WOMEN, LITERACY AND LIBERATION
IN RURAL CHINA

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines female illiteracy in rural China, bearing in mind the government's commitment since 1949 to female emancipation, universal literacy and the transformation of the whole of Chinese society. It aims first, to discover what has been achieved and why educational opportunities for rural women and girls are still much poorer than those of rural males or urban males and females. Second, it aims to understand how literacy practice is gendered in China and how this gendering undermines efforts to eliminate illiteracy amongst rural females in particular.

This study is situated within the framework of research on Chinese women defined by scholars concerned with the changing status of women in China. In pursuing the aims of this research, I have also needed to draw on current debates from the three different fields which intersect in this study: literacy, gender and rural studies. Each of these three fields represents a different kind of social practice, which has its own sets of values, ideologies and practices which interact to produce female illiteracy in rural China. In addition to the above, I have analyzed national data and used official government reports to give a broad view of the situation across the country; and provided a detailed analysis of my own data collected in a specific rural locality in central China.

This analysis finds that although the greatest reductions in illiteracy have occurred amongst females, being female still is the single most discriminatory factor associated with illiteracy in China. It also demonstrates that the proportion of the remaining illiterates who are female and rural is increasing. Furthermore, not only are many girls in rural areas still being denied the same educational opportunities for education as rural boys (and urban boys and girls), many married women in rural areas find they have little opportunity to use their literacy skills and hence, these skills are gradually being lost. The reason for this is that literacy practice is gendered according to cultural expectations which are expressed

through the gender division of labour, patrilocal marriage, and the processes involving the production and dissemination of knowledge.

The thesis concludes that neither economic advancement nor the improvement in educational opportunities have brought about male/female or urban/rural equality of opportunity and that literacy data suggests that there has been little change in the position of rural women relative to rural males, or to urban males and females.

DECLARATION

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being available for loan and photocopying.

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 'Women, literacy and liberation'

The title of this thesis, *Women, Literacy and Liberation in Rural China*, embraces three commitments made by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) when it came to power in 1949: the emancipation of women, universal literacy, and the liberation of Chinese society. The purpose of this study, however, is not to focus on these three commitments in the abstract, but bearing them in mind, to further our understanding of the nature and causes of illiteracy amongst rural females in China today.

These three themes first came together at the end of the second decade of the twentieth century in the May Fourth Movement when young, urban-based intellectuals called for the total rejection of traditional Chinese culture and a complete transformation of society.[1] Prompting this 'cultural revolution' was the threat of internal political disintegration which followed the October 1911 revolution and the collapse of the Qing dynasty; the failure of the first constitutional government; the fragmentation of China into warlord controlled areas; and a weak central government unable to stand up to the aggressive demands of foreign powers. Intellectuals blamed China's weakness on the subjugation of the individual within the traditional 'big family', the subordination of women, and the ignorance and superstitions of the rural masses. Thus the emancipation of women and the reform of 'peasant' culture through mass education were seen to be part

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[1] Chow Tse-tung defines the movement as 1917-1921 inclusive, consisting of two phases separated by the May Fourth Incident proper in 1919. He says: "During the first phase, some new intellectuals concentrated on instilling their ideas in the students and youth of China. During the second phase an all-out attack on tradition and conservatism was launched principally by students, and the movement was carried beyond purely intellectual circles." Chow Tse-tung, *The May Fourth Movement: Intellectual Revolution in Modern China*, (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1960), p.6.

of the larger project to 'liberate' the whole of society and transform China into a modern nation.

Myron Cohen points out that the first task in cultural reconstruction is the definition and the construction of a convincing negative image of the 'old society' that is to be replaced by the new liberated society.[2] For China's urban intellectuals, the rural population represented the old society comprised of 'peasants' who were 'feudal' and 'backward' and therefore, an obstacle to modernization.[3] According to Cohen, both communists and non-communists created "the notion of the peasantry as a culturally distinct and alien 'other', passive, helpless, unenlightened, in the grip of ugly and fundamentally useless customs, desperately in need of education and cultural reform".[4] Similarly, these intellectual elites invoked the position of women in the traditional family as a symbol of everything in Chinese culture that was keeping the nation weak.[5] With the family at the centre of the nation and 'woman' at the centre of the family, the emancipation of women served as a metaphor for the liberation and transformation of the nation.[6] Women's problems were the same as the nation's problems so both required the same solution, namely - the destruction of traditional Chinese culture.[7]

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[2] Cohen, Myron L., "Cultural and political inventions in modern China: the case of the Chinese 'peasant'," *Daedalus*, Vol. 122, No.2, (Spring 1993), p.152.

[3] There was no 'peasant class' in traditional China in the same sense that there was in Europe. Cohen argues that *nongmin*, which usually translates as 'peasant', is a modern invention associated with Marxist and non-Marxist perceptions of peasants in the West. See Cohen, Myron, ibid., pp.154-157 for a discussion of this issue. Likewise, the Chinese use of the word 'feudal' does not refer to a system of land-ownership such as the European medieval system in which a man was given land in return for promising allegiance to a lord, but is a derogatory term applied to old ideas and practices. See Cohen, Myron L., "Being Chinese: the periphalization of traditional identity," *Daedalus*, Vol.120, No.2, (Spring 1991), p.128.

[4] Cohen, Myron L., "Cultural and political inventions in modern China," ibid., pp.154-155.

[5] Honig, Emily and Hershatter, Gail, *Personal Voices: Chinese Women in the 1980s*, (Stanford University Press, California, 1988), p.2.

[6] Gilmartin, Christina Kelley, *Engendering the Chinese Revolution: Radical Women, Communist Politics, and Mass Movements in the 1920s*, (University of California Press, Berkeley/Los Angeles/London, 1995), p.236 note 5.

The illiteracy of the majority of the population (peasants and women) also assumed a new relevance in this nationalist discourse. Universal literacy was seen to be crucial to modernization. In the course of eliminating illiteracy, science and technology would replace 'ignorance' and 'superstition', and a new and more appropriate set of values and habits would supplant traditional customs and behaviour. The expectation that universalizing literacy could achieve such a transformation was based on Chinese perceptions of where the strengths of the West lay, and eighteenth and nineteenth century theories from the West linking education with modernization and progress, wealth and power.[8]

The CCP, itself a product of the May Fourth Movement, incorporated these three goals into its programs and propaganda during its formative years, attempted to put them into practice in its two revolutionary bases in Jiangxi and Yan'an, and has included them as part of its program in government.

1.2 Scope

This thesis seeks to understand why, some eighty years after these three issues were first raised together as essential to the transformation of Chinese society, more than one in four rural women is still illiterate. This compares with one in nine rural males, almost one in seven urban females and nearly one in twenty-five urban males.[9] Although

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[7] Gilmartin, Christina Kelley, ibid., p.23.

[8] Peterson, Glen, *The Power of Words: Literacy and Revolution in South China, 1949-95*, (UBC Press, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, 1997), p.15.

[9] These approximations are based on data from the 1995 one percent sample survey. *1995 Quanguo 1% renkou diaochao ziliao* [1995 National 1% Population Sample Survey], (Zhongguo Tongji Chubanshe, Beijing, 1997), pp.80-97. 'Urban' here refers to data for cities plus towns while 'rural' refers to data for

there has been a significant reduction in illiteracy across the country, as Chapter Three will show, the differences between males and females, and urban and rural, suggest there has been little change in the ordering of society.

My attention was drawn to this topic after noticing how often statistics for female illiteracy were cited by authors writing on male/female inequality in China for readers in the West. In these papers, rural females are especially singled out, and the disproportionate number of female illiterates and school drop-outs is emphasized. These educational and literacy data are used, along with other problems, such as – family pressure on rural women to give birth to sons in the face of strict enforcement of family planning policy; and discrimination against female university graduates and women in employment in urban areas – to show that male/female equality is still a long way from being achieved.[10] Commentators on China typically treat female illiteracy as a symptom of on-going prejudice against women or else it is blamed for the low status of rural women.

Other authors who discuss problems in the Chinese education system, sometimes mention that most of the children not attending school, dropping out or attending irregularly are girls. The reasons usually given for the disproportionate number of girls (once again, rural girls) missing out on an education can be summed up as: problems with the implementation of basic education, a failure to enforce educational laws, poverty, and

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counties. See Chapter Three of this thesis, where a comprehensive analysis of census and survey data on literacy is carried out, for more precise figures and discussion of their validity.

[10] For example, Gao Xiaoxian, "China's modernization and changes in the social status of rural women," in Gilmartin, Christina K., Hershatter, Gail, Rofel, Lisa and White, Tyrene (eds), *Engendering China: Women, Culture, and the State*, (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts/ London, England, 1994), pp.94-95; Tao Jie, "Women's Studies in China," *Women's Studies Quarterly*, Vol.24, Nos.1 & 2 (1996), p.352; Jacka, Tamara, "The public/private dichotomy and the gender division of rural labour," in Watson, Andrew (ed), *Economic Reform and Social Change*, (Routledge, London, 1992), p.134; and Honig, Emily and Hershatter, Gail, op. cit., p.20.

traditional attitudes and practices.[11] Why girls are affected more than boys is often glossed

over using the well-worn phraseology of Chinese educational reports which lay the blame

on 'feudal' thinking, 'backward' customs and 'traditional' practices. The few researchers

who specialize in female education usually include some analysis of educational and

literacy data.[12] Generally, the data are used as an indicator of changes that have occurred

over time with respect to girls' access to schooling. The documentation of these changes

then becomes the basis for comment on the status of women. There appears to be very

little published for readers in the West which focuses entirely on literacy issues in the

People's Republic of China (PRC), apart from Glen Peterson's 1997 publication and

Vilma Seeberg's study published in 1990, and virtually nothing which addresses female

illiteracy specifically.[13]

Although this thesis is about female illiteracy, it is not a study about educational

development or schooling in China, nor is its focus on female education. It considers the

education system and problems with implementing basic education as only one factor that

contributes to the production of female illiteracy. This thesis is primarily concerned with

the importance of the *link* between literacy practice and gender. It takes the view that

female illiteracy is essentially a gender problem and approaches it as such. As a gender

analysis, this study focuses on trying to understand the cultural construction of gender in

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[11] For example, Fan Li-min, "Some elementary education issues on the Chinese mainland," *Issues and Studies,* Vol.31, No.3, (March 1995), p.48; Li Chunling, "An educational system grappling with poverty," *China Perspectives,* No.1, (September/October 1995), p.31; Robinson, Jean C., "Stumbling on two legs: education and reform in China," *Comparative Education Review,* Vol.35, No.1, (February 1991), p.180; and Cleverley, John, *The Schooling of China: Tradition and Modernity in Chinese Education,* (Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1991), pp.303-305.

[12] For example, Lavely, William, Xiao Zhenyu, Li Bohua and Freedman, Ronald, "The rise in female education in China: national and regional patterns," *The China Quarterly,* Issue 121, (1990); Rosen, Stanley, "Women, education and modernization," in Hayhoe, Ruth (ed), *Education and Modernization: The Chinese Experience,* (Pergamon Press, Oxford/New York/Seoul/Tokyo, 1992).

[13] Peterson, Glen, *The Power of Words,* op. cit., pp.157,169; Seeberg, Vilma, *Literacy in China: The Effect of the National Development Context and Policy on Literacy Levels, 1949-1979,* (Brockmeyer, Bochum, 1990).

China and how literacy practice becomes gendered. Literacy, which is also a product of culture, is understood as a particular kind of social practice which receives meaning from and gives meaning to other forms of social practice. Thus *what* literacy means and *how* it is used to construct meaning is important, as is *who* decides what it means and what forms it might take.

The written word has always played an important role in the construction of culture in China. The production of text was a male 'fetish'[14], and a formal education in and mastery of the script and literature was essential for social advancement. This kind of literacy was not only gendered by virtue of its association with males, it was also the medium by which scholars formalized social relations, including gender relations. Therefore, it should not be too surprising to find that in early twentieth century China, literacy became a symbol for and an important means by which scholars and political elites sought to bring about a social and political transformation. First, there was a literary revolution in which young intellectuals read and wrote about new ideas from the West and produced fiction around the dilemmas of being caught between the old and new societies. Lu Xun, Mao Dun and Ding Ling are especially famous for their creation of intellectual 'New Women'.[15] These writers rejected the classical language *(wenyan)* and literature, which was part of the old culture, and wrote in the vernacular *(baihua)*, which was more accessible to ordinary people and therefore, more representative of the new culture. Second, social relations, including gender relations, were reformulated in 'scientific' and political terms.[16] "…'Science' was a talisman for universal truth, used with what has been

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[14] 'Fetish' here refers to the way the Chinese literati 'worshipped' the written word. This is discussed later in Chapter Seven.

[15] See for example, Ding Ling, "Shafei nüshi de riji ["Ms Sophie's Diary"], (1928); Lu Xun, "Shangshi" ["Regret for the Past"], (1925).

[16] See Dikötter, Frank, *Imperfect Conceptions: Medical Knowledge, Birth Defects and Eugenics in China*, (Hurst and Company, London, 1998) and *Sex, Culture and Modernity in China: Medical Science*

called a 'crusading zeal' to regenerate culture and society."[17] Third, universal literacy was viewed as being an important means of transmitting these new formulations of society to the general population.

The main focus of this thesis is on rural women who constitute 72.3 per cent of the female population. One reason for limiting the analysis to rural females is that the scale of the problem in rural areas is much greater than in urban areas. Not only is most of the female population rural, but one in every three to four of these women is illiterate. Another reason is that the household registration system affects the education of rural children quite differently from urban children; and patrilocal marriage, which is often responsible for limiting girls' access to schooling in rural areas, is much less prominent in urban areas. Apart from the need to limit the scope of this study, it is also likely that there are different kinds of issues involved with respect to illiteracy amongst urban females.

Finally, this thesis does not specifically concentrate on minority groups, though it does not exclude them. Proper consideration of literacy issues amongst minority groups requires examining them group by group rather than homogenizing them into one large group. With fifty-five officially recognized minority groupings, it is not possible to do this in a single study.

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and the Construction of Sexual Identities in the Early Republican Period, (University of Hawaii Press, Honolulu, 1995) for his critique of the production of medicalized knowledge for social and political purposes during this period.

[17] Dikötter, Frank, *Sex, Culture and Modernity in China,* ibid., p.2.

1.3 Method

... if someone had a view of the world altogether different from my own – if we shared, that is, no common perspectives – neither of us would ever come to know it. We must presuppose that we share some beliefs, assumptions, attitudes and intentions – not an unreasonable presupposition, considering that we are both human – before either of us can begin to interpret any of the other's sentences and hence establish points of disagreement.[18]

The first issue that must be dealt with concerns cross-cultural studies. As a non-Chinese person, my perspective on the issues involved, approach to research and access to people and resources will be different from those of a Chinese person based in a research community in China. This will inevitably affect the kind of research I do and the outcomes from it. Rosemont's argument (above) is that although there are differences between cultures there are also enough commonalities between people to be able to interact and learn from each other. I view cultural difference as an opportunity for applying different perspectives to problems in the hope of being able to make a contribution to their solution.

The second issue pertains to the general approach used in this thesis. If feminism is concerned with championing the cause of women who are disadvantaged because of their sex, then this work is feminist. In this thesis I draw on feminist debates in the West and in China. Although feminism has been viewed (and is still viewed by some) in China as the product of the capitalist West, and therefore irrelevant to the Chinese situation, in the last two decades Chinese women doing research on women's issues have sought to learn more

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[18] Rosemont, Henry Jr., "Against Relativism," in Larson, Gerald James and Deutsch, Eliot (eds), *Interpreting Across Boundaries*, (Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1988), p.45.

about the way western women approach such issues.[19] While the different modes of production[20] may produce different social effects, the fact that particular male/female relations can survive the change from one form of production to another suggests that they are more fundamental than modes of production. China is a prime example of this.

The third methodological issue pertains to the three different fields of study that this thesis calls upon. Each of literacy studies, gender studies and rural studies has its own literature and ways of approaching research, and I draw upon each of these fields to shed light on the issues involved. Definitions are illustrative of the need to do this. For example, what is 'literacy'? What do we mean by 'gender'? What does it mean to be 'rural'? Each of these questions is dealt with in Chapters Two, Six and Eight according to the literature relevant to its field. These questions need careful consideration if they are to be of use in the analysis of cultural matters. 'Culture', especially the Chinese understanding of it, is also discussed in Chapter Two. Because of the need to deal with three different fields of study, this thesis is broadly separated into three parts to provide the opportunity to focus on the three dimensions of the one subject – female illiteracy in rural areas.

Finally, Chapter Nine presents material collected during a brief field trip undertaken during early March 1998 to Fufeng County in Shaanxi province. Over a very intense period of ten days I was able to visit five rural villages and interview women, town and village officials, and some Women's Federation representatives. Women were also interviewed within the county seat itself. In addition to this, I had the opportunity of visiting three schools - Taibai Zhongxin Xiaoxue, a village primary school, Xiguan Yifu Xiaoxue, a model primary school, and Fufeng Chengguan Chuzhong, a model junior

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[19] See Chapter Five in this thesis for a discussion of the development of Women's Studies in China. The cross fertilization of ideas that is occurring at present is proving beneficial to women in the West and in China.

[20] The Marxist meaning of 'modes' is intended here.

secondary school - where I interviewed several teachers and school principals. Most of the interviews were carried out in the presence of local officials. Those that were not did not differ much in terms of the questions asked or the way the interviewees responded. Because of the presence of officials and, very often, some relatives and neighbours, the interviews with women focused on information which was not likely to be sensitive, personally embarrassing or damaging if divulged in the presence of others or published in a thesis. During the visit to Fufeng County, I was also accompanied and assisted in the interviews by a Chinese post-graduate student who had a better understanding of the local dialect. The interviews consisted of two parts. The first part involved relatively simple responses of a demographic nature and was not taped, though the second part, in which the answers were likely to be longer, was taped. This has enabled me to negotiate the local dialect more successfully and has provided a substantial amount of material for analysis and quotation in the respondents' own words. Permission to tape was sought before taping and again afterwards for quoting in this thesis.

In collating the results of my interviews, I do not set out to investigate literacy levels or make comparisons between males and females. The main purpose of this analysis is to study the way the development and maintenance of literacy is affected by gender issues in everyday life. In other words, I look at the lives and experiences of individual women in order to try and understand more about how they perceive these experiences, for example – the effect of parental attitudes on schooling; the impact of everyday life on the development and maintenance of literacy; and, if illiterate, whether this is a problem for them and if so, how they cope with being illiterate. In the presentation of interview data, the women are given the opportunity to speak for themselves wherever it is possible and appropriate, hence the chapter uses a large number of quotations. This is designed to

give these women a voice concerning matters that affect them in a forum where they would not normally have the opportunity to speak.[21]

Except where otherwise indicated, all translations from the Chinese in this thesis are my own.

1.4 Format

This study unfolds over nine chapters. Chapter Two serves two functions. The first is the need to understand literacy as a social practice rather than a set of skills or a special kind of 'technology' that can simply be 'acquired'. The second function pertains to my own intellectual background which affects the way I approach literacy issues in this thesis. The literature on literacy in the West has questioned many of the assumptions behind the linking of literacy with other socio-economic factors without taking account of the social nature of literacy itself.[22] The relevance to China of the literacy debates taking place in the West is two-fold. One concerns China's assumption about where the strengths of the West lie and the links assumed between education/literacy, technology and economic development. The other relates to the need to recognize that literacy practices are socially dynamic and interact with other social practices, such as gender, ethnicity, rurality, economics and so on, each of which has its own sets of values, ideologies and practices. Chapter Two establishes the general approach used to study literacy issues in this thesis. Chapter Three goes on to examine national data as well as the CCP's efforts to eliminate illiteracy since 1949, so that a broad picture of the situation and how women across the country generally fare can be established. This survey allows a top-down view of the

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[21] Of the 49 women whose interviews were taped, 41 are quoted.

[22] This literature is dealt with in Chapter Two.

issues usually thought to be associated with illiteracy and seeks to establish their overall importance. Chapter Four concentrates on the development of basic education and examines some of the problems which have arisen during the process of universalizing nine year compulsory education. Amongst these are the uneven development of basic education, the problem of school drop-outs, a shortage of funding, and an undue emphasis on an academic education. These problems, together with the prevalence of what are referred to as traditional attitudes, affect the education of girls especially. This chapter argues that problems with implementing basic education in many rural and remote areas are responsible for most of the new illiterates being produced. They are not, however, responsible for the disproportionate number of these new illiterates being female. The rationale for examining female illiteracy in rural China as a gender issue is clearly established in chapters Three and Four.

Having established that female illiteracy needs to be analyzed as a gender issue, the task of Chapter Five is to discover why it has not been approached in this way within China. This chapter discusses the relevance of 'gender' as a concept in China; the importance of the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women held during 1995 in Beijing; the contribution of women in the Women's Federation and Women's Studies groups to the new discourse on gender that is emerging; and why 'gender' as an analytical approach has not been used in the past. The discussion in Chapter Five provides the background for the following two chapters. Chapter Six is concerned with the production of gender ideology. It begins by pointing out that all *knowledge* is 'produced' and ideas concerning sex are derived by discursive means. In traditional China, sex is a sign of fundamental importance in a larger discourse of 'difference'. In modern China, this traditional discourse is replaced by a 'scientific' discourse on sex which establishes what is

'normal' and 'natural'. The problem with this new discourse is that it fails to recognize the role cultural factors play in the production of knowledge.

No study concerned with the cultural construction of gender would be complete without giving some attention to the role marriage plays in regulating gender in China. This is taken up in Chapter Seven which briefly outlines the key features of traditional patrilineal, patrilocal, patriarchal marriage and describes how *mechanisms* (self perpetuating devices) have been established within this model of marriage. These mechanisms ensure the survival of traditional ideologies and practices which are responsible for maintaining the symbolic order and regulating social life. In this chapter, a theoretical model derived from Bourdieu's practice theory is used to help understand how such mechanisms become established and are maintained and the role that literacy has had in their development.

After gender, being 'rural' is the most significant factor contributing to female illiteracy. A considerable part of Chapter Eight is devoted to traditional and more recent understandings of what it *means* to be rural in China. After exploring notions of rurality, the chapter goes on to see how it affects women in particular. Finally, the interaction between rurality, gender and literacy is illustrated through a published collection of oral histories to show how these three different kinds of social practice come together and are negotiated in the everyday lives of village girls and women. The stories selected relate the experiences of girls and young women between the ages of 11 and 20 years and fill a gap not covered in my own field work which is described in detail in the following chapter. Chapter Nine reports the results of the field study carried out in Fufeng County, Shaanxi Province during March 1998 and shows how literacy practice becomes gendered in the routines and practices of everyday life.

Finally, Chapter Ten summarizes what has been achieved in respect of female literacy in rural China and relates the results to themes explored earlier in the thesis. It argues that being female is the single most discriminatory factor affecting opportunities to become literate and, if literate, the opportunities to make use of it. Being rural is the second most discriminatory factor. This was the situation at the beginning of the twentieth century and, after successive periods of political and economic change, it is still the situation at the end of the century. The chapter closes with a brief consideration of the nature of cultural transformation and suggests one reason why the imposition of a new cultural framework from the top down has not been able to transform gender attitudes and practices.

2 LITERACY AS IDEOLOGY

In his introduction to *Literacy in Theory and Practice*, Brian Street begins by arguing that there are two ways in which literacy is usually theorized.[1] The first way assumes that literacy is a technology or a specific set of skills needed to handle written language. This technology is assumed to be neutral and that it is not affected by the social contexts in which it is used. Not considered within this view of literacy are the implicit values, beliefs, practices or power interests within the social groups in which these literacy skills are used. Neither are the values, beliefs or practices conveyed during the process of becoming literate thought to have any bearing on the literacy attained. Claims made about the consequences of literacy, typically represented in terms of cognitive skills and economic benefits, fail to recognize the role that ideology and socialization play in the process of becoming literate. This model of theorizing literacy is what Street calls the 'autonomous model'. He says that "... [f]aith in the power and qualities of literacy is itself socially learnt," with the result that the ability to describe literacy practices using this model is seriously impaired because ideologies are rarely acknowledged.[2]

The alternative to this model is what he calls the 'ideological model', one which recognizes the socialization processes which ultimately determine the meaning and form that a particular literacy takes. It is concerned to show the role that social institutions (not only schools) play in determining the meaning and value of literacy and it recognizes that literacy has different consequences for different social groups. 'Openness', 'rationality' and 'critical awareness', which are usually thought to characterize the process of becoming literate, are treated with skepticism and the role that such teaching plays in

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[1] Street, Brian V., *Literacy in Theory and Practice,* (Cambridge University Press, 1984).

[2] Street, Brian V., ibid., p.1.

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social control and ruling class hegemony is examined.[3] In other words, the meaning of literacy is recognized as being totally dependent on what it means within a particular social and historical context. Street's definition of literacy as "... a shorthand for the social practices and conceptions of reading and writing" takes it out of the realm of mere technology and places it in the realm of social practice.[4] The ideological model becomes a way of theorizing in which literacy policy and practice is critiqued to reveal the ideologies which direct the kind of literacy promoted, the way in which it is disseminated and the claims made for it. Street goes on to say that no literacy theorist fits neatly into either of these models. He deliberately caricatures two distinct lines of thinking and theorizing about literacy to show there are significant lines of cleavage within the literature on literacy and that the first model has serious problems.

Although the kind of literacy promoted in China is not critiqued in the literature written by Chinese literacy and education specialists, the role that literacy plays in serving ideological ends has been a constant theme of literacy campaigns since 1949. The teaching of literacy has been used as a means of disseminating CCP ideologies through formal and informal education. In fact, Mao Zedong considered education, including literacy campaigns, to be intimately connected with ideological work. Notwithstanding this, there are ideological frameworks of a more social and cultural nature that also need to be examined. Such a study of literacy would try to understand how these ideologies operate from the bottom up, how they are continually confirmed through daily routines and institutional practices and why attempts by the government to change certain attitudes and practices which affect the development and maintenance of literacy have not been successful.

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[3] Street, Brian V., ibid., p.2-3.

[4] Street, Brian V., ibid., p.1.

The main task in this chapter is to examine some of the literature available in the West and in China on the relationship between literacy and ideology. Before doing this, something needs to be said about the nature of ideology itself because it is not understood in the same way by everyone. Moreover, what it means in China must also be considered. Some of the arguments about the ideological nature of literacy developed in this chapter will be used in later chapters to show how they intersect with gender and urban/rural ideologies to produce female illiteracy in rural China.

2.1 Ideology

There are three ideas concerning ideology which are relevant to the discussion on the ideological nature of literacy. The first way of viewing ideology is negative. Ideology is defined as ideas which are somehow false, illusory, perhaps intentionally misleading. In this sense, the function of ideology is to justify relations of domination and subordination by falsely representing the truth, hence ideologies usually arouse criticism. The second idea is more positive, with ideology being viewed as belief systems, conceptual systems or particular world views. As such, ideologies may be developed and used to bring about social or political change. The third view of ideology does not regard it negatively or positively but considers it to be a basic ingredient of everyday existence, providing frames of reference for the conduct of social life. Ideologies, according to this definition, may sometimes involve ideas, language and consciousness, but they also include the communication of meaning through symbols, routines and experiences in a way which does not necessarily involve conscious thinking. These three ideas find their historical

foundations in the West within the writings of Marx, Lenin and Althusser.[5] Marx and Lenin's writings in particular have had a strong influence on the development of the meaning of ideology in China, especially in the writings of Mao Zedong.[6]

Because the focus of this thesis is on literacy practices in China, it is important to understand how the term 'ideology' is used in China. James Hsiung, separates the Chinese concept of ideology into three parts which are represented by three different Chinese terms – *guannian xingtai* (forms of concepts), *lilun* (theory) and *sixiang* (thought – the relationship between theory and practice).[7] In his essay "On Practice" Mao Zedong refers to two kinds of consciousness.[8] The first type means the perception of the world through the senses while the second concerns the way one understands it, that is, the conceptualization of what is perceived. The latter, according to Hsiung, is *guannian xingtai*. Mao equated this term with 'culture', a people's way of life. By culture, he meant the concrete expression of the way a particular group of people conceptualizes the world and the process by which that conceptualization is maintained. He says that changing the former must also involve changing the latter.[9] Mao believed that one's conceptualization of the world was directly related to material production.[10]

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[5] For example, Marx, Karl and Engels, Frederick, *The German Ideology*, (Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1968); Lenin, V.I., *What is to be Done?*, (Foreign Languages Press, Beijing, 1975); Althusser, Louis, "Ideology and ideological state apparatuses (Notes towards an investigation)," in Žižek, Slavoj (ed), *Mapping Ideology*, (Verso, London/New York, 1994).

[6] Mao Zedong, *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, Vols.1-4, (Foreign Languages Press, Beijing, 1965).

[7] Hsiung, James Chieh, *Ideology and Practice: The Evolution of Chinese Communism*, (Pall Mall Press, London, 1970), pp.126-128, 146.

[8] Mao Zedong, "On practice," *Xuanji [Selected Works]*, Vol.1, p.262. Cited in Hsiung, James Chieh, op. cit., p.127.

[9] Mao Zedong, ibid., p.262.

[10] Hawkins, John N., *Mao Tse-tung and Education: His Thoughts and Teachings*, (Linnet Books, Connecticut, 1974), p.59.

The second aspect of Chinese ideology, *lilun* or theory, not only includes Marxism, but Leninism and, after 1969, 'Mao Zedong thought'. Marxism is regarded as a conceptual system as well as a methodology. That is, Marx's ideas are not only used as a theoretical basis for understanding society, but they also become the means for changing it. Mao describes the relationship between Marxism and the Chinese revolution in a speech given at a cadres' meeting in May 1941 entitled "Reform Our Study" in which he says, "... The 'target' is the Chinese revolution; the 'arrow' is Marxism-Leninism."[11] While it might seem that Mao might have viewed Marxism as a temporary expediency to achieve China's revolutionary goals, the fact that those goals were concerned with overturning the existing power structure and establishing communism suggests that Mao did not see it that way. The relationship between the arrow and the target is such that neither the arrow or the target has any purpose without the other. Leninism provided the Chinese with a practical model of how to adapt Marx's ideas for a country in which the proletarian class is small, the population is largely rural, and there is little industrial development.[12] In 'Mao Zedong thought' Mao selectively expounds those of Marx's theories he considers relevant to the development of Chinese communist ideology and how they should be applied to the special Chinese situation in much the same way as Lenin did in Russia.[13] Mao referred to this as developing "... a Chinese road to socialism."[14]

Sixiang (thought) is the third aspect of Chinese ideology and is the term used in 'Mao Zedong thought' *(Mao Zedong sixiang)*. Whereas Marx and Engels viewed

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[11] Mao Zedong, *Xuanji* [Selected Works], Vol.3, p.759. Quoted in Hsiung, James Chieh, ibid., p.92. (His translation.)

[12] Starr, John Bryan, *Ideology and Culture: An Introduction to the Dialectic of Contemporary Chinese Politics,* (Harper and Row, New York, 1973), pp.21-23.

[13] Schurmann, Franz, *Ideology and Organization in Communist China,* (University of California Press, Berkeley/Los Angeles/London, 1968, second enlarged edition). p.24.

[14] Schram, Stuart, *The Thought of Mao Tse-tung,* (Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp.196-197.

consciousness as the prelude to truth, in China, *sixiang* (thought), is the product of consciousness. Thus it was possible that a person who did not come from the proletarian class, by applying the 'correct' theory and practice, could arrive at the 'correct' thought.[15] *Sixiang* is a term which has been in use since the Yan'an period and associated with 'thought reform' and indoctrination. It is never used of a class but only of individuals belonging to a particular class. Documents from the Yan'an period indicate that *sixiang* was used during the rectification activities to refer to having the 'correct' thought.[16] The traditional meaning of 'thought' in China is that it is the driving force behind everything a person is and what they do. Hence the importance of thinking 'correctly'.[17] 'Thought' in this context, however, is not merely a matter of thinking. Only by observing a person's actions can one gauge how they actually think.[18] According to Hsiung, *sixiang* (thought) does not equate with practice in a dichotomous relationship with theory. Rather, this relationship should be seen as a synthesis of the two, not as two separate things.[19] To illustrate what this means, he uses the analogy of a horse-drawn buggy. To the Chinese there is not just a horse and a buggy but also a third aspect, a 'horse-buggy-ness', in other words, a 'whole'.[20] *Sixiang* is that 'wholeness' existing between theory and practice which is expressed through an individual's behaviour and actions.

Sixiang or 'thought' as it is used in 'Mao Zedong thought' does not refer to a fixed system of ideas. The English suffix '-ism', which refers to a fixed set of ideas and is

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[15] Schurmann, Franz, op. cit., p.31.

[16] Schurmann, Franz, ibid., pp.30-31.

[17] Hsiung, James Chieh, op. cit., pp.128-129.

[18] Schurmann, Franz, op. cit., p.20.

[19] Hsiung, James Chieh, op. cit., p.146.

[20] Hsiung, James Chieh, ibid., 135.

now translated as *zhuyi*, did not exist in the Chinese language until the twentieth century. In keeping with Marx's concept of dialectical materialism or as need dictated, 'Mao Zedong thought' continually evolved as theory was put into practice. Thus 'Mao Zedong thought' should not be, nor is it conceived in China as being, Maoism. Today, 'Mao Zedong thought' is not just the thoughts of Mao or his writings, speeches or sayings, it includes those of his writings deemed to be 'correct' (i.e. without the 'errors of his later years'), and some works of Zhou Enlai, Liu Shaoqi, Zhu De and others who continued to develop Mao's ideas.[21] More recently, 'Deng Xiaoping thought' has been added to the ideological canon. Although the emphasis of Deng's policies was different from that of Mao's, he, like Mao, aimed at adapting the best from the West, including Marxism, to suit Chinese conditions and culture in what he called building "... socialism with Chinese characteristics".[22]

Other Chinese words which are used to mean ideology include - *yishi xingtai* (forms of knowing), *sixiang tixi* (a systematic body of thought), *konglun* (visionary theorizing), *guannianlun* (theory of concepts), etc.[23] One thing is clear, except for *sixiang* which has a specific Chinese meaning which relates theory to practice, ideology is connected with thinking, theory, theorizing, thought systems and concepts.

