sex only to the extent that it serves reproductive goals (Evans, 1997).

Events during the 1980s and 1990s highlight a basic paradox in the relationship between women and the state. The latter has intensified its intervention in women’s lives (through the operation of the coercive policies; see Chapter Six), yet the state’s withdrawal from traditional control over land, labour and markets has contributed to a marked increase in the commodification of women and sex, often resulting in violent abuse and humiliating exploitation. This trend ranges from relatively bland advertisements depicting women’s bodies as a marketing strategy to the sexual violation of women and even murder.²³ Harriet Evans (2000:224-225) describes in great detail the flourishing traffic in newly produced pornography; the revival of sex work and prostitution in the biggest cities; the increasing incidence of rape; widely reported stories of the kidnapping and abduction of women and girls; and the rising cost of marriage and brides. As Evans argues, those trends

represent women's sexuality being offered as a commodity that is or can be made available to men, either for purchase or for brutalisation. The women are seen as hapless victims or as evil, wilful sinners. In many rural areas a variety of forces, including out-migration and the missing women phenomenon, have resulted in a chronic shortage of women, which has essentially created a marriage market and driven up bride prices. At the extreme end of the scale are numerous reports of the abduction and transportation of women from the countryside and their sale in coastal cities.

This is considered by some observers to be part of a new social disease related to the re-emergence of capitalism and privatisation. Most attempts to account for the rise in such disturbing trends highlights the socio-economic factors, including rural poverty, lack of education and employment opportunities, as well as the marketisation of the economy and the appearance of a new underclass. Sometimes the behaviour is explained away as regression to "feudal practices". It is very rare, however, to find an account that considers the hierarchical structure of gender in China and the ideology that allows or condones fundamental abuses of women's rights. Few attempts are made to situate abuses within the context of the gendered power relations that are produced and sustained in the patriarchal structures of Chinese society. In other words, by privileging the socio-economic causes, or the historical (i.e., feudal) causes, the real issue – which is gender based subjection – is being obscured, rarely discussed and almost never challenged (Evans 2000).

Evans (1997: 163-164, 174-175) applies a similar analysis to the rising incidence of prostitution and sex work in contemporary China. Prostitutes are generally characterised as morally degenerate, sinful pleasure seekers, and the rising prevalence of prostitution is often attributed to the corrupting influence of Western habits which includes Hong Kong). The prostitute is characterised as a threat to the social order, a symbol of a sick society, something that must be controlled through criminalisation, with the state offering "salvation."

Woven into this fear of moral turpitude is the real, physical fear of contamination through the spread of HIV/AIDs, and other sexually transmitted diseases. In some ways current public policy toward prostitutes is similar to that in the 1950s, in

that the state offers the chance for reform and rehabilitation. But unlike the 1950s, at least according to Evans's argument, the states' current efforts to control and contain prostitution can be interpreted as an official attempt to counter the spread of bourgeois liberalisation that has been set loose upon society through reform and openness. The prostitute, in other words, represents the dangers of Western decadence that economic commercialisation has not been able to resist. In this light, the prostitute embodies some of the major contrasts and contradictions inscribed in the reform programme. At stake is what modernity looks like and means, as well as what 'women' are and should be (ibid; Xinxin Zhang and Sang Ye, 1987: 31-38).

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Chinese culture was replete with practices that would constitute experiences exclusively for women. It was women who had to suffer the pain of foot-binding as little girls; to be treated as lesser beings than her brothers; to face the horror of being sold as a concubine, a child bride, or a prostitute, to bear intense apprehensions on her wedding day when she was sent to live forever after with a stranger's family; to endure unspeakable anguish when her husband or her father frequented brothels or brought home a concubine; to go through the pain of childbirth and fear of giving birth to a baby girl; to manage to survive an abusive husband with neither recourse to help nor release from the miserable marriage; and to be excluded from the men's world. Regardless of her class or background and geographical location, the chances for a Chinese woman to escape all the preceding "women's experiences" were rare (Croll 1981, 1983, 1995; Chan 1970; Chan 1995; Chang 1996; Chang 1991; Chow Chung-chen 1961; Chow Ching-li 1978; Gronewald 1985; Hua R. Lan and Fong 1999; Jackson 1997; Jaschok and Miers 1994; Johnson 1983; Levy, 1966; Pruitt 1945, 1979; Wang Zheng 1999; Wong Su-ling 1953; Wolf 1985).

Today, violence against women in China is still a deeply disturbing fact of life. At every stage in her life, a Chinese woman was vulnerable to violence precisely because she was a woman. She could be killed at birth by parents who wanted a son; raped by assailants who were strangers, suitors, neighbours,

or relatives; abused by her parents for asserting her right to marry a man of her own choosing; kidnapped and sold into marriage far from her native place; or battered by her husband and members of his family for a variety of offences, real or imagined.

After the Liberation in 1949, a new kind of relationship between husband and wife was set up. The government, women's federation and work units had much involvement in family affairs. Domestic violence against women occurs inside the family was constrained and managed by these outside forces. After 1978, the government and work unit gradually withdrew their affirmative interventions and so the social supportive network for women was disrupted (Honig and Hershatter 1988: 273-274). Since the early 1990s, the public support began to focus on violence against women in society. Generally speaking, violence against women can be grouped under three categories: infanticide, traffic of women and wife beating. We will now explore each category in turn to see what challenges women face in the public and domestic sphere.

Infanticide

A female in China was perhaps most vulnerable because of her gender at the moment of birth. For many Chinese families, a male heir is still considered superior, particularly in rural areas (Croll, 2000: 7-9). This traditional view of inheritance has resulted in a long history of female infanticide which was regarded either as a minor sin or as a worthy sacrifice (Lee 1981: 163-177; Waltner in Behnke Kinney 1995: 193-217). Sheryl WuDunn in *China Wakes* points to a popular sixteenth century text in which the offence of killing your child had the same impact as urinating facing north or stepping over a person on a floor mat (1994: 227).

Female infanticide, which had virtually disappeared after the Communist victory, was back. William Hinton, author of *Fanshen*, happened across a tiny corpse when he stopped to picnic by a stream in Shaanxi Province. He vividly remembers:

“She was just a beautiful little girl, about one month old. Every feature was perfect. There were little strands of mold across her eyelids and her nostrils,” he recalled. “It was early spring. If she had died of illness, she would have been buried. I suppose she just died of hunger and exposure.

Her little hand was just perfect, but purple. It looked like she had fallen asleep there, but you can imagine the suffering she went through before she died” (Wong 1999: 305-306).

No one really knew how many infant girls were smothered or drowned or exposed to the elements. One of the unintended consequences of the post-Mao reforms, however, in combination with the family limitation programme, was to increase this preference for sons to the point where it began to threaten the lives of girl babies. And female infanticide, a common practice in poor families before 1949, was once again on the rise in rural areas. It is widely believed that the strong desire for sons has produced the “missing girls” phenomenon: since the early 1980s thousands of girls are ‘missing’ in China. Demographic data reveals that the sex ratio at birth - is highly skewed. Whereas this ratio is normally about 105 (i.e. 105 boys born for every 100 girls), most recent data show that the sex ratio to be 113.8 in China, and even as high as 117 in some provinces (Hull 1990: 63-84; Johansson and Nygren 1991: 35-52; Zheng Yi et al 1991: 35-52). Although the difference between 114 and 105 might not seem great, the difference suggests that tens of thousands of girls are missing, some 12 percent of all girls in recent years.

What has happened to these girls is not fully known. But it is clear that four practices contributed to these skewed ratios. Infanticide, non-reporting of girls’ births (either because parents don’t consider such a birth worthy or because they hope to hide the birth so they can try to have a boy), abandonment and sex selective abortion all play a role in this phenomenon. Under reporting accounts for some of the missing girls, but abandonment and infanticide – although strongly condemned by the government –is inevitably the fate of some Chinese baby girls (Johnson 1996: 77-98; Kay Ann Johnson, Huang Banghan and Wang Liyao 1998: 469-510; Riley 1997b: 87-100).

Reports indicate that girls are being abandoned by their parents in increasing numbers. Many of them end up in state orphanages, where nearly all the children are girls. A large portion of these abandoned girls die in infancy, because of the precarious state of their health upon arrival and because these institutions often do not have the means to care for them adequately (Riley 1997b: 87-100).

Chances of a happy childhood or indeed survival appear to be slim in some orphanages. On 14 June 1995, Channel 4 in the United Kingdom broadcast the documentary *The Dying Rooms*, in which a team of reporters gained access to several orphanages, in some of which children suffered from severe neglect. The crew filmed children who had apparently been left to die of starvation in special 'dying rooms.' A leaflet for the series states:

The orphanages, which are run by the state, are underfunded and understaffed, and the level of care in some instances amounts to outright neglect and abandonment. Babies have been crammed six to eight to a bed with bottles of thick gruel simply propped up against their pillows. Children have been strapped down to makeshift bamboo potties all day, their legs splayed over plastic bowls full of excrement. Babies and toddlers who have fallen ill have been abandoned in empty rooms and left to die (cited in Hall 1997:114).

It is not possible to judge if the visited orphanages are typical of other or all orphanages in China, and there are no reliable statistics on the death rate of children in orphanages. However, it seems likely that the problems of lack of staff, of unqualified and often disinterested staff, lack of space and lack of finances are severe throughout China.

An official fact sheet from the Chinese embassy in London states:

Although tremendous progress has been made in setting up social welfare institutes and improving the living conditions for the children in them, China, a huge developing country with 1.2 billion people, still faces a lot of difficulties, one of which is the proper allocation of resources. There is still a lot to be done to improve the conditions in some orphanages. But anyhow, the so-called 'dying rooms' do not and are not allowed to exist in China (cited in Hall 1997: 114).

Sex selective abortions apparently account for a large proportion of the missing girls. Such abortions appear to be on the rise, as technology (particularly ultrasound) becomes available. It is estimated that 100,000 ultrasound scanners were in operation in China in 1990. Their official use is to help doctors to check internal organs and to ensure that women are still wearing their IUDs. In practice, unscrupulous parents get their doctors to tell them whether the foetus is male or female

and if they are told that they are expecting a daughter, they request an abortion. The government has attempted to outlaw this practice, but because of the widespread availability of abortion, and because the technology to detect the sex of the foetus is often privately owned governmental control has not been very effective (Croll 1995: 165-166).

In the circumstances of the single-child family policy, the birth of a daughter could give rise to open tension within a family by setting husband against wife and mother-in-law against daughter-in-law. Such cases were not confined to the countryside, but were also reported to exist among city dwellers and cadres' families. In the delivery room in a large city hospital in the north-east of China, there were instances where parents refused to accept that they had given birth to a daughter, so convinced were they that the hospital had made a mistake; where husbands were said to have fainted with worry prior to the birth, so anxious were they about the sex of their first born; where voluntary abortions took place on the mistaken advice of the fortune-teller that the expected baby was a girl; and where mothers were verbally abused on the birth of their daughters. At another hospital, the degree of post partum complications were found to be significantly higher among mothers of daughters and this was attributed to their fall in spirits immediately after birth (Beijing Women's Federation 1983).

Another of the major consequences of infanticide for family relationships and inheritance is a shortage of women to marry. Modest reports in 1991 speak of there being 20 million more men than women – a figure which would probably reach 50 million by the year 2000. As we shall see in the next section this imbalance has contributed to the revival of practices such as selling girl children and the abduction of Southern women and girls to provide future wives in the North (Honig and Hershatter 1988: 273-298). I believe the problem will worsen if infanticide and female abortions' continue. One understands, though with much disgust at its callous sexism, the argument against infanticide on the grounds that it might produce a worse situation where, in future men would not be able to find wives (Wolf 1985: 271). There is also the possibility that the imbalance could result in an increase in cases of rape.

Official commentary blamed the problem on "feudal ideas," now given new life by the state birth control policy. The

government publicised the harm caused by “feudal attitudes,” encouraged the media attention to infanticide, and promoted legal sanctions (sentences ranging from three years in prison to death for those convicted of homicide). Some commentators proposed that men move in with the families of their brides, so that daughters would no longer be regarded as temporary family members (Croll, 1995).

While others recommended improvement of social welfare for aged persons with no children, so that having a son would no longer be so crucial to survival in old age. Most of the measures adopted by the government relied on ideological work and legal regulation. Whether they could be effectively carried out by the same local authorities who were pressed to enforce the birth-limitation programme is unclear (Honig and Hershatter, 1988: 276). Whether they were sufficient to actually alter the economic pressures that made sons in peasant families more valuable than daughters is even more dubious. Ironically, state policies intended to raise the living standard of the entire population – the agricultural reforms and the family limitations programme – had the unintended consequences of putting the female half of that population at an increased risk of fatal violence.

Abduction and Traffic of Women

As we have discussed above, one of the most appalling consequences for women, is that market reforms have been the commercialisation of women for sale – and often violent abuse – on the open market. The abduction and traffic of women re-appeared in China in the early 1970s. Up to the end of the 1980s, it had extended to the whole of the country except for Tibet. Until recent years, it was widely reported and has attracted public attention. “In 1999, the reported cases rose 11.4 percent from the previous year with the number of abducted and traded women and children rising by 30.7 percent and 15.3 percent respectively” (Li Rongxia 2000:14). There are frequent media reports about police roundups and punishment of traffickers operating nationwide networks for the abduction and sale of women and children. A 1995 legal report claimed that between 1991 and 1994, nearly 70,000 cases of abduction of women and children were uncovered, leading to the arrests of more than 100,000 criminals (Evans 1997: 168-171).

From a report in the *Legality Daily* among the victims, the oldest is over 55 years old, and the youngest is only 13 years old. They are from 16 ethnic groups. They are workers, peasants, cadres, middle school students, undergraduates and graduates students (*Legality Daily* 1991). Some victims even come from neighbouring countries such as Vietnam (*Oriental Daily* 1996).

Life for these abducted women is miserable. In the process of traffic, they are often raped and abused by the criminals. After they are being sold, the buyers may take cruel measures to stop them from escaping: battering, isolation, surveillance, even chains are often used. The victims are often discriminated against when they return to their native places. There are cases of suicide or mental illness when they could not face themselves and their relatives after their escape (Pearson 1995: 1159-1173).

There are many reasons for these heinous crimes. In conditions of extreme poverty, where marriage is virtually universal, and where marriage is virilocal (on marriage, women usually move to their husband's village), the sale of a daughter into marriage may represent a means to finance a son's marriage as well as a last-resort response to desperate economic need (Kristof and WuDunn 2000: 113-118; Yayori Matsui 1999:22).

Furthermore, when a combination of demographic factors, lack of employment opportunities, and female out-migration results in a scarcity of women of marriageable age, the poor and isolated may have few options but to seek a wife through the market. Some reports also note that in such conditions the men who become the husband's of "bought wives" not infrequently have some physical and mental disability that would make it difficult for them to find a wife if simply left to their own devices (Wong, 1997: 327-332, 1999).

For instance, in Jingling County, Hebei Province, it is common practice to purchase wives. Owing to poverty, girls are unwilling to marry locally, while girls in other places shun the idea of being married off to the county. The difficulty in finding wives has encouraged many local farmers to purchase wives, as they do not realise that it is illegal. They just think that the act of paying justifies the act, just as in the purchase of any commodity (Li Rongxia 2000:16).

Another reason for these types of crimes according to representatives attending a conference on child trafficking and prostitution, is that the influx of businessmen and foreign

tourists, have increased the need for child prostitution, which has indeed become a very serious problem. This is especially true since Chinese men from Southeast Asian countries such as Thailand, Hong Kong and Taiwan demand young girls, both because of the myth that having sex with a young virgin can restore their youth and because of the fear of HIV (Yayori Matsu 1999: 22; Kristof and WuDunn 2000: 113-118).

The fight against the abduction and trade of women and children is a particular and complex task. Enhancing the current struggle, the public security department has used modern scientific and technological means such as online inquiries and DNA test. This has paved a smoother path for many abducted women and children to be reunited with their families (Li Rongxia 2000: 14-15). Presumably however, for many more, the greater majority, were never rescued.

Wife Battering

Another major crime against women is family violence. In rural China and Taiwan, this type of abuse is related to sexual jealousy of husbands, failure of wives to bear male offspring, and punishment of wives for improper conduct (Gallin, 1992:119-227; Honig and Hershatter, 1988: 273-307). In addition, since divorce is generally difficult to obtain in the countryside, husbands may deliberately abuse their wives to the point of suicide to free themselves from unwanted marriages. In the urban cities of Taiwan and Hong Kong, factors precipitating violence are different from the rural villages. Hot temperament, family finance, discipline of children, extramarital affairs, gambling, and alcoholism are often cited as the main causes of conflicts between couples, which lead to wife battering (Chen, 1991:279-303; Harmony House, 1991).

Traditional patriarchal Chinese values are also repeatedly cited as fundamental to the occurrence of wife abuse as well as why these women are reluctant to leave the abusive relationships (Chen 1991; Hong and Hershatter, 1988; Yeung, 1991: 29-36). The Confucian concept of model womanhood commands the submission of Chinese wives to their husbands (*san cong si de*), and the Chinese woman's value is judged by their capacity to fulfil their culturally prescribed domestic roles of supportive wives and mothers (*xian qi liang mu*). Despite rapid urbanisation, industrialisation, and Westernisation in recent

decades, researchers have found that modified Confucian ideals and principles still persist as the protocol for proper family life (*jia*) in contemporary Chinese societies such as China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore (Chan and Lee, 1995:83-99; Liu, Hutchison, and Hong, 1979: 84-98).

Very often family violence goes unreported. Women feel that they have to put up with the husband's violent behaviour and dare not let other people know about the scandal. Women are still taking on the traditional roles and expect themselves to be responsible for keeping the family intact, including the hiding of family shame and unlawful behaviour such as incest and violence. Owing to the traditional emphasis on chastity, rape and incest by close relatives are often unreported as well. The women are being blamed for not staying a virgin until marriage. There were reports of rape victims manifesting schizophrenic symptoms of anxiety, delusion of sin and guilt, and auditory hallucinations. Persons with mental handicaps are frequent targets for sexual exploitation. Beuber reported a story of the 23-year-old Miss Yang with a schizoaffective disorder being abducted and sold to a peasant family for 4,000 yuan as a wife. Ms Yang lived with this 'husband' for a year and a half and bore him a child, but when her mental symptoms became unmanageable he sold her to a forty-five year old man in another village who beat her and forced her to have sex (Beuber 1993: 312-313).

Nevertheless, maltreatment of women and violence against women are prohibited by law. In the survey conducted by the National Women's Federation, domestic violence is classified as "the women's position in the conflict between husband and wife." As we see in Table 5.2, about 80 percent of urban men and 70 percent of rural men never struck the first blow in a conflict between husband and wife. But the survey did not provide a clear picture about how serious domestic violence is in China because there is no clear-cut distinction between "often" (0.9%) and "sometimes" (8.2%). An IPS survey found that in the rural areas 4.68 percent of husband's beat their wives, 1.22 percent of wives often beat their husband's. The proportions in cities are 1.57 percent and 0.49 percent respectively (Xu Xun 1994: 4-5).

A survey conducted by the Beijing Association of the Study of Marriage and the Family in February and March 1994

had a surprising finding, 20.4 percent of wives were beaten by their husband's and 14.3 percent of husband's were beaten by their wives (Li Yinhue 1994: 39).

Table 5. 2 Did You Ever Strike the First Blow in a Conflict With Your Spouse?

| | No answer | Often | Sometimes | Seldom | Never |
|-------------|-----------|-------|-----------|--------|-------|
| Urban women | 0.4 | 0.9 | 4.6 | 15.8 | 78.4 |
| Urban men | 0.2 | 0.3 | 3.0 | 13.2 | 83.3 |
| Rural women | 0.3 | 1.0 | 9.1 | 21.3 | 68.3 |
| Rural men | 0.1 | 0.5 | 4.7 | 15.4 | 79.3 |

Source: WF survey, p.237

In my opinion the surveys conducted in the early 1990s should be regarded as pathbreaking since domestic violence has never been considered a serious social issue in China. Some survey conductors themselves argue that only a small percentage of women are beaten by their husband's. But I think considering the huge population of China, that is significant. Taking Shanghai for example, 0.9 percent of married women will be about 36,000 and 4.68 percent means there would be 187, 2000 family violence victims. Also, there are almost no community facilities to protect the victims of domestic violence. Nevertheless, women's studies, women's organizations, and especially the women's hotlines (Li Yang 1994: 12-14), which have emerged during the last ten years, have drawn attention to the issue.

Unfortunately, their influence, weak as it is in the cities, cannot reach rural areas, where domestic violence is more frequent. There the situation can be serious. Wives are still considered the property of their husbands. Some farmers treat their wives like chattels, whom they believe they have bought through the paying of betrothal gifts or money. "I beat the wife I married just like the horse I bought" (Co Mingsheng 1994: 3).

Looking at domestic violence from a men's perspective. It seems hard to believe that one-fifth of women strike the first blow in domestic conflicts. Unfortunately, I cannot find similar research on historical China or Western societies with which to

compare. But perhaps the high rate of “violence against men” is an indicator of women’s improved family status.

CONCLUSION

The 1949 communist takeover certainly brought about changes to the traditional attitudes and behaviour toward Chinese women. It is equally true, however, that events since 1978 illustrate other dramatic changes. Reform has brought far-reaching economic changes and a transformation agenda in social relations, which compares pre-Revolutionary China and the Maoist and Dengist eras.

How and in what way have the 1978 reforms had an impact on women’s lives? Certainly the reforms have benefited Chinese women. Bearing in mind the economic and cultural restrictions of the Maoist era, including the continued subordination of women, the market reforms have brought choice, mobility, some extra autonomy, as well as the hopes of a functioning civil society to China’s women.

The counterargument, which suggests that in comparison to gains made during the Maoist era the reform era had been marked by serious setbacks for Chinese women, which would include the following:

- Lack of collective support for women’s education, welfare and health care;
- Implicit support for restricting women’s access to workplaces outside the home;
- The threat to women’s autonomy and ability to participate in the public domain;

and

- A range of negative and often violently brutal consequences of the commoditisation of women and sex, including exploitation in the labour market.

It would be unwise to support either position definitively, bearing in mind that elements of truth can be found in both. Yet it is clear that during the Maoist and post-Maoist periods the Party-state remained largely gender-blind. The regimes did not challenge the patriarchal foundations of gender-based discriminations against women. In the 1990s some women have finally been able to find some autonomous space in the emerging civil society, but as long as the regime refuses to give up its monopoly of political power, and its insistence on monitoring in the public sphere on its terms, it will continue to be difficult for women to organise in their own interests, other than at peripheral levels.

Thus, even though women have made significant gains they have done so as “subordinate daughters rather than as “equal sisters” of fraternal Communist men” (Stacey, 1983: 212-213). Depending on which measures we survey, Chinese women have managed to achieve at least as much if not more than women have achieved elsewhere in the world; greater labour force participation; less occupational segregation; and higher representation in politics. The gains in these areas are significant achievements for a country that has been dominated for so long by traditions of male superiority. There is still a feeling, however, that the revolution – which promised women so much – has actually delivered them very little. Even if the Chinese had been able to bring about total income equality between men and women, female subordination, especially in the countryside, would not have changed very much. The reason is that subjugation of women in the Chinese countryside rests on ancient principles of kinship organization and family formation. Even after five decades of socialism there is no real evidence that patriarchy is losing its grip, because in China a woman’s life is still determined by her relationship to a man, be he father, or husband, not by her own efforts or failures.

The leaders of the CCP may have genuinely wanted to relieve women of this patriarchal burden, but they were unable to do so, largely because of their own patriarchal biases. Women have always been defined as a commodity in China, and in the reform era the price of and the profit to be made from such commodities have increased exponentially. The official response to the upsurge of female infanticide after the introduction of the one-child policy illustrates the extent of the patriarchal bias in

China. The newspaper *China Youth News*, for example, reported that “if female infanticide is not stopped quickly, in twenty years a serious social problem may arise” (Wolf, 1985: 261). It was clear from the report, however, that the “problem” in question was not that baby girls were being murdered but that there would not be enough women around to be wives! We are reminded here that Chinese women over the centuries have been defined, and have come to define themselves, by their relationships with and their status relative to men (Croll, 1995).

The revolution has brought China’s women to where they had hoped to be in the twenty-first century. The more optimistic Western feminists, like Margery Wolf, suggest that the gender revolution has only been “postponed” and that the path toward liberation can once again be cleared, perhaps after the economic reforms have solidly place China on the road to modernisation. As she put it, “Revolutions are made, not delivered in a package; women must make their own revolution” (Wolf, 1985: 271). It is difficult to imagine how women can go about this task at the present time, especially in light of some of the economic reform policies that have worked, inadvertently or otherwise, to close the door to women’s liberation. As Wolf (1985: 261) herself pointed out, even in the 1980s a Chinese woman was still expected to be “the good wife and devoted mother,” roles she has played for centuries.

6

REPRODUCTION IN CHINA AND ITS SOCIO-CULTURAL MEANINGS

Birth is universal. However, the meaning of giving birth is not universal, but culturally specific. The aim of this chapter is to focus on the socio-cultural meaning of reproduction in Chinese society, in order to explore the importance of the preferred male child. To explain this preference, I shall deal with the concern about security of old age as well as a characteristic of Chinese culture that seems at first to be unrelated to reproduction – ancestor worship. In a way, this means I have to deal with the opposite of birth, i.e. death. This is a time consuming but essential task, if we are to grasp the meaning of reproduction to Chinese people, and to understand its changed as well as unchanged traits.

REPRODUCTION IN THE TRADITIONAL CHINESE FAMILY

In the traditional Chinese family, to produce children was the first and foremost desire of married couples. A large family may have been the inevitable result of having no contraception, but it was also considered a social value. Having many children was widely viewed as a blessing, a dream and a social value because the large family really met the vital demands of ones life (Croll, Davin and Kane, 1985a: 8).

When it came to the question of how to feed many children, it was believed that “if nature creates an elephant, it certainly would create grass [to feed it]” as the saying puts it. That is a vivid illustration of an act of faith in the capacity of the economy to provide for the rising generation, and the rising generation’s capacity to sustain and develop that economy (Robertson, 1991: 72).

During the last-half of the twentieth century, reproduction, in the widest sense of the term, has undergone unprecedented changes; at the same time there has been some resistance to

these changes. It is difficult to ascertain the trends associated with fertility in the past, however, it is necessary to make one thing clear. It would be wrong to suggest that in the traditional Chinese family, women had as many children as they could because they married young (often before 20), and gave birth right up to their menopause. In fact, I tentatively speculate there were limits to their fertility. Many poor men and women had to delay marriage for years. Others used traditional methods of fertility control such as abstinence, withdrawal and abortion to avoid pregnancy (Croll, et al 1985a: 11). Soon after giving birth, many women had to get up and return immediately to work, which damaged their health. On the other hand, the death rate, from female infanticide, neglect, malnutrition and sickness, considerably reduced the number of children who survived their parents and went on to produce offspring themselves (ibid).

An unknown but large number of men were often absent from their families for different reasons: they engaged in activities requiring regular and long travel (working as hired labourers, building dikes, and in military service) (Kane, 1987: 13). In the Chinese view it was considered improper for husbands and wives to sleep together once their children had reached adulthood especially when their children married (for the reason that sexuality was supposed to serve mainly the need for reproduction; after their children had achieved maturity couples were expected to limit their sexual activities) (Baker, 1979: 5; Evans 1997: 126-129; Honig and Hershatter, 1988: 186). All those factors would have kept the fertility rates below the maximum.

REPRODUCTION IN THE CONTEMPORARY CHINESE FAMILY

According to a "Study of Women's Status in Contemporary China (hereafter known as CASS survey), there was not one woman who did not desire to have children, but rural women wished to bear more children than urban women (Zheng Zizhen, 1995: 394). The social character of reproduction was particularly emphasised. Childless couples were considered to have committed a very serious sin to their lineage (Baker, 1979: 46). The causes of childlessness were believed to be social ones (i.e., it was the result of bad behaviour in social life; or punishment for immoral behaviour or for sins committed in their earlier

existence, and so on), rather than the biological ones (e.g. a disease leading to infertility). To put it another way, there has been a moralisation of reproduction – meanwhile the present birth control programme places great emphasis on the medical aspects of birth control, with little or no concern to the social aspects (Greenhalgh, 1994: 3-30).

Nevertheless, it was women who were believed to be responsible for reproduction. It may be said that women's role expectations in reproductive life were quite clear: to bear children (Wolf, 1972: 147). Moreover, most women in the traditional society had few other social roles outside their family. The majority of them were not permitted to study or take examinations. Their identity was defined closely in terms of the home and family that they lost their own names (Croll, 1995: 11-68).

Since 1949 many women have been given better educational and employment opportunities and live on a relatively equal basis with men. Many others though, especially those living in the countryside, have failed to reap these gains. However, for both groups the family continues to provide them with identity, albeit to different extents. Whereas in some Western societies, for instance America, there is so-called voluntary childlessness among some career women, in China people cannot even imagine that. Whereas these American women evaluate both career commitment and child-rearing in terms of economic costs/rewards and social costs/rewards when making a decision to be child-free, (Sharon, 1986) it is commonly believed in China it is not easy to count the feathers of birds in the sky; similarly, the money, time and energy spent on rearing one's child are immeasurable, as a folk song puts it. That is exactly what Robertson means when he states that in reproduction, ordinary people do not behave like neo-classical economists who calculate the production of hats or cars.

The rationale of child raising is set about with complex qualitative issues that are not readily amenable to individual calculations, and instead become lodged in the folk wisdom of culture (Robertson, 1991: 72).

A woman in China who does not have any children often feels like a "failure as a woman;" Or not really a woman, but "a half-man, half-woman" (Rofel, 1999: 253). In this sense,

motherhood is still an indispensable, if not basic, part of female identity. If they have no children, women have the feelings of “personal insufficiency” – to borrow the words of Giddens (1991: 65). So in this sense, children provide their parents, especially mothers, with an essential part of their identity.

We will now examine why the government takes the position that birth planning is not only a practical but also a moral necessity, given China’s inordinate population size.

THE CHINESE GOVERNMENT’S CONTROL PROGRAMME

In 1979, when the one-child policy was announced, the concept of “birth planning” was 25 years old. An indigenous Chinese strategy, (White, 1992), birth planning differs from the Western notion of family planning in that the role of the state is paramount: births are planned by the state to bring the production of human beings in line with the production of material goods.

The one-child policy followed on the heels of two small-scale campaigns conducted in 1956-78 (Bannister, 1987: j 577-618), and the nationwide “later-longer-fewer” policy of 1971-78 (so named because it encouraged later marriage, longer child-spacing, and fewer children), peasant couples were allowed to have three children and then, beginning in 1977, two. During the 1950s, fertility fell from 6.2 to just under 3 children per women (Neft and Levine, 1997: 246-247), an extraordinary decline by any standard. Nevertheless, the post-Mao leadership became convinced that fertility had to fall even further – to about 1.7; some even hoped for only one child per woman (Song Jian, 1981: 25-31) - if Chinese society was to become “comfortably well off” by the turn of the century and the regime was to secure its legitimacy.

Largely unknown to outsiders, the one-child policy underwent substantial modification during its first decade. The policy that in January 1979 sought simply to encourage single-child families was soon abandoned and in September 1980 replaced by the call for all couples to limit themselves to one child. The coercive phase of the early 1980s was capped by a massive nationwide sterilisation campaign conducted on and off throughout 1983. In part because of widespread resistance to the campaign – in which some 20 million people were sterilised

(Ministry of Public Health, 1988) - the policy was relaxed somewhat in the mid-1980s. Rules on second children were liberalised slightly in mid-1984 (Greenhalgh, 1986: 491-515), and in 1988 rural couples whose first child was a girl were permitted to have a second child (Zeng Yi, 1989: 333-337). Throughout the decade, third births continued to be “resolutely prohibited”. In Shaanxi Province and Xianyang City, the number of conditions under which peasant couples were allowed second children rose from three in 1981 to sixteen in 1985 and in 1986 villagers whose first child was a girl were permitted to have another (Greenhalgh, 1990: 191-229).

The authorities linked the biological reproduction to education and social reproduction by promoting the maxim: fewer but healthier and better-educated children. They said the move from non-contraceptive to a contraceptive family would create favourable conditions not only for simply bringing children into the world, but also for ensuring their future by means of education and a higher standard of living for the whole family as well as the nation (Croll, 1985a). It seems to me that a large family is associated with the past, backwardness, and ignorance, while a small family is linked to modernity, enlightenment, and civilisation. Again the authorities have juxtaposed tradition with modernity and defined tradition as something bad and modernity as something good.

Nevertheless, the desired results failed to materialise. So, the government specified financial and work penalties to be meted out to couples who had more than two children. Strong enforcement measures were reported including required IUD use, abortions for unplanned pregnancies, sterilisations (Milwertz, 1998: 98-102; Mosher, 1993), financial penalties and even physical intimidation (White, 1987: 281-317). It would be safe to suggest that the extent to which these compulsory measures are taken varies from locality to locality. How does the birth control programme affect the family's reproduction?

A Smaller Family

Needless to say, contraception measures and technique bring fundamental changes to family life. In the traditional society there was little opportunity to limit the size of one's family (Croll et al 1985a: 11). Although in some areas, women after giving birth practiced temporary sexual avoidance, the purpose

was to space out the births of children, not limit birth directly (ibid). Moreover, a lot depended on the man and on his ascetic control over his sexual impulses.

Lavelly and Freedman (1990: 357-363) cite direct evidence that fertility decline was under way in some population sub-groups before the introduction of the recent government programmes. This demographic data indicates that the better-educated couples in urban China first adopted birth control. Only after the onset of the government sponsored fertility programmes did the strong relationship between education and fertility weaken, undermined by policy goals and bureaucratic regulations tailored to specific urban levels. What began as a classic story of the early and spontaneous adoption of conscious control among educated elites became an exercise in social engineering.