In China, ideology fulfills four functions. The first is to create public opinion in order to consolidate political power and the socialist system. This is done by promoting "... the correct theoretical viewpoints and the Marxist ideology" through the media. Second, it used to regulate behaviour through the ideological superstructure (i.e. the political system, the legal system, the army, police and prisons, etc.). Third, it has an

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[21] Schram, Stuart, op. cit., pp.185-186.

[22] Schram, Stuart, ibid., pp.196-197.

[23] Xing Fensi, "On Ideology," *Social Sciences in China*, Issue 1, (Spring 1993), p.134.

educational role in the realms of politics, ideology, ethics and morality. Fourth, ideology has an important role to play in promoting 'spiritual civilization' through social education.[24] Thus the 'official' ideology is disseminated through state apparatuses (repressive and ideological) from above. The aim is to influence all aspects of life and social practice as a means of consolidating CCP power.

Before going on to consider the ideological nature and role of literacy in the PRC, it is necessary to examine some of the literacy debates which have been taking place in the West. These debates critique many of the assumptions about literacy's relationship to economic development and modernization. These assumptions, made on the basis of eighteenth and nineteenth experience in the West, are of particular relevance because of China's perception that the technological and political strengths of the western nations were linked to the development of universal schooling.

2.2 Literacy and ideology – in the West

The best known literacy theorists in the West who have considered literacy from an ideological perspective are Harvey Graff, Brian Street and Paulo Friere, though they are not the only ones to examine this subject.[25] They have challenged many of the assumptions used to guide discourse on literacy which attribute certain benefits to literacy without taking account of the role that ideology and socialization plays in the process of becoming

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[24] Xing Fensi, ibid., pp.140-142.

[25] See Graff, Harvey J., *Literacy and Social Development in the West*, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1981); *The Literacy Myth: Literacy and Social Structure in the Nineteenth Century City*, (Academic Press, New York/ San Francisco/ London, 1979); Street, Brian V., op. cit.; Friere, Paulo, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, (Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1972); *Education: the Practice of Freedom*, (Writers and Readers, London, 1974); *The Politics of Education*, (MacMillan, London, 1985).

literate. They say that if literacy practice is regarded as a social practice (and they argue it should be), then, like any other social practice, it is imbued with ideology. Literacy must therefore be examined as it is practiced in specific social contexts and realistic consideration given to questions such as – "... what *is* literacy? ... what does it *mean* to be literate or illiterate? ... what is it about literacy that makes it valuable, and for whom is it (most) valuable?"[26]

Defining literacy has proved to be a difficult task itself because literacy does not only include the acquisition of certain skills, but one must be literate *in* something such as a particular language, a certain script, or specific kinds of literature, and attain set standards in these aspects. Who decides which language, which script, which kind of literature, and the standard required, will have a bearing on what it means to be literate and what value it has. How these things are regarded by those who are the target of these literacy decisions will also be important. In order to promote literacy, a government must demonstrate that becoming literate is an advantage. The most popular literacy ideologies are concerned with the benefits that literacy can deliver to individuals and to the wider community.

2.2.1 The value and benefits of literacy for individuals

First of all, what benefits do we expect individuals to receive from literacy? Lankshear and Lawler suggest the ideology goes something like this.

> Once [people] have [literacy] they can employ it for all sorts of ends; they can put it to whatever uses they choose. The world is opened up to the literate person in a way that it remains closed to the illiterate person; literacy produces good consequences for and valuable qualities within the literate person – consequences and qualities precluded from illiterate folk.[27]

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[26] Lankshear, Colin with Lawler, Moira, *Literacy, Schooling and Revolution,* (The Falmer Press, UK/USA, 1987), p.37.

[27] Lankshear, Colin with Lawler, Moira, ibid., p.39.

Like Street's two models of theorizing, this is a caricature of a particular set of beliefs about the benefits of literacy. Such an ideology would not be promoted without making more specific the benefits that literacy brings, otherwise it would fail to convince people that there are *real* benefits to becoming literate. It is a powerful ideology and few people doubt the value of literacy.

There are two assumptions behind this very commonly held view of literacy. First, it is assumed that there is just *one kind* of literacy which everyone who is literate will have to some degree, more or less, and which those who are illiterate will lack. The second assumption is that literacy will automatically bring opportunities which those who are literate can take hold of, regardless of other factors which may work against them being able to do so. Concerning the first premise, the historical evidence is clear. There have always been different literacies for different classes. According to Lankshear and Lawler, this does not mean that some people's literacy skills are simply better than others but that literacy is *patterned* in different ways. It was not just that the literacy taught to the poor was limited, but that literacy was *packaged* to convey "... a definite conception of the bounds and uses of a reading practice appropriate to their class."[28] Thus this particular literacy was conveyed as a social practice underpinned by class ideology. Contemporary examples of limited or limiting literacies have been variously labeled as 'basic', 'uncritical', 'functional' (in a basic sense) and 'improper' literacies. They contrast with 'full', 'functional' (in a full sense) 'critical', and 'proper' literacies.[29] Each form of literacy is supported by a particular ideology. Whether it involves socializing learners to accept the beliefs and practices of the society in which they live or it encourages learners to question

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[28] Lankshear, Colin with Lawler, Moira, ibid., p.46.

[29] Lankshear, Colin with Lawler, Moira, ibid., p.48.

them, there must be an ideological agenda which becomes the rationale for teaching one sort of literacy in preference to another.

The belief in one kind of literacy which is available to everyone and which will open the doors of opportunity, is usually based on blind faith in school-based literacy. This view of literacy assumes that the kinds of literacy practices, and there are many kinds, being taught in schools will promote the interests of all students regardless of their social background. School literacy, however, is not merely concerned with teaching the mechanical skills of reading and writing. Texts, teachers' attitudes to texts, the kind of reading and writing tasks and so on all impinge on the kinds of literacy practices being taught in schools. These are driven by the demands of certain types of curricula which, no matter whether they are set by the schools themselves or by education authorities, are based on ideologies concerned with particular outcomes. The whole process of acquiring literacy will involve the inculcation of a prescribed set of values, beliefs and skills which will enable the graduate to "fit in" to society. Paulo Friere calls this kind of literacy 'domesticating' literacy. In most cases, he says, learners are passive, empty vessels to be 'filled' with the educators words.[30] Students end up anaesthetized so that they are unable to "... perceive themselves as reflective, active beings, as creators and transformers of the world."[31] Wayne O'Neil refers to this kind of literacy as 'improper' literacy. Schools, he says, "... have too much improper literacy."[32]

This now brings us to the second premise - the personal benefits which can be expected from literacy. Lankshear and Lawler ask:

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[30] Freire, Paulo, *The Politics of Education,* op. cit., p.101.

[31] Freire, Paulo, ibid., p.115.

[32] O'Neil, Wayne, "Properly literate," *Harvard Educational Review,* Vol.40, No.2, (May 1970), p.262, 263.

> [W]hy are the very options that are often held up as the *real* purposes of reading and writing conspicuous by their near absence? ... what are the forces and processes that effectively close off these (pseudo) options from the great majority of readers and writers in our society?[33]

Graff's investigation focusing on three cities in Ontario, in mid-nineteenth century Canada, found that ethnicity, religion, colour and female sex militated against any personal advantages that literacy and education brought. Generally, only those who already had certain inherited or ascribed characteristics were able to benefit from literacy in terms of occupational advancement. For those with the wrong characteristics, it made little difference. Moreover, many illiterates with the right characteristics had occupational advantages not enjoyed by their literate peers who had the wrong characteristics. As for women, few were able to work so literacy and education made little difference, and where women did work, it made only a slight difference. The feminization of the teaching force, however, did eventually result in more employment opportunities for educated women.[34] Lankshear and Lawler point out that Graff's work showed that schooling in upper Canada during the mid nineteenth century

> ... reflected social relations of authority and control; patterns of domination and submission. These relations characterized the pedagogy by which reading and writing were taught/acquired, and within which they were employed in the classroom. And so the distinctive practice of school literacy [t]here was *structured* around these relations. The practice of reading and writing actually reflected hierarchical social relations.[35]

Education was supposed to be the 'lever' to a better life for the poor, providing the poor with opportunities to acquire the same sorts of attitudes, habits and values as the rich. At the same time, those who governed viewed it as a way for securing social stability and

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[33] Lankshear, Colin with Lawler, Moira, op. cit., p.50.

[34] Graff, Harvey J., *The Literacy Myth*, op. cit., pp.70-75.

[35] Lankshear, Colin with Lawler, Moira, op. cit., p.58.

cohesion through the inculcation of certain 'moral virtues.' In this way, literacy became the medium for transmitting hegemonic culture.[36]

Becoming literate today is still a hegemonic program. Paulo Friere and Donaldo Macedo call it a program for 'cultural reproduction'.[37] The kind of literacy taught in schools, they say, ignores "... the way language may either confirm or deny the life histories and experiences of the people who use it".[38] Women and blacks, for example, often end up alienated from the reality of their own experiences, while at the same time, the values and attitudes which alienate them from their own world continue to alienate them from society at large. As a result of such schooling, women might try to be like men and blacks might try to be like whites, but the fact that they are women, or black, or both, means that their own experience as women or blacks has been negated at the same time that the prejudices which deny them access to the same opportunities enjoyed by white males have been affirmed. Friere's style of pedagogy based on learning to 'read the word and the world' differs from conventional methods which do not recognize that language and literacy have social and political dimensions. To Freire, literacy is a way of 'knowing' and it should be connected to the world in which people live.[39] Acquiring literacy should become a means of 'cultural production' rather than 'cultural reproduction'. Friere's concept of 'cultural production' means affirming the reality of the learner's daily experiences and working with a group of learners to produce ideological elements which the group sees as appropriate to transforming their circumstances. This is done through a

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[36] Graff, Harvey J., op. cit., pp.33-35.

[37] Freire, Paulo and Macedo, Donaldo, *Literacy: Reading the Word and the World,* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1987), p.142. Hegemony is the means by which the subordinate groups are inducted into the ideologies and practices of the dominant group. It usually operates through persuasion even though it may actually work against their own interests.

[38] Freire, Paulo and Macedo, Donaldo, ibid., p.149.

[39] Freire, Paulo, *The Politics of Education,* op. cit., p.49.

process of 'conscientization', as he calls it, in other words, consciousness raising.[40] Adult learners begin by acquiring the skills needed to write the texts they read, the content of which is concerned with their own everyday lives. The idea behind this approach is to get them to think about their own lives so that in the course of learning to read and write, they become more aware of how they live.[41]

Kathleen Weiler considers that there are still some problems with Friere's approach, particularly for schools.[42] She says that the problem for school teachers wishing to implement Freire's concept of reading the word and the world is they find that the experience of their students is divided because different students see the world from different positions. The development of a collective knowledge and appropriate action is not possible without denying the experience of some of the people in a classroom. The teacher also has a situated position, both as a person of race, class and gender, as well as a position of authority within the school structure.[43] Furthermore, Freire's goals still do not address the conflicts which arise between and within oppressed groups, or the contradictions which are present within a single person.[44] As teachers, she says:

> How are we to situate ourselves in relation to the struggles of others? How are we to address our own contradictory positions as oppressors and oppressed? Where are we to look for liberation when our collective 'reading of the world' reveals contradictory and conflicting experiences and struggles?[45]

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[40] Friere, Paulo, "The adult literacy process as cultural action for freedom," *Harvard Educational Review*, Vol.40, No.2, (May 1970), p.221.

[41] Paulo Freire, *The Politics of Education*, op. cit., p.15.

[42] Weiler, Kathleen, "Freire and a feminist pedagogy of difference," *Harvard Educational Review* Vol.61, No.4, (1991).

[43] Weiler, Kathleen, ibid., p.454.

[44] Weiler, Kathleen, ibid., p.450-451, 453.

[45] Weiler, Kathleen, ibid., p.455.

She says that Freire's pedagogy and feminism have much in common, but they diverge most where feminists recognize and build on the concept of 'difference'. The school is full of tensions related to such differences. In the end, pressures from regimented routines, parental expectations and the need for students to achieve mean that most schools, no matter how good their intentions, will succumb and revert to a pedagogy of cultural reproduction.

Thus there are several reasons why literacy does not always deliver what it appears to promise. First, the social significance of inherited characteristics, such as being black or female, override the beneficial effects that literacy may have for some people. Second, school literacy often alienates those whose daily experience of life is not represented in the kind of literacy taught and reinforces that alienation by reproducing the prejudices which deny them access to opportunities. Third, hierarchical social arrangements are frequently reinforced through the kind of pedagogy employed in schools. Fourth, more often than not, the kind of literacy that is taught in schools is uncritical, that is, it promotes passive acceptance of the status quo. Literacy, as a form of social practice, is therefore conditioned by a number of other social factors. It is itself more likely to be a consequence than a determining factor. That does not mean it does not have value. Rather, most of its real value lies in enhancing the opportunities of those whose circumstances are already favourable. Literacy, by itself, cannot overcome social barriers but it can provide oppressed people with a voice through which to express their concerns. This voice, however, may well be stifled through the indoctrination of dominant ideologies communicated in the process of acquiring literacy.

Before moving on to consider the benefits of literacy to the wider community, there is still one further popular belief concerning the benefits of literacy to the individual, and that is, the belief that literate people are cognitively superior to illiterate people. The

academic basis for this argument, says Street, lies in the work of people like Greenfield, Hildyard and Olson, and Goody.[46] The work of Evans-Pritchard, Labov and Scribner and Cole and others, he says, shows that their arguments linking literacy to cognitive development are undermined by misconceptions about the nature of thought and the confusion of thinking processes with social, cultural and linguistic practices.[47] Anthropological evidence suggests that all people, literate and illiterate, engage in all forms of thought. Although there are clear intellectual advantages to being literate in terms of access to information and the circulation of ideas, linking literacy to cognitive development in a direct causal relationship often becomes an excuse for justifying western-style schooling and academic traditions, Street says.[48]

2.2.2..The value and benefits of literacy to the wider community

From the above, it is clear that literacy is a complex form of social practice which interacts with other social phenomena. Because of this, the treatment of literacy as an *independent* variable with particular consequences for individuals becomes problematic. The benefits that literacy is thought to bring to the wider community is similarly problematic. Graff's book *The Literacy Myth* was originally prompted by his doubts about modern day beliefs regarding some of the socio-economic benefits ascribed *directly* to

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[46] Greenfield, Patricia, "Oral or written language: the consequences for cognitive development in Africa, U.S. and England," *Language and Speech* 15, (1972); Hildyard, Angela and Olson, David, *Literacy and the Specialisation of Language*, Unpublished manuscript, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, (1978); Goody, Jack, *The Domestication of the Savage Mind*, (Cambridge University Press, 1977). Cited in Street, Brian V., op. cit., Chapters 1 & 2.

[47] Evans-Pritchard, E.E., *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic amongst the Azande*, (Clarendon Press, 1937); Horton, Robin, "African traditional thought and western science," *Africa* Vol.37, Nos.1/2, (1967); as well as others cited by Street, Brian, op. cit., pp.24-26; Labov, W., "The logic of non-standard English," *Tinker, Tailor ... the Myth of Cultural Deprivation*, (Penguin, 1973); Scribner, Sylvia and Cole, Michael, *The Psychology of Literacy*, (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1981). Cited in Street, Brian V., ibid., Chapter 1.

[48] Street, Brian V., ibid., p.38. Street presents his argument on pp.19-43.

literacy.[49] Graff does not say that literacy has no relevance to development, but that there is little evidence to support the notion that mass literacy is a prerequisite *for* development. I intend now to look briefly at some of the issues involved.

First of all, it is usually assumed that a literate workforce is needed for industrialization. Records from 17th century Europe show that, of the countries which underwent early industrialization, the proportion of the population which was even minimally literate was small. In other countries, such as Sweden, universal education came early, with industrialization coming much later. In England, the nineteenth century movement for universal schooling followed industrialization, and did not precede it.[50] In Canada and the United States, industrialization came after the establishment of primary education for the masses and almost universal literacy in the white population.[51] A large-scale study of 94 countries between 1850 to 1965 also shows that there was no *direct* correlation between the development of literacy and industrialization.[52] Graff says that the experiences of industrialization and the rise of mass literacy and education are contradictory, showing that literacy was not the springboard for industrialization.[53] Neither can it be shown that the development of education and literacy depended on industrialization. Furthermore, in countries where primary education had already been established, education and industrialization progressed rapidly together. As technology advanced, demand for literate workers increased, so promoting the development of

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[49] Graff, Harvey J., *The Literacy Myth*, op. cit., 1979.

[50] Winchester, Ian, "The standard picture of literacy," *Comparative Education Review* Vol.34 No.1, (1990), pp.31, 36.

[51] Graff, Harvey J., *The Literacy Myth*, op. cit., p.231.

[52] Flora, Peter, "Historical processes of social mobilization," in Eisenstadt, S.N. and Rokkan, S. (eds), *Building States and Nations,* (Sage, Bevery Hills, 1973), pp.213-258. Cited in Graff, Harvey J., *The Literacy Myth,* ibid., p.227.

[53] Graff, Harvey J., *The Literacy Myth,* ibid., p.223.

schooling.[54] Manufacturers, who were happy to recruit a largely illiterate workforce at first, ultimately recognized the benefits of employing more educated workers. It was not literacy for intellectual development that was valued, however, but the new attitudes and habits which developed in the course of becoming literate, says Graff.[55]

Second, it is assumed that literacy and modernization go together. Modernization theories assume that literacy has the power to bring about changes in a range of factors affecting the way a society functions. History shows that it is not literacy itself which does this. We have already seen how literacy was used to train potential workers in suitable work habits for the nineteenth century factory environment as well as to impart appropriate moral virtues amongst the working class. In North America, literacy was also the medium used for training immigrants to think of themselves as Canadians or Americans in order to get rid of traditions and ties associated with their home countries.[56] Once literacy was acquired, the medium of print was also useful in reinforcing certain traits in those who had left school. Today, education and literacy play key roles in the modernization programs of developing nations. Literacy campaigns have abounded in the second half of this century and many countries have sought to universalize primary education. The assumption that underlies these developments is that the more educated or literate the population is, the more productive it becomes, so leading to greater economic growth.[57] UNESCO's literacy campaigns are based on this ideology. Modernization of traditional societies in developing countries, however, usually means passing on the

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[54] Cipolla, Carlo M., *Literacy and Development in the West,* (Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, England, 1969), p.88.

[55] Graff, Harvey, J. *The Literacy Myth,* op. cit., p.229.

[56] Graff, Harvey, J. *The Literacy Myth,* ibid., pp.229-232.

[57] Street, Brian, op. cit., p.184.

'wisdom' and accumulated experience of the West, with the result that literacy has often become a means of transmitting western ideologies.

Third, history seems to show that there is some connection between literacy and economic activity. As far back as 3100 BC, the Sumerians began using primitive writing skills for bureaucratic and economic organization. Writing developed along with the earliest cities which became centres of administration and economic activity.[58] The accumulation of economic surplus required some form of accounting, and the growth of cities and towns raised questions of ownership.[59] In eighteenth and nineteenth century England, the records show that literacy levels in industrial towns and cities were low, whereas in market and county towns they were much higher. The main occupations of the people in these towns were connected to distribution and exchange, and bureaucratic administration.[60] Whether literate people migrated to these towns to take up these occupations or whether more people already living in these towns became literate, however, is not clear.[61] The evidence shows that while the majority of illiterates were poor, the majority of the poor were literate. Furthermore, a good number of illiterates were able to achieve a degree of economic success.[62] In some other countries, however, the experience was different. Sweden, Scotland and a number of other countries in Europe achieved almost universal levels of literacy before the end of the eighteenth century because of religious factors. For example, in Sweden a state sanctioned church required

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[58] Sampson, Geoffrey, *Writing Systems*, (Hutchinson, London, 1985), p.47.

[59] Graff, Harvey J., *The Legacies of Literacy: Continuities and Contradictions in Western Culture and Society*, (Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1987), p.19.

[60] Schofield, Roger, "Dimensions of illiteracy, 1750-1850," *Explorations in Economic History* Vol.10, No.4, (1973), p.453.

[61] Houston, R.A., "The developments of literacy: Northern England, 1640-1750," *The Economic History Review* Vol.25, No.2, (1982), p.209, 212.

[62] Graff, Harvey J., *The Literacy Myth*, op. cit., p.198.

communicants and those who wished to marry to be literate. Women, who were expected to have an important role as home educators, achieved comparable levels of literacy with men. Nevertheless, Sweden remained very poor. In these countries, high levels of literacy did not lead to economic development, neither did they follow economic growth, urbanization or industrialization.[63] The evidence seems to suggest that increased productivity which leads to an exchange economy, followed by investment in education may accelerate the development of literacy, though other social factors may just as well do this, as Sweden shows. Economic success, it seems, was achievable without schooling, but the development of an economic system and the supporting bureaucracy required literate people.[64]

Fourth, it is often claimed that a literate population is needed for participatory democracy. Modern democracies have come to rely on an educated and informed population, but the powers of literacy and education are often overestimated when it comes to popular rule and democratic rights, according to Graff.[65] Lankshear and Lawler provide a good illustration of this. In England until the Reform Act of 1832, participatory democracy was limited to the privileged class while the working class and most of the middle class were not permitted to vote. When the Act was passed, the franchise was still limited to property owners who were considered worthy enough to be allowed to vote.[66] At the time, most of the poor were denied schooling for fear that they would become discontented with their place in society. Even when opposition to schooling for the poor declined later in the nineteenth century, the schooling they received, as we have seen, was

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[63] Graff, Harvey J., *The Labyrinths of Literacy: Reflections on Literacy Past and Present,* (The Falmer Press, London, 1987), p.34.

[64] Graff, Harvey J., *The Literacy Myth,* op. cit., p.200.

[65] Graff, Harvey J., *The Labyrinths of Literacy,* op. cit., p.70.

[66] Lankshear, Colin with Lawler, Moira, op. cit., p.81-91.

designed to keep them in their place. In the meantime, the working classes began a struggle to win the vote. One organization which was dedicated to this cause was the London Corresponding Society, founded in 1792 by eight men whose sole aim was to work towards full voting rights for working class people. Meetings involved reading and discussing political works and publishing various materials, and gave its members opportunities to participate in democratic organization. Members who were unable to read were able to listen to the reading of a newspaper article and take part in the discussion which followed its reading. Over time, the members of the Society became conscious of themselves as a distinct class of people with their own interests and aspirations. It should not be too surprising to learn that this was viewed with some alarm by the government. In 1792, 1795 and 1799, successive Acts of Parliament outlawed organizations such as this one, naming the London Corresponding Society specifically, arresting members and even transporting some. The ability to read newspapers, form judgments, write letters and so on does not guarantee the democratic process. Neither is there any guarantee that print will not be used for the manipulation of public opinion in the guise of permitting informed choice. Equally, a literacy which awakens potentially 'subversive' desires to liberate oneself from social and political conditions may not appeal to some less than democratic governments. Schools may teach children how to participate in a democracy, but they also play a role in transmitting the values and attitudes of the dominant groups in society. Furthermore, it has already been shown that the kind of literacy propagated in schools is rarely critical. That democracy depends on people being able to make critical and informed choices is true, but literacy does not guarantee that they can, or will.

Last, it is assumed that education or literacy is a direct causal factor in fertility decline. After doing a survey of the literature on the subject, Graff says that there are

several problems which contribute to a lack of clarity on this issue.[67] Aside from problems with definitions, comparability of data, and assumptions made in respect to the paradigms through which the data is viewed, literacy is found to correlate both negatively and positively with fertility. Some studies show there is no link between mere literacy and fertility at all.[68] Moreover, some historical surveys use literacy data for males because there are no records for women.[69] Graff says that when inconsistencies are found in the data they are usually discussed in terms of qualifications and marginal revisions and never followed up properly. He suggests that rather than treating education as a causal factor, it should be seen as "... functioning and mediating through and with other structural and attitude-shaping factors."

Demographer John Caldwell, in the process of trying to refute Graff's argument, undermines his own argument when he says that "... the greatest impact of education [on fertility] is *not direct*, but through the restructuring of family relationships and, hence, family economics and the direction of the net wealth flow."[70] He then outlines five ways in which education impacts fertility indirectly, all of which can be attributed to social, cultural and economic factors. He suggests that schooling has the biggest impact because it intervenes in family life, replacing family values and attitudes with those of the wider community. Thus his argument actually substantiates Graff's claim that education and literacy are not directly responsible for fertility decline. In a more recent paper, John

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[67] Graff, Harvey J., *The Labyrinths of Literacy*, op. cit., pp.100-126.

[68] Hawthorn, Geoffrey, *The Sociology of Fertility*, (Collier-Macmillan, London, 1970). Cited in Graff, Harvey J., *Labyrinths of Literacy*, op. cit., p.117.

[69] Knodel, John E., *The Decline of Fertility in Germany, 1871-1939*, (Princeton University Press, NJ, 1974); van de Walle, Francine, "Education and the fertility transition in Switzerland," paper presented to the Annual Meeting of the Population Association of America, Montreal, (April 1976). Cited in Graff, Harvey J., *The Labyrinths of Literacy*, op. cit., p.119.

[70] Caldwell, John C., "Mass education as a determinant of the timing of fertility decline," *Population and Development Review* Vol.6, No.2, (1980), p.227-249. The italics are mine.

Knodel and Gavin Jones have the view that there is substantial evidence that female education has a strong negative association with fertility but they also say that "... There are ample instances that call into question the necessary primacy of women's education in *inducing* fertility decline."[71] They say there is too much emphasis in demographic literature on education and fertility and that female education is only one of several factors promoted in policies to reduce fertility.

Graff has challenged the way historical data is used as evidence to support arguments for literacy's capacity to bring about certain socio-economic outcomes. In some instances, what may appear to be a result of literacy is more often than not the result of the schooling process in which certain 'useful' attitudes, values and habits are transmitted. In other cases, literacy coincides with other social changes such as the intervention of schooling in family life. Sometimes there is no link at all as the different experiences of industrialization and economic development in England, North America and Sweden show. Graff says:

> The underlying assumptions of the importance of literacy, which we have studied as they were manifested in the nineteenth century, have been maintained to the present, uncritically accepted, for the most part, and constantly promulgated." ... "If we are to understand the meanings of literacy and its different values, past and present, these assumptions must be criticized, the needs reexamined, the demands reevaluated.[72]

Literacy as a social practice is imbued with an ideological nature. In some places the ideological role of literacy is acknowledged and even promoted. In others, especially where individual freedoms are valued, hegemonic ideology tends to remain hidden. In

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[71] Knodel, John and Jones, Gavin W., "Post-Cairo population policy: does promoting girls' schooling miss the mark?" *Population and Development Review*, Vol.22, No.4, (December 1996), p.685.

[72] Graff, Harvey J., *The Literacy Myth*, op. cit., p.323.

modern China, literacy has been a hegemonic program from the beginning, with literacy development being linked to political, social and economic goals. The aim of the next section is not so much to study the history of this development (this will be covered more in the next chapter), but to examine how literacy is understood ideologically in China.

2.3 Literacy and ideology – in China

The resolution, "Decisions on the eradication of illiteracy" promulgated by the Central Committee of the CCP and the State Council in 1956, defined basic literacy quantitatively, setting targets of a minimum 1500 characters for peasants and 2000 characters for workers, with the expectation they would also be able to read simple newspapers and popular books, and carry out simple calculations.[73] This definition, reiterated in 1978 by the State Council under the title "Directive concerning the eradication of illiteracy", appears to emphasize skills rather than the *kind* of literacy involved. The original 1956 definition, as it appears in the *Zhongguo jiaoyu nianjian 1949-1981* in the section on adult education, however, also includes a brief bracketed reference to literacy primers. These primers were specially designed using an officially compiled list of frequently used characters to acquaint learners with the new social and political order at the collective, the county and provincial levels.[74] Thus the kind of literacy campaigns carried out during the first twenty to thirty years of the PRC not only aimed to make participants literate in terms of reading and writing, but also aimed to make them politically and ideologically literate.

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[73] *Zhongguo jiaoyu nianjian 1949-1981* [China Education Year Book 1949-1981], (Zhongguo Dabaike Quanshu Chubanshe, Beijing, 1984), p.578.

[74] *Zhongguo jiaoyu nianjian 1949-1981*, ibid., pp.580-581.

As in any other place, literacy in China is, and has always been, bound up in ideology. Full literacy in the traditional sense was synonymous with a thorough Confucian education involving the study of the Confucian classics, traditional commentaries, histories and literature.[75] This did not mean only the mastery of characters, but entailed a complete schooling in the values and attitudes, customs and creeds of the Confucian life-style. Such a literacy can only be properly understood in the light of the texts studied, the pedagogical style used and the bureaucratic aspirations of traditional scholars. Though it was theoretically possible for any male to aspire to this kind of literacy, the population at large did not have the time or the resources to become fully 'literate' in this sense. Amongst the general population, however, other more limited literacies were practised. In her study of Qing China, Evelyn Rawski found that there was a continuum of literacy skills amongst ordinary people from only knowing a hundred or so characters to knowing several thousand. These vocabularies were usually quite specialized and concerned with ordinary everyday matters such as carrying out business. A knowledge of a few hundred characters was often adequate enough for this, but was usually insufficient for reading a book.[76] The proportion of the Chinese population who were literate to some extent is thought to be similar to that of pre-industrial Europe.[77] Women, however, were mostly illiterate, regardless of their status. Paradoxically, it was generally believed by both men and women, though often contradicted in everyday practice, that a lack of ability in a woman was a virtue.[78]

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[75] Rawski, Evelyn Sakakida, *Education and Popular Literacy in Ch'ing China*, (Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1979), pp.1 & 5.

[76] Edwin, Joshua Dukes, *Everyday Life in China; or, Scenes Along River and Road in Fuk-kien*, (London, n.d.), pp.194-195. Cited in Rawski, Evelyn Sakakida, op. cit., p.2.

[77] Sampson, Geoffrey, op. cit., p.162.

[78] Judd, Ellen R., *Gender and Power in Rural North China*, (Stanford University Press, California, 1994), p.1.

When the CCP came to power the problem was how to develop a literacy that went beyond the specialized vocabularies of individuals to include the ideologies and functions of the new state. To begin with, those who knew less than 500 characters were classified as illiterate, while those who knew more than 500 but less than 1500 characters were deemed to be semi-literate.[79] The minimum target of 1500 characters for peasants and 2000 for workers is still quite low in light of the fact that modern schooling usually produces a knowledge of between 4000 and 7000 characters, the number considered necessary to be able to read modern newspapers, magazines and novels without too much trouble.[80] This very limited literacy was a hegemonic literacy deliberately designed to convey the official ideologies and the production goals of the CCP.[81]

2.3.1 Literacy and education according to Mao

To understand why literacy and education in the PRC developed along these lines it is necessary to examine Mao's attitude towards the role of education in the transmission of ideology. As early as 1939 Mao made it clear that "... all work in school is for the purpose of transforming the students ideologically."[82] The 'school' he was talking about then was a military college used for training the Red Army during the Yan'an Period and not the local primary school. Literacy education at this 'school' was aimed at soldiers who needed it for practical reasons, such as being able to follow written orders. Learning to read and write also provided an opportunity for indoctrinating soldiers with the ideals of

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[79] *Zhongguo jiaoyu nianjian 1949-1981*, op. cit., p.578.

[80] Peterson, Glen, op. cit., p.10.

[81] This will be dealt with in more detail in the next chapter.

[82] Mao Tse-tung, "Instruction on the question of consolidating the Anti-Japanese Military and Political College," (October 6, 1966), *Current Background* No.897, (U.S. Consulate General, Hong Kong, December 10, 1969), p.10. Cited in Hawkins, John N., *Mao Tse-tung and Education*, (Linnet Books, Hamden, Connecticut, 1974), p.76.

the revolution.[83] On the other hand, while village education included some basic literacy, it was considered less important than political and technical education. Mao generally preferred non-literate means such as slogans, posters, picture books and so on for communicating the ideals of the revolution to the masses because he found these methods quick and successful. This meant, however, that very little was actually achieved in improving literacy amongst the general population during the Yan'an period, according to a Ministry of Education document released in 1950.[84]

Mao's attitude towards literacy development did not change very much after coming to power. In his opinion, literacy and education should be practical. Too much book learning was unproductive and irrelevant to solving practical day to day problems.

> One [must] not read too many books, Marxist books should be studied but we also [must] not read too many of them. ... Should one read too many of them, one would proceed to the negative side and become a bookworm or a revisionist.[85]

Although this statement was made during the Cultural Revolution when Mao criticized the kind of education promoted in schools, it is fairly representative of his view of the role of literacy and education in general. Literacy was necessary, but its real purpose was to become politically and ideologically knowledgeable.[86] For Mao, education (and 're-

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[83] Peterson, Glen, "State literacy ideologies and the transformation of rural China," *Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs*, (January 1994), p.99.

[84] "Jiaoyu guanyu kaizhan nongmin yeyu jiaoyu de zhishi" [Ministry of Education Directive on Opening up Peasant Sparetime Education], 4/12/1950, Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo Jiaoyubu Gongnong Jiaoyusi (eds), *Gongnong jiaoyu wenxian huibian (nongmin jiaoyu)* [Compilation of Documents on Worker/Peasant Education (Peasant Education)], pp.15-18. Cited in Peterson, Glen, ibid., pp.99-101.

[85] Mao Tse-tung, "Comments on courses of study and examination method," (March, 1964), *Current Background* No.891 (8/10/1969), p.45. Cited in Hawkins, John N., op. cit., p.111. The original translation uses the word 'cannot' rather than 'must not' read too many books. I have taken the liberty of changing the word 'can' to 'must' to clarify the intended meaning.