Modern contraception creates all kinds of opportunities to control the number of children and the spacing of pregnancies (to allow a great time period between the first and second child, for example); to pursue an education, job, or career training; to improve people's standard of living and, most importantly their children's future (Croll, 1983: 88-101; Croll et al 1985a; Kane, 1987). For many educated people, especially in big cities, modern contraception has been warmly welcomed (Milwertz, 1998: 95). Many women in the countryside also use modern contraception methods.

Here are two interview notes about the life plan of peasant women. A young Taipei fish-stall keeper rejected further childbearing on the grounds that one loses at least two months of work time after a birth, which is a lot of income to forgo (Gates, 1993: 255). While another woman, a Chengdu restaurateur in her late thirties stopped with one daughter in 1974, long before the policy required it, "I believed in birth control very strongly. So as soon as I had passed the month, I took my husband to the hospital for a vasectomy, one of the first in the city (ibid: 266).

Such evidence leaves little doubt that women like this appreciate the new-found opportunity to regulate their fertility and plan their lives, in order to improve their standard of living: all advantages which older generations never enjoyed. As a result of this, some important changes have occurred. An indicator of this change is the decline in total fertility rate of

women. In China as a whole, until the 1950s, women were still bearing 6.2 children on average. However, since then this rate has declined: in 1995 the average was down to about 2.0 (Neft and Levine, 1997: 246-247).

Contraception seems to create a necessary condition for young couples to fulfil their dreams: to protect their health, and to improve their life. A 25 year-old woman said after her marriage, she and her husband discussed the question of having children. They agreed to have just two children, preferably boys. If they had two girls, then they would try again for a boy. If the third child was another girl, then they would stop there and not try again.

However, one recent study conducted in southern Jiangsu and northern Anhui provinces included a number of focus-group discussions which showed that villagers were not adverse to fewer children, but they still desired sons and discriminated against daughters (Gu Baochang, Xie Zhenming and Hardee, 1998: 79). Patterns of child-gender composition here too indicate that couples still continue childbearing until they have a son. For those with one child, the sex of the child was more likely to be male than female and couples with two children were least likely to have two daughters. Parents with one son were demonstrably happier than those with one daughter, those with two daughters were the least satisfied. While most satisfied parents were those who had one son and one daughter.

A lengthy study of one small village in northern Guangdong province in the 1990s by Hok-Bun Ku (1998: 257 cited in Croll, 2000: 82) shows the lengths and ingenuity of villagers in their "often brave struggle" to have a son. In common with most rural regions "two but not three" children were now permitted in this small village of 45 households in which there were ten households without sons who were openly circumventing birth control policies. For example, one woman with two daughters refused sterilisation and had to leave the village hurriedly to escape pressure to have an abortion when pregnant for the third time. She was rescued by a temple monk and helped to her father's home village, where along with three other women hiding from birth control officials, she awaited the birth of her third child. Fortunately, she gave birth to a son; she then returned to the village where she came under pressure to pay a hefty fine and had to distribute her belongings to other

villagers to protect them from confiscation. Although she was subsequently sterilised and her son became an object of some discrimination, she was satisfied because she now had a son.

What is interesting about this ethnographic account is the degree to which fellow villagers supported her quest, not just verbally by openly acknowledging the importance of sons, but by actively aiding in the escape, hiding a pregnant woman and looking after threatened property at times when such actions were extremely risky and could result in a heavy penalty.

In brief, modern contraception practices have effectively reduced fertility, and many people, particularly in urban areas, welcome it. Consequently, family size has been declining since the 1950s. By the end of the 1980s when the birth control programme has been tightened, the total fertility rate had fallen on average to 2.0 children per woman (Neft and Levine, 1997: 246-247). Due to these profound transformations, the family has become smaller. On the other hand, the implementation of the birth control programme also produces a lot of problems, particularly for women who bear the brunt of the birth control responsibility. It has also led to a number of health problems for women, as many suffer from the side effects of the contraceptive devices, compulsory sterilisations and forced abortions. They may also suffer from loss of status, family abuse and discrimination if they do not give birth to a son (Hartmann, 1995: 562-575).

So far we have looked at the changes in reproduction mainly from a demographic point of view. In terms of quantitative demographic data, it seems that the government's target of a maximum of one child per couple will be difficult to achieve. Demographic data reveals that many young women already had at least two children. This means that these women would have more children during their duration of marriage (Neft and Levine, 1997).

However, the demographic perspective does not tell us the whole story about the difficulty of the one-child policy. Nor does it explain why those women are likely to break the limit. As one woman quoted above said, she was lucky to have two boys. If she had given birth to two daughters, what would have happened? She said that she would have tried again for a third child. Her case speaks for those who have sons, but it also says something about people who have no son: they would continue

to try for a boy. In other words the son preference is an obstacle to the birth control programme. That will be the next focus of our study, because we need to understand not only the changed and unchanged features of reproduction, but also the meaning and importance which Chinese people attach to reproduction.

SOLUTIONS TO THE BIRTH CONTROL PROGRAMME

The one-child limit has really put great pressure on many couples, and as a result it has deeply affected the attitude towards daughters. Sons were not only preferred in the interests of long-term security, but daughters have increasingly been sacrificed in the same interests. Daughters might be under-registered or subjects of discrimination either at birth by infanticide or through neglect shortly thereafter, or increasingly before birth by gender selective abortion (Johansson and Nygren, 1991: 35-52; Hull, 1990: 63-84; Johnson, 1996: 77-98) (see Chapter 5). Now because of the limit, many parents feel anxious if the first child is a daughter. They want to have a son as the first child to be sure that their dream has already come true. Then they need not worry which sex the second child is – they won't need to break the limit. If they have a daughter as the first child, and next have a son, they are viewed by public opinion as successful because they have both sexes. Moreover, a daughter as the first child will be the indispensable helper according to tradition (Wolf, 1985: 223). However, they have to go through an uncertain period between two births. Therefore the birth of a daughter as the first child is generally less welcome.

Many couples longing for at least one son have made use of the solutions that were predominant in the traditional family, and some of which are contrary to the government's birth control policy. This creates a conflict between the interests of the society and those of the family. This also brings many problems to the couples concerned. The possible solutions open to the couples are set out below.

The wife continues bearing children

The first solution is that the wife continues to bear children until at least one son is born, no matter how many children that may entail. In many cases, the more they try, the more they fail; their efforts result in only daughters. They are described as being "greedy" couples (Greenhalgh, 1994: 19). When choosing this

solution, couples have to cope with problems of not only having more mouths to feed, but also of conflict against the one-child policy. Here is one concrete case from Vietnam, which illustrates nicely, the experiences many couples from China have to face every day.

In Binh province (1992), there was a 29-year-old peasant woman, who had just given birth to her third child, a daughter again (she already had two daughters, born in 1985 and 1987). It was said she felt unhappy; when her husband came to take her and the baby home from the commune's health care station, she cried throughout the trip. Everyone felt sorry for her. Her family had to pay a fine of 200 kg of paddy imposed by the commune administration on those who broke the two-child limit: this put them into debt because they did not have enough money yet to buy paddy. During the interview she was sad. She said that she was well aware of the two-child limit and did not want to go through too many births.

When she was two months pregnant for the third time, the head of the Women's Union branch and the head of her village tried to persuade her to get an abortion, but she refused. The reason was there were too few people in her family at the moment. Her father-in-law had died; moreover her husband was an only child so her mother-in-law was reliant on him. In her words, "I told the above people that I would not get an abortion. Anyway, I must have the third child, regardless of its sex" (Mai Huy Bich, 1993: 27-28). It was clear that she had experienced a conflict of roles, which in the end was resolved in favour of the family through her decision to bear a third child.

It was her mother-in-law who was the most coercive element in persuading her to try for a third child. At last, four years after having a second child, the daughter-in-law was pregnant again in 1991. As we saw, the result was yet another daughter. When asked: "You already had three nice, healthy granddaughters; will you push your daughter-in-law to bear more?" the old woman said: "I do not know what to do now" (ibid).

Although this example was from Vietnam, what happened to this couple is similar to that experienced in China. It tells us a lot about the conflict arising from the opposing role expectations. Like men, women now have their social roles outside their families, too: as citizens, as members of the

Women's Union, and members of agricultural co-operatives, etc. As wives and daughters-in-law, they are expected to bear children, but everywhere outside their family they are expected to observe the one-child limit, or suffer the legal consequences. However, those who have not yet had a son are really under pressure from their family to carry on trying for a boy. Such couples find it difficult, if not impossible, to conform simultaneously to the two distinct sets of role expectations. Thus the role conflict emerges. Cases like this are quite common in rural China.

Adoption

As in the past, adoption is still one of the solutions for families who have no son. The adoption of children follows a different pattern from that in the West. There are two purposes of adoption: one is to continue the lineage, another is to secure the additional manpower. In the former, the choice is limited within the husband's nephews because they belong to his lineage. It is only they who can be considered, and one of them is chosen as the adopted son. In the latter, the adoption of children who do not belong to the husband's lineage is merely aimed at securing additional labourers. The scope of choice in this case is not limited (Wolf and Huang Chien-shan, 1980). The desirability of sons is also evident here, especially if one compares the patterns of adoption of Chinese infants by Chinese couples and Western ones (Riley, 1997b: 88). A policy is to give priority to Chinese families who wish to adopt children, while there is also a supply of baby girls for foreign adoption. As Riley (1997b: 87-102) points out the availability of Chinese girl babies for adoption is the result of the preference for male babies among Chinese prospective adoptive parents (*ibid*). However, this way of coping with the lack of male childlessness varies from place to place. In Zhenfu silk weaving factory, several families without male progeny have shown a preference for child adoption (Rofel, 1999: 253), while couples from other areas of China choose to remain childless (Tian Sen, 1994: 17).

MOTIVATION OF STRIVING FOR SON(S)

One may explain the preference for sons in Chinese society from three different viewpoints: economic, care of ageing parents, and ancestor worship.

The economic value of son(s)

First, one may explain the strong preference for son(s) in terms of their economic roles i.e., what benefits and costs of having son(s) are. It is argued that it is rational for the bulk of the population to have large families to share in manual labour. Sons with their physical strength are a source of 'manpower' (Eastman, 1988: 20-21). Moreover, compared to a daughter, who might be considered an unprofitable investment because she will leave the family when she marries, a son, when he marries, brings in a daughter-in-law, an extra labourer (Wolf, 1985: 223). This view is held by some researchers, especially after the recent reforms, when the family regained its function as production unit.

Based on the data of the survey "Women's Status in Contemporary China" (CASS survey) conducted in 1991, by the Population Institute only a small majority of respondents mentioned a son's economic role as the motivation for them to have sons (Zheng Zizhen, 1995: 393-399). Some of the interviews in this survey help to identify the economic role of sons. Local parents are expected to conform with prevailing custom, to bear the main financial burdens in their sons' marriages to help their married sons with building houses, and to provide them with furniture. The more sons one has, the heavier one's financial responsibility towards them. In fact, many parents began to fulfil their duties in this respect well in advance, when their sons were very young; now those parents are old, but they have not totally discharged their obligations yet (Mu Aiping, 1999: 143-155). The economic burden of having one or more sons may be one aspect.

But what about the other aspect, the economic rewards of having sons? Interviewees also said that sons are no more economically productive than daughters. One respondent of the 1991 survey conducted by CASS was a peasant woman, aged 41, who had four children of both sexes. She said "sons do not produce more than daughters; on the contrary, the latter sometimes prove to be better than the former in economic activities" (Zheng Zizhen, 1995: 396). So it is not generally agreed that sons always produce more than daughters; but they do consume more than daughters. In other words, the cost of having sons may well outweigh the benefits (Mu Aiping, 1999;

Zheng Zizhen, 1995). Given that fact, what is the motivation behind the preference for sons?

Care for aging parents

In the Chinese view it is sons, not daughters, who are expected to be responsible for old parents. In fact the sons themselves may not personally assume the care; often this role is handed over to their wives (Chang, 1996: 171-172). However, it is notable that if there are no sons in the family daughters became just as important as a source of support or of a home in old age (Davis-Friedmann, 1991). Sons may live separately, or far away from parents, but they are still responsible for them. This remains little changed even in the age of mass migration (Gamer, 1999: 143). Jan Wong (1999), points out that if something happens any time in one's family, one just sends a telegram, fax or email; however, far away one's son may live, he will be back very soon. Nevertheless, it takes a long time for one's daughter to do so, as she has to ask for permission of her husband's family, and that depends on the family's actual conditions. Even if a daughter wants to visit her natal parents she has to get the permission of her husband's family (Wolf, 1985). For that reason, having no son can be a cause of old people's loneliness.

The old communist woman lost her husband, and has four daughters, but now lives alone. The interview with her and her daughters shows her situation. When the interviewer asked why she did not live with one of her four sons-in-law, her first daughter who was also present in the interview said that according to a common belief:

Your son is your blood relation. He may quarrel with you, but after that everything is all right. As for a son-in-law, he is not your blood relation; how can you live together with him?

Replying to the question: "What about your daughters? Do they want you to live with them?" the old woman said:

They asked me to do so several times, but I told them: "That is your wish, but your husband's view is not so. How can I bear the situation in which I live with my son-in-law, and during every meal there will be many more tears than rice in my food (Mai Huy Bich, 1993: 33-34).

This interview was a group one, thanks to which we know not only what the old woman thinks of her actual circumstances, but also her fears as to what she imagines might have happened had she gone to live with one of her daughters. She has a complex about having no son; she imagines her unhappiness if she was living with her sons-in-law. Nevertheless, her loneliness is only too real, not imagined.

Her case is far from unique. Many people feel the same way as she does, but to different extents. It is common for old people to have a complex about living with their son-in-law, no matter however good he may be (Mu Aiping, 1999: 149). As for your own sons, however badly they may treat you, you still feel more comfortable living with them. That in part explains why people like to have sons as their main, if not only, source of security in their old age. While relatively young during the childbearing period parents are already thinking about their coming old age; this is why they want to have sons (ibid: 150-15).

In one village in northern Guandong province it was the plight of sonless 80-year old Grandma Xiao which constituted a perpetual and timely reminder to all in the village of the misery of old age in the absence of sons. Recently when she had fallen and broken her bones the villagers were reminded once again of the age-old lesson.

If we don't have a son, we will be very sad in our old age. The state won't take care of our livelihood. Do you know Grandma Xiao? Her experience shows us that having your own son is very important. Although she adopted a son, the son isn't her own. Last time while she was hurt, he didn't come to visit her. I don't want to follow in her footsteps (Hok-Bun Ku, 1998: 258-259).

The villagers contrasted her plight with that of fellow-villager Granduncle Liu who, when he died aged 75 years had an elaborate funeral at which the attendance of four sons and four grandsons had reminded the villagers once again of the importance of having descendants. What is the greatest blessing of Granduncle Liu! Full of posterity. Luckily he has so many sons and daughters. If not how can they afford the large expenditure? Nowadays, it isn't easy to pay for a death. Granduncle Liu's funeral was so lively. Now every family only has two children. I wonder if the funeral can be done like that.

Sons are the greatest blessing of Granduncle! If there were no sons, who can handle all these things for him (ibid: 263-264).

It could be said that if people in the modern Western family take rather a narrow view of reproduction as not being related to old people, that is because the situation there is quite different from that in China. For both, reproduction has remained a vital process. However, the modern Western family has had “considerable success in transferring responsibility for the organization of reproduction out into the public realm presided over by the modern state” (Robertson, 1991: 128). Meanwhile, the Chinese one is left to its own devices in coping with the basic challenges of reproduction, and is still heavily dependent on its own security mechanism. To put it in a simple way, old people in China up until now have had to rely on their children, above all their sons.

Interviews reveal that there is no guarantee that sons will take good care of old parents; many sons treat their parents badly (Ikels, 1993: 323, 327-328). So why are people keen to have sons? Probably they hope that their sons might not be too bad. Moreover, a discussion also casts light on one of the motivations. One man’s answer shows that if you do not have sons, “there will be nobody who kow-tows before your coffin” when you die. A man in another interview said: “When someone is keen to have sons, nobody thinks of the son’s economic contribution; the main thing one thinks about is lineage (Davis-Friedman, 1991) All these interviews reveal that a vital motivation in the striving for sons is that only a male child can fulfil the duties of ancestor worship.

The son’s role in ancestor worship

Ancestor worship is based on the conception of lineage. In the Chinese view, lineage is a human community, but one of a special kind that could be called a diachronic and generational community (Baker, 1979: 26-28). This community stems from a remote ancestor, whose name may be either recorded in the list of ancestors or transmitted orally (Wolf, 1968: 10-12). This line of descent extends through the present into the future. In this sense, the lineage is more than a group of individuals; it is a continuing entity carrying on from generation to generation (Baker, 1979).

In a patrilineal lineage, a man is not an independent person, an individual in the full sense of the word, but a member of a given lineage. He is the personification of this lineage at present. His existence is only a link in the communal chain. He must remember his ancestors, practice ancestor worship, and continue his lineage by having at least one son to guarantee that someone will fulfil in the future his present obligations (*ibid*). It is only a male child who can ensure the continuation of the lineage in two senses; first only he can practice ancestor worship. This cannot be done by female descendants who are treated as members of their husband's families, and are not allowed to have access to the ancestral temple (Wong Su-ling, 1953: 119). Second, it is only a son who can ensure the continuation of the bloodline because of the prevailing patrilineage. If a man should die without male progeny, his whole lineage, including his ancestors and his unborn descendants would die with him (Davis-Friedman, 1991).