[86] Chen, Theodore Hsi-en, *The Maoist Educational Revolution*, (Praeger Publishers, New York/ Washington/London, 1974), p.75.

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education') was a deliberate, slow and methodical process of 'ideological remolding'.[87] Through education, that is, through 'persuasion', the individual would be *continually* transformed in mind and behaviour. Such education, however, was not limited to literacy classes or schools. Non-literate methods such as radio, 'study' groups, mass meetings, exhibits and demonstrations were used together with some literate means, such as posters and leaflets, to 'educate' the public about what was taking place in the country.[88]

Mao's concern for ideological and political education never wavered. During the Cultural Revolution, the statement, "... all work in school is for the purpose of transforming the students ideologically," was reiterated in the official press. This time Mao was criticizing schools which, he said, showed a lack of enthusiasm for carrying out adequate ideological and political training. As far as he was concerned, schools spent too much time on book learning and showed insufficient interest in teaching practical skills.[89] The aim of education, according to Mao, should be to create a new kind of socialist person, one who has academic and technical skills as well as a high level of political consciousness.[90] He advocated an all-round education so that every person should "... develop morally, intellectually, and physically and become a well-educated worker imbued with socialist consciousness."[91] While it seems that this meant that there should be an equal balance between these aspects, other writings indicate that he actually placed moral

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[87] Chen, Theodore Hsi-en, ibid., pp.59-60.

[88] Chen, Theodore Hsi-en, ibid, p.77.

[89] Hawkins, John N., op. cit., pp.109-111.

[90] Hawkins, John N., ibid., p.78.

[91] Mao Tse-tung, "On the correct handling of contradictions among the people," (February, 1957), *Four Essays on Philosophy*, (Foreign Languages Press, Peking, 1968), p.110. Cited in Hawkins, John N. ibid., p.69.

and political education ahead of the others.[92] Mao's insistence on the importance of ideology bordered on fanaticism. "... Not to have a correct political point of view is like having no soul," he said.[93]

Mao believed the function of education, as with literature and art, was political and ideological and therefore it had a class nature. It had to be harnessed and used for inculcating proletarian ideology into the young.[94] "... In class society everyone lives as a member of a particular class, and every kind of thinking without exception, is stamped with the brand of a class," Mao said.[95] He had tremendous faith in the possibility that people could change, however. Through education, persuasion and ideological work it was possible to acquire the correct 'thought' *(sixiang)*.[96] He had to admit, though, that transforming the system was much easier than transforming people.

> The socialist revolution came swiftly. In a matter of six or seven years the socialist transformation of capitalist ownership and of individual ownership by small producers has by and large been completed. But the transformation of man still has a long way to go, though some progress has been made.[97]

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[92] Price. R.F.. *Education in Modern China*, (Routledge & Kegan Paul, London/Boston/Henley, 1979), p.22.

[93] Mao Tse-tung, "On the correct handling of contradictions," op. cit., p.79.

[94] Kwong, Julia, *Chinese Education in Transition: Prelude to the Cultural Revolution*, (McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal, 1979), p.44.

[95] Mao Zedong, *Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Art and Literature*, (Peking, 1960), pp.31-32. Cited in Löfstedt, Jan-Ingvar, *Chinese Educational Policy: Changes and Contradictions 1949-79*, (Almqvist & Wiksell International, Stockholm & Humanities Press, Atlantic Highlands, N.J., USA, 1980), pp.39-40.

[96] Price, R.F., op. cit., p.8.

[97] Mao Zedong, "Beat back the attacks of the bourgeois rightists," *Selected Works*, Vol.5, p.460. Cited in Löfstedt, Jan-Ingvar, op. cit., p.43. (His translation.)

Even if progress was good, he considered there was still a need for periodical re-education because circumstances change while people do not. Furthermore, they also needed to be 're-educated' because 'bourgeois' ideas keep creeping back into people's minds.[98]

Literacy also has a class nature. In traditional China, as we have already seen, various kinds of literacies accompanied particular classes. Furthermore, educational practices from the West had introduced what Mao called 'bourgeois' ideologies of education into Chinese education which were the antithesis of socialist ideologies. Hence he was concerned to develop a literacy which reflected the ideologies of the Party leadership and used educational practices appropriate to the goals of the revolution. Mao, however, never set out to write systematic educational theory. Most of his comments about education are scattered throughout his other writings and were usually addressed to Party members and cadres concerning specific problems and issues.[99] His criticism of schools which placed too much emphasis on learning from books arose because he believed that people should learn by doing, that is, through 'social practice'. By this he meant that they should participate in production while still studying. He criticized party members who merely memorized Marxist theory and did not put it into practice solving real problems.[100] He also disapproved of 'incomplete intellectuals', those who have proceeded through their education without ever having taken part in any sort of practical activities or actually applied what they have learned to a real life situation.[101] In short, theory should not be divorced from practice. Too much of the kind of schooling that was

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[98] Price, R.F., op. cit., p.9.

[99] Price, R.F., ibid., p.21. Löfstedt, Jan-Ingvar, op. cit., p.39.

[100] Mao, *Selected Works*, Vol.3. (Foreign Languages Press, Beijing, 1965), p.38. Cited in Price, op. cit., pp.22-24. Löfstedt, Jan-Ingvar, ibid., p.41.

[101] Mao Tse-tung, "Rectify the party's style of work," [February 1942] *Selected Works*, Vol.3, p.39. Cited in Kwong, Julia, op. cit., p.49.

offered in the education system was bad for the health, he said, because there was too little physical activity and it was divorced from the reality of work.

Mao's attitude to the role of literacy and book learning is probably best understood in the light of his views on the way knowledge is properly acquired, especially his views on the relationship between theory and practice. Hawkins summarizes five basic stages to the acquisition of knowledge. The first is the gathering of information through the senses (empiricism). This is followed by thinking about what is perceived in the light of social practice in the past which, in turn, leads to the formation of theoretical concepts (rationalism). According to Mao, stages one and two are interdependent and cannot be relied on by themselves. These concepts are then applied to practical situations with the view to bringing about change.[102] Mao said:

> Marxist philosophy holds that the most important problem does not lie in understanding the laws of the objective world and thus being able to explain it, but in applying the knowledge of these laws actively to change the world.[103]

The next step is to generate theories which are tested in practice so that when theory and practice finally agree, it could be considered that knowledge, as it applies to that particular situation, is complete. After this it can be applied to new situations and adapted accordingly. Each small piece of knowledge thus acquired gradually makes the larger picture clearer. These five stages form a chain which is repeated many times, creating an upward spiral in which the quality of the knowledge acquired continually improves. Therefore it was important that schooling be connected to production so that students could apply what they learned in school to problems in production and conversely, take

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[102] Hawkins, John J., op. cit., pp.59-60.

[103] Mao Zedong, "On practice: On the relation between knowledge and practice, between knowing and doing," [July 1937], *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung Vol. I*, (Foreign Languages Press, Beijing, 1965), p.304.

problems of production back into the classroom so they could be studied. Mao's ideas on the relationship between theory and practice led to the development of many 'part-work part-study' schools running their own factories in the larger cities. The aim was not only to bring theory and practice together, but also to lessen the gap between mental and manual labour, intellectuals and labourers.[104] Without linking theory to practice in this way, Mao considered that knowledge was not rooted in reality. Moreover, the acquisition of knowledge was then also tied to the needs of the country rather than to the interests of individuals. Mao's call for the curriculum to be cut by half to accommodate production work during the Cultural Revolution, however, resulted in a substantial drop in the literacy skills of school graduates.[105]

According to Chen, the supremacy of politics and ideological education in schools also applied to adult education, including the elimination of illiteracy. Literacy was only the 'means', a 'basic necessity'.

> The real goal [was] political intelligence. Teaching to read and write [was] inseparable from political and ideological education. From the first day of a literacy class, politics and ideology furnish[ed] the content of the lessons.[106]

He says that having the right 'ideological orientation', the right attitudes and habits, was essential if work skills and knowledge were to be useful. Although there were no meaningful statistics to support it, it was generally believed that illiteracy was significantly reduced during the Mao era. Chen, however, points out that most of the information came from selected areas where 'successful' literacy campaigns had been carried out and these

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[104] Chen, Theodore Hsi-en, op. cit., pp. 81-82.

[105] Pepper, Suzanne, *Radicalism and Education Reform in 20th-century China,* (Cambridge University Press,1996), p.408.

[106] Chen, Theodore Hsi-en, op. cit., p.75.

results could not be applied to the whole country. In some areas, it was reported that the entire population had attained basic literacy, although the meaning of 'basic literacy' was somewhat vague. Furthermore, he says that those who did not use their newly acquired literacy skills tended to lapse back into illiteracy.[107] Besides these problems, it is likely local officials exaggerated their reports of progress in order to ingratiate themselves with higher authorities.[108] In other words, no one really knew what was being achieved.

Although Mao's emphasis on political and ideological education had a significant effect on the development of literacy and regular education, it is doubtful that Mao's ideas were ever fully implemented. Those within the Party with reformist tendencies ('revisionists' according to Mao), such as Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping, managed to maintain some control over and continuity in educational development throughout most of the Mao era with what Löfstedt calls, periodic 'Mao inspired' interruptions during the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution.[109] It is doubtful that Mao's ideas were applied in any systematic way even then. Mao's predilection for spontaneous activity over proper planning and organization undoubtedly meant they were only ever implemented in an ad hoc fashion. Following Mao's death and the fall of the Gang of Four, the reformists have been able to implement their program of regularizing education without interruption.

2.3.2 Literacy and education according to Deng

Under Deng's leadership, the emphasis in education shifted from ideological work to training the necessary experts for economic, scientific and technological development.

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[107] Chen, Theodore Hsi-en, ibid., pp.76-77.

[108] That this practice still occurs was volunteered unsolicited in March, 1998 by two of my informants who have been doing research in rural areas.

[109] Löfstedt, Jan-Ingvar, op. cit., p.185.

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That is not to say that education was no longer important in the transmission of values and attitudes or that political and ideological education was scrapped altogether. Deng said:

> Instill in every person in the country ideals, morals, literacy and education, and discipline ... [we] must constantly be educating our people. Our young people must have ideals.[110]

In 1979, he affirmed the importance of Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong thought, along with the need to uphold the leadership of the Communist Party, the dictatorship of the proletariat and strict adherence to the socialist road, in a speech called "Uphold the Four Cardinal Principles".[111] Although the ideological foundations of his regime seemed to be little different from those of Mao, ideology and politics were no longer to be given the same priority. He denounced the primacy given to politics in education during the Cultural Revolution, saying "... the main task of students is to study, to learn book knowledge, i.e. science and culture." He called for less time to be spent on ideological and political education in schools, pointing out the need to improve the quality and efficiency of education in order to train much needed scientists and technologists.[112] "... Without paying special attention to science and education there is no hope of achieving the Four Modernisations," he said.[113] In the National Conference on Science and the National Education Work Conference held in 1978, Deng caused a quite a stir when he said that

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[110] Deng Xiaoping, *Deng Xiaoping wenxuan disanjuan* [Deng Xiaoping Selected Works, Vol.3], p.110. Cited in Guo Ge, "Xuexi Deng Xiaoping tongzhi cong zhanluegaodu zhua jiaoyu de sixiang" ["Study comrade Deng Xiaoping's thought on the undertaking of education at a strategically high level"], *Jiaoyu yanjiu*, [Educational Research], No.3, (1996), p.5.

[111] Yeh, Milton D., "The ideology and politics of Teng's leadership in post-Mao mainland China," in Chang, King-yuh (ed), *Ideology and Politics in Twentieth Century China*, (Institute of International Relations, National Chengchi University, Taipei, 1988), p. 117. The quotation comes from Deng Xiaoping, "Uphold the Four Cardinal Principles," *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping (1975-1982)*, (Foreign Languages Press, Beijing, 1984), pp.166-191.

[112] Sautman, Barry, "Politicization, hyperpoliticization and depoliticization of Chinese education," *Comparative Education Review*, Vol.35, No.4 (1991), p.678.

[113] Deng Xiaoping, *Deng Xiaoping tongzhi lun jiaoyu* [Comrade Deng Xiaoping on Education], p.68. Cited in Guo Ge, op. cit., p.3.

past policies had mistakenly believed education and science were part of the 'superstructure' when they were, in fact, 'productive forces'.[114]

While intellectuals welcomed these changes, many were still cautious about them as shown by some of the papers published in social science and education journals at that time with titles such as "Is education a form of ideology?" "Is education a superstructure or a productive force?" and "Are the schools in socialist society an instrument of the dictatorship of the proletariat?"[115] It would take a little time for the memory of the Cultural Revolution and Mao's anti-book learning ideas to fade sufficiently so that intellectuals were convinced that education was valued once again. Other changes which demonstrated the shift in emphasis include replacing the subject of 'politics' in primary schools with the study of 'ethics' and urging teachers to foster patriotism amongst their students. This usually involved adherence to the 'Four Cardinal Principles', supporting reform and open door policies, and a willingness to participate actively in the modernization process.[116] According to Sautmann, in practice this meant holding flag raising ceremonies, singing the national anthem and stressing certain aspects of Chinese history in primary schools. In secondary schools it called for the incorporation of aspects of Chinese history, politics, literature, music and so on in the normal curriculum so that national sentiment and loyalty to the socialist ideals were promoted. This kind of activity

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[114] Deng Xiaoping, *Deng Xiaoping wenxuan [Collected Works of Deng Xianping]*, (Renmin Chubanshe, Beijing, 1983), pp.83-88; *Zhonggguo jiaoyu nianjian 1949-81*, op. cit., pp.60-61. See also Bastid, Marianne, "Chinese educational policies in the 1980s and economic development," *China Quarterly*, Issue 98, (1984), pp.189-219. Cited in Peterson, Glen, *The Power of Words*, op. cit., p.154.

[115] Li Kejing, "Is education a superstructure or a productive force: major differences appear in discussion on the essence of education," *Social Sciences in China*, (September, 1980), pp.16-25. Cited in Rosen, Stanley, "Recentralization, decentralization, and rationalization: Deng's bifurcated educational policy," *Modern China*, Vol.11, No.3, (July 1985), pp.326-327.

[116] *People's Republic of China Year Book 1990*, p.358.

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was little more than what would be done in schools in many other countries around the world.[117]

The need for highly trained experts has had repercussions for schooling in general. The change in emphasis in education on quality rather than quantity meant that the more egalitarian ideals of Mao's policies were replaced by a bifurcated educational policy in which scientists and engineers were to be trained in elite educational institutions while the masses received an education which emphasized the acquisition of basic educational skills with some vocational training.[118] The elite sector attracts central government funding, while that for the masses must be funded locally. The former favours urban students while the latter has affected the opportunities for advancement amongst rural students. One of the most damaging aspects of this policy is the effect it has had on the education of rural girls and the continuing problem of female illiteracy in rural areas. This aspect will be taken up in Chapter Four where problems in the educational system are examined in some detail.

The elimination of illiteracy in rural areas is also linked to modernization goals. In the third session of the "Forum on Science and Culture," the chairman, Qian Sanqiang, spoke of the impossibility of bringing about modernization in rural areas when illiteracy amongst the rural population is numbered in the "hundreds of millions".[119] Changing the "small-peasant's economic ideology" and increasing the use of science and technology in farming is dependent on having an adequately educated rural population, he said. In the past, limited literacy skills were sufficient for being a team member within the collective,

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[117] Sautman, Barry, op. cit., p.687-688.

[118] Rosen, Stanley, "Recentralization, decentralization, and rationalization, op. cit., p.301.

[119] Chang Lan, and Shang Zhi, "How shall our country bring about modernization when there are several hundred million illiterate people in the countryside?" *Chinese Education: A Journal of Translations*, Vol.23, No.2, (Summer, 1990), p.45-46.

hence the rather low target of 1500 characters. After decollectivization, needs and opportunities changed, creating a demand for a kind of literacy which is capable of supporting new economic opportunities involving greater mobility, entrepreneurial and managerial skills, and the acquisition of technical skills.[120] Despite the need for literacy skills in rural areas, the number of people attending literacy classes fell dramatically, there was a decline in primary school enrollments and an increase in school dropouts during the 1980s. Females were most affected, suggesting that social convention, driven by ideologies of female inferiority, were exacerbated by urban/rural ideologies which gave urban residents access to centrally funded educational opportunities not available to rural residents. Thus ideologies governing social practice at the level of everyday life have interacted with political ideologies to produce an inordinate number of female illiterates in rural areas.

2.4 Literacy *as* ideology

The focus of this chapter has been the ideological nature of literacy. No matter which definition of ideology one subscribes to, literacy is clearly ideological. Choosing a theoretical framework within a particular paradigm and theorizing about it, also involves ideological decisions which affect the outcome of a research project. Ideological positions influence every person involved in literacy and education activities, from those who make decisions about what kind of education or literacy program is to be implemented and those who carry it out, right down to the person who decides whether or not they or their children will participate in these programs.

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[120] Peterson, Glen, *The Power of Words*, op. cit., pp.153-154.

If the researcher takes the view that ideology is concerned with presenting a false picture in order to justify decisions taken which serve one group's interests while purporting to serve the interests of everyone, then he or she will be concerned to show how particular kinds of literacy practices are promoted as serving the interests of the group being targeted. The nature of those literacy practices and the way they are disseminated, however, usually ensure that the group is inculcated with the values and attitudes of the dominant group whose interests are really being preserved. The ideologies being disseminated may be political, but they could just as well be gender, class, ethnic or racist ideologies. Much of Harvey Graff's work which focused on the nineteenth century city in North America is concerned with this kind of analysis.[121]

If literacy is used as a means of socializing learners to a particular world view in order to consolidate social changes that have occurred in the political arena, that is, it is unashamedly 'ideological work', the researcher would need to examine literacy practices to show how they are being promoted to meet these ideological ends. An example of this is found in the work of Colin Lankshear and Moira Lawler who discuss the literacy campaigns in Nicuagua.[122]

If, on the other hand, we wish to consider literacy from the point of view of the way it is practised in everyday life at all levels of society, we would not only consider the way literacy ideologies are disseminated officially, but also the way particular literacy practices are promoted by the community itself. This would include questioning – which practices are considered valuable; who considers them valuable; who is most likely to use them; why some people who are literate do not make use of them; why certain groups of people do not become literate; and so on. Because literacy ideologies are promoted in

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[121] Graff, Harvey J., *The Literacy Myth:* op. cit.

routines and practices in the family, the street, the school and the workplace, as well as in formal and informal community organizations, literacy practices would need to be studied in these contexts. The researcher will also be interested in how ideologies are communicated through symbols, attitudes, gestures and patterned behaviour. Such an examination of literacy ideologies would focus on the way they work from the bottom up, not only from the top down. It would also examine how these 'bottom-up' and 'top-down' ideologies interact with and influence each other and why 'official' literacy policies sometimes do not achieve the desired outcomes. In this thesis, I will take this latter approach. The next chapter begins this task by looking at the broader issues and the overall situation across the country with respect to literacy development.

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[122] Lankshear, Colin with Lawler, Moira, op. cit., pp.175-223.

3 THE FEMALE FACE OF ILLITERACY IN CHINA

The elimination of illiteracy amongst females represents a blending of two important commitments made by the CCP when it came to power in 1949: the elimination of illiteracy from the *whole* population, and the development of gender equality. This chapter aims to examine what has been achieved in respect of female illiteracy and in doing so, will show that although the greatest reductions in illiteracy have occurred amongst females, being female is still the characteristic most consistently associated with illiteracy, whether it relates to age groups, nationalities, regions, geographical location, urban or rural status, or economic circumstances.

This analysis uses 1982 and 1990 census data plus the 1995 one per cent sample survey data to give a relatively detailed description of the situation. The use of census and sample data to examine literacy trends, however, is not without some problems. The first of these relates to changes in the definition of 'urban' and 'rural', and the second has to do with the more general problem of assessing who is, or is not, literate. Changes to 'urban/rural' definitions in 1984 include the redefinition of towns so that many 'townships' (*xiang*) where 10 per cent or more of the population are non-agricultural could become towns *(zhen).* [1] Because the redefinition of towns has resulted in an increase in the number of towns, it also means that there has been an increase in the 'urban population' between the 1982 and 1990 censuses. [2] Furthermore, government policy which promotes the

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[1] Townships or *xiangs* replaced the commune. *Zhongguo tongji nianjian* 1985, p.657. Martin, Michael F., "Defining China's rural population," *The China Quarterly,* Issue 130 (1992), pp.392–401 outlines these changes which were part of a government plan to promote the growth of towns and local industry.

[2] More than 2,000 new towns were recognized in the first six months after these new regulations were promulgated. *Zhongguo renkou tongji nianjian 1985,* p.99. Census definitions of 'urban population' and 'rural population' reflect residency. Permanent residency is determined by household registration or living in a place for more than one year. Mallee, Hein, "China's household registration system under reform," *Development and Change,* Vol.26 (1995), p.8. Mallee also gives an account of changes in the household registration system which include the addition of a new urban category without entitlements to

development of township enterprises by encouraging rural people to 'leave the land, but not the township' *(litu bu lixiang)* has led to an increase in rural migration to townships.[3] The population growth occurring in townships, along with an increasing proportion of people who are engaged in non-agricultural work living in these townships, in turn, has led to an increase in the number of townships being reclassified as towns. Official sources report that there was a 7 percent increase in the proportion of illiterates aged 15 years or more in urban areas between the 1982 and 1990 censuses, meaning that more than 10 million rural illiterates became urban illiterates due to such changes.[4]

The second difficulty arises when deciding who is, or is not, literate. Literacy assessment is plagued with problems of definition and measurement which are related to conceptual notions of what literacy actually is. Literacy cannot be viewed as mere technology, that is skills of reading and writing, because it cannot be divorced from social practice. The implication of a simple dichotomous relationship based on the presence or absence of certain skills does not recognize that there is a multiplicity of literacy practices and that within each type, there is a continuum of skills. What kind of literacy is being assessed? At which point is a person considered to be literate? In China, census and sample surveys mainly rely on levels of schooling or attendance at literacy or adult education classes. This information is then qualified by whether a person is still at school,

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subsidized grain and some of the privileges accorded other urban residents. This new category permitted 'rural' people who had proper housing in town and who were engaged in non-agricultural work to acquire 'urban' registration. Since the late 1980s there have also been experiments with selling local urban household registrations to rural people or giving them to those who have invested in enterprises in cities. (pp.14-16). See Chapter Eight of this thesis for a more detailed discussion of the household registration system and the use of the terms 'urban' and 'rural' in association with it.

[3] Martin, Michael F., op. cit., p.395.

[4] Guojia Tongjiju Shehui yu Keji Tongjisi and Guojia Jiaoyu Weiyuanhui Chengren Jiaoyusi, "Woguo 80 niandai saomang qingkuang yanjiu" ["Research into literacy work in China in the eighties"], *Jiaoyu yanjiu* [Educational Research], No.11, (1995), p.25. The increase in urban illiterates occurs in this case as a result of changes in boundaries rather than migration. Male or female, migrants are more likely to be literate (see Chapter 8 of this thesis).

has graduated or has dropped out. People are usually considered to be literate if they have a primary school education even if they dropped out of primary school, or if they never went to school, but know more than 1500 characters, are able to read ordinary books and newspapers and can write simple notes.[5] It appears that sometimes some self-assessment or assessment by the enumerator about whether a person is literate is also undertaken.[6] The main problem with using levels of schooling as the main indicator of literacy is that it presumes that schooling always results in literacy and that literacy skills are retained in later life. When it comes to self assessment, respondents usually overestimate their competency.[7] Thus census data is more likely than not to underestimate the extent of illiteracy and semi-literacy. Why use census data, then? Given currently available data, it is not possible to carry out a national survey of literacy levels which might be more comprehensive. Census and survey data, though still imperfect, provide the only available starting point from which the examination of national trends becomes possible.

The tabulation of data on illiteracy collected during censuses in China also needs some clarification. Until fairly recently, illiteracy rates in the 1982 census have been expressed as the number of illiterates aged 12 years or more and calculated as a per cent of the population over 12 years. Data compiled from the 1990 census have usually been expressed as the number of illiterates aged 15 years and above and calculated as a per cent of the *total* population. In this thesis all literacy data, including those for the 1995 sample

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[5] *Guojia tongji diaocha zhidu,* 1994, p.383.

[6] Survey Questionnaire, 1995 *Quanguo 1% renkou diaocha ziliao,* op. cit. See also Office of the Sichuan Provincial Population Census Leading Group, *Census Enumerators Handbook,* (1982), pp.30-31 for the 1982 census. Cited in Laverley, William [et al.], op. cit., p.63.

[7] For example, an international survey conducted by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) for their International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) found discrepancies between tests carried out and levels of schooling. They also found few people rated their work –related literacy skills as poor when asked, even when testing showed that their skills were poor. OECD Statistics Canada, *Literacy, Economy and Society,* (OECD, Paris and Minister of Industry, Canada, 1995), p.14.

survey, are expressed as the number of illiterates aged 15 years or more calculated as a per cent of the population aged 15 years and above unless otherwise indicated.[8] Thus the national percentage for those aged 15 years or more in 1982 was 34.5 per cent, for 1990 it was 22.2 per cent and in 1995 it appears to have been reduced to 16.5 per cent.[9] Because earlier censuses in China were much more limited, data from these censuses will not be included. In their absence, I will briefly outline some early developments in the eradication of illiteracy and show how this is reflected in data in the 1982 census.

This analysis begins by tracing literacy development from 1949 when the CCP came to power and describes efforts and achievements in the eradication of illiteracy during the Mao era. It shows that the reduction of female illiteracy was not considered as important as the need for more literate males during the early days. The 1982 census data seem to indicate that there was a steady overall decline in both male and female illiteracy rates during the Mao era, but not sufficient to reduce the disparity between them. Post Mao illiteracy trends and the achievements of the 1980s are examined by comparing the 1982 and 1990 censuses. It is at this point that gender variables are compared with other variables to show that no other factor lines up consistently with illiteracy in the way that being female does. Data from the 1995 sample survey complete the review of literacy development in China. They not only represent trends between 1990 and 1995, but also allow comparisons to be made with the earlier data to show longer term trends. Regardless of the limitations of census data, it is clear that when comparisons between males and females are made, being female is undeniably the single characteristic consistently associated with illiteracy in China. This, together with other evidence such as

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[8] Likewise, the rates for male/female illiterates are calculated as a percentage of the male/female population unless stated otherwise.

[9] *Zhongguo renkou nianjian* [China Population Yearbook], 1986, calculated according to figures on p.315; *Zhongguo renkou tongji nianjian 1994* [China Population Statistics Yearbook 1994], p.159; and *1995 Quanguo 1% renkou diaocha ziliao*, op. cit., calculated according to figures on pp.82-83.

lower school enrolments, poorer attendance rates and higher drop-out rates amongst girls, suggests that traditional attitudes continue to undermine educational opportunities for many females.

3.1 The Mao Era

The precise situation inherited by the new communist government under the leadership of Mao Zedong in 1949 is not entirely clear. Mao said:

> Sweeping away illiteracy from eighty per cent of the population is an important mission for the New China.[10]

Whether or not eighty per cent of the population was illiterate, is not certain because it is likely that a continuum of literacy skills, extending from those of the elite scholar through to the merchant and on down to the ordinary person who knew a few hundred characters, existed as it did in the late imperial period. Evelyn Rawski found that a multiplicity of specialized literacies were in use then which were not necessarily acquired through formal schooling and she suggests that somewhere around thirty to forty-five percent of men and two to ten percent of women could read and write to some degree.[11] To add to the confusion, other estimates of illiteracy at the end of the republican era have varied wildly from 30 per cent amongst those aged 12 to 25 up to 85 per cent or more of the total population.[12] Vilma Seeberg posits around 32 per cent as the real figure.[13] There is no

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[10] *Zhongguo jiaoyu nianjian 1949-1981*, op. cit., p.684. Translation is from Stites, Regie and Semali, Ladislaus, "Adult literacy for social equality or economic growth? Changing agendas for mass literacy in China and Tanzania," *Comparative Education Review*, Vol.35, No.1 (1991), p.44.

[11] Evelyn Rawski, op. cit., p.140.

[12] Cleverly, John , op. cit., p.69.

[13] Seeberg, Vilma, op. cit., pp. 268.

certainty about the real situation. With respect to formal education, it is suggested that 25 per cent of all school-age children were attending primary schools, 3 per cent were enrolled in secondary schools and only 0.3 per cent were in some form of higher education. One thing that is clear, however, is that educational opportunities were poorest in the countryside where most of the population lived, and illiteracy amongst women was common.[14]

The government's assault on illiteracy began when a conference concerning worker and peasant education was held in September 1950 and measures for reducing illiteracy were proposed. In December of that year, the State Council ratified directives for the development of spare time education for peasants and set targets for literacy education. These included the expectation that peasants would learn more than one thousand commonly used Chinese characters and have basic reading, writing and numeracy skills within three years.[15] Considerable difficulties, however, were encountered in the implementation of these directives. Besides the unrealistic expectation of achieving basic literacy within three years, and the efficacy of non-literate methods of communication used in the early days of communist rule, meant that men who were busy with revolutionary activities felt that the arduous task of memorizing characters was not worth the effort. Various fast literacy learning methods were tried, only to find that participants just as quickly forgot all they had learned. The emphasis on political education and land reform over literacy education also affected motivation.[16] In 1953, further directives targeted cadres and workers, doubling the number of characters to be learned and specifying higher levels of reading and writing skills. The fast literacy efforts of the past were criticized and

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[14] Cleverly, John, op. cit., p.69.

[15] *Zhongguo jiaoyu nianjian 1949-1981,* op. cit., p.578.

[16] Peterson, Glen , "State ideologies and the transformation of rural China," op. cit., pp.104-105.

it was recognized that literacy work was an on-going and complex task.[17] These criticisms, however, together with the recognition that spare time schooling could not produce the same consistent improvement in literacy levels that regular schooling could, led to a loss of enthusiasm for literacy work across the nation and a general disbanding of literacy classes.[18]

During these early years, women attending spare time literacy classes increased from a participation rate of 40 per cent of all those attending in 1951, to 78 per cent in 1952.[19] Women of all ages attended classes, some taking their whole families with them. Such was their enthusiasm to become literate that it drew comment from Lin Handa, the Secretary-General of the National Anti-Illiteracy Association, that the best students in village literacy classes were women and not the labourers and cadres for whom the classes were primarily intended.[20] The cessation of classes because the men had more important matters than literacy education also cut short opportunities for women, contributing to the legacy of female illiteracy which has since proved difficult to eradicate.

The need for literacy became more urgent with collectivization, however, because it required the keeping of records. Not only were cadres with some degree of literacy needed, peasants also had to record the work done by the members of their own households. Attempts to use non-literate methods failed and it is likely organizational problems which resulted in the disbanding of many mutual aid teams and cooperatives

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[17] *Zhongguo jiaoyu nianjian 1949-1981*, op. cit., pp.577,578.

[18] Peterson, Glen, "State ideologies and the transformation of rural China," op. cit., p.106-107.

[19] Hunan Sheng Fulian Funü Ganbu Xuexiao and Hunan Shengwei Dangxiao Funü Lilun Jiaoyanshi, *Funüxue gailun* [Introduction to Women's Studies], (Beijing Funü Ertong Chubanshe, 1987), p.218.

[20] Lin Handa, "Wei shehui zhuyi jianshe kaizhan saomang gongzuo" [Develop anti-illiteracy work in order to build socialism] , (Shanghai *Wenhuibao*, Part 1, 2/11/1955), *Union Research Institute* (L0364 42222). Cited in Peterson, Glen, "State ideologies and the transformation of rural China," op. cit., p.114.

were related to a lack of literate personnel.[21] On 29th March 1956 the Central Committee of the CCP and the State Council jointly promulgated the "Decision on the eradication of illiteracy" which stated that workers were to learn 2000 characters and peasants, 1500. Peasants were to reach a standard where they could read popular books and newspapers, keep simple accounts, write simple notes and do simple calculations with an abacus.[22] The 1956 document which aimed to sweep away illiteracy from the whole nation within five to seven years, was accompanied by language reform. Putonghua, based on the dialect spoken by the people in and around Beijing, was chosen as the national language and simplified characters were to make literacy more attainable. Pinyin, the spelling out of the sounds of Chinese characters in romanized lettering, was to aid in the pronunciation of putonghua.[23]

The new literacy skills were to play a role in economic production and political education. To make the acquisition of literacy relevant and to overcome the problem of lack of motivation experienced earlier, a three-tiered series of literacy primers was developed. The first primer was compiled locally and contained vocabulary dealing with daily life in the collective such as the recording of work-points, team assignments, and the keeping of accounts and receipts. It also built up a knowledge of the various structures within the collective and provided the basis for indoctrinating peasants into the new society.[24] The second level of primers covered vocabulary used at the county level, while the third level focused on vocabulary related to the state, including official ideology and

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[21] Peterson, Glen, ibid. p.111.

[22] *Zhongguo jiaoyu nianjian 1949-1981*, op. cit., p.578.

[23] Cleverley, John, op. cit., p.120.

[24] Peterson, Glen, "State ideologies and the transformation of rural China," op. cit., 115.

the names of important officials.[25] The aim of the 1956 decision was that workers and miners should achieve a literacy level of 95 per cent within 3-5 years, while peasants and urban residents should reach a level of 70 per cent within 5-7 years. Minority areas and other difficult regions would take longer and needed to proceed according to local conditions.[26] The political upheavals that followed the 1956 decision, however, affected progress in the ensuing years.

From 1949 to 1958, about 60 million people participated in literacy classes, with the greatest participation rate occurring during the earliest stages of the Great Leap Forward (1958-59). The quality of literacy work at that time, however, was sacrificed in order to satisfy the desire to speed it up.[27] Eventually the demand for production during the Great Leap Forward drew many peasants out of spare time classes, with the result that many lapsed into illiteracy.[28] Later, during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), literacy work stopped altogether, with educational institutions and classes being disrupted by the political turmoil. Many peasants reverted to illiteracy and many children whose schooling was interrupted by the Cultural Revolution added to the pool of illiterates.[29]

What was achieved in female education during the Mao era? According to William Laveley [et al.], female literacy and education increased in two periods, the first from 1950-1958, and the second from the late 1960s until the mid 1970s. They attribute this primarily to the new opportunities for more females to receive a primary education. The famine years from 1959-1961, they say, particularly affected female education and caused

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[25] Peterson, Glen, ibid., p.115.