Why is ancestor worship so important? In China, it is believed that death does not mean a complete end to everything. By contrast, the soul lives on after death. Moreover, after their death, people maintain ties with their descendants in a certain way. To some extent, the narrowing interaction is probably the most marked difference between death and life (Chao, 1983: 125-126).

Let us examine a concrete link in the communal chain of the lineage – the parent-child relationship. The parent-child dependence continues after the death of the parents. Death does not release a son from his duty to his parents; it merely alters the form of duty. His worship to his parents starts from their death. In the funeral procession sons of the deceased wear apparel of the coarsest sack of hempen cloth with a fringe and walk on bamboo staffs (Chao, 1983: 159-160). It is essential to have at least one son who walks on staffs before one's coffin.

I tentatively speculate that a Chinese man is socialised into old age and death by attending the funerals of others, and by preparing his own coffin. He knows in advance exactly what will happen to him after his death. Having at least one son to alleviate the fearful feelings of death, helps to reduce the most traumatic experience of the human condition.

Sons must continue their obligations of worship to their dead parents. One of the fundamental purposes of ancestor

worship is to ensure the happiness of dead parents in the afterlife. While alive, parents are served and respected; when dead, they are served and worshipped. Their otherworldly existence needs the same things as this worldly existence does. If parents need food, clothing, shelter, and money when they are alive, they would continue that when they are dead. By practising ancestor worship, children supply their dead parents with these essentials. In celebrating death anniversaries of their parents, children 'transfer' goods from this world to the next. This transfer is achieved by burning, incense, paper money and food offerings on a traditional altar. Offerings could be sent on to the dead parents in this way; Real food was not burnt, but merely offered to the dead parents (Potter and Potter, 1990: 224).

Dead parents need the worship of their children in order to be comfortable and happy. A soul with no descendants is doomed to eternal wandering in the World of the Shadow because it would not receive homage. Children who do not observe the sacrifice are considered as committing a serious crime of impiety. They are not dutiful because the souls of their dead parents have to make a precarious living as wandering beggars (Kipnis, 1997).

However, the relationship between dead parents and their children is mutual interdependence. For their part, dead parents are believed to become the protectors of their descendants. In return for the sacrifices and services of the living, the dead parents render such blessings to their descendants as are in their supernatural power. Moreover, they might warn their children about some impending unhappy events so that their children could escape. To give their supernatural support, the dead parents are informed on occasions of family joy or sorrow, such as weddings, birth of a new-born child, success in an examination, or serious sickness or death (Li Yih-yuan, 1985: 263-281).

The ritual focus of the house was traditionally the family ancestral altar. This was located at the rear of the large central ground floor room in each house, on a shelf reached by a wooden ladder. Twice daily, according to the old custom, incense was burned by the women before the wooden ancestral tablets, or before the ancestors' names written in black characters on orange paper pasted to the altar. Frequently the altar also held portraits of the deceased (Potter and Potter,

1990:223). On the first and fifteenth of each month, and on festival days, offerings were placed on these altars. During the Cultural Revolution, efforts were made to stamp out these practices, and the Red Guards destroyed all the ritual paraphernalia they could find (Chang, 1991: 206-207). Some families hid what they had in order to avoid criticism. The ancestral altars were removed. In their places, portraits of Chairman Mao were displayed; he had, in effect, assumed the status of a state-level deity. In my opinion from a symbolic point of view, this suggests that it was now the state that was the most potent source of support and aid.

Since 1981, no efforts have been made to restrict the practice of the family level ancestral cults. The family ancestral spirits are enshrined as before on the traditional altars at the rear of the house. Incense is burned, and food offerings are made as they used to be (Potter and Potter, 1990: 224). It is my belief that the revived household ancestral cult is a symbolic statement of the renewed economic and social importance of the household. The replacement of the state-level deity by the family deity is a ritual recognition that peasants must look to their own households rather than to the state for the basic securities of life.

Such an outlook on life and death exerts a profound influence on the family, determines many characteristics and makes its structure very close. While in this world, people live with their family and lineage members; but after death, they are believed to interact with their living family members only. It is believed that it is only the blood ties that can help to pave the way for the communication between this world and the next. That is why ancestor worship is carried out first and foremost in the family. Moreover, only sons can get access to the souls of the dead parents. If a couple has no son, then their daughters, especially the eldest one, can worship them; but that is not a good solution.

CONCLUSION

In the eyes of family members it is not simply due to their wish for more workers in their family that the peasants long for the birth of a son. Neither is it simply due to the custom that a married couple lives with or near, the husband's parents and takes care of them, though the last factor is quite essential. The cause of the strong preference for sons goes beyond the usual

economic and psychological motives. The male child, in the eyes of his family, assumes an overwhelming importance in economic, religious, practical, and symbolic fields, and last but not least in terms of his role in the continuity of the lineage. In this sense, giving birth to a son means continuity to people, while a daughter does not. The conception of continuity in the lineage not only reflects a mystical view of the world; on the social plane it separates one lineage from others.

Thus, the movement towards a smaller family in China is not merely a cognitive, technical, economic, or psychological problem as in many other societies, but also a socio-cultural problem. It is not likely that lower fertility will be achieved once wealth is more evenly distributed and social security systems well established. In China, in order for this fertility to be possible, the individual must be liberated from the tight control exercised by the community (including both diachronic, generational one, and the synchronic one that consists of people around the individual at present) with regard to his/her reproductive behaviour. Personal reproductive decisions are deeply shaped by the concerns about long-term security in old age and death. If supporting social institutions are non-existent, or cannot reassure parents in these respects, most parents will continue to try to safeguard their own welfare by bearing and relying on children.

7

A REVOLUTION IN FAMILY LIFE: THE POLITICAL AND SOCIAL STRUCTURAL IMPACT OF CHINA'S ONE CHILD POLICY

As we have noted in the last chapter few governmental policies are as intimate and invasive as those that affect within family decisions regarding procreation, family size, and the basic sense of family identity. In this chapter I am interested in examining not simply the direct impact of the one-child policy, but the extent to which it clearly affects other aspects of life that, at first appear to be far removed from the intent of the original legislation.

A dramatic illustration is the critical problem of overpopulation in China and the myriad related problems faced by the 1.3 billion Chinese people. Moreover, with almost one-quarter of the earth's population, China cannot help but intrude on the economic, social, and political well being of other nations in its requirements for resources, land, food, and energy. For example, food and water are becoming increasingly scarce in China as the world's most populous nation grows. In part this is because the Chinese have moved their dietary preferences up the food chain, shifting their diets toward more consumption of meat, eggs and milk. Production of these foods requires many times more grain than producing the Chinese traditional rice-based diet (Brown 1993:6; Gillette 2000a: 145-166; Hall 1997: 124-125) Thus, the observation is not surprising that China's sheer bulk gives it indisputable power to affect other nations.

In this chapter I will examine the impact of the family policy on family structure, and socialisation processes in China. I will explore the factors leading to overpopulation in China, describe the government's strenuous efforts to solve the problem by issuing a one-child mandate, and analyse its immediate impact on individual family life, the developing child, the family structure and parental practices. The after effects echo throughout the political and social structure of the earth's most populous nation, with enormous impact on the Chinese people's economic well-being and quality of life.

THE POLITICS OF REPRODUCTION

When the Communists came to power in 1949, demographers in the West were convinced that drastic measures were needed to slow the growth rate of the Chinese population. Mao Zedong, however, was not convinced of that; in fact he was dismissive of such advice, referring to it as “bourgeois” Malthusian propaganda. In what would later become one of his better known public pronouncements Mao observed in 1949 that:

of all things in the world, people are the most precious. Under the leadership of the Communist Party, as long as there are people, every kind of miracle can be performed. We believe that revolution can change everything, and that before long there will arise a new China, with a big population and a great wealth of products, where life will be abundant and culture will flourish. All pessimistic views are utterly groundless (Mao Zedong, 1956: 454).

With statements like this Mao effectively put a damper on the incipient birth control movement in China. After the arduous struggle against the Japanese, followed by the long civil war against the Nationalists, Mao felt that to implement birth control policies would be a cruel punishment for the long-suffering Chinese people. He felt it would be unfair, in a purportedly egalitarian society, to punish the poor for having too many children and in his opinion birth control was little more than “a means of killing off the Chinese people without shedding blood” (Tien, 1973: 179). Mao reasoned that the Chinese masses were a major component of the productive forces, and in fact they represented the only component that was in a healthy condition after the revolutionary struggles.

For a few years Mao’s views went unchallenged, and despite great debate over birth control policies, the official party line was that China’s population should continue to grow. Mao was not worried about China having too many people because, as he put it in one of his pithy sayings, “every stomach comes with two hands attached” (Pan, 1988: 152). The effects of this decision – or rather non-decision – can be seen in the population growth rates recorded into the 1970s.

In 1956 the greatly revered Chinese premier Zhou Enlai, had publicly announced his support for the concept of planned parenthood, and it seemed likely that a policy change was

impending. Even Mao himself was heard to waiver on the issue, in 1956, when he wrote: "We have this huge population. It is a good thing, but of course it also has difficulties...Steps must therefore be taken to keep our population for a long time at a stable level, say, of 600 million. A wide campaign of explanation and proper help must be undertaken to achieve this aim" (Mao Zedong, 1960: 46-47). For the next two decades the Chinese government provided such "help" through a series of campaigns and attempts to encourage the use of contraception (Croll et al 1985a : 190-232). Their goals of family planning at this time can be broadly described by the three terms late (*wan*), thin (*xi*), and fewer (*shao*). It was hoped that the Chinese people would defer childbirth by marrying later; by spacing out their offspring in intervals of at least four years; and by having fewer children overall (Greenhalgh, 1994: 6-7).

Until the late 1970s the population policy remained essentially voluntary, and in 1975 the average fertility rate (the number of live births per women) was between three and four (*ibid*: 7). Demographers predicted, if the rate continued that China, would have a population close to 1.5 billion by the year 2000. Even if the fertility rate stayed at the 1978 level, around 2.3, the population would rise to 1.28 billion by that time. This was a frightening prospect in a country so desperately short of land and resources, and to make matters worse a baby boom was expected in the early 1980s as a result of high birthrates in the mid-1960s (New World Press, 1983).

Mao has been criticised since his death on several fronts, including his reluctance to take a firmer stand on the issue of birth control. China's population grew by more than 75 percent between 1949 and 1978, and it was becoming clear to demographers and politicians alike that drastic measures were needed. At this time China had already begun its heralded drive toward the 'Four Modernisations,' the goal of which was to transform China into a powerful and modern socialist society by developing four sectors of the economy: agriculture, industry, science and technology, and national defence. These modernisation reforms emphasised the importance of production and the need to develop the overall skills and professional abilities of the Chinese labour force. There was to be a new emphasis on the profitability of urban and rural enterprises, with

a relatively lucrative system of material incentives designed to increase and speed production (Gamer, 1999: 78-79).

New in China at this time was the first real attempt to link the efforts to increase industrial and agricultural production with the efforts to reduce the growth of population. It was obvious to some leaders that a population increase of the magnitude experienced during the 1960s and 1970s would become a major barrier to accumulating the capital needed for the modernisation drive. As result the government essentially redefined “production” to include both the production of material goods and the reproduction of human beings. The Chinese people were asked to “grasp these two kinds of production” and to help keep the population down as an integral part of developing the economy.²⁴

The economic policymakers at this time felt that Mao Zedong had not fully grasped the nature of the link between production and reproduction, hence his decision not to consider implementing any coercive form of population policy. To correct the situation specific target were laid out in a series of Five Year Plans for both production and reproduction. The goal was to quadruple the gross value of industrial and agricultural production by the year 2000 and to keep the population down to about 1.2 billion by achieving zero population growth at the turn of the century (Yan Hao, 1988: 165-183). Most everyone involved was aware of how difficult it would be to implement such a policy: There were more than 240 million women of childbearing age, and producing large families had been the cultural norms for centuries.

POLICY RESPONSE TO THE POPULATION CRISIS

In this context, the Chinese government decided to regulate population growth by advancing the one child per couple family policy. As we have discussed in previous chapter’s the one-child policy, enacted as a legislative decree in 1979, dramatically altered Chinese family structure and resulted in an increase by tens of millions the number of only children in China. Ethnic minorities and people residing in rural areas generally were exempted from the one child mandate because of the respect for the strong familial ties held by ethnic groups and rural residents and concern that the number of minorities should not be reduced (Croll et al 1985a). For example, in Ningxia Hui in north-

western China, an area populated by Muslims, minority families are allowed to have two children in the cities, three in the rural areas (Croll, 1985b: 125-139). In provinces with predominantly Han populations there generally have been fewer exemptions, but the geographical differences are considerable.²⁵

Another impact on the family structure after the adoption of the one-child policy, it appears is that the typical households, especially in urban areas, will be a married couple supporting four elderly parents and one child the so-called 4-2-1 dilemma; (see Figure 7. 1). This explains in part why so many peasant households have refused to comply with the one-child policy, as a family with more children means more protection for the elderly (Leung and Nann, 1995: 105).

The mandate was supplemented by a myriad of governmental efforts to change prevailing customs. Mass propaganda as well as education about modern methods of contraception, eugenics, and maternal and childcare have been emphasised. School programmes have shown how one-child families would improve population quality and improve living standards. The government has dispensed free birth control pills and devices and gave awards to couples pledging to have only one child. A State Family Planning Commission was established and a multitude of legal and social measures have been instituted to facilitate birth control (Greenhalgh, 1994: 1-30).

To sweeten the pill – and to provide this shocking policy some teeth – incentives encouraged couple with one child to sign a pledge promising to have no more children; penalties would come to those who refused to comply (Mosher, 1993). In Beijing in 1979, for example, it was announced that parents who signed a pledge would receive a Y5 (Chinese yuan) monthly subsidy in addition to preferential access to nurseries and kindergartens, priority medical care, and the promise of favoured treatment in the educational and employment spheres (Kristof and WuDunn 1994; Mosher 1993; Tao and Chiu 1985: 153-165). The family would also receive additional housing space (or a larger plot of land if in the countryside). Punitive economic sanctions were established for families who refused to sign a pledge or failed to adhere to local plans.

If the family broke the pledge, it would have to return the subsidy and was in danger of losing all other benefits. If a third

child was born the family would pay a fine equal to roughly 10 percent of annual income until the child turned fourteen.²⁶



Figure 7. 1. China's 4-2-1 Dilemma.
Source: Smith, 2000:89.

The government soon recognised that the effects of this new policy would be far-reaching. For example, a new family structure limited in numbers and availability would necessitate rethinking such problems as old age security, including pensions, medical care, and living facilities for the elderly. Further, stable and reliable contraceptives for the young would be essential, as well as counselling clinics to aid in family planning (Greenhalgh, 1994: 7-10; Milwertz, 1998: 102; Potter and Potter, 1990: 233-249). Moreover, there was some parental reticence to risk their only child in joining military services. Others were concerned about care for the elderly (Jing, 1994: 29-53). As we

have seen in Chapter Six sons are expected to care for their elderly parents, and when a woman marries, she is expected to care for her husband's parents. In fact, Chinese laws require children to care for their elderly parents. What, then of the condition where two only children marry and are required to care for four elderly parents and grandparents (Chen and Kols 1982: J577-J619; Ikels 1993; Hall 1997).

THE IMPACT OF THE ONE-CHILD MANDATE

Chinese officials foresaw correctly the deleterious results of continued, unrestrained increases in population size. However, it could be argued that the architects of the government's response to these problems failed to anticipate the difficulties of implementing restraints on family size within this particular cultural context, and the potential social and emotional effects on children. In a nation bound by tradition where several generations historically had lived together in an extended/stem family, where interdependence in family life was valued and individualism was discouraged, and where Confucian ideology had, for thousands of years, emphasised filial devotion to elders, resistance to a single-child mandate was predictable (See Chapter 6).

Effect of the One-Child Mandate on Population

Despite the web of social hurdles to implementing restrictions on the number of children born, China's single-child mandate has as noted in Chapter Six had a dramatic effect on family size and reproductive behaviour. Since 1970, the number of only-child families has nearly doubled in China. On the national level, the percentage of one-child births rose from 23.6 percent in 1970 to 50.4 percent in 1987. In Beijing and suburban areas, the percentage rose from 38.5 percent in 1970 to 86.8 percent in 1984. Presently, over 95 percent of preschool children in urban areas of China (Beijing, Nanjing, Shanghai) are only children. By the end of 1993, despite the government's remarkable efforts, China's population had already exceeded 1.185 billion, with experts still predicting the population will rise from a current 1.3 billion by 2030 (Wong 1999: 330). Much of the rise in population may be explained by decreased mortality rates. Continued improvements in health and welfare have extended

the life expectancy of Chinese from 35 years of age to 70 years of age (Birth Planning Commission 1993).

Interestingly, the current social trends in one-child families in the Western world have also escalated. The percentage of women in America who have just one child has more than doubled in the past twenty years – up from 10 percent to 23 percent. Many of these women tend to be urban professionals who have put off starting a family until later. Between 30 percent and 40 percent of children in Manhattan are what Americans call “singletons”. One-third of American families started today will have only one child (Summers 2001: 32)

Departure from Cultural Tradition

A major difficulty in implementing family planning in China is related to cultural emphasis. Chinese feudal society lasted for over 2000 years, and its ideology is deeply rooted among the Chinese people, particularly the Confucian ideology. Ancient traditional Chinese patrilineal family structure emphasised primogeniture, the exclusive rights of inheritance of the eldest son. When a daughter married, she married into her husband’s family, taking the surname of her new family. Following tradition, having many children ensured having sons to inherit the title and perpetuate the family. In addition, for rural families, a son was another worker for the land. He not only earned a living, but also supported the extended family. Finally, a family with several sons provided greater support to its elderly members (Croll, 1983, 1994, 1995; Jacka 1997; Johnson 1983; Stacey 1983; Wolf 1985).

When one examines the socialisation practices and expectations of Chinese parents for their children’s social development, it is not surprising I think that the one child policy might provide severe disruption for families and schools. Some teachers told Hall (1997: 115) that they have already noticed the effects: insolence, lack of discipline and lack of patience. In China, social competence is judged by how well one gets along with others. There is little tolerance for individuality. Children must be well behaved, and Chinese parents exert great control over the child’s behaviour and independence and reinforce compliance with group authority (Livingston and Lowinger

1983). Chinese children are expected to serve societal goals rather than individual ones (Wu and Wu 1983; Rice 1992). They must exhibit obedience, conformity, self-sacrifice and respect for group goals and standards (Baker 1979: 26-48; Falbo 1987:159-183). Some believed that rigid rules were the only way 1.3 billion people could live in harmony. "Chinese people are afraid of softening up their children for a world that isn't soft (Quoted in Wong 1999: 311).

Many nursery schools stressed conformity. During morning callisthenics at one nursery, toddlers fanned out into four neat lines from a single one – and back again. In art class, four-year-olds copied a painting of a bear, with a sun on the left. The teacher noted proudly that out of 32 children, only one "goofed," and drew the sun on the right (Wong 1999: 313).

Comfort habits were also considered a character flaw and terribly unhygienic. In Three Mile Village Nursery in Beijing, toddlers who hugged stuffed animals or chewed on quilts were kept under surveillance. "We watch them the whole nap," said Xie Shuling, the vice principal, with a benign smile. "We tell them, 'Look at the other children. They don't need anything to go to sleep. Why can't you be like them?'" At another nursery, teachers confiscated cuddly toys that the one year-olds had brought from home. "These are bad habits. We just tell them we lost it," said Ren Shuling, the director (Wong 1999: 313).

Since the 1950s the focus on children's moral education by the Chinese authorities has reflected the persistence of the Confucian tradition. During the Ming and Qing dynasties, Neo-Confucian philosophers promoted education for children between the ages of seven and fourteen. They believed that at this stage children can be indoctrinated and nourished by the thoughts of the sages and learning to become an acceptable "man" (Saari 1990: 30). However, as we have discussed above today's kindergartens have pushed moral education and the indoctrination of patriotism for children as young as three years old. The Neo-Confucians believed in the theory of "stuffing" young children with moral learning before they could understand things. Once they were stuffed with the correct thoughts, there would be no room left for immoral or inappropriate thoughts. By the 1920s, after the May Fourth Movement, an enlightened new generation of scholars dismissed child socialisation by stuffing (Saari 1990: 38-39).

Yet traditional Chinese thinking on early education seemed to have gained favour among later-day communist elites. Even the contents of communist moral education for young children reflect the nationalistic ideology of late nineteenth and early twentieth century intellectual discourse (Wu 1992: 1-26). Today's parents support the idea of early indoctrination in the pre-school, believing in the benefit of teaching and discipline to improve their child's intelligence and conformity for group goals and standards.

THE IMPACT OF THE ONE-CHILD POLICY ON THE ONLY CHILD

Today, the psychology and education of only children is one of the most talked about social issues in China. Accounts of parents' and teachers' perceptions of the growing number of only children as spoiled and wilful appear frequently in the popular press, and these reports emerge periodically in the West. Traditionally, the presence of a sibling has been assumed to facilitate social and emotional development of the young child, while sibling absence has been thought to be accompanied by undesirable consequences for the child (Neal 1927: 1-3). Even one of the founders of American psychology, G. Stanley Hall is alleged to have said: "Only children are a disease in themselves" His crushing verdict loomed large from the end of the nineteenth century right up until the 70s, when modern researchers began to challenge the stereotypical view – which judging from the research literature still persists - that only children are lonely, selfish, overprotected, spoilt and maladjusted. (Summers 2001: 32).

Much of the Western literature has depicted the only child as self-centred, limit testing, low on tension binding, impulsive and maladjusted (Blake 1981:43-54; Rosenburg and Falk 1989; Rosenburg and Leino 1987; Thompson 1974: 93-124). The only child has been viewed as less affiliative (Miller and Maruyama 1976: 123-131), mostly likely to be psychologically maladjusted (Belmont 1977: 79-104), and generally regarded negatively by many people. Indeed, Leichtmann (1985: 225-292) has emphasised the critical role that a sibling plays in the normal acquisition of a child's identity through the older sibling as a role model and teacher for the younger sibling.

Interestingly, these outcomes are mirrored in recent studies of the only child in China. In one of the more rigorous studies, Jiao, Ji and Jing (1986) found several undesirable qualities characterising the only child. Using peer prestige ratings, they found only children to be at a disadvantage compared to children with siblings in terms of their persistence at a task, behavioural control, and tension-binding qualities or inhibition. Moreover, these children were rated as being significantly more egocentric.

Only children in China are reported to display negative character traits and behaviour problems: marked food preferences, short attention span, obstinacy, demand for immediate gratification, disrespect for their elders, bossiness, timidity, and lack of initiative (Wan, Fan, Lin 1984: 383-8391; Jing 1994: 29-53). These findings are not unlike findings with Western only children (Rosenburg and Leino 1987). Available data on the behavioural and personality characteristics of Chinese children reveal some similarities between only children in China and the Western world.

One must keep in mind differing distribution of personality traits in each culture, differently valued, differently reinforced in socialising, so that their mutual appearance may herald different meanings and outcomes. For example, whereas in the West, social inhibition is taken to reflect internal fearfulness and a lack of self-confidence, in the Chinese culture these behaviours are considered to reflect maturity and understanding (Chen, Rubin, and Li 1995: 531-539; Ho 1986: 1-37; King and Bond 1985: 29-45).

Despite the wealth of evidence in past studies that being an only child is accompanied by undesirable outcomes for the child, the past decade has witnessed a weakening of this conviction (Falbo and Polit 1986: 176-189; Mao 1984: 240-244; Meredith, Abbott, and Lu 1989: 251-256; Poston and Yu 1986: 305-310). Indeed, some recent evidence has suggested an advantage for only children in certain cognitive, emotional, and physical domains. However, studies that have examined personality characteristics of only children have revealed strikingly inconsistent results. Some studies in the Western world and China confirm the negative qualities of only children, while others show no differences in the personalities of firstborns with and without a sibling.

Jing and his colleagues (Jiao et al 1986; Ji, Jiao, and Jing, 1993: 821-830; Jiao, Ji, and Jing 1996:387-395) studied personality and cognition in only children in China using peer ratings, and found personality problems to be common for only children (i.e., egocentric, disrespectful, sassy, wilful behaviour). However, only children appeared to be superior in intellectual matters, although this intellectual difference disappeared by the fifth grade.

Recently, in a broad examination of the status of the only child in China Falbo and Poston (1993: 18-35) used teacher and parent ratings to investigate cognitive, personality, and physical differences between only children and children with siblings. Their results confirmed the cognitive and physical status benefits of being an only child, but these benefits did not extend to the area of personality. This latter finding is in concert with earlier studies of only children in China. The Shanghai Preschool Education Study Group (1980:17-27) found children with siblings have more desirable behavioural traits. On the other hand, Wan, Fan and Lin (1984:383-391) found no differences between only children and children with siblings in their dependency, willingness to help others, or aggressiveness.

Chen (1985:264-269) studied affiliation in young children, finding lower affiliation in suburban boys who were only children, but not with girls who were only children. Poston and Falbo (1990:433-451) found no differences between only children and children with siblings with respect to virtue and competence, while Yang and his colleagues (Yang, Ollendick, Dong, Xia, and Lin 1995:1301-1311) found children with siblings to be higher on measures of depression, fear and anxiety than their only child counterparts.

Only children also differ from children with siblings on a number of physical characteristics and in their family relationships. Average body weight and height of only children have been found to be greater than for children with siblings (Falbo 1982: 285-304). One study showed that 80 percent of middle school only children received milk in their daily diet, while only 12 percent of multisibblinged children consumed milk on a daily basis.

Falbo (in Summers, 2001: 32) also reported that parents spent more time with only children, read to them, played with them, and took more educational excursions (zoo, botanical

parks) thus promoting linguistic, intellectual development and emotional health in the single child. Falbo's conclusion is that only children have a slighter stronger need to achieve, which may be linked to the fact that their parents can afford to give them more education and quality family time. Law, medicine, engineering and finance are likely to attract single children.

Su Songxing director of the Juvenile Problems Institute with the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences, has researched the only child issue and has recently published his findings, that appear to be similar to those found by Falbo (in Summers, 2001). Su found that single children lay greater emphasis on self-esteem and getting things done on their own compared to other children with siblings. All children want to grow up and find a career that best fulfils their childhood dreams, earns them decent money, and promises stability. Su found, however, single children tend to choose more prestigious jobs, which are probably the result of their central position at home. They have a strong ego, which in many instances is very contrary to traditional Chinese values and tends to foster a strong sense of individuality (Lu Hui 1997: 28).

In sum, available studies, although not entirely consistent, have suggested that only children experience better environmental and health conditions have broader interests, better cognitive development, and higher intellectual ability than children with siblings.

One positive aspect of the one-child family is that a child's special talents are more likely to be noticed and encouraged, whether it's a boy or a girl. Eleven-year-old Wang Jing, a primary school pupil in Beijing, is a typical example. She is profiled in *China Pictorial*:

Wang Jing is a gentle and quiet girl, who is always smiling...an excellent student, who is often praised by her teachers and her parents. Wang Jing's parents arranged that at the age of seven, she study calligraphy under the guidance of Mr Han Shi, a famous calligrapher....She has participated in five national children's calligraphy contests and won prizes on every occasion.

Like many only children, Wang Jing seldom does housework... She stays at her grandma's home until her mother picks her up at five o'clock in the evening. Her mother takes care of her daily needs while her father is in charge of her lessons and calligraphy. Sometimes, her father teaches her to read classical books and to play the xiao, a vertical bamboo flute.

Wang Jing spends her weekends practising calligraphy. Her room is so cluttered with calligraphy that her parents have little room to move.

“We were born at the wrong time,” Wang Jing’s mother remarks. “And we place all our hopes on our daughter. It is the same for almost all families today.”

Wang Jing.. is aware that her parents spend all their energies and money on her. “I must be better than others because I know that life is not easy for mum or dad.” (Xie Chen 1996: 30).

Ultimately, girls benefit from the one-child policy. If an urban couple’s only child is a daughter, they will give these girls the best food, the best healthcare, the best education they can afford, and lavish all their affection on them. If the girls had brothers, the parents would concentrate on giving boys as much as possible, whereas the girls would have to do with whatever resources are left over after the boys have been cared for. Furthermore, as the girls grow up, the parents will put all their hopes and ambitions into their daughters. They will fight for their daughters’ rights to equal education and career opportunities and will not accept any discrimination against girls (Hall 1997: 116).

However, according to Croll (1995: 169-171) for single-girl children this is something of a new phenomenon and it has led to stresses and strains in family relations, with girls unable to stand the pressures and in extreme circumstances even running away from home. School provides no relief. Children are thrust into a world where students compare grades, teachers publicly announce exam results, and getting into “key” high schools (and subsequently a prestigious university) means doing better than most everyone else (Huang Wei, 2000: 15-24).

One small daughter in grade six primary school wrote a letter to her mother in which she tried to convey to her the negative effects of the high expectations she demanded of her daughter:

The night is so quiet. I have been bending over the desk for five hours, writing mechanically, the extra homework that you required me to do. Rubbing my eyes, looking at the endless subjects and those inexplicable problems, I have no way out but to write you this letter to tell you what is on my mind (Chen Bo 1993: 66-68).

A few girls feeling pressurised to achieve, have given up on their parents and left home, making ‘runaway’ or ‘vagabond’ girls a

feature of newspaper reports for the first time since the early decades of the century. The girls ran away from home in their attempt to further their education; now girls are running away primarily to escape from the pressures to achieve educationally (Women Studies Forum 1993: 25-29).

Boys as well as girls crack under the pressure. Doctors in Shanghai, and around the country, are diagnosing a growing number of children with nervous tics, obsessive-compulsive behaviour disorders, and other mild mental health problems. Relief may be on the way. After a 17-year-old boy in Zhejiang province killed his mother with a hammer in January 2000, China's Ministry of Education issued regulations banning schools from holding mandatory classes on weekends, vacations, and evenings and from giving written homework to first and second graders (Huang Wei, 2000: 15-24).

In this brief overview, it seems clear that mandating the one-child family has a dramatic impact on the child. Obviously, external forces restricting a family in procreating have not only a great immediate effect on the child, but also on parental practices, perceptions, and ultimately on their hopes and aspirations, the nature of which presumably influences how the child is treated and ultimately how he or she develops.

CHANGES IN PARENTAL PRACTICES

Just as the developmental outcomes of China's only children are somewhat unknown, so too the effects of the only child mandate on parental behaviour remain unclear. Though explicit causal chains between socialisation practices and personality development have been forged (Ho 1981: 81-95), it is widely assumed that parental attitudes, values, and practices have predictable outcomes on the child's personality. Baumrind's studies (1989: 349-378), in particular demonstrate the powerful influence of patterns of parental practices on the child's developing personality.

In terms of parenting and family life, social change is occurring at a rapid pace in China, and it is quite remarkable that the socialisation practices of the Chinese people who account for so large a portion of the world's population have been so little studied (Lin and Fu 1990: 429-433; Siegal 1988: 384-390). Although some authorities maintain that the essential character of traditional child-rearing patterns appears to continue in

mainland China (Ho 1981), changes in family structure as a secondary effect in the wake of the one-child mandate appear to have significantly altered child-rearing practices (Ho and Kang 1984:1004-1006; Chen and Uttal 1988: 351-358).

As recently as 1985, Wu commented, "for many years we have received little scientific information on Chinese child-rearing and child training...and there are indications that child-rearing has changed little in rural China, but dramatically in urban centres" (p.132). For example, in Gough's (1987) terminology, Chinese people have traditionally internalised authority (being reticent, reserved, modest), and have been norm-abiding (conscientious, conventional, dependable). Thus children have been found to be obedient and conforming in a society that strongly values adherence to agreed-upon norms (Hsu 1981; Kessen 1975; Ying 1992: 166-172). With the advent of the one-child family policy, how have parental practices changed in order to deal with widely known but little studied increase in externality (outgoingness, confident, talkative) and norm-questioning (rebellious, pleasure-seeking, self-indulgent)?

According to Chinese authorities (Wu 1996), parents tend to neglect character development in early childhood. They spoil only children who become the focus of attention in the family. Parents become overly worried when the only child is ill, overindulge the child with rich foods, expensive clothing, and books and toys. Whatever the child demands is provided, and spoiling and lack of discipline are the most common weakness of parents of only children. Their overprotectiveness and excessive indulgence inevitably encourages selfishness in the only child. Moreover, parents seem not to realise the importance of moral development, nor do they realise the implications of providing the child with role models of discipline and integrity. Finally, family inconsistency occurs in handling a child, e.g., the father demands discipline while the mother spoils only children, or mother demands, and grandmother indulges. So, only children get what they want, because someone is always available to back them up. Discipline is inconsistent, so the only child becomes the authority, and is overly indulged.

For example China's last Mao Generation had hatched China's first "Me Generation." This was one of the unintended results of the one-child policy. Li Xiaodong, a Communist Party cadre in the Ministry of Agricultural Machinery, told Jan Wong

(1999: 314) he had no idea how to stop his twelve-year-old son from slashing the furniture with scissors. I've tried slapping him, but it doesn't do any good, he said. "When I was twelve, I cooked, washed and cleaned for my family. But my son doesn't know how to do anything."

For generations, the extended family defined each person's place in the hierarchy (Baker 1979). The Chinese had no clue how to raise an only child. There was no indigenous Dr Spock to guide them on their way. While parents enforced taboos on hugging or chewing stuffed animals, they often surrendered in the face of antisocial behaviour.

"It's the one-child policy," agreed one woman. "We all want the best for our child." She bought her son expensive giant prawns for dinner but would not eat any herself. One summer, foreign correspondent Jan Wong (1999: 314) saw grandmothers chasing after their grandchildren on the pavement, bowl and spoon in hand, begging them to take another bite. In a land of scarcity, love was expressed through food. Child obesity, unheard of a decade ago, became so common that hospitals in Beijing held "fat reduction camps" (see photo 7.1). Wong's housekeeper's ten-year-old son was so overweight that she had to sew all his clothes. When he was eleven, she still bathed him each night and dressed him each morning. She even tied his shoelaces.