[26] *Zhongguo jiaoyu nianjian 1949-1981, op. cit.,* p.896.

[27] Qian Tang, "Adult education in China: policies and practice in the 1980s," *Policy Studies Review,* Vol.13, Nos.3 & 4, (1994), p.393.

[28] Stites, Regie and Semali, Ladislaus , op. cit., p.51.

regional disparities to widen.[30] If we look at *Figure 3.1* we can see in the data from the 1982 census that there was a steady over-all decline in illiteracy rates amongst females, with the sharpest decline amongst those in the 1938-42 and 1943-47 cohorts and again in the 1958-62 and 1963-67 cohorts.

Figure 3.1: **China's illiterate population by sex and birth cohort in 1982**

Source: 1982 Census, *Zhongguo renkou nianjian 1986*, p. 315.

These women would have completed their primary school education between the years 1949-1958 and 1969-78 which supports the claims made by Laverly [et al.]. However, the bulge in the 1948-52 and 1953-57 cohorts who would have received their primary schooling between the years 1959-1968 cannot be attributed to the effects of the famine years alone, because these cohorts were born at the same time as there was a sharp increase in population.[31] This increase would have placed even greater strain on limited

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[29] Qian Tang, op. cit., p.394.

[30] Lavely, William [et al.], op. cit., p.61.

[31] See data in *Zhongguo renkou nianjian 1986*, p.315. (1982 census figures)

educational resources at the same time that the effects of the Cultural Revolution, which disrupted schooling, were being felt. What is extraordinary, is the reduction in female illiteracy which occurs in the 1963-67 cohort where the illiteracy rate was reduced by 8.5 per cent at the same time as the population in that cohort increased by more than one third of the previous cohort. This group would have completed their primary education during the years 1974-78, suggesting that many more girls were attending school during those years.

These results still need to be treated with considerable caution, however, since levels of schooling are used to indicate literacy levels. Although school enrolments increased steadily overall, they declined significantly from 1959-1963. From 1964-1976 they rapidly rose to an amazing 96 per cent, but Liu Yingjie argues that there is an underestimation of school-age children during the period 1974-1980 which, of course, would undermine this figure. Enrolment rates are also not the same as attendance rates, which are believed to be significantly lower.[32] According to Vilma Seeberg, there was in reality very little change in illiteracy rates during the Mao era with early gains being undermined later by reduced standards and politicization.[33] Suzanne Pepper suggests that one may argue either for or against post-Mao claims of improvement in literacy levels during the Mao era if only a few years basic literacy training, which seems to be the pattern emerging at the end of the Cultural Revolution, is used as the criteria for determining literacy achievement.[34] Whatever is the case, it is widely known that the 1982 census results which showed there were 237 million illiterate adults, 164 million of whom

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[32] Liu Yingjie (ed), *Zhongguo jiaoyu dashidian 1949-1990* [Chronology of Major Education Events in China], (Zhejiang Jiaoyu Chubanshe, Zhejiang, 1993). Cited in Tsui Kaiyuen, "Economic reform and attainment in basic education in China," *The China Quarterly*, Issue 149, (1997), p.110.

[33] Seeberg, Vilma, op. cit., pp.278-279.

[34] Pepper, Suzanne, *Radicalism and Education Reform in 20th-century China:* op. cit., pp.446-447.

were women, surprised and shocked officials.[35] Regardless of what progress was actually made, the disparity between males and females is still very clear in the data.

3.2 Post Mao

After the death of Mao Zedong in 1976 and the introduction of the economic reforms in 1978, it soon became apparent that the educational quality of China's population needed to be raised if the reforms were to be successful. In November 1978, the State Council called for renewed efforts to eliminate illiteracy amongst peasants with the three directives to 'block, sweep and raise'. The universalization of primary education was to *block* the production of new illiterates. The eradication of illiteracy amongst young and middle-aged people between the ages of 12 and 45 would *sweep* away illiteracy. The provision of post literacy education would consolidate newly acquired literacy skills whilst providing vocational education, thus *raising* the quality of the labour force.[36] The requirements for basic literacy were the same as those published in 1956 and they were to be achieved by at least 85 per cent of those aged 12 to 45 years, with priority being given to young people, party members, collective members, commune cadres and agricultural technicians. Particular attention was to be given to literacy work amongst young women. This target was to be achieved by 1980, 1982 or a short time afterwards, according to local conditions.[37]

The 1982 census data, however, shows that these targets were still not met, with 34.5 per cent of the adult population aged 15 years or more still being illiterate, 69.1 per

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[35] *Zhongguo renkou nianjian 1986*, op. cit., p.315.

[36] *Zhongguo jiaoyu nianjian 1949-1981*, op. cit., p.577.

[37] *Zhongguo jiaoyu nianjian 1949-1981*, ibid., p.900.

cent of whom were women.[38] More detailed analysis of the data in *Figure 3.2* shows that the disparities between regions, and between males and females, were quite substantial.

Figure 3.2: **Provincial male and female illiteracy in 1982**

Source: 1982 Census, *Zhongguo renkou nianjian 1986*, pp. 316-317. (Note: These figures are based on those aged 12 years and above.)

For example, Beijing had the lowest level of illiteracy at 14.9 per cent.[39] Contrasted against this, is Qinghai, Gansu, Yunnan, Guizhou, Ningxia and Anhui, where 43-49 per cent of the population were illiterate. Tibet *(Xizang)* stands isolated with a staggering 73.15 per cent of its population being illiterate. The greatest disparity between males and females occurs in Guangdong. Although it had a relatively low provincial level of illiteracy compared with other provinces, of the 22.9 per cent who were illiterate, males comprised 4.7 per cent and females, 18.3 per cent.[40] That means approximately 79.7 per cent of the province's illiterates were female. Surprisingly, Xinjiang, with an illiteracy rate of 30.7 per

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[38] *Zhongguo renkou nianjian 1986*, op. cit., p.317.

[39] See Appendices *Table 11.1.*

[40] See Appendices *Table 11.3.*

cent, had the smallest male/female disparity, with males comprising 13.1 per cent and females, 17.6 per cent of the region's illiterates (i.e. 57.3 per cent of Xinjiang's illiterates were female). Thus *Figures 3.1* and *3.2* clearly show that the disparity between males and females occurs across all ages and across all regions.

What about intra-regional variations? Glen Peterson's work on Guangdong Province shows that the wide disparities in literacy levels seen at the national level are also apparent within regions. For example, although Guangdong's overall illiteracy rate in 1982 stood at 22.9 per cent, some minority areas were reported as having an illiteracy rate of 90 per cent.[41] In stark contrast were areas with high literacy levels in places like Meixian (Mei County) where Meizhou's literacy level was 91 per cent. This was higher than Guangzhou's 85.8 per cent and Foshan's 86 per cent, and was the highest in Guangdong.[42] Guangdong's literacy figures revealed that there were three different types of areas within the province. The highest literacy levels were to be found in the prosperous Pearl Delta region in the south and in Meixian in the north-east, while the lowest, as one would expect, were associated with minority areas, and poor coastal and mountainous regions. Between these two there was a middle zone. Poverty alone did not account for the large disparities in Guangdong, however, as Meixian was inhabited by the poor Hakka people.[43] In Guangdong, literacy levels were highest in areas which traditionally valued education and where there was an established foundation of schooling. Local commercial development also fostered the development of literacy. While female illiteracy in

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[41] Guowuyuan Renkou Pucha Bangongshi, *Disan ci quanguo renkou pucha shougong huizong ziliao huibian* [Compendium of Manually Compiled Materials from the Third National Census] vol.5, (Beijing, 1983), pp.122-29; Guangdong Jiaoyuting (eds), *Guangdong jiaoyu nianjian 1949-85* [Guangdong Education Yearbook 1949-85] (Guangzhou, 1986), pp.51-52. Cited in Glen Peterson, "The struggle for literacy in post-revolutionary rural Guangdong," *The China Quarterly*, Issue 137, (January 1994), p.940.

[42] Peterson, Glen, ibid., p.938.

[43] Peterson, Glen, ibid., p.937.

Guangdong was lower than most other areas of China (37 per cent of females were still illiterate in 1982 compared to a national average of 45 per cent), traditional values which favour boys over girls still affected school enrolment and attendance rates for girls.[44]

The unexpectedly high illiteracy rates revealed by the 1982 census and a sample survey carried out later in 1987 prompted the State Council to issue new regulations for the eradication of illiteracy in February 1988. People aged between 15 and 40 years were targeted, with the goal of reaching 85 per cent literacy in rural areas and 90 per cent in urban areas within five years. Literacy conferences were held in Beijing in November of 1988 and Lanzhou in September 1989 in which counties and individuals were commended for special achievements in literacy work. A national tele-conference was held in 1990 to observe International Literacy Year.[45] Against this background, what was being done to reduce illiteracy amongst women?

In March 1989, the All-China Women's Federation, together with twelve other government bodies launched an education campaign for rural women called 'competing and learning' *(shuang xue shuang bi)*. This campaign targeted around 179 million rural women who were responsible for carrying out 60 to 70 per cent of the nation's agricultural production. In order to maintain a stable food supply for the country in the future, the government felt that there was a need to improve educational standards and lift agricultural productivity.[46] Because it was middle-aged women who were staying home to work the farm, the idea was for these women to learn to read and write while also learning skills and technologies which would help them with their farming and side-line production.

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[44] Peterson, Glen, ibid., p.941.

[45] Huang Shiqi, "Non-formal education and modernization," in Ruth Hayhoe (ed), *Education and Modernization: the Chinese Experience,* (Pergamon Press, Oxford, 1992), p.148.

[46] Rai, Shirin M. and Zhang Junzuo, " 'Competing and learning': women and the state in contemporary rural mainland China," *Issues and Studies,* Vol.30, No.3, (1994), pp.52-54.

Competition would provide the incentive for these women to take part.[47] Besides improving agricultural production, this campaign also aimed to address two other issues in rural areas – first, female illiteracy and second, the poor social status of rural women. If these women became better educated, earned more and felt more confident it was thought that their social position within the family and the community would also improve.[48] According to a report in the *Renmin ribao (People's Daily)*, by 1992, 120 million women had participated in the campaign, of whom 90 million had received technical training, another 12.5 million had specialized technical training, 8 million had become literate, 1.5 million had done agricultural courses while another 340 thousand had become technicians.[49]

3.3 Achievements and problems in the 1980s

Perhaps the best way of viewing the progress of the 1980s is by comparing the 1982 and 1990 censuses.[50] Before examining the data, however, it is necessary to point out that some of the data from the two censuses are not entirely comparable. In the 1990 census the term 'urban population' refers to the population contained within the officially administered districts of the city and the city neighbourhoods administered by street committees, as well as those living in neighbourhoods administered by street committees in towns. The 'rural population' consists of the people not included in the above

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[47] *Zhongguo Funübao*, March 10, 1989, p.1. Cited in Rai, Shirin M. and Zhang Junzuo, ibid., p.56.

[48] Rai, Shirin M. and Zhang Junzuo, ibid., p.58.

[49] *Renmin ribao* [People's Daily], 7 & 8/3/1992. Cited in Rai, Shirin M.and Zhang Junzuo, ibid., 61.

[50] In order to compare the 1982 and 1990 censuses it was necessary to regroup the 1990 census figures so that the same groups of people were being compared.

definition.[51] The 1982 census is similar but tabulations of data do not usually include the districts administered by cities, whereas data from the 1990 census include them. Another problem is that provincial data for the 1982 census is based on literacy figures for those aged 12 years or more, and they do not include data according to age. Thus it has not been possible to recalculate literacy figures using those aged 15 years or more when using provincial data from the 1982 census in comparisons with 1990 and 1995 data. Despite these problems when comparing data from the two censuses, gender related trends are still clear.

In the eighties, some demographers have raised questions about the accuracy of the 1982 census.[52] An examination of population data actually shows that the two sets of data match quite well, with only one very minor problem in the 1958-62 cohort where there seems to be an unexpected increase in that population cohort in the 1990 data for no accountable reason.[53] Since the data from the two censuses generally correlate well across the various cohorts, literacy data should similarly correlate well. The next task, then, is to examine the data to see how female illiteracy patterns may be related to other factors such as gender, ethnicity, urban/ rural status, and economic development.

3.3.1 Gender factors

The 1982 census revealed that although there had been a steady decline in illiteracy, there was still a considerable gender gap. If we compare the data from the 1982 and 1990 censuses, we should be able to see what has been achieved, especially with

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[51] *Zhongguo renkou tongji nianjian 1996*, p.364.

[52] Petersen, William and Renee with the collaboration of an International Panel of Demographers, *Dictionary of Demography - Terms, Concepts and Institutions (A-M)* (Greenwood Press, New York, 1986), pp.142-143.

respect to reducing that gap. First of all, by plotting the two sets of data alongside each other in *Figure 3.3*, there appears to be a dramatic reduction in female illiteracy amongst the 1948-52 and the 1953-57 cohorts which suggests that adult literacy programs were most effective in reaching females between the ages (in 1990) of 33 and 42 years.

Figure 3.3: **Adult illiteracy within birth cohorts in 1982 and 1990**

Sources: 1982 census, *Zhongguo renkou nianjian 1986*, p. 315; 1990 census, *Zhongguo renkou tongji nianjian 1994*, pp. 162-165.

This could reflect the success of literacy programs such as the 'competing and learning' campaign which was specifically aimed at middle-aged rural women. In my own field work, however, of those interviewed who were illiterate, few had attended literacy classes, and if they had, it was only for a short time. Most of these said they had forgotten what they had learned. Housework and caring for children were most often cited as the reasons for not attending or for dropping out of literacy classes. If this is characteristic of other rural areas, it then becomes difficult to account for the dramatic reductions in illiteracy

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[53] See data in *Zhongguo renkou nianjian 1986*, op. cit., p.315; 1990 census, *Zhongguo renkou tongji nianjian 1994*, pp.162-165.

seen in the census data.[54] Amongst younger females the drop in literacy rates is not so dramatic. This might be explained by the fact that the 1982 census data show there had already been a steep decline in illiteracy rates amongst this group, most probably because of increased opportunities for schooling. Of those who had missed out on schooling, it is most likely that these younger women would have been too preoccupied with the care of young children between censuses to attend literacy programs.

What has happened to the gender gap which was so clearly apparent across the different regions in the 1982 data? *Figure 3.4* shows that there is still a significant gap across all regions.

Figure 3.4: **Provincial male and female illiteracy in 1990**

Source: 1990 census, *Zhongguo renkou tongji nianjian 1992,* pp. 140-141. (See Appendix A for a comparison of the percentages between regions and censuses. Note: 1990 figures are based on the population aged 15 years and above.)

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[54] These observations were made during fieldwork in Fufeng County, Shaanxi during March 1998. Some 59 women were interviewed of whom 23 said they were illiterate. The fieldwork is discussed in detail later in Chapter Nine.

If we compare this chart with *Figure 3.2*, however, there appears to be a shift to the left of the chart, indicating a further reduction in illiteracy in all regions. Thus a comparison of data from the two censuses shows that the gender gap, although it *appears* to have narrowed a little, is still quite significant.[55] It is clear that across all age groups and all regions, being female is still the characteristic most likely to be associated with illiteracy.

3.3.2 Ethnic factors

China has 56 officially recognized ethnic groupings, of which the Han group is the largest (93 per cent).[56] While the official policy of the government is to promote the use of putonghua across the nation, it also recognizes the importance of the various ethnic languages in the development of literacy.[57] Despite this, it is thought that one of the most likely characteristics of an illiterate person is that he or she is a member of a minority group. If we use the 1990 census data to compare Han illiterates with minority illiterates across the different regions we find that this is not necessarily so. *Figure 3.5* shows that there is not the same consistent disparity across regions between minority groups and the Han nationality that is clear between the sexes.[58] The line drawn across the graph shows the points where minority and Han illiteracy levels are about the same.[59] Those regions above the line are regions where minority groupings have an illiteracy level greater than the level for the Han nationality, those below the line are regions in which the Han

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[55] See Appendices *Table 11.1* for percentages. Bear in mind that *Figure 3.4* uses data for those aged 15 years or more, while in *Figure 3.2,* it is based on those aged 12 years or more.

[56] Harrell, Stevan, "Linguistics and hegemony in China," *International Journal of the Sociology of Language,* Vol.103, (1993), p.97.

[57] Huang Xing, "On writing systems for China's minorities created by foreign missionaries," *International Journal of the Sociology of Language,* Vol.97, (1992), p.82.

[58] See Appendices *Table 11.4.*

[59] For example, Liaoning is just below the line because it has slightly more Han illiterates (11.74 %) than non-Han illiterates (10.15%).

illiteracy exceeds that of the minorities. It is also clear that in the autonomous regions which have large minority populations, a greater percentage of those minority populations is illiterate.

Figure 3.5: **Illiteracy among Han and minorities by province in 1990**

Sources: 1990 census, *Zhongguo minzu renkou ziliao: 1990 renkou pucha shuju*, pp. 74-75; *Zhongguo renkou tongji nianjian 1992*, pp. 140-141.

Minority groups, when taken as a whole across the nation, are consistently more illiterate than the Han nationality across both sex and age groups as *Figure 3.6* shows. In fact, the gap between non-Han illiterates and Han illiterates (males and females) appears to have widened amongst the younger cohorts, indicating that minority groups are not enjoying the same benefits resulting from the spread of basic education as the Han. Furthermore, the gender disparity does not appear to have lessened amongst the younger non-Han illiterates to the same extent as it has amongst the Han. The aggregate national data, which takes no account of regional and intra-minority ethnic differences, however, obscures the fact that there is a relatively higher rate of literacy amongst some minority groups in some regions, for example, Liaoning, Jilin and Heilongjiang. (*Figure 3.5*

indicates that more Han are illiterate than non-Han in these three regions.) These three

regions are inhabited by a large Korean population who traditionally, have regarded

education as a basic necessity rather than the means to some other end.[60] The Han

Chinese, on the other hand, traditionally view education as a way of improving one's

social and economic status. Amongst Koreans in the north-east, education has had a high

priority with relatively good facilities, a guaranteed income for teachers, few drop-outs,

and amongst those in the sixth grade of primary school, 50 per cent are girls.[61] A high

regard for education by some minority groups such as the Koreans means that illiteracy is

not always associated with ethnic minorities. Of most importance to the argument in this

paper though, is that, whether Han or non-Han, females are generally more illiterate than

males.

Figure 3.6: **Illiteracy among Han and minorities by birth cohort and sex in 1990**

Source: 1990 census, *Zhongguo minzu renkou ziliao: 1990 nian renkou pucha shuju,* p. 76.
(Han/minority, male/female illiteracy calculated as % of Han/minority, male/female
population respectively.)

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[60] Pepper, Suzanne, *Radicalism and Education Reform in 20th-century China:* op. cit., pp.442-443.

[61] Pepper, Suzanne, ibid., pp.443-445.

3.3.3 Urban/ rural status

People living in urban areas (cities and towns), especially large cities, have always had greater educational advantages over those living in rural areas. Since the early 1950s there has been a separation of urban and rural development in China. With the introduction of the First Five Year Plan, the government expected that agricultural production would finance the development of heavy industry in the cities. The exploitation of the countryside to provide for urban industrialization has led to gross inequalities between urban and rural areas ever since.[62] This has been compounded by the strict enforcement of the household registration system which, until recently, made it almost impossible for rural residents to migrate or avail themselves of the privileges enjoyed by those in the cities. Rural education has always lagged behind urban education, encountering problems with funding and organization. The universalization of nine-year compulsory education has been difficult to achieve in some rural areas with remote areas and regions to the west experiencing the most problems. In some better off rural areas, education has low priority amongst some families as well as amongst some local authorities. Amongst the former, improving the family's circumstances first has often been placed ahead of a daughter's education. She may be withdrawn from school to go out to work so that the family can have the benefit of her labour before she marries and goes to live with her husband's family. Numerous reports into such problems were published during the 1980s.[63] Amongst the latter, there

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[62] Meisner, Maurice, *Mao's China and After: A History of the People's Republic*, (The Free Press, New York/London, 1986), p.136.

[63] All-China Women's Federation, "Employment of child labor by family-run enterprises is a problem that demands immediate solution," *Chinese Sociology and Anthropology*, Vol.21, No.3, (1989), pp.9-10; Zhejiang Women's Federation, "Resolutely dismiss child laborers to protect the legitimate rights and interests of children," *Chinese Education*, Summer 1989; Li Yunhong, "More attention should be paid to the education of girls," *Chinese Sociology and Anthropology*, Vol.21, No.3, (1989); Fujian Education Commission, "An investigation of the status of primary education among rural school-age girls," *Chinese Education*, (Summer 1989).

are those who think that education is a form of unproductive social welfare which soaks up limited financial resources and produces no immediate results.[64]

Another report based on the 10 percent tabulation of the 1990 census result revealed that although enrolment rates in primary schools were 97.8 percent in 1990, 19 percent of all 6-14 year olds (16 per cent of boys and 22.3 per cent of girls) were not at school at the time of the census.[65] Of rural children aged 7-11 years (many children in rural areas do not start school until they are 7), 11.9 percent were not attending school at the time of the census.[66] Since most of the population lives in rural areas, this represents a large number of potential illiterates and semi-literates. The report does not specify what was meant by 'children not at school', but it is likely that it included children who have never attended school, those who have dropped out and not returned, as well as those who attend irregularly and who were not at school at the time of the census. The first two categories alone would not account for these high figures.

Since most of the Chinese population is rural, any significant reduction in illiteracy has to occur in rural areas. An examination of the data shows that overall literacy rates in cities and towns are almost the same, while those for rural areas (counties) still lag significantly behind.[67] For this reason it is most appropriate to analyze the data only in terms of urban data (including towns) and rural data. Amongst those born after 1956, the illiteracy rate is less than 5 per cent in urban areas. Illiteracy rates also appear to have been significantly reduced to less than 10 per cent amongst those born after 1960 in rural areas,

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[64] Zhang Ning, "A conflict of interests: current problems in educational reform," in Watson, Andrew (ed), *Economic Reform and Social Change*, (Routledge, London, 1992), pp.145, 147.

[65] See Chapter Four this thesis for a complete breakdown of this data by sex and region along with a discussion of the issues involved.

[66] *Zhongguo renkou tongji nianjian 1993*, "Quanguo you 3373.9 wan xueling shaonian ertong buzai xiao" ["There are 33.739 million school-aged children and teenagers not at school across the country"], p. 273.

which confirms that primary education is becoming accessible to more rural children. When considering the effect that urban/rural status has on the gender disparity in *Figure 3.7* we see that rural women are still more likely to be illiterate than urban women.

Figure 3.7: **Urban and rural female illiteracy in 1982 and 1990**

Sources: 1982 census, *Zhongguo renkou nianjian 1986,* p. 315; 1990 census, *Zhongguo renkou tongji nianjian 1994,* pp. 166-177.
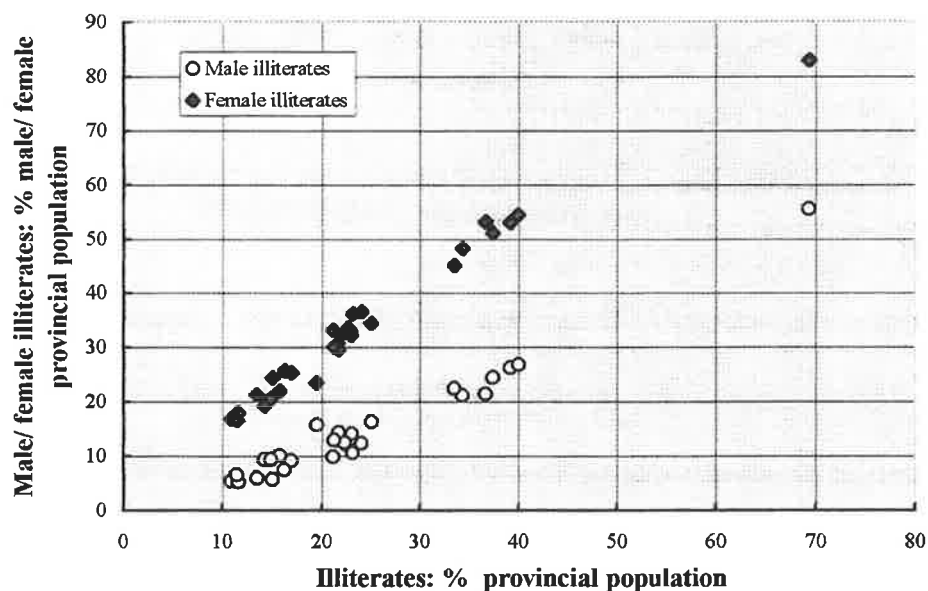
It seems, however, that the greatest reductions in illiteracy have also occurred in rural areas. As with the national data, it is the 1948-52 and 1953-57 cohorts in which this has taken place. We can also see a general decline in illiteracy rates amongst younger females which seems to indicate that opportunities for girls to receive basic primary education in rural areas have been improving steadily.

Despite the overall reductions shown in *Figure 3.7,* it appears that rural females, although showing a significant overall decline in illiteracy, are not keeping pace with their urban counterparts, resulting in an increase in the *proportion* of female illiterates who are

[67] See data in *Zhongguo renkou tongji nianjian 1994,* pp.166-177.

rural. *Figure 3.8* shows that in 1990 around 80 per cent of the total female illiterates in the 1926-30 cohort lived in the countryside, while in the 1971-75 cohort it was around 95 per cent.

Figure 3.8: **Female illiterates across cities, towns and counties in 1990**

Source: 1990 census. *Zhongguo renkou tongji nianjian 1994,* pp.162-177. (100% represents the total female illiterates in each cohort.)

At the same time, the proportion of female illiterates living in towns and cities in the same cohorts were: 15.0 per cent (cities) and 5.1 per cent (towns) in the older cohort reducing to 3.7 per cent (cities) and 1.3 per cent (towns) in the younger cohort. In other words, the urban/rural gap was larger in the younger cohort than in the older cohort. Figure 3.8 shows that a progressively larger proportion of female illiterates in the younger age cohorts were living in rural areas than in urban areas.[68] This increase occurs despite changes in urban/rural definitions in the 1980s which resulted in more than 10 million rural illiterates being relabeled 'urban'.[69] Thus the increasing proportion of rural females evident

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[68] Based on data in *Zhongguo renkou tongji nianjian 1994,* pp.162-177. (1990 census figures)

[69] Refer back to the earlier discussion of this at the start of this chapter.

in *Figure 3.8* might have been even greater if the effects of urbanization were not producing a counter-effect.[70]

With respect to the gender gap, *Figure 3.9* appears to indicate that it has almost disappeared amongst the youngest cohorts in urban areas.

Figure 3.9: **Male and female illiteracy by birth cohort and urban/rural status in 1990**

Source: 1990 census, *Zhongguo renkou tongji nianjian 1994*, pp. 166-177.

This is deceptive, however, when illiteracy percentages are very small. (*Figure 3.12* will show that in Beijing female illiterates comprised almost 75 per cent of the total illiterates in 1990.) Nevertheless, it is very clear that female illiterates outnumber male illiterates across all cohorts in rural areas.

A survey carried out during 1990 under the direction of the All-China Women's Federation and the National Statistical Bureau, in preparation for the Women's World Conference held in Beijing in 1995, investigated the status of women across the whole

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[70] The large percentage of rural females who are illiterate is to be expected because most of China's population is rural. Similarly, fewest people live in towns. What is significant, is the increasing or decreasing proportion who are illiterate.

country, including women's education and literacy levels.[71] Around 2000 interviewers visited homes across 23 provinces, autonomous regions and centrally administered municipalities, with 41,755 completed questionnaires being returned. Males and females, urban and rural, were more or less equally represented. Ages ranged from 18 to 64 years and a variety of occupations as well as the unemployed were included.[72] Whereas the census generally used levels of education to determine literacy levels, this survey conducted a test using a random selection of 125 characters from the State Council's 2500 commonly used characters. The survey found that the average number of characters recognized by males was 94.5, while for females, it was 69. Urban males averaged 116 characters and urban females, 102. Rural males averaged 89 characters and rural females, 61.[73] Thus the survey data confirms the disparities in literacy levels between males and females and between urban and rural areas shown by the census data. This suggests that urban females are more literate than rural males who are in turn, more literate than rural females. Further analysis of the survey data on urban and rural females across age groups showed that only 1.5 per cent of urban females aged 20-24 years knew less than 50 characters compared to 29.6 per cent amongst rural females of the same age. These data suggest that educational opportunities for girls in rural areas were still much more limited than those for urban girls during the 1980s. The test used in the survey, however, does not test for literacy in an ethnic language, nor does it attempt to test comprehension of texts or the ability to write a meaningful statement. Because of these factors, the survey data do not lend themselves to too much detailed analysis. The survey data, however, support

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[71] Guan Tao (ed), *Zhongguo funü shehui diwei gaiguan* [General Survey of the Social Status of Chinese Women], (Zhongguo Funü Chubanshe, Beijing, 1993).

[72] Guan Tao, ibid., Appendix III.

[73] Guan Tao, ibid., p.45.

census data, showing that being female and living in the countryside are the two most common attributes associated with illiteracy.

3.3.4 Economic factors

Illiteracy is often, though not always, associated with poverty. A survey of education in the poor areas of China carried out in 1992-93 found that 10 percent of children between the ages of 6 and 12 in some of the 592 areas classified as poverty zones by the State Council's Poverty Assistance Office, had never been to school, with the percentage being even higher in rural areas. These children have never had the opportunity to become literate through regular schooling. In fact, 57 per cent of those who did not complete their primary education across the whole country cited financial problems as the main reason for dropping out. Many did not reach third grade.[74] A table drawn up by the Task Forces from the State Office of Statistics and the State Education Commission dividing regions according to literacy levels based on 1990 census data shows how literacy levels related to income levels in 1990.[75] By using information contained within this chart as the basis for *Table 3.1* and adding the figures for female illiteracy, it is now possible to see how adult literacy as well as literacy levels for females relate to income levels. Overall there seems to be some link between economic circumstances and literacy levels, with poorer areas generally having higher illiteracy rates. However, areas B and C, and areas D and E which have similar income levels have significantly different illiteracy rates. Similarly, areas C and D have similar literacy rates but different income levels. The rates for female illiteracy follow a similar trend to the rates for adult illiteracy, however, the rates for female illiteracy are higher. This suggests that rather than poorer economic

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[74] Li Chunling, op. cit., p.30.

[75] Guojia Tongjiju Shehui yu Keji Tongjisi and Guojia Jiaoyu Weiyuanhui Chengren Jiaoyusi, op. cit., p.28.

circumstances being responsible for higher illiteracy rates amongst females, being female is the overriding factor in illiteracy, regardless of economic circumstances.

Table 3.1: **Relationship between illiteracy rates and economic conditions in 1990**

Area	Province, region, municipality	Ave. income GDP (yuan per month)	Adult illiteracy rate (% adult pop)	Female illiteracy rate (% female pop)
A	Beijing, Tianjin, Shanghai, Liaoning, Guangdong	>2000	13.23	20.73
B	Jilin, Heilongjiang	1500-2000	14.66	20.12
C	Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Fujian, Shandong, Xinjiang	1500-2000	22.74	33.01
D	Hebei, Neimongu, Jiangxi, Henan, Shanxi, Hubei, Sichuan, Hainan, Guangxi, Shaanxi	<1500`	20.77	30.83
E	Anhui, Yunnan, Xizang, Gansu, Guizhou, Qinghai, Ningxia	<1500	36.8	51.13

Sources: 1990 census, *Jiaoyu yanjiu*, No.11, (1995), p. 28; *Zhongguo renkou tongji nianjian 1992*, pp. 140-141. (Note Hunan is missing.)

What has been achieved during the eighties? The data from the 1982 and 1990 censuses seem to indicate that progress has been made in reducing illiteracy on two fronts, first, through expanding opportunities for schooling and second, through literacy programs amongst adults. When comparing the two sets of data, it appears that the greatest reductions are occurring amongst females, particularly amongst middle-aged rural women. The data also suggest that improved educational opportunities for girls have also continued to reduce female illiteracy. Whether or not census data adequately reflects the true extent of illiteracy, it is clear that being female is still the characteristic most commonly associated with illiteracy irrespective of age, nationality, locality and economic circumstances.

3.4 From 1990 to 1995

The next task is to discover what has been happening during the 1990s. In August 1993 the *Regulations on Work to Wipe Out Illiteracy* promulgated in 1988 were revised by the State Council. The aim was to reduce the illiteracy rate of the young and middle-aged population to below 5 per cent by the end of this century.[76] Not only was the target raised from 85 per cent to 95 per cent, but the upper age limit of the targeted group was also raised from those aged 15-40 years to all illiterates and semi-literates over the age of fifteen. Furthermore, it was expected that the literacy target for urban areas should be 98 per cent. In rural areas, post literacy education was to be integrated with technical education. Methods of assessing literacy work were to be implemented at all levels of government, each level checking on the next level down. Documents containing practical measures for implementing and assessing literacy work which had been developed and carried out in Fujian Province were distributed to help promote literacy work across the nation.[77] During 1993, new literacy and post literacy teaching materials were developed with the help of UNESCO subsidies, and trials were carried out in rural areas. In 1994, illiteracy rates for Beijing, Tianjin, Shanghai, Liaoning, Jilin and Heilongjiang fell below five per cent.[78]

Results from the one per cent population sample survey carried out in 1995 seem to confirm that there has been a further overall reduction in illiteracy since the 1990

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[76] Wang Dai and Li Jialin, "Chengren jiaoyu: nongcun chengren jiaoyu" ["Adult education: rural adult education"], *Zhongguo jiaoyu nianjian 1994* [China Education Yearbook 1994], p.232.