A student who was also the centre of his family told reporter Lu Hui (1997: 28):

"When I was in elementary school, I never washed myself. My mother was a kindergarten teacher and treated me as another of her charges. After I came to live on campus, my mother came to my dorm before work to make my breakfast. My major is tourism. When I had my internship, I went to work in a hotel, and the lobby manager told us that we should start out with the least difficult tasks at hand. If one could not do the least desirable jobs then he or she would never get promoted. My job was to open the door for guests and to bow to every one of them. I knew I had to do it, so I bowed a full 90 degrees to every visitor. After my internship, the manager gave me a good job review... I guess I finally grew up when I had to become independent."

Finally, Tao and Chiu (1985: 164) examined the one-child policy and its impact on the child, his/her parents, and China itself. They concluded that the key to good mental health in the only child is directly related to enforcing early socialisation practices

so as to minimise the potential demerits likely in the only child and to educate parents in proper parenting of the only child. Here we see affirmation of the importance of child training practices



Photo 7.1 Fat reduction camp for obese children
Source: China Today vol XLVI (6) June 1997: 28.

and the govern/love relationship of mother and child. Continued scrutiny of domestic policies bearing on the family probably will sensitise us to the far-reaching effects, many unanticipated, of any policy that bears directly on the intimate relationship of parents and children and the potential for disruption of cultural consensus.

In recent decades, family structure has been significantly modified, challenging the age-old tradition of having a large family and many children. For example, in child care, 77 percent of children under the age of three are in nursery school six days a week, 21 percent elsewhere. Thus, even without siblings, most children have the opportunity of continuous socialising with other children before the age of three (Zhang Xueying 1999: 62 Wong 1999).

As more single children become the norm, many parents often invite children from neighbours' and relatives' homes over to create a relaxed environment in which to foster communication skills and the ancient Chinese sense of collectiveness. Other schools have students participate in

military training, so as to let them experience hardship (Lu Hui 1997:29).

In sum, in the midst of such profound social change, modern Chinese families comprise parents, both of whom work, and preschool children who (at least in urban areas) spend six days a week at government-sponsored day care facilities where their social, emotional, and cognitive behaviour are certainly influenced. The traditional family situation in which grandparents, parents, and children live together, sharing childcare and socialising is vanishing especially from urban areas.

The twenty-first century is now upon China, and it's a generation of single children who will soon be in charge. They proclaim, "we are a generation with hope" (Lui Hui 1997: 29). The implementation of the one-child policy provided them with an environment where they have received better health care than their parents. Economic development has offered more opportunity, and everyone under the age of thirty is starting to become aware of what lies ahead for China. Their upbringing will have an impact as it has never had before.

IMPLICATIONS FOR NOW AND THE FUTURE

The study of the only child and the impact of governmental mandates on the family occur in remarkably different contexts when compared with those in the West. Whether for the study of Chinese practices, or for purposes of comparing only children with only children in the West, detailed studies are necessary. After all, China is a society markedly different from the West. Only children in the West result from such things as personal decisions of parents, both parents in the marketplace, divorce, death of parents, or philosophic beliefs.

Regulation of procreation as a result of legislative mandate has markedly different meaning and motivation, and presumably different effects. As the decision to have only one child is externally determined in China, we would expect different parental attitudes towards the only child in contrast with the freedom of the West to determine how many will comprise one's family.

It is important to keep in mind the different factors that result in the same outcome, only children. First, in China, the

outcome (the only child) is state inspired, and is accompanied by incentives, and at times, coercion, i.e., it is mandated (Greenhalgh and Jiali Li 1995: 601-231; Kane 1999:193-203). In the West, on the other hand, it is individually inspired (e.g., by death, divorce, both parents working), i.e., it is a matter of free choice. Second, China's family structure is basically homogenous, permeated by Confucian ideology, with cultural emphasis on the family (Chong-chor Lau 1993: 20.2-20.5). The West, on the other hand, has many variants of family structure, with cultural de-emphasis on the family. Third, Chinese emphasise care of the elderly by children, where Westerners show relatively less commitment to this (Davis-Friedmann 1991). And finally, in China, collectivism, centralised legislation, and a trend to small families prevails, whereas in the West, individualism, democratic legislation, and only a modest trend to small families prevails.

So here we find a surprising degree of similarity in only children personalities in remarkable different cultures (Jing, Wan and Over 1987: 127-136; Falbo and Poston, 1993: 18-35) and for remarkable different reasons, suggesting different cultural and governmental pathways that the single-child family transverses in order to achieve what appears to be some highly similar outcomes in the offspring. As we have noted, research suggests that only children in the West and China are described in surprisingly similar terms in showing greater achievement and intelligence than children with siblings (Falbo and Poston 1993: 18-35). The results of personality studies are more inconsistent within and between these groups, though the results are somewhat similar in negative outcomes for the only child.

One cannot help but note how powerful or coercive the experience of only-childness must be in order to override the remarkable cultural differences and yield such similarities. The questions inherent in this brief presentation of the effects of a one-child family policy are numerous and social and behavioural scientists must begin to answer some of those that are most pressing: What is it like to be an only child? What changes occur in the parents? How does the parent-child relationship differ as a result? What is the developmental trajectory of being an only child without siblings, cousins, aunts, or uncles? Can state ways really change folkways as in this attempt? How very far-reaching are the political and economic influences on social

policy and legislation? It is not surprising that the mandate regarding the one-child family should ultimately resound with questions little conceptualised at its onset.

Further discussion is necessary in order to pursue the threads of the one-child policy throughout the entire social system. For example, now over thirty years later, one might ask how the one-child policy has affected the sex ratio at birth in China? As we discussed in Chapter Five there are always more males born than females (about 105 males to 100 females). Under normal conditions early death rates among males even things out. In 1964 in China, 103.5 males were born for every 100 girls. In 1992, there are 118.5 males to every 100 females. Some hold that this is due to selective abortion of female foetuses. There is evidence that advances in technology, ultrasound, and amniocentesis make the decision to have a child or abort much easier for parents (Croll, 2000: 3537; Tuljapurka, Li and Feldman 1995: 874-876 White, 2000). In Chapter Five we explored in detail the issue of “missing” women in China – those millions who either are not born or do not survive, in large part because of the strictures of the one-child policy. If current trends continue, due to the cultural preference for male children and the pressure of the one-child policy, in the next century there would be 100 million males not able to find partners. I am of the conviction that this shortage of women will lead to later marriages, and greater benefits for men who can afford to pay for prospective brides. Divorce rates may also increase. It will also be difficult for these divorced women to remarry because they will not have another opportunity of bearing a child. There will also be an increase in kidnapping and trading in women and children for wives, prostitutes, and the slave trade etc. It is not surprising that the government in China recently has forbidden use of ultrasound and amniocentesis procedures for purposes of gender identification.

There is also significant evidence that women who “fail” to give birth to boys are routinely abused, both mentally and physically. In addition it is clear that women’s bodies have become the sites of both compliance with and resistance to the birth control programme and that both strategies can have disastrous consequences for women (Greenhalgh, 1994: 1-30). Many women decide to remove their IUDs in an attempt to get pregnant, then have them reinserted after birth. More than four-

fifths of women who resist the programme by “illegally” removing their IUDs become pregnant within three months. Reports from various parts of rural China have described the most squalid and dangerous conditions under which birth control methods are performed. Having additional children and tampering with IUDs put women’s bodies at risk due to poor local care and inadequate facilities (Mosher, 1993).

It is also likely that women who resist the programme are labelled as troublemakers and marked for harsh treatment in the future. In another context, women who resist the exhortation to abort “illegal” (i.e., above-quota) pregnancies early on often face the prospect of being coerced into much more dangerous late-term abortions.²⁷

In another note of governmental ambivalence, Supplee (1995: 15) indicated that the reason for a strong male bias is the special role that sons provide for old age security of their parents. (See Chapter’s 6 and 8) As a result, the government targets future social security projects towards those who have no sons. On the other hand, a cost-conscious government would prefer male births, which reduces the government’s obligation to provide care (See Mufson 1995: 8 for additional information).

The question, must be raised “can state ways change folkways?” Though one can comprehend resistance to the one-child policy in rural areas, we should note that not all Chinese find the one-child mandate oppressive. According to Kristof (1993: 1), city dwellers where the one-child policy is thoroughly enforced (e.g., Beijing, Shanghai and Nanjing, 97 percent of all preschoolers are only children) support a tough family planning policy, holding that a drop in fertility is helping to produce an historic economic boom and a rise in education and health standards. Further, they hold that by restricting couples to one or two children, the government is leading China “out of poverty and into a modern, industrialised state” (Kristof 1993: 1). Some factory workers view the people who seek to follow “the old ways” as barbarians, while the rest of the country is developing. In a sense, one might argue that in rural areas behaviour is suppressed, at best, while in urban areas, apparently underlying beliefs and enduring patterns of behaviour are certainly changeable.

On the other hand, 75 percent of China’s population is rural. China’s peasants make up 1 out of 5 of every person on

earth. As we saw in Chapter Six for the peasant, nothing is so important as bearing children, particularly sons. If they do not have sons to carry on the family line, they have dishonoured their ancestors. So, for several of the reasons acknowledged above, rural families have two, and sometimes three children with little governmental interference. There are reports, though that in some rural provinces one may have a first child at any hospital, but the second child must be born in a government-run hospital where sterilisation is performed after the birth of the second child (Mosher 1993; Kristof and WuDunn 1994).

CONCLUSION

Thus, as we have seen, when a problem such as overpopulation occurs and the government seeks solutions through setting of family policy (such as the one-child policy), such action may have pervasive influence on areas often assumed to be remote from it, including socialisation practices, economic development, health, education, and the adoption and use of advances in science and technology. What will the power and pervasive nature of family policy, hold in the future? One of the most far-reaching possibilities has to do with the impact of changing family structure on culture and values. China has a history of strong cultural emphasis on the family, and usually it is the father who holds the authoritarian position in the family. As the one-child policy takes a hold, family structure and parental practices change considerably with advent of greater freedom and greater “say” by the child participant, i.e., a more interactive parent-child relationship is potentially a precursor of a more democratic environment. As this greater value is placed on the individual, ultimately the culture will reflect this change.

You could bemoan China’s little emperors who didn’t know how to tie their own shoes. But there is a ray of hope. For the first time in Chinese history, the individual was more important than the collective. Pampered “onlies” were growing up to be strong-willed, spoiled, self-centred types who remind me of, well, the West. When you have a nation of little emperors, you can’t have a nation of little slaves, and maybe, just maybe, China will get democracy. With its one-child policy, the Communist Party may have unwittingly sown the seeds of its own destruction.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this chapter is to bring together the threads of the study in order to be able to draw some conclusions regarding changes to the Chinese family over the last fifty years. It has the objectives of reviewing the body of literature, and demonstrating the importance of the historical sociological inquiry in the analysis of this study. It then comments on the substantive content enclosed within Chapter's Three to Seven in order to identify a number the important features of reform that have helped to transform the Chinese family over time.

OVERVIEW OF LITERATURE

The review of literature on Chinese families shows that various disciplines were involved and some interdisciplinary approaches were applied. The number of publications is not comprehensive. Sociological, anthropological, historical and women's research studies constitute the major portion of the research on Chinese families. The most frequently published topics among sociologists are family organization and structure, family relations and women's family roles. Childrearing and family problems also receive some attention. Anthropological and historical studies concentrate on family organization and structure, but also include overseas Chinese families, women's family roles and general discussions of such topics as modernisation and the family as an institution. The main focus of demographic studies is family planning and fertility behaviour; less attention goes to marriage and other aspects of the family. In publications other than those by sociologists, anthropologists and demographers, family problems clearly dominate the research interest, perhaps because of practical concerns in the approaches of these disciplines.

Data on publications on Chinese families show that sociologists, anthropologists, demographers and other social scientists differ somewhat in their research focuses. Except for family organization, sociology and anthropology (or others) share few research areas. The finding may have been expected because of the different theoretical backgrounds within various

disciplines. Even researchers with similar interests may raise different questions or examine the same issues with different approaches guided by their respective training.

REVIEW OF RESEARCH METHOD

The research was conducted using a historical sociological research methodology because it is a successful tool for a critical study of the past, which looks for mechanisms through which a society changes and reproduces itself over time. It was able to highlight the particular and varying features of specific kinds of social change necessary to make a detailed analysis of the subject material. Using different historical periods as a kind of data-base, is a successful strategy because it helps to shed light on the peculiarities of historically specific family arrangements and suggest why such family systems have the characteristics they do. More abstractly, such comparison – which treats historical cases together with and in the same way as ethnographic comparison – process our general understanding of social processes, the way societies work and how they change. Empirical sociological survey's using a quantitative methodology were also used as a resource because they emphasised measurement and analysis of causal relationships between variables, not processes.

CHANGE WITHIN THE CHINESE FAMILY

It was discussed in Chapter Three that during the CCP reign, family and kinship networks had undergone tremendous changes. Mao Zedong treated the family as the basic revolutionary unit. Within the family, he advocated an equalisation of wife with husband, and children with parents, in participating in socialist revolution and construction (Stacey, 1983). Outside it, Mao took various strategies to break the kinship and organise individual families into a residential network connected to both work units and the people's government. While worship of ancestors, life-cycle events, and other activities featuring kinship relations were prohibited, families were organised in a new way for various CCP programmes (e.g. security, sanitation, medication, and political education programmes in the neighbourhood). During the Cultural Revolution class struggle as recalled by older respondents, the solidarity of a nuclear family was even

penetrated. The wife was asked to fight her tainted husband, and children were intimidated to draw a class line from their stigmatised parents. The radical movement, while manipulating the family for revolutionary control, caused unprecedented damage to family and kinship relationships (Stacey, 1983).

Under Deng's pragmatic programme, Chapter Three shows that the family becomes basically an economic unit. Deng's production responsibility system allows a family to rent the state land for independent cultivation or collective production with other families within or outside a kinship. Urban reforms puts the family into a similar position for private business or contracting of state enterprises (Wong, 1999) Family and kinship networks that were previously injured through political movements begin to resume their natural functions in the economic development. The kinship network re-activates itself with mutual visits, ceremonial rituals, and entertainments among associated members.

However, with the advent of the economic reforms in 1978, consumption has become a major player in family and individual change. There has been a new interest in consumer goods and in their style, colour, material and brand name, all which have generated a new phenomenon – consumer desire. Eyes, and not just those on the advertising billboards, are firmly fixed on consumer objects to do with fashioning the individual and furnishing the home. One of the most visible of changes according to Chapter Four is in women's clothes; and fabric, colour, pattern and new fashions can excite attention and demand fostered by television, specialist magazines and shop and billboard displays. We will note in Chapter Three that the home too – and one sure sign of improving reform livelihood is the scale and style of new housing – is also a focus of consumer attention, with new interests in furniture, soft furnishings and floor and wall coverings. New interior decoration magazines devoted to the art of furnishings suggest that sofas, wall cabinets and coffee tables are items in fashion. Children too have become an important new focus of consumption, with the emphasis on children's clothes, toys and convenience foods (Davis, 2000).

A second major change during the reform years discussed in Chapter Three has been the introduction of new opportunities for income generation. In the countryside the new hum and liveliness of activity as families set about to expand their

economic activities through cultivation, livestock raising, handicraft and entrepreneurial activities which spilled over into courtyards, streets and markets. The novelty of the moment on all conceivable forms of home-made transport and business with stall, workshop and small factory all generating new goods and services creating new wealth and new and greater choices for families and villages, which in turn have also brought new demands and risks (Croll, 1999).

There is a new sense of risk and vulnerability felt by many peasant families amongst the twists and turns of government policy, although according to Chapter Three some say that there are still moments when they ponder the permanence of the reform; rather, at a practical level, the new opportunities, choices and riches are seen to be vulnerable in that they are daily dependent on supplies of inputs and markets which are all frequently outside their experience, understanding and certainly control. While some enjoy risk taking and become very practiced, other find the new risks and responsibilities so onerous that they wish for a return to what was familiar and safe in the revolution (Croll, 1999).

In urban areas as early as 1979 many small businesses started to reappear in Chinese cities, the most common being restaurants, barber-shops, photographers, tailors, selling clothes, and street vendors, offering all kinds of goods and services that had previously been scarce or unavailable. In 1981 there were 1.13 million people working in private enterprises, but by 1983 there were 7.3 million, almost 7 percent of the workforce nationwide. By 1987 it was estimated that this figure had grown to more than 20 million working in businesses with total sales exceeding y76 billion (Gong, 1988: 18-20).

In spite of its long-standing bias against entrepreneurs, the post-Mao leadership encouraged the development of private enterprise. In a landmark 1984 resolution the CCP made that clear, stating that “we should promote [the] individual economy particularly in those economic fields mainly based on labour services and where decentralised operation is suitable [and] we should...encourage...co-operative management and economic association among the state, collective and individual sectors of the economy” (China Daily, 1984: 9-12). This resolution relaxed constraints for many urban families to overcome fears of embarking on private careers. Contrary to the beliefs of most

outsiders, CCP leaders were arguing that such developments, would help strengthen rather than damage Chinese socialism. To quote the official language of the resolution: "It is our long-term policy and the need of socialist development to promote diversified economic forms and various methods of operation simultaneously" (ibid, p. 11).

The rapid commercialisation of consumption discussed in Chapter Three did more than simply increase consumer choice and raise the material standard of living for Chinese families. It also broke the monopolies that had previously cast Chinese consumers in the role of supplicants to the state. When party and government officials reduced their control over the flow of commodities, they also ceded greater autonomy to everyday sociability. In granting market principles new legitimacy to coordinate economic transactions the reformers became increasingly indifferent to how citizens used their commercial freedoms. And in this more lightly censored terrain, Chinese citizens initiated networks of trust, reciprocity and attachment that differed from the vertical relationship of obedience between subject-citizens and party or government. The greater affluence and new consumerism of the 1990s have weakened the hegemonic sureties that defined life for many Chinese families in the 1960s and 1970s.

HUSBAND AND WIFE RELATIONSHIP

The family law in pre-communist China described in Chapter Four was that the husband's word was law. He was the boss in the family and the wife remained subservient, deprived of basic human rights, family property and inheritance. Over 95 percent of marriages were arbitrarily arranged (Bossen, 1999). The Communist Party helped to raise the status of women radically. In 1950, the first year of its government, the Communist regime passed a new Marriage Law which made it possible for men as well as women to obtain a divorce, and gave unmarried, divorced and widowed women the right to hold land in their own names.

In contemporary China, as we previously explored in Chapter Four the pattern of choosing a partner has changed dramatically over the last 50 years. More and more women select their own spouse, or at least have a say in their parents' choice for them (Jankowiak, 1993). The age of marriage has

risen. But one aspect of the woman-man relationship has changed little: sex before marriage and even loving relationships without the firm intention to get married are nearly taboo (Hall, 1997: 68-83).

This study has discovered that the ethical basis for the establishment of a family is switching from the family to the individual. We saw in Chapter Four that the family was formerly considered a societal cell, and it was widely believed that family stability was an indicator of overall social stability. This ideology is no longer common (not so the state) as greater emphasis placed on individual happiness, and marriage is considered more as a private affair. People do not force themselves to maintain an unhappy marriage, and divorce is no longer the discrimination it was in the past. Women now are not merely their husbands' attachments or tools, but demand more emotional and sexual satisfaction, as well as rights within marriage, in particular the right to enjoy more freedom generally (Honig and Hershatter, 1988).

As we have discussed previously in Chapter Four many couples have described their relationship as "very harmonious" and some said they and their spouse were deeply in love, which is in stark contrast to the past when most Chinese couples found the conjugal relationship to be devoid of emotional and mental interaction. Most Chinese men it appears are proud to be good husbands. During 1990-92, the National government initiated 'Modern Good Husbands' public campaigns, to be carried out by local governments. These encouraged men to support their wives' careers to prepare meals and to share responsibility for the family's finances with their wives. This initiative was met with the greatest enthusiasm in the three biggest cities: Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou, but rural areas showed less interest (Hall, 1997: 92).

The one-child policy has made children a precious possession and childcare a prestigious duty. Chinese men today are proud to wash, dress, feed and play with their children. They are so eager says Hall (1997: 92) to demonstrate that they care for their wife, and the ultimate status symbol is – as in Victorian England – the ability to support and pamper an idle wife. Although, some researchers have now noticed that, many women and men seem to favour this reverse process and cherish the ideal of the woman as homemaker, or husband's assistant and

supporter (Hall, 1997: 178; Huang Shu-min, 1998). This trend is strongest among the newly-rich who regard a non-working wife as the latest status symbol, and it seems to be growing rapidly.

GENDER ISSUES IN THE REFORM ERA

As we discussed in Chapter Four a Chinese couple seeking to marry in the 1990s would find a humble, grovelling request for betrothal ludicrously outdated. In the new era of materialism, wealth and possessions have once again become the major criteria in the marriage business, and those unable to make an attractive offer may find themselves permanently on the shelf.²⁸ At the beginning of the reform era in 1978, it was clear that three decades of collective socialism had brought some considerable gains to Chinese women, but the Dengist state has been disinterested in or incapable of using political power to push through major changes. In my opinion in fact it seems to be a feature of socialist societies that policies towards women have been forever, subordinate to the productionist goals of the state. This means that the perpetuation of female subordination, and the way in which socialist policy condones male-female inequality, is continually postponed.

Every time the issue emerges... a new orthodoxy is constructed around it by emphasising one or the other role of women [reproduction versus production] rather than a fundamental restructuring of gender relations. This contrast displacing of the women's question is often hidden by the formal equality that women have acquired, and behind the accession of women to previously unconventional occupations (Thakur, 1997: 6).

In other words, the gains since 1949 are used to co-op women and divert attention away from gender issues. Although the Party-state has successfully smashed some elements of the old patriarchy – by pushing through land reform and changing marriage laws – gender conflict has never really been allowed to emerge as a public discourse. The debate about women's equality, therefore, remained almost entirely within the confines of communist ideology and did not become a public issue that could challenge the various modes of power within Chinese society (Rai, 1999:184) The consequence was that despite the strong language often used to criticise discrimination and violence, women have never been able to create the public political space needed to debate and frame their own demands.²⁹

It appears that Marxism, at least in its Chinese variant, does not have a conceptual framework to analyse the nature of gender-based hierarchy. The Chinese Communist party has consistently refused to deal with certain aspects of gender relations, especially the sexual division of labour and the belief that women are naturally suited for certain roles involving reproduction and the family.³⁰ As a result, contemporary Chinese policy remains a curious mix “of patriarchy and socialism, where the tensions between women’s productive and reproductive roles remain unsolved.” (Thakur, 1997: 62).

It is no surprise to learn that in Party-state discourses women are spoken of as “those who need to be ‘protected,’ on a par with children” and that women’s rights are enshrined in the constitution “as a gift of the Party rather than as something won by women through struggle and because women deserve to be equal” (ibid). This protectionist discourse allowed the CCP after 1949 to suppress the more radical and independent discourses that had emerged decades earlier in the fledgling Communist Party during the May Fourth Movement of 1919. The protective strategy also ensures that women who do act independently outside the state-supported mass organization for women (the All-China Women’s Federation) are marginalised and effectively discredited as being divisive. The Party can righteously claim that it established an organization to protect women’s interests, and it discourages (in fact prohibits) efforts to set up more radical, autonomous women’s organisations.

Evans (1997) in *Women and Sexuality in China*, has pushed this argument even farther, suggesting that the Party orthodoxy has significant implications for the way Chinese society interprets some of the emerging trends in China that affect women and their sexuality. The Chinese state has managed to control the issue of sexuality as a way of maintaining marital, household, and familial social relationships. By controlling what Evans calls the “technology of sex” – through a variety of medical, pedagogical, social and political discourses – the state is able to “construct” sex as an issue that requires individuals to place themselves under surveillance, all in the interest of social harmony.³¹ The Party-state seeks, more than anything else, a secure and stable society, and it has appointed itself the guarantor of stability. The assumption is thus that societal stability can be ensured only if there is family

stability, which in turn requires the state to control and shape gender relations.

The state today identifies women as the main agents responsible for patrolling general standards of sexual morality and family order. Based on the biological principles of what is considered to be appropriate gender conduct, the “ideal” woman as we have discussed in Chapter Five is defined in terms of the private (household based) sphere of wifely behaviour and maternal concern. If she has views about the issue of sexual desire they will, it is assumed, be defined entirely in terms of her conjugal responsibilities, which are necessarily contained within the marital relationship. If a woman steps outside that context, her sexuality immediately becomes a source of potential danger, perhaps even contamination and chaos (Evans, 1997: 218). This produces an attitude in which any woman whose sexual behaviour does not conform to societal norms will be marginalised.

As we have discussed in Chapter’s Five and Six female sexuality is considered to be defined only in terms of complementing the more powerful male drive, and it can only be directed toward the needs of procreation, essentially “ignor[ing] the female subject as an autonomous site of pleasure” (Evans, 1997: 219). To prevent this from occurring the state tries to make sure that women are protected, before marriage to ensure their virtue, energy, and health for the demands of homemaking and childbirth. During marriage women are expected to be selfless, absolutely faithful and responsive to their husbands’ needs and attendant to all domestic chores and duties. Beyond marriage, widows are expected to remain faithful to deceased spouses, and divorcées are expected to live in celibacy. If a woman performs all of these tasks well, she will be contributing significantly to the state’s overall goal of maintaining the moral and social stability of the Chinese family (Honig and Hershatter, 1988).

In my opinion many Chinese women may actually be worse off now than in the Maoist era. In contemporary China it is difficult for women to reconcile the two powerful forces impinging upon them: the naturalised view of gender hierarchy, with women as subservient and primarily responsible for reproduction; and the new but already widespread representation of women as a sexualised object in the commoditised and

privatised world of male fantasy. However, many Chinese women have successfully managed to carve out a “life of self-master” in the very limited new spaces that are becoming available to them.

THE GENERATIONS: EXPECTATIONS OF REPRODUCTION IN CHINA

In Chapter Six the discussion has focussed on how parents, and grandparents express preferences, decide plans and rationalise the number, spacing and gender of children and that they do so in accordance with familial needs and interests. This study has discovered that it is primarily inter-generational obligations which shape parental expectations and influence reproductive choices and behaviour. Certainly parental preferences, choices and rationales for favouring sons and penalising daughters can only be understood if they are interpreted within the familial context and take account of familial needs.

The family is the primary arena for determining the generational and gender roles, for forging kin solidarity, for socialisation, for economic co-operation and for reproduction of the family line, but it is because individuals accept a common notion of ideology of the family that they enter into relations of production, reproduction and consumption with the family, they plan and beget children, work to support dependents and accumulate, transmit or inherit material or cultural resources (Croll, 2000; Potter and Potter, 1990). It can be argued that the family is still especially important in determining reproductive choices and behaviour, for all generations remain tied into family needs, collective activities and joint schedules.

In China, the lives of individuals both old and young and their generational, gender and reproductive roles are deeply embedded in the affairs of the family and cannot be analysed outside this primary reference point. Most economic, social and political activities take place with or via diverse family and kinship units, however, there is an underlying notion of the family which, with a public face of unity and co-operation, has three core attributes: its centrality, collectivity and continuity (Baker, 1979; Croll, 1995).

The centrality of the family as the entity in which the production and reproduction of socio-economic and political life is carried out cannot be overemphasised. Perhaps this should not

be too surprising given that China is characterised by relatively fixed residence, the absence of government sponsored social welfare and pervasive small and large family businesses (Short and Zhai Fengyang, 1996: 670-716; Wu Naitao, 1995a: 12-13). It is this central notion of the family, re-emphasised as a much-vaulted component of Chinese values which shapes collective ideas about family line or continuity, ideal family composition, intra-and inter-family and kin relations and resource entitlements. The identification of individuals with short or long-term family interests is apparent in the motives for the rationales behind the reproductive choices and behaviour characteristic of family planning and building strategies.

In China as we have discussed before in Chapter Six the central parent-child contract is still biased in favour of parent-support and the care of the aged (Ikels, 1993). The inter-generational flow of resources from child to parent in old age is time-honoured, sanctioned and enhanced as it is by the concept of filial piety which has been elaborated and reinforced by religious script or classic text (Croll, 1978). For centuries filial piety and the economic support of parents were extolled as the highest virtue and in contemporary Chinese societies where there was little or no social welfare outside the family, the parent-child relationship constituted an essential prerequisite for old-age support. Indeed it can be argued that in China today, childcare still is primarily practised and represented as a means of securing parent-care in old age (*ibid*). As ethnographers of China have noted, there is continuing and everyday assumption that it is the old rather than the young whose needs take precedence and that childrearing is still the main strategy for securing parent-care. Sulasmith and Jack Potter (1990: 228-229) and Ikels (1993: 307-333) have noted that, more than ever before, parents find it necessary to think and act strategically to nurture a sense of filial obligation in their children. Childcare thus remains 'a means to an end' or 'a form of long-range self interest.'

Despite economic development there is still little or no support for parents among most socio-economic groups in China, where the costs of maintaining care and support for the parents are increasing as life expectancy is lengthened and the costs of medical and other life-enhancing facilities rise. Even where there has been a recent history of some old-age support, as in urban China, this has been threatened by economic reforms

which have reduced state sponsored forms of social security (Davis-Friedmann, 1991; Potter and Potter, 1990). If economic development in China has left child to parent flows of resources intact, it has altered the flow of resources from parent to child.

For instance, as we discussed in Chapter Four and Seven there has been an increase in the costs of children to parents largely because of the new availability and rising costs of education and an increase in expenses associated with marriage (Croll, 2000: 112; Yunxiang Yan, 2000). The result of these increasing child expenses in China has made parents much more aware of the costs of childrearing with the increasing resources demanded of parents, encouraging a desire for smaller numbers of children, which in turn, reduces the number of children available for parent care (Mu Aiping, 1999: 137-155). Additionally parents feel more vulnerable as the flow of resources to the older generation seem threatened by the educational, social and geographic mobility of the young, whose members in some cases tend to establish separate or distant households upon marriage (Wong, 1999). In the face of these new threats to the parent-care contract, parents have intensified their interests in family building strategies and the management of resource flows to their children in order to enhance and maximise long-term returns.

First, parents invest in their children's education and income-generating prospects in order to enhance their capacity for parent-care in later years. Second, they have sought to emphasise anew a sense of familial obligation towards older generations to counter new threats and risks to child-parent resource flows. Many parents talk quite openly of their children's indebtedness and in one case children are even referred to as 'indebted ghosts' (cited in Croll, 2000: 112). This new intensity attached to returns or indebtedness is directly related to the rising costs of childrearing and the fewer children who will maintain the same support. The tension between maintaining the parent-child contract in the face of the increased child costs and the bid for smaller families by the state has been resolved by renewing efforts by parents to ensure the birth of sons, for the intergenerational contract is primarily and almost exclusively a parent-son contract.

EVALUATION OF THE ONE-CHILD POLICY

This family planning effort remains perhaps the most misunderstood, complex and varied of all the policies China has embraced in its race to become a modern nation. Population control became a linchpin for the entire modernisation effort. Births had to be state planned and allocated, according to the needs of the economy and society as a whole. It is evident from the discussion in Chapter Six and Seven that the one-child policy has carried with it visible effects, some of which have added to the programmes unpopularity.

One obvious result of the one-child policy that we discussed in detail in Chapter Seven is a dramatic split in the composition of families in cities compared to rural areas. White (2000: 119) defines this as a “sibling gap.” It is the result of the uneven enforcement and implementation of the one-child policy, China’s urban homes, schools, and workplaces are now being filled with a youthful generation that is uniformly without siblings. These mainly urban products of the one-child policy, who in their youth were dubbed by Chinese observers the “little emperors,” are now heading for young adulthood in ever larger numbers. As they do, they are beginning to change the demographic and family landscape. For now, they are unique simply because they so uniformly lack brothers and sisters. Twenty-five years from now, they will be unique for their lack of nieces and nephews, since they have no siblings to produce them. In turn, their children will lack the typical childhood universe of aunts, uncles and cousins.

These single children, as we discussed previously in Chapter Seven, normally bask in the attention of their parents and two sets of grandparents. Adults give their tots music lessons, buy them computers and cute little outfits, take them to amusement parks, and treat them to McDonald’s “Happy Meals” (Davis, 2000). The upside of all this parental doting is that children belonging to white-collar families enjoy comfortable lives filled with new opportunities. Growing up during a period of peace, prosperity, and opening to the outside world, they know nothing of hardships and international isolation that their parents experienced. Their world is filled with music videos, the Internet, and exciting future prospects. Having lived their formative years under reform, they are better prepared than their parents for the challenges posed by a market economy.

China's rural population, in contrast, according to Chapter Seven has produced what White (2000: 120) calls a "sibling generation" – that is, a generation coming of age marked by the traditional presence of brothers and sisters. To be sure, this generation has fewer sisters and brothers on average than the one that preceded it, but one-child policy notwithstanding, most teenagers and young adults in rural China still have at least one sibling, and about a third of them have two or more. This rural generation, then will carry forward for Chinese society as a whole the more traditional, complex set of family bonds and relationships that results from multi-child families.

What this will mean in the twenty-first century is impossible to say, since it is an unprecedented demographic phenomenon. Perhaps it will mean very little. China's one-child policy as discussed in Chapter Seven makes provision for couples who are both only children to have a second child, and Guangdong province recently passed legislation giving this provision legal standing (Pun, 1999: 6). Whether many in this generation will make use of that provision is unclear, however. It is hard to predict how the one-child policy and the pervasive rhetoric about China's overpopulation will affect childbearing preferences among the young. Historically, according to White (2000: 120) fertility that slides to a very low level generally stays at a very low level, and so it is not clear that China's forced march to low fertility can readily be reversed. The sibling gap, then, a product of China's confident demographic engineering of the twentieth century, may prove resistant to retrofitting.