[77] Wang Dai and Li Jialin, ibid., pp.232-233.

[78] Sun Fengzhi, "Saomang yu nongcun chengren jiaoyu qude xin jinzhan" ["Literacy and rural adult education make new progress"], *Zhongguo xianzhen nianjian 1995* [China Counties and Towns Yearbook 1995] (Zhongguo Xianzhen Nianjianshe, 1995), p.74.

census.[79] *Figure 3.10*, when compared to *Figure 3.4*, shows that this has occurred across all regions in China, however, the disparity between males and females appears to have widened.[80]

Figure 3.10: **Provincial male and female illiteracy in 1995**

Source: 1995 1% sample survey, *Quanguo 1% renkou chouyang diaocha ziliao*, pp. 80-81. (See Appendix *Tables A1-2* for a comparison of the percentages between regions and censuses. Note: 1995 figures are based on the population aged 15 years and above.)

By how much will become more apparent in *Figure 3.12*. Regional disparities have also opened up more, especially amongst the autonomous regions.

In *Figure 3.11* we can compare progress between regions using data from the two censuses and the 1995 sample survey and, after making some allowance for the fact that

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[79] The 1990 census data and the 1995 one percent sample survey are grouped according to the official tabulations of the survey data. Later sample surveys in 1997 and 1998 suggest there has been a further reduction in illiteracy, but these reductions appear to relatively small, with the percentage of illiterates being 16.36 percent in 1997 and 15.78 per cent in 1998. Ministry of Education and the National Commission for UNESCO, *National Report for EFA 2000 Assessment*, (Beijing, January 20000), p.74; *Zhongguo tongji nianjian 1999* [Statistical Yearbook of China], p.122. The Ministry of Education comments that the eradication of illiteracy has become more difficult in the latter 1990s and attribute this to having fewer younger and middle-aged amongst the remainder, and the relaxation of effort in some areas which have passed the government's targets for eliminating illiteracy. Ministry of Education and the National Commission for UNESCO, ibid., p.75.

[80] See Appendices *Table 11.3*.

the time between censuses was eight years, while between 1990 and 1995 it was only five years, see what has been achieved. In the first place, it seems that illiteracy has been reduced across all regions, with several regions achieving considerable reductions. Furthermore, such progress has been made irrespective of urban/rural status, regional economic circumstances or the presence or absence of large ethnic groupings. Nevertheless, it is also clear that the more remote regions which also have greater proportions of their populations belonging to minority groupings still have a long way to go before catching up with the majority of regions which now appear to have reduced illiteracy levels to 20 per cent or less (See *Figures 3.10* and *3.11*).

A similar analysis of data for female illiteracy, however, shows that although the overall percent of illiterates has declined significantly, the proportion of illiterates who are female is increasing across all regions (see *Figure 3.12*). In fact, the rate at which this is occurring also appears to have accelerated between the 1990 census and the 1995 sample survey.[81] What does this mean? There are two possibilities. The first possibility is that the proportion of adult females graduating from literacy classes is not matching the proportion of illiterates who are female. The second possibility is that new female illiterates are being produced at a faster rate than male illiterates.[82]

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[81] A later sample survey in 1997 confirms this trend. In January 2000, the Ministry of Education reported that the proportion of female illiterates has been increasing during the 1990s. Ministry of Education and the National Commission for UNESCO, ibid., p.75.

[82] This is indeed happening. See Chapter Four of this thesis for the discussion of issues associated with schooling.

Illiterates: % provincial population

Figure 3.11: **Level of Illiteracy in 1982, 1990 and 1995 in each region**

Female illiterates: % Provincial illiterates

Figure 3.12: Female illiterates as a proportion of total illiterates in 1982, 1990 & 1995 in each region

Region axis labels: Beijing, Tianjin, Hebei, Shanxi, Neimengu, Liaoning, Jilin, Heilongjiang, Shanghai, Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Anhui, Fujian, Jiangxi, Shandong, Henan, Hubei, Hunan, Guangdong, Guangxi, Hainan, Sichuan, Guizhou, Yunnan, Xizang, Shaanxi, Gansu, Qinghai, Ningxia, Xinjiang

Legend:
▲ 1982
× 1990
△ 1995

Value axis: 50, 55, 60, 65, 70, 75, 80, 85

Region

When examining data from the 1990 census and the 1995 sample survey across the same cohorts in *Figure 3.13*, it is apparent that the most significant decline in illiteracy is once again amongst middle-aged females, this time in the 1951-55 and 1956-60 female cohorts (those aged 35-39 years and 40-44 years in 1995).

Figure 3.13: **Adult illiteracy within birth cohorts in 1990 and 1995**

Sources: 1990 census, Zhongguo renkou tongji nianjian 1994, pp. 162-165; 1995 1% sample survey, Quanguo 1% renkou chouyang diaocha ziliao 1995, pp. 82-85.

Again, it seems that adult literacy programs are impacting these women more than any other group.

If we then look at *Figure 3.14* we see that most of the decline in female illiteracy has occurred in rural areas. Once more, this has occurred in the 1951-55 and 1956-60 cohorts. Female illiteracy appears to have been reduced to below five per cent in urban areas amongst those born after 1961. This is most likely the result of improved opportunities for basic education for girls in urban areas. A leveling off of illiteracy figures, however, seems to have occurred amongst the 1966-70 and 1971-75 cohorts in urban and rural areas, indicating that the impact of basic education on reducing illiteracy

amongst females slowed down during the 1980s. In fact, the 10 per cent tabulation of the 1990 census found that there were 14 regions in which over 20 percent of all school-age children aged 6 to 14 were not at school for one reason or another. The rate for females was higher than for males.[83]

Figure 3.14: **Urban and rural female illiteracy within birth cohorts in 1990 and 1995**

Sources: 1990 census, *Zhongguo renkou tongji nianjian 1994*, pp. 166-177; 1995 1% sample survey, *Quanguo 1% renkou chouyang diaocha ziliao*, pp. 86-97.

When we look at *Figure 3.15* which includes the 1976-1980 cohort in the data for females in 1995, we see however, that illiteracy has declined to 5 per cent in this cohort in rural areas. This could indicate that measures to combat the prevalence of child labour and traditional attitudes towards females in rural areas have had some effect. Nevertheless, a recent report indicates that traditional values and customs favouring boys over girls are still very strong in rural areas.[84]

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[83] *Zhongguo renkou tongji nianjian 1993*, "Quanguo you 3373.9 wan xueling shaonian ertong buzai xiao," op. cit., p.273.

[84] British Broadcasting Commission (BBC), World Service. *Summary of World Broadcasts*, part 3, Asia-Pacific, (24/5/1997).

Figure 3.15: **Female illiteracy in cities, towns and counties in 1995**

Source: 1995 1% sample survey, *Quanguo 1% renkou chouyang diaocha ziliao,* pp. 86-97.

According to a recent report, the enrolment rate for primary school students in 1996 stood at 98.8 per cent. For junior secondary school students it was 82.4 per cent and for senior secondary students, it was 31.4.[85] This shows a steady decline in the percentages of eligible children entering school at higher levels. Thus literacy development is largely dependent on primary schooling for many children. The reality in 1995 was, however, that the retention rate for students who had managed to complete five years of primary education was still only 82.78 per cent, which means a considerable number are not completing primary school.[86] Despite a reduction in the yearly dropout rate from 2.4 per cent in 1990 to 1.49 per cent in 1995 in primary schools, many children are not at school long enough to consolidate their literacy skills.[87] Yet, if levels of schooling are used

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[85] Guojia Jiaoyu Weiyuanhui, *Zhongguo jiaoyu fazhan chengjiu 1992-1995* [Achievements in Educational Development in China 1992-1995], (1997), p.1.

[86] *Zhongguo jiaoyu shiye tongji nianjian 1996* [Educational Statistics Yearbook of China 1996], (Remin Jiaoyu Chubanshe, Beijing, 1997), p.347.

[87] Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo he Guojia Jiaoyu Weiyuanhui Jihua Jianshesi, ibid., p.347.

to determine who is literate, they would be classified as literate, even though their skills may well be minimal or lost over time. One investigation into the high dropout rate amongst rural girls in Hebei found that girls were usually able to finish primary school, but many did not go on to junior secondary or, if they did, they often dropped out in their second year when they turned 15 or 16 and were able to find work.[88] Poverty, distance, ignorance of legal requirements and parental expectations affected the education of girls more than it did boys.

3.5 Conclusion

This chapter has used census and sample survey data to investigate achievements in reducing illiteracy from the Chinese population since the CCP came to power to determine what the situation is for women. In considering the results, it must be remembered that literacy figures in national censuses are general indicators which do not take account of exceptional circumstances such as pockets of extremely high illiteracy, or uneven distribution of literacy levels within regions. The other factor that needs to be considered is that only objective and comprehensive testing will truly determine who is functionally literate. Levels of illiteracy are usually reckoned to be higher than census and survey data indicate.[89] Furthermore, it is difficult to determine the real extent of the reductions in illiteracy because census data are most often based on levels of education which are not always a true reflection of literacy attainment.

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[88] Meng Xianfan, Li Haifu and Wu Lijuan, "Protection of the right of rural girls to receive an education," *Social Sciences in China*, Vol.17, No.3, (Autumn 1996), p.64-67.

[89] Carceles, Gabriel, "World literacy prospects at the turn of the century: is the objective of literacy for all by the year 2000 statistically plausible?" *Comparative Education Review*, Vol.34, No.1, (1990), p.4.

The data analyzed in this chapter, despite their shortcomings, nevertheless clearly show that the two main characteristics associated with illiteracy in China are being female and living in a rural village. National data show that no matter whether age, region, urban/rural status, economic circumstances or ethnicity is being considered, the majority of illiterates are female. Hence being female is the factor most consistently associated with illiteracy. Even though the statistical data show that female illiteracy levels have been reduced dramatically, the same data also show that roughly three out of every four illiterates (72.49 per cent in 1995) are female. Moreover, the proportion of illiterates who are female has increased, with the rate accelerating between 1990 and 1995.

The second most characteristic feature is that of living in a rural village. This is not surprising given that the vast majority of illiterates have always lived in the countryside. Any significant advances in reducing illiteracy amongst the general population has surely had to occur in the countryside. Nevertheless, the exploitation of the countryside to produce the surpluses needed for industrialization in the cities; the special privileges, including better education, enjoyed by city residents; the anchoring of rural residents in their village through collectivization and the household registration system; and so on have meant that conditions for rural people have remained much poorer than those of urban people. Though these problems have affected literacy development in rural areas, they do not explain why females are affected more than males. Nor do they account for the fact that, though the actual number of illiterates is small in urban areas, the *proportion* of illiterates who are female, is similar to that in rural areas. It also does not explain why this gender disparity is increasing in both urban and rural areas.

This chapter does not set out to answer these questions, but simply provides a top-down, sweeping view of the situation across the country at various points in time according to the literacy data available. The next chapter will examine problems

implementing basic education which have resulted in large numbers of new illiterates still being produced.

4 THE PRODUCTION OF FEMALE ILLITERACY IN RURAL CHINA

The main emphasis of strategies for eliminating illiteracy during the post-Mao years has been on the development of compulsory education and the eradication of illiteracy amongst adults under the age of 45 years, especially women. This chapter focuses on the development of nine-year compulsory education and some of the difficulties encountered in implementation which have meant that new illiterates are still being produced. According to one report based on the 1990 population census, 11 million new illiterates were produced during the eight years between the 1982 and 1990 censuses, of whom eight million, or 72 per cent, were female. The same report says that amongst school-age children (those aged 6-14), 16 per cent of boys and 22.3 per cent of girls were not at school at the time of the census.[1] In another report, the State Statistical Bureau also reported that the illiteracy rate amongst rural children aged 12-19 was three times the rate for urban children.[2] In the light of statistics such as these, what are some of the problems occurring in the process of implementing nine-year compulsory education? How successful are the measures being taken to reduce the numbers of primary and junior middle school students dropping-out of school? Finally, what are the implications of these problems for the educational opportunities for girls?

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[1] Guojia Tongjiju Shehui yu Keji Tongjisi and Guojia Jiaoyu Weiyuanhui Chengren Jiaoyusi, op.cit., p.31. According to the report, between 1982 and 1990 there was a reduction of 48 million illiterates, of whom 23 million actually became literate, 36 million illiterates died and 11 million new illiterates were produced.

[2] State Statistical Bureau, "Education in present day China," *Beijing Review*, (July 17, 1989), p.21.

4.1 The development of nine year compulsory education

The notion of schooling for all (males and females) rather than the few came to China along with other things western. Admiration for the technological achievements and the politics which led to their production enticed intellectuals, the elite of the country, to call for a departure from long held traditions which had given them their privileged positions and to begin to promote the idea of schooling for the masses. Egalitarianism was not a basic tenet of previous social practice in China, neither was equality between the sexes. Since the development of universal education appeared to go hand in hand with industrialization and modernization, however, the obvious solution to China's 'backwardness' was to wipe out ignorance among the masses through schooling for all. Although the Communist Party did not initiate the goal of universal education in China, it has had this goal on its agenda since coming to power in 1949. During this time there have always been tensions between the quality and quantity of education, and between egalitarianism and elitism which have never been satisfactorily resolved.

Some western scholars have identified three strands which have influenced developments in education to varying degrees in the PRC since 1949.[3] The first is a bureaucratic strand such as that found in the centralized, highly bureaucratic Soviet model implemented during the First Five Year Plan. It was concerned with the development of the necessary expertise for social and economic development during the 1950s. This approach appeared again briefly under the leadership of Hua Guofeng after the Cultural Revolution in the late 1970s. The second is a radical strand in which politics took precedence over economic development, egalitarianism displaced elitism, class struggle was considered more important than book learning, and a decentralized administration

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[3] Sautman, Barry, op. cit.; Solinger, Dorothy (ed), *Three Visions of Chinese Socialism*, (Westview, Boulder, Colorado, 1984).

replaced a centralized bureaucracy. It found its strongest expression in the Great Leap Forward (1958-59) and the Cultural Revolution (1965-75). A third strand is concerned with reform. Unlike the other two, it sought to lessen the importance of political outcomes for education and re-emphasized the importance of education to economic development. Key schools to speed up the training of much needed experts is a feature of this approach, together with a decentralized educational administration. This strand found expression in the policies of Liu Shaoqi in the early 1960s after the Great Leap Forward, and in those of Deng Xiaoping during implementation of the Four Modernizations in the late 1970s.[4] Thus the first strand aimed to foster the development of much needed experts for heavy industry in the cities, with the result that it favoured urban residents more than the rural masses. The second emphasized quantity over quality and rejected the elitism of experts in favour of a more egalitarian education which was more relevant to peasants, though in practice, peasants did not actually receive more education. The third aimed to reinstate quality in education and emphasized the need to develop the elite expert in order to achieve modernization, devolving responsibility for educating the masses to local administrations. Once again, urban residents benefited more than those living in the countryside. It is this latter strand which provides the backdrop for this brief study of some the difficulties being experienced during the implementation of nine-year compulsory education and their role in the production of new illiterates.

A program of educational reform associated with the Post-Mao modernization program began following the May 27 decision taken at the national conference on education held in 1985.[5] Later, promulgated by law in 1986, this decision divides the

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[4] Sautman, Barry, ibid., pp.670-680.

[5] *Reform of China's Educational Structure: Decision of the CPC Central Committee (1985)*, (Foreign Language Press, Beijing). Cited in Cheng Kaiming, "China's recent education reform: the beginning of an overhaul," *Comparative Education*, Vol.22, No.3, (1986), pp.255-257.

country into three regions with different timetables for the development of nine-year compulsory education. Article 5 of the *Compulsory Education Law* (1986) requires children aged six years or more to attend school and receive compulsory education for a fixed number of years, regardless of sex, nationality or race. In poorer areas, the compulsory school age can be raised to seven years to allow for limited educational resources.[6] The development of compulsory education has also had to reflect the reality of the local economic and educational situation. In order to be able to guarantee teachers, funding, school buildings, equipment, leadership and administration, different goals were set for the different regions.[7] These goals included realizing nine year compulsory education by 1990 in those areas which already have a strong economic and educational base (mainly coastal provinces and cities under direct administration). Most other provinces and regions were expected to achieve universal primary education by 1990, with nine year compulsory education being reached around 1995. Western border provinces and regions, minority areas, isolated and mountainous areas were expected to take longer. These regions were to aim for universal primary education by the end of the twentieth century.[8]

According to the 'Law', basic or compulsory education refers to six years of primary education followed by three years of junior middle school education. Junior middle school graduates are then to be streamed two ways, one group to be admitted to regular senior middle schools with the expectation of entering colleges or universities, and

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[6] "The Compulsory Education Law of the PRC," *Renmin ribao* [People's Daily], (Beijing, 18th April 1986), p.3. Cited in Fan Limin, op. cit., p.46.

[7] *Zhongguo jiaoyu nianjian 1982-1984* [China Education Yearbook 1982-1984]), "Xiaoxue jiaoyu" ["Primary Education"], (Hunan Jiaoyu Chubanshe, Changsha, 1986), pp.76-78. Translated in *Chinese Education and Society*, Vol.27, No.5, (1994), p.90.

[8] Li Peng, "An explanation of the draft of the Compulsory Education Law of the PRC," *Renmin ribao* [People's Daily], (18th April 1986), p.3. Cited in Fan Limin, op. cit., pp.59-60.

the other group being admitted to vocational and technical schools. Those who have attended junior middle vocational or technical schools can go on to higher-level schools or find work.[9] Thus China's children are to be educated to meet the needs of economic reform and the Four Modernizations by providing skilled workers and high quality intellectuals.

Local governments are to be responsible for the implementation of basic education, including the relevant legislation and administration, as well as raising the necessary funding. Major policy directions with respect to education and coordination of plans for the universalization of basic education are still to be carried out centrally, but local governments are expected to decide on and implement specific policies and plans which suit the economic levels, social customs, and cultural and educational conditions of the local area. In this way, it is hoped that some enthusiasm for education will be generated at all levels of government, with rigid central control being avoided.[10] Provincial, prefectural or municipal governments are expected to give leadership for basic education in rural areas. County governments, which are relatively experienced in administering rural schools, and already have appropriate organizational structures, are expected to draw up plans and policies, and foster enthusiasm for education amongst lower level governments. Townships (successors of the communes) are to assume more responsibility and power for educational planning, appointing teachers, raising funds and

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[9] *Reform of China's Educational Structure: Decision of the CPC Central Committee (1985),* op. cit., p.11.

[10] China Education Yearbook 1990, "Local responsibility and separate-level management for basic education," *Chinese Education and Society,* Vol.27, No.5, (1994), p.95.

solving local problems, while village governments are to deal with local conditions, teachers' salaries and local problems.[11]

In February 1993, the 1985 "Decision" was not only affirmed in the "Outline for China's Educational Reform and Development," but expanded to include a greater emphasis on finance, private schooling and tertiary-level reform. Its two main goals for the 1990s, however, were to implement nine-year compulsory education and to wipe out illiteracy in those under 15 years of age.[12] In October 1993 the *Teachers' Law* was promulgated. These two documents aimed to deal with some of the problems which had emerged during the late 1980s and early 1990s.

4.1.1 Funding problems

Funding the development of basic education, especially in poorer areas, is a problem which has never really been overcome satisfactorily. Because of this, the central government's devolution of responsibility for mass education to the various levels of local government has been criticized by some people who accuse it of merely shifting the burden of education onto the people.[13] Apart from the problem of raising funds for education, the funds raised have often been poorly used. For example, the number of administrative personnel handling education is reported to have increased considerably in proportion to the number of schools and students enrolled, absorbing much of the

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[11] *Jiao zheng yanzi,* No.002 (15/6/1987), "Proposal by the State Education Commission and Ministry of Finance on some questions concerning structural reform for the management of basic rural education," *Chinese Education and Society,* Vol.27, No.5, (1994), pp.78-80.

[12] Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, "The program for educational reform and development in China," *Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo Guowuyuan Gongbao 2,* (1993), pp.58-66. Cited in Mok Ka-ho, "Retreat of the State: marketization of education in the Pearl River Delta," *Comparative Education Review,* Vol.41, No.3, 1997, p.265.

[13] Miao Zuobin, "Qiantan nongcun jiaoyu gaige he fazhan zhong de liang ge wenti" ["A brief discussion of two problems of rural education reform and development"], *Jiaoyu yanjiu* [Educational Research], No.8, (1996), p.19.

funding.[14] In other cases, even in more developed areas, funds earmarked for education have been diverted by some local authorities to other projects which they consider to be a more profitable use for the money.[15] In some places local officials consider funding for education to be a low priority alongside economic development. Finally inflation, especially during the mid 1980s and the first half of the 1990s, has further eroded the value of those resources which are available.

To help resolve the shortfall between funds allocated by local governments and expenditure, schools have had no alternative but to collect miscellaneous fees and run school enterprises. By 1989, over 72 per cent of primary and secondary schools in China were running school enterprises.[16] Schools are not permitted to charge tuition fees for basic education but are allowed to collect modest fees for miscellaneous items. In 1993, however, there was a considerable public outcry concerning rising school fees. It was not clear how much the fees were or what they were for, but according to the limited information available, it is likely that officially sanctioned fees accounted for a relatively small proportion of the total collected.[17] The reason most often cited by students for dropping out of school in the late 1980s and early 1990s has been the inability to pay

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[14] Yang Dongping, "China's crisis in education: inadequate investment, low returns, and slow reform," *Chinese Education*, Vol.23. No.2. (1990), p.16.

[15] Pepper, Suzanne. "Gaining the initiative for education reform and development," *China Review 1995*, (The Chinese University Press, Hong Kong, 1995), pp.18.6 and 18.9. Funds which were to be used for education, including teachers salaries, were used as investment capital in rural areas in the South. Zhang Ning, op. cit., p.148. According the SSB, 420 million yuan was diverted during 1986.

[16] Smith, Kathlin, "Funding China's education: will trickle-up work?" *China Exchange News*, Vol.17 No.2, (June 1989). Cited in Delany, Brian and Paine, Lynn W., "Shifting patterns of authority in Chinese schools," *Comparative Education Review*, Vol.35, No.1, (1991), p.34; Mok Ka-ho, op. cit., pp.269-270.

[17] Editorial, *Zhongguo jiaoyubao* [China Education Daily], (28 August 1993), with other texts by the SEC and State Council, (28/8/1993 & 2/10/1993). Cited in Suzanne Pepper, "Gaining the initiative for education reform and development," op. cit., 1995, p.18.11.

these school fees.[18] Rising school fees was still a matter of concern at the start of the 1994-1995 school year.[19]

The ability to raise funds for education varies considerably across regions as well as within them. For example, after grouping China's thirty provinces (regions or municipalities) in five groups according to targets set for the development of compulsory education, a comparison of groups A, B and E, show that the level of economic development (per capita GDP) in 1994 was 5.6:2.9:1.0. At the same time the differences in per capita expenditure on education were 3.2:1.9:1.0.[20] A poor district may invest a quarter of its local budget on education, which is a high proportion by anyone's standards, but the actual amount of budgetary revenue is very small.[21] Although the central government provides subsidies to help develop education in poorer districts, inflation and rising costs as well as an inability to increase local revenue has meant that many schools in these districts have been closed. For example, it was reported that Luodian District in Guizhou, had 508 schools in 1975. By 1992 they had been reduced to 301 because funds were insufficient to maintain them or to pay teachers.[22] A survey of forty villages in ten poor districts across ten provinces carried out in 1993 found classes being held in abandoned houses, stables, ruined temples or buildings without a roof. Some buildings were unsafe, lacked water, toilets and playgrounds. In some schools the teachers did not

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[18] Pepper, Suzanne, ibid., p.18.12.

[19] Pepper, Suzanne, ibid., p.18.15.

[20] Wang Lei, "Woguo butong diqu jiunian yiwu jiaoyu jinzhan qingkuang ji fazhan shuiping de bijiao yanjiu" [A comparative study of the progress and development level of compulsory nine-year education in different regions of China"], *Jiaoyu yanjiu* [Educational Research], No.7, (1996), p.5. The five groups are – A: Beijing, Shanghai and Tianjin; B: Liaoning, Jiangsu, Zhejiang and Guangdong; C: Jilin, Shandong, Heilongjiang, Fujian, and Hainan; D: Shanxi, Anhui, Jiangxi, Hubei, Hunan, Hebei, Henan, Sichuan, Shaanxi, Neimengu, Xinjiang and Guangxi; and E: Ningxia, Gansu, Yunnan, Guizhou, Qinghai, and Xizang (Tibet). The author does not include the ratios across all five groups.

[21] Li Chunling, op. cit., p.32.

[22] Li Chunling, ibid., p.32.

have blackboards or chalk, and the children did not have text books, exercise books or pencils.[23]

One of the ways of raising extra funds for education has been through the development of private schools. Article 19 of the Constitution of the People's Republic of China (1982) allows for the development of private schools and more recently, the government has been encouraging organizations to raise funds to set up privately funded schools.[24] Now there are private schools covering the full range of education from kindergarten to university. There is some confusion about the exact number of privately run schools because they are now referred to as *minban* (people-run) schools to distinguish them from *gongban* (state-run) schools. *Minban* is not a new term, though. Originally it referred to schools funded and run by communities or collectives during the 1950s and 1960s, as well as those run by individuals or social groups for short time during the Great Leap Forward.[25] The local *minban* in the rural village, however, is usually poorly funded and poorly regarded.

The government's use of *minban* is a political expediency to disguise the incongruity of state approval for some private schools, namely the more expensive elitist schools.[26] With so many state schools also charging fees, including fees which buy 'back-door' educational opportunities at key-schools for some students, there is little distinction

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[23] Li Chunling, ibid., p.34.

[24] Qian Shuyuan, "On private schools," *Fuyin baokan ziliao: jiaoyuxue*, No. 7, 1994, p.76. Cited in Fan Limin, op. cit., p.51.

[25] Mok, Ka-ho, op. cit., p.271; Pepper, Suzanne, "Gaining the initiative for education reform and development," op. cit., p.18.19. See also Peterson, Glen, "State literacy ideologies and the transformation of rural China," op. cit., pp.116-120 for a discussion of *minban* schools. From the mid-1950s, they were encouraged to run as 'half work, half study' schools to promote the development of local knowledge. Peterson says that in reality, their very limited curriculum meant they differed very little from adult literacy classes. During the Cultural Revolution, all schools were referred to as *minban*.

[26] Mok, Ka-ho, ibid., p.271; Pepper, Suzanne, ibid., p.18.19.

between some state and private schools in terms of fees. At the bottom of the pile is the humble *sishu*. Based on the traditional one-teacher one-room school, it has been revived in some villages to provide rural children who cannot afford regular schooling with basic literacy and numeracy at half the cost. Thus the urban rich with access to elite private schooling contrast sharply against the rural poor.[27]

Is the story all bad? According to one report, there have been some remarkable success stories. One is that of Guigang municipality and Heng County, both in Guangdong Province. An educational survey carried out in 1995 revealed that these two places had been able to build new schools and buy equipment after mobilizing the local people. It is reported that the local people were so enthusiastic about improving educational opportunities for their children that they were willing to set aside improvements in their own living standards.[28] From 1985 to 1995, Guigang municipality raised three hundred million yuan, about 200 yuan per capita, to build 1480 new school buildings. In this way, the number of primary and secondary schools increased 1.5 times. Generating this kind of enthusiasm for education in other well-off areas, however, is not always so successful. Neither does this approach solve the shortage of funds in poor areas which have few resources in the first place.

Based on figures released during 1998, the different expectations set in 1986 for the three designated educational regions were not reached. In 1997, universal compulsory education in region one was 95 per cent, with the expectation of reaching 100 per cent in the year 2000. With government help between 1995 and 1997 for 383 poor counties in region two, the rate of universal compulsory education in this region managed to reach 63

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[27] Pepper, Suzanne, ibid., pp.18.19 & 18.41.

[28] Miao Zuobin, op. cit., pp.19-20.

per cent in 1997. It was expected to reach 95 per cent in the year 2000. The rate of universal compulsory education in region three still stood at only 32 per cent in 1997. This region was to receive special government support for 469 poor counties in all nine provinces or autonomous regions between 1998 and the year 2000. By the year 2000, it was expected that around 200 counties would have achieved nine-year compulsory education, another 200 would have six years of primary school education with the remaining counties having three or four years of compulsory schooling.[29]

A recent Ministry of Education[30] report cites primary enrolment rates across the country in 1998 as being 98.9 per cent, of which 99.0 per cent were boys and 98.86 were girls.[31] While this suggests that the government's education plans are on target for 100 per cent enrolment in 2002,[32] the reality may not be quite so good. First, the statistics supplied by local governments are often unreliable. The drive to meet government requirements has led some school officials to 'adjust' the figures to make the situation appear better than it actually is.[33] Second, funding is still a major problem in poorer and more remote areas and school fees continue to prevent many children in these areas from being able to attend school. Primary schools may charge $20-$35 (US) a year for miscellaneous fees, a huge sum for subsistence farmers.[34] Even a fee of $7-50 per semester is considered to be a large

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[29] Cui Wen. "Largest poverty-relief project for education," *Beijing Review*, Vol.41, No.23, (June 8-14, 1998), pp.16-17.

[30] After undergoing reorganization during 1998, the State Education Commission became the 'Ministry of Education' (MOE).

[31] Ministry of Education and National Commission for UNESCO, op. cit., pp.32-34.

[32] "Ministry of Education (MOE): PRC Ministry/Commission Profile," *ChinaOnline*, [On-line], (Updated June 2000), <http://www.chinaonline.com/refer/ministry_profiles/MOE.asp>.

[33] Rosenthal, Elisabeth, "In China, school fees keep many children away," *The New York Times on the Web*, [On-line], (1/11/1999), <http://www.nytimes.com/library/world/asia/110199china-edu.html>.

[34] 'Miscellaneous fees' in one school, for example, included "a book fee, a materials fee, a substitute-teaching fee, an electricity fee, a coal fee, even a fee to raise matching funds for a World Bank loan." Rosenthal, Elisabeth, ibid.

sum in Lijiagou, Ningxia, where the per capita income is around $50 per year.[35] Third, the implementation of basic education in regions two and three is still is a long way from being achieved. Clearly, new illiterates are being produced in significant numbers in these two regions. If nine-year compulsory education has not yet been fully implemented in region one, it is likely that considerable numbers of new illiterates are also being produced in this, the most populous region of China.

4.1.2 Teachers

The next major concern is teachers. Many reports during the 1980s and 1990s have reflected problems of teacher supply and quality. The implementation of compulsory education is made more difficult by the fact that teachers are leaving teaching in large numbers to find better paid jobs.[36] This is hardly surprising when teachers are not only amongst the lowest paid workers, but in 1992-1993, it was reported that the payment of teachers' salaries was in arrears in nearly every province, with some areas being several months behind. While poor rural areas are most affected, some of the better off areas had also not paid their teachers.[37] Some of the funds which were diverted for other 'more economically rewarding projects' had originally been destined for teachers' salaries. This, together with the inability of teacher training programs to fill their quotas means that many poorly qualified or unqualified teachers are being employed to meet the demand.[38] The promulgation of the Teachers' Law which came into effect at the beginning of 1994 aimed to deal with some of the problems affecting teachers. Article 31 of the Law protects

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[35] Rosenthal, Elisabeth, ibid.

[36] Zhang Ning, op. cit., p.150.

[37] Pepper, Suzanne, "Gaining the initiative for education reform and development," op. cit., p.18.9.

[38] State Statistical Bureau, "Education in present day China," op. cit., p.23; Lin Jing, *Education in Post Mao China*, (Praeger, Westport, Connecticut/London, 1993), p.41; Zhang Ning, op. cit., pp. 149-150, 152.

teachers against local authorities defaulting on teachers' salaries including diverting and using them for other purposes.[39] Teachers have also been promised a series of pay rises until their salaries, including those of *minban* teachers, match those of other state employees. Those areas which still lacked sufficient funds for teachers' salaries could, for a time, rely on county management of their finances.[40] In the middle of July 1994, however, it was reported that only eight provinces or regions were paying all of their teachers on time. One might expect that of the eight listed, Beijing, Shanghai, Tianjin and Guangdong could easily comply, but that Tibet, Ningxia, Yunnan and Hainan might have had some difficulties. This, plus the fact that some of the remaining provinces were unwilling to supply relevant statistics at all suggests that rather than a shortage of funds being the main problem, local officials in some areas simply do not consider the issue of teachers salaries a high priority.[41] The payment of teachers' salaries continues to be a problem. A study carried out by the Educational Workers' Trade Union in 1999 found in 125 counties and cities that two thirds of teachers were owed $85 million in unpaid wages.[42]

Teachers' living standards are also low, with poor housing or a lack of housing, so much so that some teachers have not been able to marry or are not able to live together after marriage. Funding for the medical care of teachers is also in short supply.[43] Furthermore, the social status of teachers is also low, with teachers often being viewed as

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[39] *Zhonghua renmin gongheguo jiaoshifa* [Teachers' Law of the People's Republic of China], *Renmin ribao*, [People's Daily], (3 November 1993). Cited in Pepper, Suzanne, ibid., p.18.10.

[40] Pepper, Suzanne, ibid., p.18.11.

[41] Pepper, Suzanne, ibid., p.18.18.

[42] Beech, Hannah, "Lesson unlearned," *AsiaNow*, Vol.155, No.10, (13/3/2000), [On-line], <http://cnn.com/ASIANOW/time/magazine/2000/0313/china.education.html>.

[43] State Statistical Bureau, "Education in present day China," op. cit., p.23; Pepper, Suzanne, op. cit., p.18.15.

little more than skilled workers whose work is repetitive and not particularly creative. Some people believe that given some training, anybody can teach.[44] Added to this problem is the assumption that teaching lower grades is easier than teaching higher grades, with the result that the most poorly trained teachers are often assigned to the lower classes.[45] This occurs despite these early years of schooling being the most critical stage in a child's education for establishing the foundations for literacy and numeracy.