The young childbearing-age couples of the early twenty-first century will live with the results of that engineering, and their views about it are likely to be shaped by their own experiences. Urbanites, who tend to blame overpopulation on the peasantry, already resent the "profligacy" of rural families and of the floating population they call the "guerrilla birth corps" because of their violations of birth limits (Smith, 2000: 359). Many peasants, by contrast, as we note in Chapter Six cling to their traditional childbearing preferences (at least the preferences for a son and for more than one child), yet they aspire to the living standards of prosperous, urban one-child families and resent their own second-class social status.

How will these resentments express themselves in the years ahead? The answer I think surely depends on the social

context in which the question is asked and answered, and that is where the traditional demographic issues discussed above will be significant. Rural-born adults are far more likely to have siblings, nieces, and nephews to help them with their elderly parents and their child-rearing obligations than are urban-born only children, but the urban-born will rely heavily on the tax social security and health care plans. The rural-born adults might come to see this as unfair burden, particularly if the social security system is not extended fully to the rural population. Similarly, rural-born males are far more likely to have sisters, at a time when brides will be in short supply. Although this phenomenon may give some women of rural origin an unprecedented opportunity for upward mobility as they marry into urban households, it may also be a source of tension and resentment between urban and rural males, as rural males lose out not only to other rural males (those who are more prosperous and better educated, perhaps) but also to urban males who are obliged to take the undesirable step of marrying “down” to the countryside rather than “up” the urban social ladder.

To sum up, the economic and political reforms of the 1980s altered the larger environment in which Chinese citizens maintain their homes and families. The reforms gave Chinese people an unprecedented opportunity to indulge their desires for a comfortable and, by Maoist criteria, luxurious private life. Freed from political pressure to denigrate individual preferences, Chinese people made choices that the Maoist party-state had censored for three decades. Supplied with more better-quality housing, they also had unprecedented opportunity to upgrade their accommodations and enjoy more space and privacy. In terms of material conditions the results were more homes with running water, indoor plumbing, separate kitchens, as well as a massive upgrading in terms of the outward trappings of modern households: colour televisions, refrigerators and even VCRs. But as we saw in the high rates of multigenerational living at the time of marriage and the tendency to share a home with a son rather than a daughter, the reform decade appeared to have little effect on traditional rules of family formation. Despite a general trend towards a higher proportion of nuclear family households, it may suggest that the new consumerism and the freedom to fulfil personal dreams may actually have strengthened pre-

communist preferences for virilocal living in the form of stem households.

In the twenty-first century forced marriages in China will become less frequent because women are becoming more educated in the countryside and consequently more aware of their legal rights. Weddings where bride and groom actively dislike each other will become the exception. This study finds that in the overwhelming majority of cases, the compromise between the arranged marriage and free one has been adopted by many young couples. It takes the form of either the childrens' choice, parents' approval/disapproval, or parents' introduction and/or selection, childrens' say etc. Matchmakers will always play an important part in bringing people together, but in future it will be the young people rather than their parents who will consult the matchmaker and make a choice. As the village matchmaker disappears dating agencies will soar. It can be reasonably predicted that more and more young people will get married of their own volition in the future, without introductions by friends and family.

If one evaluates the role of women in China's development from a global perspective, there is reason for optimism. The efforts of the state to extend education and healthcare to its female population have improved women's life expectancies and given them more skills with which to participate in society than they had in the past. Chinese women still have major battles to fight if they are to achieve equality, but now that the majority of women are educated and less encumbered by reproduction, they are better positioned to organise themselves and make their demands in the future. In this respect, Chinese women have an interest in the development of more democratic institutions and an effective legal system that respects civil and human rights for all citizens.

The present Chinese government's family planning programme uses heavy-handed methods of enforcement aimed primarily at women that deprive them of choice, but it also acts as a buffer against patriarchal demands for large families. Withdrawal of the state programme would not necessarily empower women to make their own reproductive choices or to limit their childbearing. The state policies bring about results that, for the majority of rural women fortunate enough to bear a son, are probably close to what they would choose for

themselves (Zheng Zizhen, 1995). For the minority who fail to bear a son, there is a desperate desire to break the rules – with direct consequences for baby girls who are unregistered, abandoned, or killed. It is possible that the government will not deviate from this policy, which may become stricter as the problem of food shortage increases. For example, it may be necessary to curb the reproduction of ethnic minorities. The situation will only relax when China becomes wealthy and confident enough to afford, and depend on, imported food. The traditional preference for male offspring continues to exist, resulting in abortions and the killing of female babies. As age-old traditions die hard and new technology spreads quickly, female abortions may increase further, although laws, old-age pension insurance, and severe punishment may help reduce the killing of babies.

Ultimately, there will be a shortage of woman as marriage partners. This is partly the result of female infanticide and partly because more and more women become educated and financially independent, and an increasing number will choose to remain unmarried. One possible result of this is that women will have a wider choice of marriage partners and that husbands will treat their wives better, if only out of fear that the woman will leave them if they don't. On the negative side, the shortage of women as marriage partners will almost certainly lead to a sharp increase in the existing problem of abductions and of trading women into sex slavery. It seems likely that prostitution will also increase.

As the twenty-first century begins, many Chinese anticipate important gains in their daily lives in addition to the economic opportunities made possible by reform. It is clear in the 1990s that many Chinese families (especially those in urban areas) have been allowed more breathing space in how they spend their free time. No longer is the state the major provider of leisure activities, and profit has not replaced ideology as the primary concern. The net effect has been an explosion of popular culture, bringing new music, film, television programmes and reading materials to the masses, who have eagerly gorged themselves and demanded more (Zha, 1997: 109-150).

In addition to the new social and cultural spaces, geographical freedom has emerged. There are now far more places for Chinese families to go to in the cities, a stark contrast

to the squeaky-clean monotony of Maoist cities and villages. For those with enough cash there are theme parks, karaoke bars, restaurants of all types, as well as vast new department stores and even shopping malls. The new Chinese city, as Vivienne Shu (1995: 90-112) has observed, presents a “jolting cacophony” of new opportunities which along with a “jostle of opinions...some liberating and others intimidating was neither known nor knowable just a few years ago.” Many Chinese families have seen the future; it is Western-style urbanisation, and most of them like what they have seen.

END NOTES

CHAPTER THREE

¹ The household or *hu*, is the basic unit of domestic organization within the village, and is usually defined as the group of kin relations distinguished by a single kitchen, a common budget and normally, although not necessarily, co-residence (Croll, 1994: 164).

² Many accounts place primary emphasis upon the overwhelming Chinese emphasis on obligations to the family and the use of the cult of filial piety to reinforce these obligations in the younger generation (Whyte, 1997: 1).

³ The term traditional family – the Chinese term *jia* or *jiating* – is conventionally defined as an economic unit composed of persons who are related by blood, marriage or adoption and who partake of common property and generational depth – ranging from two persons of the same generation to fifty or more persons from four or five generations (Eastman, 1988: 15-16).

⁴ Confucianism expressed a preoccupation with familial relations and ethics. Families organised on the basis of ‘proper’ relationships were considered by Confucian scholars to be fundamental to the maintenance of social harmony and political stability in Imperial China (Baker, 1968, 1977, 1979).

⁵ Patrilocal means that upon marriage the woman moves from her natal family into her husband’s family (Jacka, 1997).

⁶ The May Fourth Movement is named after the climactic student demonstration at Tiananmen Square (the Gate of Heavenly Peace in front of the Forbidden City in Beijing) on that date in 1919. The Chinese reformers of this period became very interested in the question of women’s oppression in “feudal” Chinese society. Male intellectuals who were influenced by Western notions of women’s status and missionary attempts to promote women’s education, were at the forefront of promoting reform for women. Their emphasis on the victimisation of women in traditional China was grounded in their iconoclastic stance towards Chinese tradition. In the May Fourth discourse, “woman” became a figure for the struggle between tradition and modernity. Indeed, the portrait of the suffering Chinese woman would become a standard theme in modern Chinese literature (Croll, 1978; Johnson, 1983).

⁷ The Guomindang (or Kuomintang) was a political movement, with its own armed forces, and economic and social constituency. It was formed early in the twentieth century as a revolutionary movement committed to the revolutionary transformation of Chinese society (Gamer, 1999).

⁸ The Great Leap Forward in 1958-1960 was a developmental strategy put forward by Mao Zedong that was characterised by the policy of “walking on two legs.” Under this policy, modern large-scale urban-centred heavy industry would receive the greatest proportion of investment, but the agricultural sector would also be developed and become self-sufficient by relying on the mass mobilisation of rural labour for work in the fields, on large-scale construction and water control projects, and in local small-scale industries. It was found that the existing collectives lacked sufficient labour power and resources to meet the requirements and consequently they regrouped into communes. By the end of 1958, 99 percent of all peasant families were members of rural people’s communes, comprising on average of about 4,600 families (Jacka, 1997). A Chinese commune is not a large agricultural co-operative but a composite unit of local government what encompasses the whole range of economic, social, administrative, and political functions of the rural community. Its essential purpose is to organise and mobilise the rural population, to develop their land and other resources in order to meet their essential needs on the principle of self-reliance while at the same time reducing social inequalities and creating a rural society based on justice and equality (ibid).

⁹ The term Cultural Revolution is commonly used to refer to the 1966-1976 decade of restless upheaval in the People's Republic of China (PRC). In essence the Cultural Revolution was a result of a power struggle between Mao Zedong, Chairman of the Chinese Communist Party and Liu Shaoqi, President of the PRC. It arose from their different concepts of culture and art, educational reforms, economic policies and nature of political institutions, and ultimately, what each saw as the proper road to socialism in China (Jacka, 1997).

¹⁰ The term family refers to the residential unit. Scholars customarily distinguish the Chinese family into four basic structural categories: the first is single men and women living alone, including those who have not married and those who are widowed or divorced. Second there was, the small conjugal family, which was made up of at most about three to six persons. Third was the large, joint or extended family, in which a husband and wife lived in the same household and shared a family budget with their unmarried children, with two or more married sons and their wives and their sons' wives and children, possibly with their grandsons' wives and children. And finally, the fourth form of the family represented an intermediate stage between the joint and conjugal families. This was the stem family, in which the parents, unmarried children, one unmarried son, and the son's wife and children lived in one household. A stem family may be regarded as an incomplete, or broken joint family (Baker, 1979, Zang, 1999: 268). This fourfold typology of Chinese family organization is useful for descriptive purposes. It conceals, however, the dynamic character of Chinese family life, for a mother-and-father family group might, during its lifetime, evolve through all four forms (Jacka, 1997; Wolf, 1985: 1-14). "The Chinese family.....was like a balloon, ever ready to expand whenever there was wealth to inflate it" (Yang, 1959: 9). Thus a man and wife who at marriage set up a household formed a conjugal family – and their family continued to be conjugal in form as long as their children living with them remained unmarried. Later, when their elder son took a wife and brought her into his parents' home, the family became stem in form. And if a second son took a wife and continued to live with his parents, a joint family was established. But the deaths of the parents or the decision to divide the household resulted in further changes in form of the family size (Wolf, 1968).

¹¹ In 1978 per capita income was 316 renminbi (rmb), in 1990 it was 1,387 rmb and in 1994 it was 3,179 rmb. Indexed with 1976 as 100 per capita income had grown to 197 in 1990 and 273 in 1994. *Zhongguo tongji nianjian 1995*, p.257.

CHAPTER FOUR

¹² Decollectivisation is the devolution of land, or the granting of control over its use, exchange, and profits to families through household contracting (Ruf, 1998).

¹³ The collectivisation of agriculture and rural industry began once land reform had been completed. Families were organised into larger and larger production groups, and much of the ownership of the means of production was taken over by these groups. The process was undertaken gradually at first, but under the Great Leap Forward of 1958-1960 the pace of collectivisation was enormously increased (Jacka, 1997: 32).

¹⁴ The Open Door policy means to open up China to external economic forces. It became an official government policy at the Third Plenum of the Eleventh Central Committee in December 1978. Since that time China has become increasingly incorporated into the international capitalist economy (Wong, 1999).

¹⁵ During the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) acting on the communist ideology convictions that nationalist traits must be removed if bourgeois society is to wither away and the dictatorship of the proletariat flourish, Red Guard activists aggressively sought to destroy places of worship, languages, clothing, music, and all other manifestations of these cultures (Gamer, 1999: 88-89).

¹⁶ Men gave similar responses (Sha, Xiong and Gao, 1994: 374). Though potentially biased by a general East Asian tendency to acquiesce to any opinion, taken at face value, Chinese were more approving of divorce than American respondents, only 47 percent of whom

approved and 21 percent of whom were indifferent on the issue of whether divorce was the best solution when a couple could not seem to work out their marriage problems (Davis and Smith, 1994: 591).

¹⁷ More precisely, divorce was rare in the late 1950s and then again in the late 1960s through to the 1970s. In urban areas, divorce was even more common than today when the new 1950 Marriage Law campaigns encouraged couples to escape marriages arranged before 1949. And there was an uptick in divorce in the early 1960s. For historical summaries, see Diamant, 2000; PRI, 1987: 504; Meijer, 1971.

¹⁸ Note that I use not the yearbook figure of number of people divorcing but the more common divorces per 1,000 population. For unknown reasons, divorce was also common in the northeast (Manchuria). And in common with a pattern elsewhere in the world divorce was common in Muslim dominated provinces such as Xinjiang, Ningxia, and Quinghai.

¹⁹ The percentage of applications by women varies from a high of 89 percent in the North-East (Manchuria), where divorce rates are high, to a more common figure of 60 to 70 percent in the major cities (Liu, 1992: 539; Zhou, 1992: 62).

²⁰ The only exceptions are three Muslim provinces (Xinjing, Ninxia and Quinghai), where men are still greatly advantaged in remarriage. Men are also slightly advantaged in the South-Central provinces in Hubei, Hunan and Guangdong. Everywhere else, women and men remarry about in proportion to the overall sex ratio, except that on the East coast women are advantaged in Shanghai City and three provinces of Jingsu, Zhejiang and Shanghai (PRI, 1993: 36).

CHAPTER FIVE

²¹ See Margery Wolf's (1972) *Women and their Family in Rural Taiwan* Stanford: Stanford University Press, for a discussion of the role of the uterine family in women's lives.

²² This is what was implied in the notion of the "dreams of heaven" in the collective era. See Croll, 1994.

²³ A survey conducted in Beijing in 1994 showed that 21 percent of husbands admitted to beating their wives; also more than a fourth of divorces in China are as a result of family violence. See M Blecher 1997: 157. The incidence of rape has been increasing rapidly. See Liu et al [1997] and by the late 1980s was second only to robbery in crime rates.

CHAPTER SEVEN

²⁴ In announcing this new development in 1979 the government looked for moral support in the writings of the major socialist theoreticians; See Croll et al (1985a). In the nineteenth century, Engles had written about the twofold nature of production, suggesting that one of the unique strengths of a socialist system was the state's ability to include both production and reproduction within its planning domain.

²⁵ In Guangdong Province, which is close to Hong Kong and generally considered to be one of the most Westernised parts of China, the population growth rate in the 1990s was still significantly higher than the national average. This can be explained in part by exemptions, which have allowed couples in rural areas to have a second child in any number of circumstances, including if their first child was handicapped with a nongenetic disease and unable to work as an able-bodied person; if they were married for a second time and only one of them had a child in the former marriage; or if both had children raised by their former spouses; if they had adopted a child after one of them was incorrectly diagnosed as sterile; if both of them were only children; and finally if either or both of them had worked for more than five consecutive years underground. See China Daily, May 6, 1986.

²⁶ Croll et al (1985a) it appears that the birth of a second child produced some ambivalence in official responses. The vast majority of penalties to date have been directed towards

families that have had three or more children, particularly if they happen to be political leaders, who are expected to set a good example to others.

²⁷ There are many stories of women who refuse to be sterilised when ordered to do so by local officials. Although it takes tremendous courage to stand up to the state, in many cases the acts of resistance prove to be a two-edged sword, in both physical and social terms. This issue is discussed by Mosher, 1993 and Evans, 1997.

CONCLUSION

²⁸ One of Zhang and Sang's (1987: 138) respondents in their book *Chinese Lives* faced just such a prospect. As he said: "My biggest headache is finding a wife. My job's nothing to great. Even with bonuses and extras the best is a little over seventy yuan a month...The girls I go for wouldn't give me a second glance...If I had 3,000 yuan I could buy a colour TV, a sofa and a fridge, and they'd all be after me."

²⁹ As a consequence, some Western feminists contend that the CCP colluded with China's patriarchal system in order to gain support for the revolution, both before and after 1949. See for example, E.R.Judd, 1994, *Gender and Power in Rural North China*.

³⁰ Stacey, 1983 *Patriarchy and Socialist Revolution in China*, p. 263. There has never been a problem mobilising women for tasks that are seen to be extensions of their familial roles, and it is important to note that many women have been keen to join and support the Party, even with the implicit understanding that gender-specific interests would always be subordinated to the larger issues of national and class liberation.

³¹ The terminology here is adopted from the works of Michel Foucault in *ibid.*, p.217.

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