Rural teachers have low salaries, low social status and heavy work loads, with many teaching large classes in inadequate buildings which lack facilities. Few properly trained teachers are willing to teach in rural areas such as these, resulting in many using their training to find other better paid and more highly regarded jobs after graduating.[46] The government has taken some steps to improve the quality of teachers through better teacher training and in-service training and by replacing 'community paid teachers' with 'publicly funded teachers'.[47] While the percentage of community funded teachers has been decreasing, the number of substitute teachers (unqualified teachers who are not recognized by the state) has increased from 10.4 percent in 1994 to 12.7 per cent in 1998 across the country. Most of these substitute teachers are employed in poorer areas. According to the Ministry of Education, the gradual phasing out of community paid teachers and the banning of substitute teachers would mean many schools in these regions

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[44] *Guangming ribao* [Guangming Daily], (12 April, 1989). Cited in Zhang Ning, op. cit., p.152. This view may be associated with the nature of the curriculum taught and the examination system which tends to encourage the use of rote learning. The curriculum is discussed below.

[45] Lin, Jing, op. cit., p.25.

[46] Lin, Jing, ibid., p.41; Pepper, Suzanne, "Gaining the initiative for education reform and development," op. cit., p.18.15; Zhang Ning, op. cit., p.150.

[47] 'Community paid teachers' are paid through surcharges on certain taxes paid by the local community. 'Publicly paid teachers' are paid by the state. The salary of a community paid teacher is usually 1/3 of the salary of a publicly paid teacher and there are no secure fringe benefits. Ministry of Education and the National Commission for UNESCO, op. cit., p.54.

would be unable to afford the teachers needed to carry out the universalization of basic education.[48]

Teacher morale in poor areas is especially low and this affects their students. Not only do the children's own problems affect their schooling, teacher absenteeism and lack of enthusiasm for their work, means that these children find no pleasure in going to school. When their poor achievement means they have to repeat a grade many students leave school. These poorly educated students soon forget what they have learned, adding to the pool of new illiterates and semi-illiterates.[49]

4.1.3 Curriculum

The third issue which has a bearing on the production of new illiterates is the nature of the educational curriculum. China has a long tradition of associating education with social mobility. In the past, success in examinations led to opportunities to take up positions in the bureaucracy and to improve one's position in it. Today the desire of many parents is that their children will achieve academic success, go on to university and find a well-paid job which has a high status in society. Amongst rural families, this usually means that they hope their children will be able to leave farming.[50] It should not be too surprising, then, that vocational education, the path designated for those who are less academically successful, is the less attractive option. Psychologically as well as historically it represents failure.

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[48] Ministry of Education and the National Commission for UNESCO, ibid., pp.52-56.

[49] Lin Chunling, op. cit., pp.34-35.

[50] Ma Zaixin, "A difficult turning point: a review of educational reform in China's rural areas," *Chinese Education*, Vol.22, No.4, (1989-1990), p.31.

With a high emphasis on examinations, rote learning and book knowledge, many students find lessons tedious and not appropriate to their situation. Since the majority of rural students will return to work on the farm, or to work in the local town or village enterprise, an education which is designed to prepare students for higher education has little relevance. While the government urges more rural students to attend vocational secondary schools which have greater relevance to local needs, most students still want to go to general secondary schools which use the national curriculum, the same curriculum used in urban schools. There is always the hope that they may be successful enough at school to go on to university or college and leave farming altogether. Needless to say, the odds against students in rural areas being able to do this are very high.[51] Rising school fees, a shortage of university places, and the introduction of university fees which parents cannot afford to pay means that this pathway is out of reach for most rural students. Even if they are able to graduate from university, there is no guarantee of employment in the city. With a declining state sector, university graduates are no longer guaranteed job placements. Lacking the right connections in the city, many rural graduates are forced to return to the countryside if they are unable to find work within a specified time. Given these difficulties, it is not surprising that many rural parents are starting to think that there is little point in sending their children to school.[52]

The emphasis on rote learning and cramming students with knowledge has also caused many students to lose interest in school, to dislike studying or worse still, become demoralized when they do not achieve the high academic results needed for promotion upwards through the education system.[53] This has reinforced the view that study is useless

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[51] Lin Jing, op. cit., p.26-27.

[52] Rosenthal, Elisabeth, op. cit; Beech, Hannah, op. cit.

[53] Yang Dongping, "China's crisis in education: inadequate investment, low returns, and slow reform," op. cit., p.17.

and that there is no point in studying.[54] In the end, not only do students lack the necessary practical skills needed for farm work or working in town or village enterprises, most young people returning to the countryside after finishing their education are not very motivated to work towards developing the local economy. They look down on rural life and want to leave at the first opportunity.[55] Although they are better educated than the local farmers and have studied sciences in school, they are unable to apply what they have learned to the local situation because it was learned by rote rather than by understanding basic principles.[56] At the end of the 1980s it was claimed that only thirty per cent of the results of agricultural research was being used because farmers did not have the knowledge to use it, and the students returning home to work in their home town or village did not have the skills to apply what they knew. Since what they had learned in school was not being used, they soon forgot it, making them little different from uneducated farmers.[57]

During 1999 and early 2000, the Ministry of Education encouraged schools to change the emphasis in the curriculum on the memorization of facts to one where problem solving and creativity are more important. This has met some resistance from parents, teachers and school officials because there has been no significant change to the requirements for university entrance examinations. As a result, many parents continue to unduly pressure their children to study. Teachers and school officials are often reluctant to

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[54] Yang Dongping, "Set up an educational program that is democratic, centres around man, and is alive," *Chinese Education*, Vol.22, No.4, (1989-1990), pp.8-9.

[55] Lin Jing, op. cit., p.29.

[56] Lin Jing, ibid., p.28.

[57] Wu Fusheng, "Problems in China's rural educational reform," *Chinese Education*, Vol.22, No.4, (1989), pp.50-51.

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take a more creative approach to education because of the link that still exists between the status of teachers, the classification of schools and examination results.[58]

Another problem, especially in rural areas, involves repeating grades. In one primary school in Zhejiang province, 90 percent of the students had repeated at least one year. Some students in Zhejiang have repeated grades three or four times. This practice may result in the students having an age range of four to five years in one year level.[59] While failure to achieve satisfactory results may be the reason why students are forced to repeat a year, there are several reasons for poor achievement. The first concerns children who have had no pre-school education and who find adapting to the classroom difficult. By the time they have become accustomed to class routines and the learning process, they have missed out on important early education. While many children repeat first grade, others repeat a year at a later stage because they did not acquire an adequate foundation at an earlier stage of their education.[60] Teachers and schools have also been known to keep students down a year to improve the pass rates for their graduate classes, thus eliminating students who were unlikely to pass the final examination.[61] The discouragement that students experience as a result of repeating years as well as the unsuitability of the curriculum for the majority of students, causes many rural students to look with envy at those who drop out of school and begin earning an income. If education

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[58] "Ministry of Education (MOE)," *ChinaOnline*, op. cit.. The MOE promised in April 2000 that university entrance examinations would gradually be rewritten to incorporate a greater emphasis on using knowledge to solve problems rather than the simple regurgitation of 'facts'.

[59] Lin Jing, op. cit., p.24.

[60] Fan Limin, op. cit., p.56; and Lin Jing, ibid., p.25. 1994 and 1998 data shows that the repetition of grades has generally been reduced, according to the latest MOE information. The rates for grade one, however, remain very high (probably because of poor access to kindergarten and pre-schools in rural and remote areas). Boys are more likely to repeat than girls. (No reason for this is given, but it is possible that parents withdraw girls rather than have them repeat.) Ministry of Education and National Commission for UNESCO, op. cit., p.59.

[61] Lin Jing, ibid., p.25.

is not going to provide opportunities for leaving farming, many farmers and their children do not think that it is worth continuing. This leads to the problem of children dropping out of school because they have come to see it as irrelevant, or because their parents decide their children's time could be more profitably used working to improve the family's living standards. They may not yet have achieved a basic standard of literacy, or if they have, the nature of the work they do means they forget the little they have learned.

4.2 School-age children not at school and the problem of drop-outs

The impact of the above problems is clearly seen in statistics for those not at school and drop-out rates. The survey into the status of women carried out in 1990 by the All-China Women's Federation, in response to a question about the number of school-age children in the respondents' households who had no schooling, found that 8.9 per cent of the households surveyed in rural areas and 1.2 per cent of households in urban areas had one child in this category. In 1.8 per cent of households in rural areas and 0.1 per cent in urban areas there were two children in this category, and while there were no urban households with three, 0.3 of rural households said they had three children in the household who had no schooling. Most of them were girls.[62] *Table 4.1* shows that not wanting to go to school was the most commonly cited reason for non-attendance in rural areas, with financial reasons or failing examinations being the next most common reasons. Failing exams was the most often cited reason for urban children. Illness or disability was the least cited reason in both cases, although in my own interviews with village officials this was cited as the only reason why children might not be at school.[63] The gender

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[62] Guan Tao, *A Review of the Social Status of Women in China*, (New World Press, 1995), p.480.

[63] Fufeng County, Shaanxi, March 1998.

disparity, however, is greatest amongst rural children where financial circumstances, not being allowed to go to school and too much housework usually affect the education of girls more than boys.

Table 4.1: **Reasons for not attending school in 1990 (%)**

	Sex	No answer	Financial	Too far away	Not pass exam	Illness/ disability	Not allowed	Did not want to	Too much housework	Total not at school
Urban	female	0.1	0.1	0.0	0.4	0.1	0.0	0.2	0.0	0.9
	male	0.1	0.1	0.0	0.3	0.1	0.0	0.2	0.0	0.8
Rural	female	0.1	1.6	0.4	1.2	0.3	1.1	2.0	1.0	7.7
	male	0.1	0.9	0.3	1.0	0.2	0.3	1.8	0.3	4.7

Source: Guan Tao (ed), *A Review of the Social Status of Women in China,* constructed from data given on pp.481-482.[64]

Across the whole of China, the percentage rates for 6 to 14 year olds not at school at the time of the census showed that they were lowest in the three municipalities, the north east, southern central and eastern areas, while some provinces and regions in the north west and south west had comparatively high rates. [65] *Table 4.2* shows that the gender gap is usually greatest in regions with large minority populations or where economic conditions are relatively poor. The exceptions are Liaoning, Heilongjiang, Jilin and Xinjiang which have large minority populations but a relatively small gender gap[66], and Fujian which has a comparatively large gender gap. In the case of Fujian, an Education Commission report blames traditional prejudice against women, the income girls can earn while not at school, and inadequacies in the education system itself for their

[64] Respondents were asked to refer to the youngest child when answering this question.

[65] What this report might have meant by 'children not at school' was discussed in Chapter Three in section 3.3.3 of this thesis.

[66] See Chapter Three of this thesis for a discussion about the attitudes of the Korean populations in the three north-eastern provinces, and Xinjiang which was cited as having the smallest disparity between illiterate males and females.

non-attendance.[67] For the remainder, apart from Beijing, Shanghai and Tianjin where there is very little difference between boys and girls, the rates for females not at school are usually higher than those for males.

Table 4.2: **Children aged 6-14 years not at school in 1990 (%)**

Region	Male	Female	Gender gap	Region	Male	Female	Gender gap
National	*16.05*	*22.32*	*6.27*	Jilin	15.03	16.68	1.65
Jiangsu	7.83	11.97	4.14	Sichuan	17.53	23.73	6.2
Beijing	11.19	10.94	-0.25	Neimongu	18.99	22.51	3.52
Shanghai	11.25	11.17	-0.08	Hainan	23.02	25.79	2.77
Hebei	10.75	12.61	1.86	Anhui	17.48	29.21	11.73
Shanxi	11.01	12.85	1.84	Fujian	18.02	29.45	11.43
Henan	10.69	15.66	4.97	Guangxi	20.25	27.28	7.03
Liaoning	12.90	13.70	0.8	Zhejiang	22.31	25.50	3.19
Hubei	11.31	16.86	5.55	Xinjiang	23.12	24.15	1.03
Tianjin	14.04	14.36	0.32	Jiangxi	19.78	32.94	13.16
Shandong	12.13	17.57	5.44	Ningxia	21.75	32.90	11.15
Hunan	13.07	18.14	5.07	Gansu	22.65	35.60	12.95
Shaanxi	13.39	14.62	1.23	Guizhou	25.15	43.50	18.35
Heilongjiang	15.34	17.37	2.03	Yunnan	29.27	41.76	12.49
Guangdong	15.53	20.56	5.03	Qinghai	33.81	45.09	11.28

Source: 1990 census, *Zhongguo Renkou Tongji Nianjian 1993*, p.274. (Figures for Tibet were not included.)

Children not attending school or dropping out of school is a long-standing problem and was the subject of numerous official reports during the 1980s.[68] Besides problems within the educational system itself, such as raising adequate funding, poor teacher morale and problems with the curriculum, parents' attitudes have also affected school attendance. These include taking children out of school to stay home and work or sending them out to

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[67] Fujian Education Commission, op. cit., pp.56-60.

[68] Listed in Chapter Three of this thesis, note 57.

work in a factory, and traditional prejudices which mean that educating a girl is considered to be less important than educating a boy.

4.2.1 Child labour

Taking children out of school to work is not only a characteristic of poor areas. During the 1980s when the economic reforms brought new opportunities for making money, many children were not at school because their labour was too valuable and parents thought that improving the family's circumstances was more important than ensuring their children had an education. While some children were withdrawn from school to stay home and do farm work, or in the case of girls, do household chores and look after younger siblings in order to free a parent for more remunerative work, many children were found working in factories, parents' businesses or sidelines, or township enterprises. Many were primary school children and most of them were girls.

A survey carried out in Zhejiang in 1987 showed that school-age girls comprised 76.6 percent of children in the province not in school. In one county, Cangnan County, the enrolment rate of school-age children was 93.7 per cent but it was only 85.5 per cent for girls. In some places within the county, however, it was much lower. For example, Changshan Township's enrollment rate for girls was a low 54.4 per cent.[69] The Women's Federation in Zhejiang, after investigating 284 household enterprises in four villages and two communities in Jinxiang Township in Cangnan County in 1986, found that 483 child labourers aged between ten and sixteen included 78 boys and 405 girls.[70] Their working hours were long and, it was reported, some of the work the children did was harmful to

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[69] Xue Huanyu, "Dui dangqian woguo zhongxiao xuesheng liushi wenti de tantao" ["An enquiry into the present problem of school drop-outs in China"], *Jiaoyu yanjiu* [Educational Research], No.10, (1989), p.50.

[70] All-China Women's Federation, op. cit., p.41.

their health. For their efforts, they earned an average of 1.5 to 2.5 yuan a day. Cangnan County is one of five poor counties in Zhejiang province. A similar investigation in Haining City, which had a highly developed economy, however, found that child labour was also a problem there and that most of the child labourers were girls working in silk weaving factories.[71]

Zhejiang was not the only place where this sort of thing was occurring. The story was similar in many places across the country.[72] Aside from economic concerns such as a labour shortage and new opportunities for increasing the family's income, research showed that poor teaching and lack of adequate facilities, students' dislike of school and the belief that studying is useless, along with traditional attitudes which favoured sons over daughters, were the main reasons why students dropped out of school.[73]

4.2.2 Traditional attitudes towards female education

Traditionally, education was not considered to be an asset or a necessity for females. "Women never read, dogs never till the land" and "to educate a daughter is to water another man's garden" are two old Chinese proverbs which express this view.[74] In line with the government's policy of equal access to education for both sexes, the State Education Commission, together with some other government departments, carried out an investigation in 1987 into the reasons why children were dropping out of school and why

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[71] Zhejiang Women's Federation, op. cit., p.69.

[72] Xue Hanyu, op. cit., pp.49-50.

[73] Zhejiang Women's Federation, op. cit., p.70; Xue Hanyu, ibid., pp.50-51.

[74] Kou Zhengling, "Spring Bud Program helps female drop-outs return to school," *Beijing Review*, Vol.38, No.36, (September 4-10, 1995), p.19; Rai, Shirin, "'Watering another man's garden': gender, employment and educational reforms in China," in Rai, Shirin, Pilkington, Hilary and Phizacklea, Annie (eds), *Women in the Face of Change: the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe and China*, (Routledge, London/ New York, 1992), p.30.

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so many of them were girls.[75] Their main concern was to break the cycle which was still producing new female illiterates. The two most prominent factors that emerged as a result of the survey were poverty and the traditional view that females are inferior to males. The combination of the two meant that parents were often willing to sacrifice their daughter's education because she would marry and go to live with her husband's family. They found that such traditional prejudices often meant that girls were not being sent to school at all or they were only being sent long enough to obtain a degree of literacy before working at home or in local village enterprises. The income they earned was then used to alleviate poverty, improve the family's living standards, support their brothers' education or help save the money needed to find a wife for a brother. The survey found that a ten year old girl could earn quite a good income. In order to be able to pay the bride price (the betrothal and marriage gifts that are given by the boy's parents to the girl's family according to the local custom), some girls were even engaged at an early age. The ridicule they then faced at school made them too embarrassed to attend.[76]

Another problem that has been affecting rural girls, in particular, is that some girls are not being registered with government authorities when they are born because of the preference of families for boys. China's one-child family planning policy often means that parents, especially farmers, want to have sons rather than daughters. In a survey of three villages in Qianqi Township in Fudian County, Fujian province, a house to house check by the schools found 32 children of school age, mostly girls, were not recorded.[77] Another survey of some 3570 parents found approximately 81 per cent of the parents surveyed said they treated sons and daughters equally, ten per cent believed that boys were more

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[75] Li Yunhong, op. cit., p45.

[76] Li Yunhong, ibid., pp.46-47.

[77] Fujian Education Commission, op. cit., p.54.

important because they carried on the family line but still believed that girls would benefit by becoming literate, while nine per cent did not want to, or could not afford to, send their daughters to school at all.[78] Some parents expressed the view that if girls were educated, they would not want to stay in the locality and marry in the traditional way, depriving local men of brides and the girls' families of betrothal gifts.

4.2.3 Government measures to stem the tide

During 1989, even before the 1990 census revealed that 11 million new illiterates had been produced since 1982, various measures were taken to stem the tide of school drop-outs. At the start of 1989 the Education Commission published a document, "Some opinions on keeping the elementary and intermediate school drop-out issue under strict control", which contained nine measures for dealing with the problem.[79] They can be summarized as follows.

- enforcement of the Compulsory Education Law;

- tightening procedures for managing attendance rolls and reporting on drop-outs;

- toughening up on child labour according to the Labour Ministry's Circular on the strict prohibition of child labour;

- educating parents about education and labour laws;

- improving the quality of teaching in schools;

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[78] Fujian Education Commission, ibid., pp.56-57.

[79] *Zhongguo jiaoyu nianjian 1990* [China Educational Yearbook 1990], p.100.

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- providing special courses for older students and primary school graduates who have not gone on to junior secondary school, and giving special attention to the problems which cause rural girls to drop-out of school;

- greater supervision of the collection of school fees; and

- establishing a system of responsibility and supervision for education throughout the country.

In the same year, the State Education Commission launched the "Prairie Fire Program" *(liaoyuan jihua)*. Also in 1989, the China Youth Development Foundation launched the "Hope Project" *(xiwang gongcheng)* and the "Spring Bud Project" *(chunlei jihua)*. Each of these programs has a special focus. The Prairie Fire Program aims to make education more relevant to local needs, especially in rural areas, and to carry out educational reform. The Hope Project has established a fund which solicits donations from people within China as well as from overseas Chinese to help children from poor families attend school. The Spring Bud Project is a smaller program which focuses on helping girls with their school education.[80]

4.2.4 The 1990s

The results of the 1995 one per cent sample survey provide some information which will enable us to see what happened during the early 1990s with respect to school attendance as a result of the above measures. Since many children cannot begin their schooling until they are seven years of age in rural areas, it is less confusing if those under seven years are not included in the data. The survey then shows that of the children aged 7-14 years, 6.99 per cent were not at school. One third of these were aged 7-11 years, the

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[80] Fan Limin, op. cit., pp.48-49.

age when children are most likely to be in primary school.[81] (It should not be overlooked, however, that many children above 11 years are still at primary school level in rural areas for one reason or another.) A clear disparity between boys and girls is evident, with 7.36 per cent of girls aged 7-14 years not at school at the time of the survey, compared to 4.39 per cent of boys in this age group. Of the 2.56 per cent of children aged 7-14 years who have never been to school, 3.21 per cent were girls and 1.97 per cent were boys.[82] *Table 4.3* shows the percentages for children aged 7-14 not at school by age, sex and location.

*Table 4.3:***Children aged 7-14 years not at school in 1995 (%)**

Age	Boys	Girls	Gender gap	Cities	Towns	Counties
7	6.24	8.04	1.8	3.14	3.45	8.27
8	2.36	3.50	1.14	1.04	1.24	3.44
9	1.70	2.69	0.99	0.87	0.94	2.56
10	1.67	3.11	1.44	0.84	1.13	2.78
11	2.02	4.02	2.0	1.01	1.12	3.59
12	3.15	6.55	3.4	1.44	1.57	5.89
13	5.53	11.15	5.62	2.69	2.62	10.08
14	10.83	18.62	7.79	5.45	4.88	17.46

Source: *Zhongguo renkou tongji nianjian 1997*, pp.498 & 499. Based on data from the 1995 1% Sample Survey.

It shows that the percentage of girls not at school is greater than boys across all age groups. Amongst 7, 8 and 9 year old children, the gender gap is not as great as it is for the other age groups. From the age of ten, the gap between boys and girls gradually widens, accelerating with age. This suggests that more girls than boys leave after only receiving a few years of schooling, or as soon as they graduate from primary school. The proportion

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[81] *1995 Quanguo 1% renkou chouyang diaocha ziliao*, op. cit. Calculated from figures on pp.26, 61-62.

[82] *1995 Quanguo 1% renkou chouyang diaocha ziliao*, ibid. Calculated from figures on pp.26 & 29.

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of children living in the counties who are not at school is also much higher than both the cities and towns. The figures suggest that many rural (county) children do not start school until they are 8 years old, with a sharp increase in those not at school occurring again amongst those aged 13 and 14 years. This is most probably because many rural children do not continue with their education once they graduate from primary school. Those not at school include children who have never attended school, primary school graduates (who, we are left to presume, do not go on to junior middle school), and primary and junior middle school students who drop out before graduating.[83]

Data published by the State Education Commission show that the drop-out rates amongst school-age children were reduced between 1990 and 1995 by 0.91 per cent in primary schools, and 0.82 per cent in junior secondary schools. *Table 4.4* shows the drop-out and retention rates from 1990 to 1995.[84]

Table 4.4: **Drop-out and retention rates 1990-1995 (%)**

Categories		1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1990-1995
Drop-outs	Primary	2.4	2.35	2.19	2.27	1.85	1.49	- 0.91
	Junior middle	4.8	5.38	5.78	7.08	5.11	3.98	- 0.82
Retention rates	Primary	71.42	74.11	76.74	78.83	81.08	82.78	+ 11.36
	Junior middle	82.72	85.76	85.5	82.68	84.23	87.46	+ 4.74

Source: *Zhongguo jiaoyu shiye tongji nianjian 1996*, p.347.

Closer inspection reveals, however, that drop-out rates in primary schools fell by very little in 1991 and 1992 and actually rose in 1993, while in 1991, 1992, 1993 in junior

[83] *Zhongguo renkou tongji nianjian 1997*, "Wo guo 6-14 sui ertong wei zai xiao xianxiang mingxian jianshao" ["The number of children aged 6-14 not at school has obviously decreased"], p.496.

[84] Retention rates are based on the percentage of students who remain at school for the full five years in primary school or three years in junior middle school. For example, the retention rate for primary school children in 1995 refers to the children who entered school in the 1990/91 school year and who five years later completed their primary schooling.

secondary schools they rose, only falling below that of 1990 in 1995. This suggests that it would take very little to make them rise again in the future and shows that many of the problems of the eighties have continued into the nineties. Assessment of the situation in 1994 showed that funding local education was still a problem, leaving local authorities with little alternative but to raise the extra funds needed by increasing school fees. The late payment of teachers' salaries continued to be a problem and teachers were still leaving teaching for other jobs. Children were also dropping out of school for economic reasons, either because they couldn't pay school fees or child labour was in demand for small enterprises. In addition to these problems, the education system was still unable to provide enough middle schools for those graduating from primary schools, especially in poorer areas.[85]

How are these difficulties affecting children in minority areas? A survey of minority border regions carried out during the 1992/93 school year, taking in two county-level districts of administration in Inner Mongolia, the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region and five border counties in Yunnan, showed enrolment and drop-out rates generally varied between different regions according to economic development.[86] In the border regions of Inner Mongolia inhabited by the Manchus, enrolment rates were quite good and the drop-out rates were relatively low, although still above the national average.

[85] Pepper, Suzanne, "Gaining the initiative for education reform and development," op. cit., pp.18.14-18.16. She cites Guojia Jiaowei Guojia Jiaoyu Fazhan Yanjiu Zhongxin, "Jiaoyu tizhi gaige de xin silu" ["New thoughts about education system reform"], *Liaowang* (Beijing), No.9, (28/2/1994), pp.4-7; Yang Chunmao (SEC Personnel Office Director), "Jichu jiaoyu de jichu zai dongyao" [The basis of basic education is being undermined], *Liaowang* (Beijing), No.4, (24/1/1994), pp.13-14; *Zhongguo jiaoyu bao*, (23/10/1994, 8, 15, & 22/1/1995) on teachers' problems; *Zhongguo jiaoyu bao*, (24/8/1994) and Zhou Daping, "Guizai you xu, nan zai you xu: guanyu zhongxiaoxue shoufei de guancha yu sikao" ["The important and difficult thing is order: observations and reflections on collecting school fees"], *Liaowang*, (Beijing), No.46 (14/11/1994), pp.14-19.

[86] Ai Yiping, Meng Hongwei and Postiglione, Gerard A., "Zhongguo bufen bianjiang minzu diqu chuoxue qingkuang diaocha" ["A survey on the situation of drop-outs in some minority border areas of China"], *Jiaoyu yanjiu*, [Educational Research], No.1, (1995), p.60.

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For example, the primary school enrolment rates in two districts, Xinba'erhu youqi and Chenba'er qi, were 97.4 per cent and 98 per cent, with the 1992 drop-out rates being 2.4 per cent and 3 per cent respectively. The average per capita income in these two places was around 1000 yuan. On the other hand, in Ningming County in the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, the drop-out rate for the school year 1992/93 was 10 per cent. In Zhai'an township, Ningming County, the primary school enrolment rate was 92.6 per cent with a drop-out rate of 26 per cent. In Zhilang Township, also in Ningming, the enrolment rate was 90.4 per cent. This included one village where the enrolment rate was 80 per cent. In these two townships, the average per capita income was below 400 yuan.[87] The drop-out rate was also higher in mountainous, sparsely populated border regions. The survey report supplies tables and other data which explain why children, including girls, drop out of school. The views of students, parents, teachers, school principals and education officials were canvassed using questionnaires and interviews. *Table 4.5* displays the views of school principals and current students' views as to why students, including brothers, sisters or friends, had dropped out of school. It shows that poverty, poor school facilities, traditional views about females, poor achievement and loss of confidence were the most consistent reasons for dropping out. The survey also found that female enrolment and drop-out problems occurred most often in the countryside.[88]

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[87] Ai Yiping [et al.], ibid, pp.60-61.

[88] Ai Yiping [et al.] ibid., pp.61-62.

Table 4.5: **Reasons for dropping out of school in minority border regions in 1992/93** (%)

Reasons for dropping out of school	School principals	Students: about brothers & sisters	Students: about friends
Family related reasons			
• Poverty, unable to pay school fees	65.8	54.2	53.5
• Too many children, not able to meet responsibilities	22.4	22.2	19.0
• Parents unwilling, want children to return home to work	13.2	8.6	11.2
• Parents want children to go out to earn an income	5.3	1.5	2.1
• Parents do not give attention to children's education	35.5	4.6	13.7
Students' personal reasons			
• Physiological	9.2	5.3	3.4
• Studies poor, loss of confidence	35.5	24.0	25.4
• Studying is uninteresting	32.9	11.9	14.4
• Want to leave to earn an income	13.0	11.9	8.6
• Want to help with family labour	11.8	31.1	21.5
• Have a job	2.6	0.9	0.8
• Think studying is useless	27.6	7.5	7.6
School related problems			
• School environment and equipment poor	65.8	61.7	45.2
• Teacher quality low, teaching not satisfying	9.2	9.0	6.9
• Teacher prejudice, treat students poorly	0	1.5	2.5
• Can't understand teacher	2.6	2.6	4.3
Traditional customs			
• Don't return after participating in ethnic activities	6.6	7.5	10.0
• Females are inferior, education for girls is useless, better to prepare early to marry	38.2	30.2	27.5
• Males are inferior, education for boys is useless	5.3	7.9	4.3
Other reasons			
• School too far away, too difficult to reach	15.8	21.1	14.7

Source: Ai Yiping [et. al], *Jiaoyu yanjiu* 1, 1995, p.62.

Enrolment rates, drop-out rates and retention rates tend to present the most favourable measures of progress. Actual daily attendance rates for those children enrolled are difficult if not impossible to find.[89] The surveys into primary education in poor districts across the country carried out in 1992/93 (cited in the previous chapter) found that of the children who were enrolled, a large number attend school very irregularly. In busy times they stayed home to help their parents or they were absent from school when school fees were due. These children are not counted amongst the drop-outs because they still attend school, albeit on an irregular basis. The survey also found about 60 per cent of children in these circumstances were girls, with some only attending 20-30 per cent of the time.[90] Needless to say, the educational achievements of children such as these are very low. The same survey found that 16 per cent of primary students and 20 per cent of junior middle school students left school because of poor results. The district exam results in 1990-1992, according to the Education Office for the Luodian District in Guizhou, showed that only 12 per cent of students achieved a score of 50 per cent, with the average being 36 per cent.[91] These children are often barely, if at all, literate when they leave school.

The Hope Project has helped many children in these kinds of circumstances. By the end of 1997, it had received 1.26 billion yuan (US$152 million) in donations from inside and outside China which have been used to support 1.85 million students who could not otherwise afford to continue with their schooling. In addition, the fund was used to set up over 5256 primary schools.[92] Another project which was started in 1993, Hope Books,

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[89] Perhaps it is more a problem of definition. School attendance seems to refer more to whether children have or have not dropped out, or whether they have ever been to school and not to the actual daily attendance rates for those enrolled.

[90] Li Chunling, op. cit., pp.30-31.

[91] Li Chunling, ibid., pp.34-35.

[92] Huang Ying, " 'Hope' gives final details for helping dropouts," *China Daily*, (March 2, 1998), p.1.

has solicited the help of Chinese publishers as well as the public to provide sets of books for rural schools which would ordinarily have few book resources for their students to use.[93] These specially selected books were donated to rural primary school libraries. The Spring Bud Project, which is designed to help girls continue with their education had helped over 400 thousand girls all over the country by the middle of 1997. Its program is much more modest than the Hope Project and concentrates mainly on helping girls finish primary school and acquiring a little technical training. More recently it has extended its efforts to help a small number of girls with their junior middle school education.[94] The special focus on the education of girls, it was reported, had a significant impact on the attitudes of the local people when the project was first started, making them aware that the education of girls was important.[95] Nevertheless, considering the proportion of school drop-outs who are female, its small scale is somewhat surprising. The Hope Project, which supports children of both sexes, attracts more enthusiasm and donations from the public, suggesting that the affirmative action needed to redress the *imbalance* between educational opportunities for boys and girls is yet to come.

The Ministry of Education data published in January 2000 claims that drop-out rates fell to 0.9 per cent for primary schools and 3.23 per cent for junior middle schools by the middle of 1997.[96] The reliability of this data is questionable, given that teachers and school officials may be fined if dropping-out is a problem in their school. With little incentive for them to accurately report drop-out rates, underreporting is highly probable.[97]

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[93] Zhou Yi, "Books provided for rural children," *Beijing Review*, Vol.39, No.11, (March 11-17, 1996), p.20.

[94] "First Spring Bud class," *Beijing Review*, Vol.40, No.35, (September 1-7, 1997), p.34.

[95] Kou Zhenling, op. cit., p.20.

[96] Ministry of Education and the National Commission for UNESCO, op. cit. p.52.

[97] Beech, Hannah, op. cit.

According to the Ministry of Education, other studies have shown that the drop-out rates for junior middle school students in rural areas is much higher than in urban areas, with many more girls dropping out than boys. The reasons for students dropping out have changed little from those cited earlier in this chapter. Some students do not want to go to school, others encounter financial problems. Others in more economically developed areas are withdrawn from school to help in a family enterprise or to do household chores to free a mother to work. The idea that males are superior to females is still a common reason for cutting short a girl's education. Many parents continue to disregard the Compulsory Education Law, despite the threat of stiff fines.[98]

Another problem to emerge since restrictions on population mobility have eased is the huge "floating population" *(liudong renkou)*. This floating population, consisting mainly of rural people seeking better opportunities for employment in the cities, is estimated to be around 10 per cent of the total population in major cities.[99] Most migrants are single men and women, or married men without their families. Increasingly, however, the children of migrant workers are presenting a new challenge to educational authorities. In 1992, it was estimated that about 10 per cent of the floating population were under the age of 16 years, with about 70 per cent of those being of pre-school age. That means that the other 30 per cent were mostly school-age children.[100] Because of the temporary nature of the work their parents do in the cities (the average length of their stay has been put at about 5-8 months), their schooling is disrupted.[101] Furthermore, authorities in their host cities often exclude these children from city schools or charge high fees. Thus many

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[98] Ministry of Education and the National Commission for UNESCO, op. cit., pp.50,52.

[99] Mallee, Hein, "China's household registration system under reform," op. cit., 1995, p.8.

[100] Pepper, Suzanne, "Gaining the initiative for education reform and development," op. cit., p.18.18.

[101] Mallee, Hein, "In defence of migration: recent studies on rural population mobility," *China Information,* vol.10, nos.3/4, (Winter 1995/Spring 1996), p.121.

children do not attend school for long periods of time.[102] The exclusion of these children from city schools is not condoned by authorities in the Ministry of Education who say that these temporary workers pay tax to the local governments while resident in these cities and therefore should be able to send their children to the local public schools.[103]

Some cities, such as Beijing, comply with the law entitling migrant children to attend public schools, but charge high fees for the privilege. This may amount to $360 or more (fees which 'official' residents do not pay), with another $80 for books, just to attend a public school on the outskirts of Beijing. Fees for inner city schools are even higher. Given that many rural workers often earn less than $100 a month, few can afford to send their children to such schools. As a result, many unlicensed schools have sprung up to provide an education for Beijing's 100,000 migrant children. While a few other cities have given these schools official accreditation, Beijing is yet to do so. Not only are unlicensed schools constantly under the threat of being closed down, they often have to make do with poorly qualified or unqualified teachers. Many migrant children receive little or no schooling at all while their parents work in the city.[104] These children are potential new illiterates.

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[102] Pepper, Suzanne, "Gaining the initiative for education reform and development," op. cit., p.18.18.

[103] This was the view of Wang Dai who is in charge of Adult Education in the MOE (Beijing) when I visited him in February 1998. It was also a directive which came out of the party-state work conference in June 1994. See Pepper, ibid., p.18.17.

4.3 Implications for the educational opportunities of girls

This chapter has focused on the development of compulsory education in China to see how the educational opportunities of girls have been affected by some of the problems which have occurred in its implementation. It is clear that such problems are contributing to a large pool of new illiterates between the ages of 14 and 19 years (2.51 million in 1995, 1.72 per cent of all illiterates fifteen years or more), but these problems are not directly responsible for 70 per cent of them being girls.[105]

Raising and allocating adequate funding for education has proved to be one of the main stumbling blocks to the development of education in regional China. Many of the difficulties experienced, however, stem from the lack of priority given to education rather than a lack of funds. Not only are other more 'economically productive' projects which produce quick results favoured over investment in education, the meagre funds set aside for education in local government budgets have sometimes been diverted and used for more 'productive' causes. The need for schools then to increase fees to make up for the shortfall in allocated funding is one of the main reasons why a large number of school-age children (18.36 million in 1995) are not at school.[106] Besides shortening the length of schooling for many children, it is also responsible for a good number of girls not attending school at all. The *disproportionate* number of girls who drop out of school or who never go to school at all, however, cannot be blamed on funding problems.

Poverty is an important factor affecting the schooling of many children. Not only does it limit the ability of local governments in poor areas to raise the necessary funds, it also affects the capacity of parents in such areas to send their children to school. Besides

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[104] Eckholm, Erik, "For China's rural migrants, an education wall," *The New York Times on the Web*, [On-line], (12/12/1999), <http://www.nytimes.com/library/world/asia/121299china-migrants.html>.

[105] *Zhongguo renkou tongji nianjian 1997*, op. cit., p.496.

not being able to pay school fees, the income which a child can earn while not at school may be used to help improve a family's circumstances. Although it is illegal to employ a child under the age of sixteen, it is often overlooked if the child is working at home on the farm. Girls may be kept home to do housework and mind younger siblings, enabling a mother to go out to work. Poverty itself, however, is not responsible for the *unequal* opportunities for education between boys and girls.

Good teachers are needed if children at school are to become the skilled workers and technical experts of the future, yet many teachers go unpaid for several months, resulting in a demoralized teaching force leaving teaching in large numbers. Those unable to leave, usually the most poorly qualified, are left to cope with teaching in inadequate facilities with few resources. The impact of this on the children they teach, together with a style of teaching which is geared to memorizing facts for examinations rather than the use of more creative teaching methods, has also resulted in many children dropping out of school. Poor progress, failing exams and repeating grades has given many parents and students the impression that studying is useless and children could be better occupied working and earning an income. While most parents in rural areas would like to see their children succeed at school and go on to university as a way of leaving farming altogether, lack of progress is also an important reason why many children do not continue at school. It is not the only reason though. The story of one girl whose parents chose to cut short her education as soon as her younger brother started school, even though her school grades were better than those of her older brother, is one example of why 70 per cent of the children who drop out of school are girls.[107]

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[106] "Facts and figures," *Beijing Review*, (July 14-20, 1997), p.23.
[107] Kou Zhengling, op. cit., p.19.

Thus it appears that the problems associated with the implementation of basic education are not of themselves responsible for the gender imbalance seen in the statistics for school drop-outs, for those not at school, or for illiterates aged 15 to 19 years. Along with the effects of poverty, these other problems merely exacerbate existing gender biases which become more apparent in the more difficult circumstances. Problems implementing basic education in rural areas are more serious, however, when viewed in the light of the significantly better opportunities enjoyed by urban children. When universal senior school education for children in major cities and developed coastal areas is occurring at the same time that many rural and remote areas still do not have basic primary school education, the unequal opportunities experienced by girls in the countryside *can* then be more directly attributed to the poor provision of basic education in these areas.[108] The stark contrast between the educational opportunities for city children and rural children, let alone girls in rural areas, therefore needs much greater attention.

The more plentiful educational opportunities in cities and coastal areas, however, does not necessarily mean that there is little or no gender bias in these places. Employment problems being encountered by female university and college graduates would suggest this is not the case. That women are more likely than men to be made redundant in the workplace in the name of economic rationalism also confirms this. These problems along with stratification in bureaucracies, academies and government seem to suggest that the same gender biases denying girls basic education in the countryside are still alive and well in the cities.[109] They have simply reappeared in new guises. This means that even if girls are able to receive a better education, they find that opportunities to

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[108] State Council, "Opinion," *Zhongguo jiaoyu bao*, (28/8/1994), (Article 3). Cited in Pepper, Suzanne, "Gaining the initiative for education reform and development," op. cit., p.18.27.

[109] Croll, Elisabeth, *Changing Identities of Chinese Women: Rhetoric, Experience and Self-perception in Twentieth-century China*, Hong Kong University Press/Zed Books, London/New Jersey, 1995, pp.119-123, 131.

make use of their qualifications are restricted by gender biases in places of employment. The notion that educating girls is less productive than educating boys is thus reinforced, perpetuating the cycle which tends to limit the educational opportunities of girls.

In rural areas in places where nine-year basic education is available, educational opportunities for girls tend to end at junior middle school. Not only are junior middle school admission rates for girls lower than for boys, many drop out before graduating. Many of these girls drop out to find employment as soon as they turn fifteen or sixteen. For some, this may be as early as their first year (possibly because they were almost fifteen when they left primary school), others drop out during their second year.[110] Reasons usually include the cost of education, problems with the enforcement of laws which ban the use of child labour in enterprises, the availability of work, and parental attitudes.[111] In many rural areas there are not enough junior middle schools to cater for those graduating from primary school. Access to senior middle school and university education is even more limited, creating little incentive to continue with a secondary education.[112] The usual expectation of parents is that girls will at most graduate from junior middle school while boys will at least graduate from senior middle school.[113] The limited education of girls

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[110] Meng Xianfan, Li Haifu and Wu Lijian, op. cit., p.64. This was the situation found during a survey conducted in three rural areas with different levels of economic development in Hebei. Also Pepper, Suzanne, "Gaining the initiative for education reform and development," op. cit., p.18.16. Zang Jian, "Nütong shengcun yu fazhan: yige buke hushi de lingyu" ["The lives and development of girls: an area which cannot be ignored"], Beijing University, a paper given to me by the author in February 1998, pp.3-4. Her survey included poor areas in Ningxia. These problems were also mentioned by Wang Dai in the MOE during my conversations with him at that time.

[111] Meng Xianfan, Li Haifu and Wu Lijian, ibid., p.65.

[112] Pepper, Suzanne, "Gaining the initiative for education reform and development," op. cit., p.18.16.

[113] Institute of Population Studies, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (ed), *Sampling Survey Data of Women's Status in Contemporary China,*(International Academic Publishers, Beijing, 1994), pp.441 and 460. Hong Yuanchao, "Nannü fazhan ziyuan de chayi yu funü diwei" ["Differences in the development of resources between males and females, and the status of women"], *Dangdai Zhongguo funü diwei* [Women's Status in Contemporary China], in Sha Jicai and Liu Qiming (eds), (Beijing Daxue Chubanshe, 1995), pp.256-257.

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combined with the fact that some do very little reading after they leave school means that many forget what they have learned and eventually become semi-literate.[114]

The 1995 sample survey revealed that one in three or four, or 28.37 per cent of females aged 15 years or more in rural areas, was illiterate. This compares with one in nine, or 11.09 per cent, of males.[115] Amongst those aged 15 to 20 years, one in twenty, or 5 per cent of rural females are illiterate, which shows that their access to basic education has improved substantially over the years. However, when this is compared with the figures for rural males in the same age group, we find that 2.25 per cent, or roughly one in 44 rural males was illiterate. When urban females aged 15 to 20 years are compared with their male counterparts, we see that 0.9 per cent, or one in 111 urban females was illiterate, compared with 0.5 per cent, or one in 200 males in the same age group in 1995.[116] Most of the Chinese population is classified as rural (70.96 per cent in 1995), which means that most of the new illiterates produced in the preceding five years were females living in rural areas.[117]

The male/female and urban/rural disparities seen in the national literacy data are thus clearly apparent in the data for new illiterates. Problems with implementing basic education in many rural and remote areas are responsible for most of the new illiterates being produced, but not for the disproportionate number of them being female. Poverty affects the educational opportunities of both boys and girls, but it affects girls most. Dropping out of school may be related to poor progress at school, but sometimes girls are forced to leave school by their parents when they are actually doing quite well. Of those

[114] Hong Yuanchao, ibid., p.257. This was also a problem amongst some of the women I interviewed.

[115] *1995 Quanguo 1% renkou chouyang diaocha ziliao*, op. cit., pp.94-95.

[116] *1995 Quanguo 1% renkou chouyang diaocha ziliao*, ibid., pp.86-91.

[117] *Zhongguo renkou tongji nianjian 1996*, op. cit., p.364.

girls who are still enrolled, some in poor areas attend school so infrequently that they learn very little and their progress is poor. Although the educational opportunities for girls are still generally not as good as those for boys in both urban and rural areas, all the data show that in rural areas, girls have the poorest access to schooling of all.

Chapters Three and Four have clearly established that being female is the most discriminatory factor associated with illiteracy and poor access to education. The next task is to examine it as a gender issue. Before doing this, however, Chapter Five considers the reasons why such an approach is not usually used in studies of female illiteracy within China.

5 GENDER: A NEW DISCOURSE IN CHINA

The previous two chapters have set out to show that the characteristic most often associated with illiteracy is being female, and that although illiteracy is gradually being reduced amongst females, more female illiterates than male illiterates are still being produced. Up to this point I have used the word 'gender' rather loosely to refer to the male/female distinction when 'sex' would have been the traditional choice. This chapter seeks to explain why the word 'gender' is more significant to the discussion about female illiteracy than the mere designation of sex. In China a new discourse on gender is emerging which is exploring the use of gender as an analytical category for studying women's problems. Questions that this chapter addresses are - why has gender, the social, cultural, political and ideological meanings and practices constructed on the basis of sex, not been used as a category for analysis in China before?[1] How is the new discourse on gender developing? Finally, what is its relevance to the problem of female illiteracy?

5.1 Why gender was not used before

Female illiteracy is most often the subject of reports within the Ministry of Education and the Women's Federation. Little has been published on it elsewhere in China, except in the context of more recent discussions on the status of women by academics. The educational authorities at the state and provincial levels have been concerned with the implementation of nine-year compulsory education as a means of overcoming illiteracy, while the Women's Federation has been concerned with the practical side of implementing programs to help girls overcome unequal opportunities for schooling, or organizing educational programs to help women overcome adult illiteracy

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[1] This is a rather simplistic summary of the meaning of gender. A fuller discussion of its meaning in the West and in China, along with the idea of using gender as an analytic category, is developed in this chapter.

and a lack of technical competence. Analysis of problems is usually carried out using census and survey data, with a few surveys including testing for the recognition of Chinese characters. While this information is useful, it does not approach the problem of female illiteracy as a gender problem. Female illiteracy is usually regarded as a symptom of other more general social problems related to poverty, ethnicity, remoteness and so on rather than the results of particular gendered meanings and practices which work together to produce it. Not asked, for example, is why the married lives of many rural women are organized so that they have little use for literacy beyond very basic levels.[2]

The elimination of illiteracy from the whole population in China has been part of the larger agenda of economic and social development since 1949. Central to this development is a Marxist approach to the social relations of production in which private ownership of the means of production is replaced by public ownership. Women's emancipation is dependent on their participation in production under these different arrangements. Although male/female relations have undergone many changes since 1949, both Chinese and western commentators recognize that the liberation of Chinese women is incomplete.[3] Some western feminists suggest that the main reason problems such as the sexual division of labour and unequal opportunities for education and employment are difficult to overcome is because they have not been analyzed and confronted in China as gender problems.[4]

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[2] Many of my own interviewees (Fufeng County, March 1998) said they do not use their literacy skills much.

[3] Andors, Phyllis, *The Unfinished Liberation of Chinese Women 1949-1980*, (Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Wheatsheaf Books, Sussex, 1983); Croll, Elisabeth, *From Heaven to Earth: Images and Experiences of Development in China*, (Routledge, London and New York, 1994); Li Xiaojiang, "Economic reform and the awakening of Chinese women's collective consciousness," in Gilmartin, Christina K., Hershatter, Gail, Rofel, Lisa and White, Tyrene (eds.), *Engendering China: Women, Culture and the State*, (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts/London, England, 1994); Lin Chun, "Towards a Chinese feminism," *Dissent*, Vol.42, (Fall 1995); Wolf, Margery, *Revolution Postponed. Women in Contemporary China*, (Methuen, London, 1985), to name some.

[4] For example, Rai, Shirin, "Watering another man's garden, op. cit.; Stacey, Judith, *Patriarchy and Socialist Revolution in China*, (University of California Press, Berkeley/Los Angeles/London, 1983), pp.262-263.

There are several reasons why 'gender' as a category for analysis has not been used in China before. The first is that Marxist class analysis has always been regarded by the Chinese as capable of providing a path for the liberation of women. Second, the concept of 'gender' has been regarded as the product of a 'bourgeois' feminism which has developed in the capitalist west and therefore is not relevant to the Chinese situation. Third, until new political and economic pressures arising during the reforms and the implementation of the one child per family policy revealed that attitudes had not really changed, Chinese women believed they were liberated. Finally, the officially sanctioned women's organization, the Women's Federation, has been responsible for promoting an 'official feminism' which has controlled all discourse on women.

5.1.1 The Marxist approach to women's liberation

The Marxist approach to women's liberation has been the basis for liberating women from 'feudal'[5] attitudes and practices since the CCP came to power in 1949. Historical accounts of the changing situation of women in China are well documented in China and in the West, with many China specialists in the West critiquing the social experiment which was taking place.[6] The tenets which have formed the basis for women's development are founded on a fairly typical approach to Marxist theory. Briefly summarized they include: the idea that material forces, including the mode of production, determine social life and therefore decide women's status; that private ownership is at the root of all women's problems; that women's liberation along with class liberation is dependent on the liberation on the whole of society; that women will be liberated as they

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[5] Refer back to Chapter One (note 3) for a discussion on the Chinese use of the word 'feudal'.

[6] Andors, Phyllis, op. cit.; Croll, Elisabeth, *Feminism and Socialism*, (Routledge & Kegan Paul, London/Henley/Boston, 1978); Croll, Elisabeth, *Chinese Women Since Mao*, (Zed Books, London/M.E. Sharpe, Armonk, New York, 1983); Davin, Delia, *Woman-Work: Women and the Party in Revolutionary China*, (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1976); Johnson, Kay Ann, *Women, the Family and Peasant Revolution in China*, (University of Chicago Press, Chicago/London, 1983); Stacey, Judith, ibid.; Wolf, Margery, ibid., are some of the best known written in the West.

take part in social production; and that the Marxist theory of women is a scientifically based theory of development which liberates women.[7]

It is generally agreed that considerable progress has been made in improving the situation of women but how much is the direct result of the implementation of Marxist doctrine and how much has occurred as a result of the *process* of mobilizing women for production and revolutionary activity is hard to tell. Now that this type of mobilization has ceased, there is considerable evidence appearing to suggest that *attitudes* may not have changed very much after all, especially in the countryside. Some of the issues which are still problematic include – the use of men's status and roles to measure equality between the sexes and the status of women; household work is still a problem for women in China in much the same way as it is in capitalist countries; the sexual division of labour is regarded as 'natural' because of women's role in reproduction; and women's oppression is linked to class oppression so that relations between the sexes are not dealt with as a separate issue. While some feminists in the West have found a Marxist style of analysis useful, many have found it still wanting. Not considered, they say, is the part that men play in the exploitation of women.[8] For example, if in China women are to be liberated through participation in production, why do they still carry the heavier burden for reproduction, childcare and household work so that their ability to participate in production is limited? If they therefore must occupy the lower paid, less responsible positions and part time or temporary work, how does this represent equality?

Chen Muhua, president of the All-China Women's Federation and vice chairwoman of the National People's Congress Standing Committee, explains that the

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[7] Deng Zhonghua, "Guanyu Makesi zhuyi funü lilun de ji dian renshi" ["A few points to know about the Marxist theory on women"], *Funü zuzhi yu huodong* [Women's Organizations and Activities], No.11, (1991), pp.9-10.

[8] Jaggar, Alison M., *Feminist Politics and Human Nature*, (Rowman and Allanheld, Totowa, N.J., 1983), pp.51-82.

whole country's interest's must come first and that women's needs will then be solved in the context of general social development. Women's development is limited by the level of development of the economy, she says. She goes on to say that although women's interests and those of the whole country are basically the same, the development of society occurs in phases, producing some conflicts between the needs of women and the interests of society as a whole.[9] She points out that women's long term interests should not be sacrificed for the sake of economic development, but her position as a government leader means that she has no real alternative but to defer to the prerogatives of the male majority in the government leadership, with the result that economic goals continue to have priority over issues which specifically affect women. Thus it is that she, along with many others, must support the view that the needs of women will be met as economic conditions improve. Gender analysis has no place in the analysis of women's problems in Marxist theory which, Chen reminds everyone, already analyzes women's problems from a gender perspective.[10]

5.1.2 The rejection of western feminism

The second reason why gender has not been used as an analytical category is because of its place in the development of western feminism. Western feminism has been regarded by men and women alike in China as a 'bourgeois' women's movement developing in the capitalist West and therefore ideologically incompatible with the goals of socialism.[11] Because it began with a campaign for women's rights in a culture which

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[9] Chen Muhua, "Jiaqiang funü lilun yanjiu cujin funü fazhan" ["Strengthen women's theoretical research and advance the development of women"], in *Zhongguo funü yanjiu nianjian 1991-1995* [Women's Studies in China Yearbook 1991-1995], (Zhongguo Funü Chubanshe, 1997), pp.2-3.

[10] Chen Muhua, ibid., p.4. A gender perspective here refers to the Marxist view in which women are to be liberated as they become more economically independent through participating in the labour force. It does not mean problematizing male/female relations.

[11] Zhu Qing, "Summary of the Second National Symposium on Women's Studies," *Chinese Sociology and Anthropology*, Vol.21, No.3, (1989), p.25; Li Xiaojiang, "Economic reform and the awakening of Chinese women's collective consciousness," op. cit., p.367.

promoted the rights of individuals, it found little sympathy in China where collective rights are traditionally regarded as more important than individual rights.[12] The idea that western feminists were not fighting for the collective interests of women is more of an assumption based on perceived differences between cultures and politics in China and the West than a fact. The call by some female academics in China now to awaken the collective consciousness of women indicates that collective interests in China have always been selective anyway, with women's interests being prescribed for them according to agendas run by men.[13]

The women's rights movement in China begun during the May 4th Movement did not continue to develop as an autonomous women's rights movement. There were two reasons for this. First, male resistance in rural areas in the formative days of the CCP resulted in the incorporation of women's organizations into peasant associations, with the result that male leaders defined what the issues were and how they should be understood ideologically, and men increasingly took it upon themselves to speak for women. Women's opportunities to participate in the decision making process within the party hierarchy were restricted to members of the Women's Bureau where being married to a prominent party member was usually the unspoken prerequisite for holding high office.[14] The second reason was that women's emancipation became part of the CCP's official

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[12] Barlow, Tani E., "Politics and protocols of *fun ü* (un)making national woman," in Gilmartin, Christina K., Hershatter, Gail, Rofel, Lisa and White, Tyrene (eds.), *Engendering China: Women, Culture and the State*, (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts/ London, England, 1994), p.352-353. Here she is referring to a book by Li Xiaojiang, *Xiaowa de tansuo* [Eve's Exploration], (Hunan Renmin Chubanshe, Changsha, 1988), p.22.

[13] Li Xiaojiang, "Economic reform and the awakening of Chinese women's collective consciousness," op. cit., p. 367-368; Du Fangqin, "Funü shi yanjiu: nüxing yishi de 'quexi' yu 'zaichang'" [Research into women's history: the 'presence' or 'absence' of gender consciousness"], *Fun ü yanjiu luncong* [Collection of Women's Studies], No.4, (1996); Zhang Yanxia, "Zhongguo funü yanjiu zoushi" ["Tendencies in women's studies in China"], *Fun ü Yanjiu Luncong*, [Collection of Women's Studies], No.4, (1997).

[14] Gilmartin, Christina Kelley, *Engendering the Chinese Revolution*, op. cit., p. 203; Johnson, Kay Ann, ibid, pp.46-47; Lee, Lily Xiao Hong and Wiles, Sue, *Women of the Long March*, (Allen & Unwin, Australia, 1999), pp.84, 222.

agenda in government. Chinese women therefore no longer felt the need to develop an independent movement to fight for the right to participate in society alongside men. For thirty years women did not see that participating in society meant doing so on men's terms. 'What men could do, women could do too' set the terms of reference for women's liberation.

After the cultural revolution, when China gradually opened up again to the outside world, Chinese women intellectuals, who were still reacting against the masculinization of women during the cultural revolution, were repelled by the activities of radical feminists in the West because they saw them as an attempt to deny women's special female attributes.[15] A return to traditional ideas of femininity and dependence on men as well as a perception that western feminists were trying to be like men have meant that the idea of being called a 'feminist' is repugnant to many women in China.[16] Indeed, men can be feminists and be considered enlightened, but a woman who calls herself a feminist is considered to be unmarriageable.[17] Thus there has been a reluctance by women to embrace feminism or take a stance which might challenge men. Women still feel uncomfortable and even guilty if their husbands do housework, and think that the trivial nature of housework trivializes the men who do it and therefore undermines their masculinity.[18] Traditional ideas of masculinity and femininity mean that the idea of treating

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[15] Roberts, Rosemary, "Chinese women writers and their response to western feminism," *Asian Studies Review*, Vol.18, No.2, (1994), p.40. Remarks made by Shen Rong in an interview with the author.

[16] Ding Xiaoqi, "Feminism in China," *Asian Studies Review*, Vol.15, No.1, (1991), p.111.

[17] Roberts, Rosemary, op. cit., pp.49-50. She cites Dai Jinhua who was speaking at a conference at Beijing University in 1989, and Wang Meng who was quoted in "Wenxue, shehui, minzu, shijie" ["Literature, society, the nation, the world"], *Wenyibao*, (10/9/1988), p.3.

[18] Woei Lien Chong, "The position of women in China: a lecture by woman writer Zhang Jie," *China Information*, Vol.10, No.1, (1995), p.56. Zhang Jie's words are reproduced verbatim. Zhang Xinxin, "Zai tong yi dipingxian shang" ["On the same horizon"], *Shouhuo* [Harvest], No.6, (1981), p.177. Cited in Roberts, Rosemary A., "Images of women in the fiction of Zhang Jie and Zhang Xinxin, *China Quarterly*, Issue 120, (1989), p.807.

the male/female relationship, whether public or private, as sexual politics still sits uncomfortably with many Chinese women.

5.1.3 Women considered they were liberated

The third reason given for rejecting western feminism and its emphasis on gender analysis has been that during the thirty or so years following the establishment of the People's Republic of China, many women intellectuals considered that they were already fully emancipated, enjoying even greater freedoms than women in the West.

> In those days, if anyone had talked about women's liberation movements or women's rights, she would have been frowned upon or considered crazy.[19]

It wasn't until the economic reforms took effect that women found they were discriminated against, specifically on the grounds of sex.

While women in the West have had to fight for changes in the law to give them equal rights, laws protecting the interests of women have been promulgated over time since 1949 without much need for the agitation of Chinese women. China now proudly boasts a comprehensive system of legislation giving women equal legal status with men. By hosting the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, the government hoped it would become a means for displaying what had been achieved with respect to women's liberation in China.[20] To their credit, the law gives women very necessary legal guarantees, but by no means do these legal guarantees mean that women are equal to men. First of all, the fundamental principle underlying these laws is that of protecting women. Chen Muhua, in a paragraph called "The relationship between protecting women and

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[19] Tao Jie, op. cit., p.351.

[20] Wang Zheng, "A historic point for the women's movement in China," *Signs,* Vol.22, No.1, (1996), p.193.

social justice" where she discusses the role of the law, uses the word 'protect' ten times.[21] Chinese academics are now questioning this emphasis on protecting women because they say it assumes that women are weaker than men and need a kind of paternalistic protection which denies them equal status with men.[22] Because women then become reliant on the government to give them equal status, they remain passive recipients rather than active participants in the process of liberation. One of the ways in which this becomes most apparent is the extent to which many women do not even know about the laws, let alone how to use them to protect themselves.[23] To the extent that they are aware, there often is a false consciousness of freedoms gained which in reality have yet to be grasped by many women. A 'liberation' carried out by others does not guarantee that 'the liberated' acquire sufficient independent power to stand on their own feet and create their own place in society.

If we remember that traditional Chinese culture assigned women no worth at all, we should not be too surprised that a lot of women feel they are liberated. New marriage laws, and opportunities for female education, participation in politics and employment have revolutionized many women's lives. Had the reforms not brought about changes in economic and social organization, they may have taken even longer to notice that the revolution had not really challenged the continuing superior status of men. Lin Chun, after her exposure to western feminism, now asks how they, as Chinese who were striving towards ideals of equality, managed to miss "the kind of questions that since the late 1970s have stimulated notable contributions by Euro-American feminist critics to China scholarship?" She also wonders about the women who, like her mother, participated in the revolution.

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[21] Chen Muhua, op. cit., p.3.

[22] Tao Jie, op. cit., pp.351-352.

[23] Wang Jiaxiang, "What are Chinese women faced with after Beijing?", *Feminist Studies*, Vol.22, No.3, (1996), p.500.

Did they see their specific 'female subjectivities' being in any way sacrificed for the universal cause of liberation? Had [her mother] and her fellow participants ever experienced any 'systematic' discrimination in the revolutionary camp? Were they aware of any 'male dominance' existing within the Communist power structure? Have they, in fact, ever had a pondering moment or sufficient interest to look at their place in relation to men within and without the family during the revolutionary struggles? Was it possible for them to think of 'gender identity' not in the normative context of women's liberation but in terms of the defects of the revolution itself? [24]

Only as she began to ponder these things did she see the "… contradictory character of a communist feminism." This then brings us to the last issue, the role of 'official feminism' in China.

5.1.4 The role of 'official feminism'

Although the May Fourth women's rights movement bore many similarities to its counterpart in the West, it developed quite differently after 1949. Already mentioned, is the absorption of the earlier women's rights movement into the wider liberation of the whole of society. Feminism became part of an official discourse on women promoted by the official organization for women's matters, the Women's Federation. The Women's Federation was originally set up in 1949 to be a mass organization whose chief purpose was to disseminate the policies of the CCP downwards to women and to reflect their views back up the organizational chain to Party leaders. As such, its role was not unique in that it was one of several mass organizations, including the trade unions and the Communist Youth League, whose principal purpose was to build the new state. Its job was to mobilize women for production and to awaken their consciousness so that old ideas and practices could be replaced by the new. One of its first jobs was to help implement the new marriage laws passed in 1950. To be a member of the Federation one

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[24] Lin Chun, op. cit., p.478.

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had to study Marxism, Leninism and Mao Zedong thought, have an appropriate political background, be involved in class struggle, be committed to advancing socialism, love the nation, be dedicated to the organization, be one with the masses and be over sixteen years old.[25] In representing the new Chinese woman the Federation controlled all discourse on what it meant to be a woman (*funü*) in the new society. More than that, it has been said that "one could not until recently be 'represented' *as a woman* without the agency and mediation of Fulian" (the Women's Federation).[26] After Mao's death in 1976 and the fall of the Gang of Four, women rejected official feminism which had expected them to be like men during the Cultural Revolution. This has meant that the Women's Federation has come under pressure now to redefine its role in order to be relevant in the new period of reform.

In reviewing the four reasons why gender was not used to analyze the situation of women in China, it is clear that both men and women did not see the need to deal with the male/female relationship itself as a kind of politics which needed its own type of analysis. Women's problems, including female illiteracy, have been understood as outcomes of other social or economic problems. Now that the government has moved from a heavily interventionist role to one of less direct involvement in many matters, it has become apparent that traditional attitudes towards males and females have not changed much, with women being discriminated against in education and employment in particular. The extent of the discrimination against females is most starkly seen in the statistics for sex ratios at birth and the high rates of female infant mortality in rural areas, such that in the early part of the 21st century, it is expected that one million men a year will not be able to

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[25] Hemmel, Vibeke and Sindbjerg, Pia, *Women in Rural China: Policy Towards Women Before and After the Cultural Revolution,* (Curzon Press, London and Malmo/Humanities Press, Atlantic Highlands, USA, 1984), pp.11-12.

[26] Barlow, Tani E., "Politics and protocols of *funü,*" op. cit., pp.273-274.

find wives.[27] That, together with the fact that female illiterates comprise 70 percent of the country's illiterates shows that traditional attitudes which favour males over females are still well entrenched. The realization of this has led urban women intellectuals to develop a new discourse on women's issues which includes the concept of gender.

5.2 The new discourse on gender

There are two aspects to the development of a new discourse on gender in China which need to be considered. The first is an 'awakening' which occurred during the 1980s as women became aware of the contradictions between the official discourse on women and the reality of women's lives. The second one is the significance of the timing and the holding of the Fourth World Conference on Women in China. Both of these developments led to a new interest in the concept of gender and how it might be relevant to the situation in China.

As the economic reforms took effect during the 1980s, women came under new pressures. In urban areas this was most clearly evident as women were discriminated against in employment, with female university graduates not being able to find jobs and women who had jobs being sent home.[28] Women's reproductive and nurturing responsibilities were seen to make them liabilities in enterprises that had to become more efficient if the country was to become more prosperous. In rural areas, the greatest pressure came from the strict enforcement of family planning policies which limited the number of children a woman could have to one or two at the most. Rural women,

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[27] Zhu Chuzhu, Li Shuzhuo, Qiu Changrong, Hu Ping, Jin Anrong, *Jihua shengyu dui Zhongguo funü de shuangmian yingxiang* [The dual effects of the family planning program on Chinese women], (Xi'an Jiaotong University Press, 1997), p.88.

especially, came under enormous pressure from their husbands and their husbands' families to give birth to a son because of traditional ideas and practices which were backed up by the claim that a son was needed to help with the labour in the fields.[29] This has led to the aborting of female fetuses, female infanticide, neglect and abandonment of girls, not registering the birth of girls, family disapproval of women who give birth to girls, and even suicide.[30] The reporting of these problems in the national media shocked urban women, especially those in the Federation, who had assumed that Chinese women were liberated. Along with other issues such as marriage and divorce, and an increase in prostitution in urban areas, these problems precipitated urgent calls for more research to be done on women's issues.

The Women's Federation responded to these problems by organizing the First National Conference on Theoretical Research on Women in 1984. It then established research centres and formed associations in which scholars from universities and research academies could work alongside their cadres on women's issues. At the same time, the Federation also set up programs to give their cadres training in new theories and methods of dealing with women's issues.[31] Groups of women scholars also formed informal women's studies groups within universities and research institutes to study women's problems. They felt there was a need to develop new theoretical frameworks and research methods which could be used to challenge traditional attitudes and values. Theories and research methods from abroad are now being studied, and there is a keen interest in finding out about what is going on in the women's movement elsewhere.[32] All of these

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[28] See Li Xiaojiang, "Economic reform and the awakening of the Chinese women's collective consciousness," op. cit., pp.360-382; Rai, Shirin M, "Modernisation and gender: education and employment in post-Mao China," *Gender and Education,* Vol.6, No.2, (1994).

[29] The government's new laws giving girls the right to inherit property, efforts to encourage more men to live with their wives' families after marriage and the fact that much of the farming is done by women has not changed the traditional preference for sons.

[30] Croll, Elisabeth, *From Heaven to Earth,* op. cit., pp. 199-202; Honig, Emily and Hershatter, Gail, op. cit., pp.274-276.

developments have meant the timing of the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995 was very significant for women in China.

In the lead up to the conference, women's issues were given greater prominence in Chinese books, journals, newspapers and special television programs, promoting a heightened interest in these issues. 'Feminism', which had previously carried negative connotations, took on a positive meaning for the first time. Many Chinese women engaged in research and activism in the women's movement in China looked forward to linking up with women similarly engaged in other countries. Despite the strict monitoring of the presentations given by Chinese participants (because of government anxiety following the protests by human rights organizations in the lead up to the conference), many Chinese women researchers and activists are of the opinion that the outcome has been good. The government's positive assessment of the event and its pledge to implement the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action has given impetus to the Chinese women's movement so that many women now feel they are able to participate in global feminism for the first time.[33] As a result, the concept of 'gender' has become important in the current discourse on women's liberation in China.

A whole range of new terminology in the Chinese language is evolving incorporating the gender concept. In 1996, the *Zhongguo Funübao (Chinese Women's Newspaper)*, the official publication of the All-China Women's Federation, ran numerous articles with titles such as "Canzheng nüxing tan xingbie yishi" ["Women participating in

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[31] Wang Zheng, "Maoism, feminism, and the UN conference on women: Women's Studies research in contemporary China," *Journal of Women's History*, Vol.8, No.4, (1997), pp.127-128; Tao Jie, op. cit., pp.354-355.

[32] Wan Shanping, "The emergence of women's studies in China," *Women's Studies International Forum*, Vol.11, No.5, (1988), pp.455-464. Tao Jie, op. cit., pp.351-363.

[33] Wang Zheng, "A historic point for the women's movement in China," op. cit., pp.192-199. Wang Jiaxiang, op. cit., pp.497-501.

government and politics discuss gender consciousness"], "Xingbie yishi dajia tan" ["Everyone is discussing gender consciousness"], "Jiaoyu gaige: cujin shehui xingbie gongzheng" ["Educational reform: bring in gender justice"] and so on.[34] Gender is frequently discussed in journals such as *Funü Yanjiu Luncong* [Collection of Women's Studies], a relatively new publication, in articles written by researchers in women's studies centres within universities and in research centres within the Women's Federation. In order to understand the significance of this new discourse in China, we first of all need to know something about what it means in western feminist discourse and then how it is being used in Chinese feminist discourse.

5.2.1 The concept of gender

Originally, 'gender' was a word which referred to the classification of nouns as masculine, feminine or neuter in a number of languages. Feminists appropriated it in the late 1960s to make to make the distinction between 'sex', which was biological, and 'gender', which was socially constructed. More recently, however, feminists have used 'gender' to refer to "any social construction having to do with the male/female distinction, including those constructions that separate 'female' bodies from 'male' bodies."[35] This later meaning acknowledges that even the body is understood socially. Thus 'sex', the word previously used to distinguish the biological, is gradually being included in the concept of gender too. Gender, then, becomes more concerned with the *meanings* attributed to the physical differences between men and women.[36] Not all writers use the term with the same ideas in mind, resulting in some confusion over the term. Furthermore, some social scientists use the term 'gender' to refer to biological sex, that is, giving it the

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[34] Listed in Zhang Yanxia, op. cit., p.13.

[35] Nicholson, Linda, "Interpreting gender," *Signs,* Vol.20, No.1, (1994), p.79.

[36] Scott, Joan, *Gender and the Politics of History,* (Columbia University Press, New York, 1988), p.2.

opposite meaning to that for which it was originally appropriated.[37] Two reasons why almost everyone in the West is using the word 'gender' in preference to the word 'sex' when referring to all aspects of the male/female distinction are – there is a reluctance to use the word 'sex' because of its close association with biology and the sex act, and because everyone wants to be 'politically correct'.

The gender concept most relevant to this present discussion is the feminist one because this is the one which is receiving a lot of attention in women's studies in China. The western feminist perspective evolved to contend with patriarchy in the West and Chinese researchers, after initially rejecting it, are now considering its relevance to the persistence of traditional Chinese patriarchal attitudes and practices.[38] Patriarchy uses biological differences, namely, women's role in reproduction, to legitimize sexual divisions in the various spheres of life in a hierarchical arrangement where males are regarded as superior to females. Global experience shows that patriarchy has the capacity to adapt to different forms of economic production and political organization and can be found in feudal, capitalist and socialist societies. It is important now to see how Chinese researchers are grappling with the concept of 'gender' and its inclusion in the current discourse on women's issues in China.

5.2.2 Finding the right words

The search for a suitable word for 'gender' in the Chinese language has not been easy. There is no single word in Chinese which is as free of former 'political' (large or small 'p') connotations as the seemingly 'neutral' word 'gender' in the English language.

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[37] Udry, J. Richard, "The nature of gender," *Demography*, Vol.31, No.4, (1994), p.561.

[38] Patriarchy is "the historic system of male dominance, a system committed to the maintenance and reinforcement of male hegemony in all aspects of life - personal and private privilege and power as well as public privilege and power. Its institutions direct and protect the distribution of power and privilege to those who are male, apportioned, however, according to social and economic class and race. Patriarchy takes different forms and develops specific supporting institutions and ideologies during different historical periods and political economies." Bleier, Ruth, *Science and Gender*, (Pergamon Press, New York/Oxford/Toronto/Sydney/Paris/Frankfurt, 1984), p.162.

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To explain the meaning of the English word 'gender' as a grammatical term used to describe the *yin-yang* nature of words may convey the general idea but it is hardly a good reason for adopting the term.[39] The *yin-yang* of Chinese words is closely associated with Confucianism and Daoism and carries strong gender implications which exemplify the kind of traditional Chinese thinking which is under attack.[40] Some writers try to overcome the problem by inserting the English word 'gender' in the Chinese text. In Chinese, *xingbie*, is often used interchangeably for both 'sex' and 'gender'. Wang Zheng suggests using *shehui xingbie*, which refers to the social nature of the sexual distinction, which is different from *shengli xingbie*, the biological distinction.[41] This translation of 'gender' and 'sex' at least corresponds with their general usage in English. The use of *xingbie* in both terms may be useful in the sense that it implies that their meanings are interrelated. On the other hand, there is also an inherent problem with any term which incorporates *xingbie* because it too has traditional connotations of 'natural difference' and the inference that females are lower, weaker and inferior to males.[42] Because of this, it tends to confuse the meaning of any new term which uses it.

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[39] Wang Zheng, "'Nüxing yishi', 'shehui xingbie yishi' bianyi" ["The distinction between "female consciousness and social gender consciousness"], *Funü yanjiu luncong*, [Collection of Women's Studies], No.1, (1997), p.18. The *yin-yang* of words is her definition. It is not possible nor appropriate to give any good account of the meaning of *yin* and *yang* here. Min Jiayin says that the "Confucian analogy of *yin* and *yang* in Chinese culture at large to the gender relation in human society and its emphasis of 'respect for *yang* and debasement for *yin*' is an erroneous theory that created a basis for the oppression of the female sex and caused serious repercussions in history." Min Jiayin, "Conclusion," Min Jiayin (ed. in chief), in *The Chalice and the Blade in Chinese Culture: Gender Relations and Social Models*, (China Social Sciences Publishing House, Beijing, 1995), p.587.

[40] Fan, Carol, "Patriarchy and modernization: the changing images of Chinese women, Sha Jicai and Liu Qiming (eds), *Women's Status in Contemporary China*, (Peking University Press, 1995), pp.221-232; Burridge, Kate and Ng Bee-Chin, "Writing the female radical: the encoding of women in the writing system," in Finnane, Antonia and McLaren, Anne (eds), *Dress, Sex and Text in Chinese Culture*, (Monash Asia Institute, Monash University, Clayton, Australia, 1999); Hodge, Bob and Louie, Kam, "Gender and the classification of Chinese characters," in Finnane, Antonia and McLaren, Anne (eds), *Dress, Sex and Text in Chinese Culture*, (Monash Asia Institute, Monash University, Clayton, Australia, 1999).

[41] Wang Zheng, "'Nüxing yishi', 'shehui xingbie yishi' bianyi," op. cit., p.19.

[42] Wang Zheng, ibid., p.17; Evans, Harriet, *Women and Sexuality in China: Dominant Discourses of Female Sexuality and Gender Since 1949*, (Polity Press, Cambridge, 1997), p.28; Barlow, Tani E., "Politics and protocols of *funü*, op. cit., p.348.

At present, the promotion of 'gender consciousness' amongst women is receiving a lot of attention in women's studies centres in universities and in Women's Federation publications. What is not always clear, is the difference in meaning between the terms *xingbie yishi, shehui xingbie yishi*, both of which are used to mean 'gender consciousness' and *nüxing yishi*, which is used to refer to both 'gender consciousness' and 'female consciousness'. This raises the question whether they all actually mean the same thing. In the West, 'gender' has often been used to mean 'women', probably because most men have felt little need for studies based on gender.[43] The problem is, though, the same Chinese words are often used with obviously different meanings such as a natural female consciousness associated with glamour and sex appeal, which is very different from its association with a growing awareness of the role of male oriented structures and values within society which discriminate against females. *Nüxing yishi* (female consciousness) is often preferred because it represents a rejection of the 'masculinization' expected of women during the Cultural Revolution. Unlike *shehui xingbie yishi, nüxing yishi*, emphasizes the 'female position' and the need to understand the world from the angle of the female subject.[44] Tani Barlow, however, says that the use of *nüxing* may "provide a position of great potential for resistance" but its emphasis on difference, along with the commonly accepted scientific basis for the inferiority of the female sex, does not express a position of power.[45] Another rendering of 'gender consciouness' is *xingbie zijue*.[46] This

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[43] Scott, Joan W. *Gender and the Politics of History*, op. cit., p.31.

[44] Yu Qing, "Kunan de shenghua: lun nüxing yishi de lishi fazhan guiji" ["The sublimation of suffering: tracing the historical development of female literature and female consciousness"], *Dangdai wenyi sichao* [Current Trends in Art and Literature], No.6, (1987), p.55. Cited in Liu, Lydia H., "The female tradition in modern Chinese literature: negotiating feminisms across East/West boundaries," *Genders*, Vol.12, (Winter 1991), p.25.

[45] Barlow, Tani E., "Theorizing woman: *Funü, guojia, jiating* (Chinese woman, Chinese state, Chinese family)," in Zito, Angela and Barlow, Tani E. (eds), *Body, Subject and Power in China*, (The University of Chicago Press, Chicago/London, 1994), p.278.

one literally means 'gender awareness' and is closer in meaning to *ziwo renzhi* (self knowledge) which has been used in campaigns carried out by the Women's Federation such as the promotion of the 'four selfs' (*sizi*) – 'self respect' (*zizun*), 'self love' (*zi'ai*), 'self importance' (*zizhong*) and 'self strength' (*ziqiang*).[47] The development of this kind of gender awareness has been central to the thrust of the Federation's work on improving the status of women for some time.[48] While it is important for women to develop a sense of self worth, this approach still lacks the potential to challenge the social system which causes women to be treated, and therefore to feel, as though they are less important than men. With its emphasis mainly on personal qualities, it does not emphasize the need to develop a *collective* gender consciousness in which women as a group comprehend gender injustice and develop ways of challenging it.

Women's studies groups in China are now looking for new ways of developing a collective sense of gender consciousness. One of the ways in which this is being done is through the writing of new historical texts redressing the male view of history and the writing of historical accounts which have a distinctly female angle (*nüxing shijiao*). By looking back to find the historical basis of social structure, the aim is to try and understand the "Confucian basic construct of oriental power and sexual relations" and to develop a theoretical basis for transforming it.[49] Not only are these new texts to be analyzed by researchers, they are also designed to be used in history courses in schools and universities to change the way people think about gender relations. Recent histories are also being collected in the form of oral histories so that current social practices can be

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[46] Zhang Yanxia, op. cit., p.13.

[47] Hunansheng Fulian Funü Ganbu Xuexiao and Hunansheng Weidangxiao Funü Lilun Yanjiushi, op. cit., p.223.

[48] Guan Tao (ed), *Zhongguo funü shehui diwei gaiguan* op. cit., p.283.

[49] Du Fangqin, "Funü shi yanjiu: nüxing yishi de 'quexi' yu 'zaichang' " op. cit., p.4.

examined.[50] Academics carrying out this kind of research have often become actively involved in promoting local projects to help overcome some of the difficulties being encountered by the women and girls they have interviewed.[51] The benefit of this is that the research results in immediate benefits to society and provides on-going contacts for researchers as the situation changes.[52]

Gender discourse *(xingbie huayu)* is only in its early stage of development in women's studies in China and the meaning of terminology associated with the 'gender concept' will take some time to evolve.[53] It will also depend on theorists in women's studies centres establishing what gender actually means in the Chinese context. The meaning of gender in the West is also still developing and there are many issues currently being explored. Some of the questions being asked in the West include – whether the meaning of gender can only be constructed on the basis of the male/female distinction and whether it should only be conceived in binary terms. Even within the categories of male and female, does the concept of gender have room for vastly different experiences of what it means to be male or female? [54] Then there is the question of how far the meaning of gender can be expanded before it disintegrates and loses its usefulness altogether.

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[50] A project of this kind was recently carried out by the History Department associated with the Women's Studies Centre in Beijing University and resulted in the publication of Yang Liwen (ed), *Chuangzao pingdeng: Zhongguo xibei nütong jiaoyu koushushi* [Creating Equality: An Oral History of Girl's Education in Northwestern China], (Minzu Chubanshe, 1995).

[51] The researchers from the Women's Studies Centre and the History Department of Beijing University who were collecting oral histories also became involved in local projects to improve the situation for women and girls in the areas where they had been doing their research. I met one of these people, Associate Professor Zang Jian in February 1998.

[52] Of course the disadvantage is that the research can also lose its objectivity, but isn't objectivity really a myth anyway? Feminists along with post modernists think so. E.g. Hughes, Donna M., "Significant differences: the construction of knowledge, objectivity, and dominance," *Women's Studies International Forum,* Vol.18, No.4, (1995), p.396; Bourdieu, Pierre, *Outline of a Theory of Practice,* (Cambridge University Press, London/New York/Melbourne, 1977), p.1.

[53] Discourse here means "a historically, socially, and institutionally specific structure of statements, terms, categories, and beliefs." Scott, Joan W., "Deconstructing equality-versus-difference: or, the uses of poststructuralist theory for feminism," *Feminist Studies,* Vol.14, No.1, (1988), p.35.

[54] Nicholson, Linda, "Interpreting gender," op. cit., p.97.

Understanding gender becomes even more complicated when trying to transfer the concept across cultures. There is considerable anthropological evidence which suggests that the physical distinction of male and female does not account for all gendered experiences. In some societies, other categorizations of gender may be based on tasks and roles.[55] In traditional China, the body was considered to be less important in discourses on gender than the relations between family members and the relevant protocols associated with those positions.[56] Since 1949, however, the body has assumed greater importance with medical experts claiming "… the authority of medical science to argue that reproductive development, physiological structures and biological differences determine gender characteristics in social as well as sexual behaviour".[57]

What is significant for the understanding of gender, however, is the meaning of gender relations and what they signify in terms of power relations. The study of gender must also be considered along with other forms of difference such as race, ethnicity, class and so on, as well as the historical context in which it exists.[58] All of these characteristics affect the production of gender.

5.2.3 Gender as a category for analysis

In the light of these complex understandings, how useful is 'gender' as a category for analysis? The aim of focusing on gender is to build up some kind of theoretical understanding of the way society is organized on the basis of the male/female distinction as well as how such organization is perceived. Before gender can become a useful

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[55] Moore, Henrietta, "'Divided we stand': sex, gender and sexual difference," *Feminist Review* 47, (Summer 1994), p.91.

[56] Barlow, Tani E., "Theorizing woman," op. cit., pp.275.

[57] Evans, Harriet, *Women and Sexuality in China,* op. cit., p.34.

[58] Moore, Henrietta, op. cit., p.88.

theoretical category for social analysis, however, there are some fundamental issues of scholarship which must be dealt with.

Feminists, although not the only ones to do so, have challenged the epistemological foundations of western scholarship in the latter part of this century, raising questions such as, whose version of knowledge does such scholarship represent?[59] Feminists want to know how the exclusion of women from the development of scholarship in the past has affected the tools and conventions which are routinely used in research today?[60] Might not the paradigms, assumptions, methodologies and techniques of western academia which have been responsible for rendering women invisible in social science research limit the ability of the researcher to understand issues of importance to women?[61] The most obvious example of this is the absence of women from recorded histories. While trying to redress this problem, feminist historians have found that there was not only a need to redefine ideas of what was historically significant, but also the way in which it was interpreted.

Joan Scott's work as a feminist historian has been very important in the development of an approach to using gender as an analytical category. Gender in history is not just another useful descriptive tool but becomes the basis for theorizing about the way societies are constructed, in this case, according to sexual differences. In her critique of the three most common approaches to gender analysis – an examination of the origins of patriarchy; a Marxist attempt to explain gender in terms of a 'material' basis; and a

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[59] Waldby, Catherine, "Feminism and method," Caine, B and Pringle,R. (eds), *Transitions: New Australian Feminisms,* (Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1995), p.15.

[60] Thiele, Beverly, "Vanishing acts in social and political thought: tricks of the trade," Pateman, C. and Gross, E. (eds), *Feminist Challenges,* (Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1986), pp.30-43.

[61] Williams, Claire, "Patriarchy and gender: theory and methods," Najman, J. and Western, J. (eds), *A Sociology of Australian Society,* (MacMillan, South Melbourne, 1988), p.119.

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psychoanalytical explanation for sexual antagonism; she points out that they are limited because they try to explain gender in terms of causal relationships.[62] She defines gender as

a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes, and [that] gender is a primary way of signifying relationships of power.[63]

Thus the second part of the definition explains the first. Gender analysis, then, involves understanding those elements through which power relationships based on sex are culturally constructed, represented symbolically and mediated through institutions and organizations, as well as the way in which subjective identity is constructed through these mechanisms. Such an analysis considers both the individual person and the social organization. It looks for processes not sources. It recognizes complex interrelationships. What women do is less important than what it means.[64] Such an analysis, she says could also be applied to class, race and ethnicity. For the same reasons it should also be useful for studying literacy and illiteracy.

It is clear in recent articles written by Chinese authors that the work of Joan Scott and other feminist scholars in the West has had an influence of the development of women's history in China during the ten years preceding the Beijing women's conference.[65] As an important category for analysis, however, gender was not properly understood until the Fourth World Conference on Women was held in Beijing.[66] Wang Zheng says that the Marxist concept of social class provided an analytic tool for understanding class and suggests that the feminist understanding of gender will likewise provide researchers with new tools to study the history of women as well as the situation

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[62] Scott, Joan W., *Gender and the Politics of History,* op. cit., pp.33-41.

[63] Scott, Joan W. ibid. p.42.

[64] Scott, Joan W., ibid., pp.42-44.

[65] Wang Zheng, "'Nüxing yishi', 'shehui xingbie yishi' bianyi," op. cit., pp.14-20.

[66] Wang Zheng, ibid., p.19.

of women now. The inference here is that gender will be to women's studies as class is to society in general. She says that whereas the concept of class originated with one man, Marx,

> the gender concept will not be produced by one or a few works, but will be the collective creation of feminists. Moreover, this creation doesn't have a framework and requirements formulated in advance, but 'let a hundred flowers blossom and a hundred schools of thought contend'.[67]

At present, there is a lot of interest from all disciplines in expounding upon the subject of 'gender' in China.

5.2 4 The role of the Women's Federation and the new discourse on gender

The public discourse on gender is still largely directed by the Women's Federation and coincides with the Federation's own need, as I said earlier, to redefine its role in the context of change. Since the introduction of the reforms in 1978, the Federation has come under pressure from several sources. In the first place, its responsibility to transmit and implement government policies has often brought it into conflict with the interests of women and girls. The most obvious example of this is the one-child per family policy. Although the Federation's role is to publicize and implement this policy amongst women, its implementation has led to blatant discrimination against women and girls. Thus its responsibilities as a government body have meant that its ability to represent the interests of women are contradictory in this case. In 1988, at the Sixth Annual Congress of the All-China Women's Federation, an important theme was how it could develop greater autonomy from the Party so that it might be able to pursue the interests of women with

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[67] Wang Zheng, ibid., p.19. She quotes a slogan used by Mao Zedong in May 1956 when intellectuals were encouraged to air their views.

greater freedom. This had to be put aside for the next few years following the events of Tian'anmen in 1989, because of a conservative backlash.[68]

During the 1980s, as the effects of the reforms began to threaten many of the past achievements in developing gender equality, many women questioned the relevance of the Women's Federation. Li Xiaojiang, one of the most prominent to do this, asked whether anyone would even notice if the Federation was disbanded.[69] She said the Women's Federation must redefine its role in order to be relevant in the new context. The 'awakening' of women which had been taking place during the 80s also meant that women now wanted to organize for themselves and they no longer wanted the Federation to monopolize the space for activism on women's issues.[70] The views of intellectuals such as Li Xiaojiang also contributed to the Women's Federation's own concern about its role and is one of the reasons it has taken the initiative and organized conferences on theoretical research on women's issues. Instead of quashing the views of these scholars, as might have occurred in the past, the Federation has sought to work in partnership with them. This, in turn, has given female scholars pursuing studies on women's issues opportunities to participate in conferences run by the Federation, space in which to publish their research results and new opportunities to affect policy making. At the same time, the Federation is undergoing a process of revitalization and its hopes of becoming a genuine organization representing women are being revived.

In the light of these events, the holding of the Fourth World Conference on Women and the accompanying Non Governmental Organization (NGO) forum in China in

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[68] Howell, Jude, "Post-Beijing reflections: creating ripples, but not waves in China," *Women's Studies International Forum*, Vol.20, No.2, (1997). p.240.

[69] Li Xiaojiang, "Economic reform and the awakening of Chinese women's collective conscious," op. cit., p.369. Li Xiaojing is a professor of Chinese at Zhengzhou University and chair-person of the Women's Studies Research Centre.

[70] Li Xiaojiang, *Nüren de chulu* [Women's Way Out], (Liaoning People's Press,Shenyang, 1989), p.37. Cited in Wang Zheng, "Maoism, Feminism, and the UN Conference on Women, op. cit., pp.132-133.

1995 was of considerable significance for the Women's Federation. Because the Federation was the main organization representing women in China, its cadres were able to attend the NGO forum. The whole concept of an NGO was a new idea for most Chinese, which explains why the Federation called itself an NGO at the time. Although it was obviously still not very clear about the nature of an NGO, many of its leaders considered the concept of an NGO offered the Federation a possible path for its future organization.[71] In preparation for the World Conference, various research projects into women's issues were carried out by the Federation, universities and academies, including joint projects with foreign universities and sponsorship by international bodies such as the Ford Foundation. The presentation of the results of these research projects at the forum meant that some Chinese women scholars were also able to attend the meetings alongside representatives of the Women's Federation. The participation of these scholars in the forum has also given legitimacy to the newer more informally organized women's studies groups.[72] All of these events together have worked to produce the new discourse on gender and a keen interest in developing its specific meaning for China.

In June 1996 at the "Working Conference of the All-China Women's Federation Standing Committee and the presidents of the Provincial and City Women's Federation", the National Vice President, Huang Qizao, gave a detailed explanation of the terms *xingbie guandian* (gender standpoint) and *xingbie zijue* (gender awareness) and said that it was necessary to disseminate these concepts, especially so that those who make policies can understand them, master them and include them in mainstream policy decisions.[73] Just exactly how this may influence policy decisions, however, is not clear. Since most of the policy makers are men, can they understand a female gender standpoint? A standpoint is a

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[71] Howell, Jude, op. cit., pp.240-242.

[72] Howell, Jude, ibid., p. 247.

[73] Zhang Yanxia, op. cit., p.13.

political location and is partisan. A feminist standpoint is a position taken by *women* to promote women's interests.[74] While men may be sympathetic to women's issues, the only kind of gender standpoint they can have is male. Meetings of the various organizations under the umbrella of the Women's Federation have discussed these new terms and concepts associated with gender, but there is still a danger that they could be included in official rhetoric before theorists have had time to work out what they really mean, and therefore, become meaningless.

How will the Federation's relationship with the Party affect the new discourse on gender? A look at a speech given by Chen Muhua to the Fourth National Conference on Women's Theoretical Studies in 1996 may be helpful in clarifying the stance of the Federation. In it she says:

> The Marxist view on women analyzes women's issues from a gender perspective in which the core is male/female equality. This is the purpose which women and society are striving for together. The women's movement must be guided by the Marxist view on women and lift high the banner of Marxism.[75]

She goes on to say that after the World Conference in 1995, the field of women's studies has continued to be very active with exchanges between China and the West being strengthened further. While this has given them some new ideas, she cautions those doing research in women's studies to remember that China's situation is different from that of the West and that some theories which work in the West many not necessarily work in China. She quite rightly suggests that China needs to develop its own ways of dealing with women's problems but the emphasis on socialist theories and carrying out surveys is somewhat reminiscent of past practices. Why is Marxism the theme still dominating

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[74] Winart, Terry, "The feminist standpoint: a matter of language," *Hypatia*, Vol.2, No.1, (1987), pp.142-143.

[75] Chen Muhua, op. cit., p.4. The speech is outlined in the Yearbook.

official discourse on women? The most obvious answer is that the Women's Federation is still a government organization obliged to carry out the policies of the Party. If we study the remarks of Jiang Zemin when he said in 1990, "The Chinese Communist Party uses the basic principles of Marxism and its view on women to direct the theories of the women's movement," we might correctly assume that the Party line is still guiding the official view on women.[76] That might be so, but it is also interesting to discover that the speech given by Jiang then was actually drafted by the Women's Federation. Apparently, when the CCP's reform agenda produced conflicts with its commitment to gender equality, the Federation used the government's commitment to Marxist theory to oppose views by some who thought, for example, that women should return to the home to ease the pressure on employment.[77] This deployment of Marxist theory has become a key element of what is often referred to as the need to develop a 'feminism with Chinese characteristics', but it is not the only one.

5.2 5 Feminism 'with Chinese Characteristics'

It is worth considering what the phrase 'with Chinese characteristics' really means when it is applied to women's studies and feminism in China, as it demonstrates what some of the conflicts are in the process of developing a new discourse on gender in China. The phrase is most often used when referring to the methodologies employed to analyze the situation of women in China and the way strategies are developed for improving their situation.

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[76] Jiang Zemin, "Jiang Zemin tongzhi guanyu nannü pingdeng de lunshu" (Comrade Jiang Zemin expounding on male/female equality"), *Zhongguo fuyun* [The Chinese Women's Movement], No.5, (1997), p.1. This is a quotation from a speech given in March 1990 at a session of the "80th Commemorative Anniversary and the Eighth Triennial 'March 8th' Conference of International Working Women".

[77] Wang Zheng, "Maoism, Feminism, and the UN Conference on Women," op. cit., p.131.

In an article in *Zhongguo funü yanjiu nianjian 1991-1995 (Women's Studies in China Yearbook)*, Deng Weizhi and Hua Ze outline three areas which distinguish women's studies in China from the methodological framework and content of women's studies elsewhere and thus give it its 'Chinese characteristics'. The first is its requirement to embody the "features of socialist market economic construction." The second refers to the importance of developing and using a Marxist perspective when doing research, while the third is concerned with the need to "embody the current characteristic features of Chinese women".[78] The latter also has a political meaning here, referring to women being the "owners of the socialist state" and "pursuing political equality until completely equal." Thus the framework which underpins any research methods developed for use in specific areas is rooted in the political situation in China. Driven by these imperatives, they say research should cover: women's characteristics (including biological, psychological and social characteristics), women's status and its effects, strategies and tactics for women's liberation, educational issues, women's history and the history of the women's movement in China and abroad, and the analysis of past and present theories in women's studies.

The first area of conflict within China over this approach lies in the idea that the Marxist perspective on women is sufficient to bring about the liberation of women. Opinion is divided about the need for the development of a separate discipline to study women's problems, with some people pointing out that a separate study of women's problems apart from other social problems is unnecessary and does not have a basis in Marxist theory. Others see the study of women as a valid component of the social sciences because women as a group are not the same as a social class and therefore need a different

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[78] Deng Weizhi and Hua Ze, "Funüxue yanjiu de xingqi yu fazhan" [The rise and development of women's studies"], in Tao Chunfang (ed), *Zhongguo funü yanjiu nianjian 1991-1995* [Women's Studies in China Yearbook 1991-1995], (Zhongguo Funü Chubanshe, Beijing, 1997), p.33.

treatment from Marxist class analysis.[79] Some say that Marxism is out of date and not able to explain problems of the present time.[80] Still others point out that there is a Marxist theory of women's liberation which is capable of developing a scientific analysis of every aspect of women's lives and it is the task of women's studies to enrich and carry it forward.[81] Chen Muhua expresses some concern about people who have doubts about the ability of Marxist theory to solve current issues affecting women and points out that this conclusion shows a lack of understanding of China's history and the progress of Chinese women.[82] The distinguishing feature of research on women in China, she says, is its close relationship to practice where problems are dealt with in the context of practice "... according to government policy." To advance the cause of women's liberation in China, she says, that researchers "... must study Marxism-Leninism, Mao Zedong thought and Deng Xiaoping's construction to have a characteristic Chinese socialist theory."[83]

The second area of conflict occurs when trying to reconcile the pragmatic approach to socialist construction begun by Deng Xiaoping with the continuing cause of women's liberation, because it demands that the development of the economy take priority over everything else. The goals of socialism are subordinated to the demands of the market economy in what is deemed to be a necessary phase in the development of socialist productive forces. Although this path has brought new opportunities and improved circumstances to many people, including women, it has also produced many conflicts for women. In the more competitive atmosphere of reform, women's duties as

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[79] Zhu Qing, "Summary of the second National Symposium on Women's Studies," *Chinese Sociology and Anthropology*, Vol.21, No.3, (1989), p.25.

[80] Ding Juan, "Funü lilun yanjiu de fazhan ji qi tedian" ["The development of research on women's theory and its characteristics"], in Tao Chunfang (ed), *Zhongguo funü yanjiu nianjian 1991-1995* [Women's Studies in China Yearbook 1991-1995], (Zhongguo Funü Chubanshe, Beijing, 1997), p.44.

[81] Deng Weizhi and Hua Ze, op. cit., p.32.

[82] Chen Muhua, op. cit., p.4.

[83] Chen Muhua, ibid., p.5.

wives and mothers clearly bring them into conflict with economic rationalism, making it difficult for women to participate fully in production. It also seems to conflict with the Marxist emphasis in liberating women through participation in production. In response to such problems, women are usually told that they will be liberated when the whole of society is liberated, that is, when productive forces have been developed.[84] Although it is recognized that the development of productive forces does not represent women's liberation, there is a belief that women's liberation cannot occur without improved economic conditions. The dilemma is how to avoid sacrificing women's development and long term interests for economic reasons while still promoting the national interests.[85] The idea of creating good material conditions *for* women's development, however, is also problematic because it means that women themselves do not have an active role to play in that development, nor do they have a role in deciding what that development should be. The appearance of conflicts such as these have led women researchers to study theories on women generated abroad with the view to seeing how they may be relevant to the problems of Chinese women. The influx of new ideas has led to repeated calls for the need to develop a women's studies, or more recently, a feminism 'with Chinese characteristics.' The use of this phrase, along with the development of a socialist market economy also 'with Chinese characteristics', represents a desire to preserve a 'Chinese' character and approach to development.

The last of the three key features outlined by Deng Weizhi and Hua Ze is the notion of a women's studies which "embodies the current characteristic features of Chinese women." Rather than relating to the actual situation of Chinese women as one

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[84] Ding Juan, op. cit., pp.41–42. Gao Xiaoxian, "Xiandaihua yu funü jiefang" ["Modernization and women's liberation"], *Funü zuzhi yu huodong* [Women's Organizations and Activities], No.3, (1990), p.11.

[85] Chen Muhua, op. cit., pp.1, 3.

might expect, that is historical and cultural characteristics, it refers to political aims which, in practice, have yet to be achieved. For example, what does being the "... owners of the socialist state" mean in practice for women who are discriminated against in education and employment, or for those women who end up bearing intolerable pressures which result from the clash of traditional attitudes and present day family planning policies? Furthermore, how can women pursue equality when their reproductive functions and roles are used to reinforce their inferiority?

In the final analysis, it seems that the use of the term 'with Chinese characteristics' is in reality a political construct which aims to distance what is considered to be Chinese from that which is not Chinese, namely, the capitalist West. Is it reasonable to expect that a feminism 'with Chinese characteristics' can be developed? The answer, I believe, is "yes". A truly Chinese feminism or women's studies can develop from the study of the different experiences of women in China, both historical and current. Theories and methodologies can evolve which enable women to understand their experiences and find new ways of changing gendered structures which are peculiar to China. As each piece of the jigsaw is put in place, a feminism which incorporates the vastly different experiences of Chinese women will develop. A feminism 'with Chinese characteristics' might be expected to follow.

5.3 The gender problem in female illiteracy in China

The main point of the discussion in this chapter is to draw attention to the absence of any consideration of the role of 'gender' in discourse on female illiteracy in China. Female illiteracy has by and large been viewed as part of the larger discourse on illiteracy in general and the discourse on the status of women. Although poverty, ethnicity, remoteness, rural status and so on do affect literacy development, they do not affect males

and females in the same way. Rather, these factors interact with gender beliefs and practices which are primarily responsible for the disparity observable between male and female literacy rates. This means that when conditions are good for literacy development, such as in urban areas, both male and female literacy rates are relatively high. When a family's economic circumstances are poor or compulsory education is not yet fully implemented, girls are more likely than boys to miss out on regular schooling. In many rural areas and some minority groupings where traditional customs are still strong, girls are the ones whose education is most likely to be affected. Although statistical information suggests that adult literacy classes are gradually reducing numbers of female illiterates, family responsibilities are the most common reasons given for women dropping out of literacy classes. In addition, literacy skills are gradually being lost as married women in rural areas find little use for them in their daily lives. Thus it is clear that female illiteracy is only the tip of the iceberg. In other words, it is the visible evidence of a much greater and less visible problem.

With a long commitment to women's liberation and the development of universal literacy, why is literacy amongst women still difficult to achieve? The problem is partly found in the way Marxist theory of women's liberation is used to guide women's liberation in China. Because it does not deal with women's subordination as a separate issue, but as a dependent one, women's liberation remains subject to the creation of circumstances in society which are favourable towards women. The most useful aspect of Marxist class analysis actually lies in the *way* it examines how one class, usually the capitalist class, exploits the other, the working class, for profit. If class were to be replaced by gender, the aim of the investigation then becomes concerned with the way one gender exploits the other to gain or retain significant advantages for themselves. Traditional attitudes are blamed for the continued subordination of women, but this begs questions such as how social arrangements in which men retain certain advantages have

been preserved, how they are being maintained now, and why. Why is it that women continue to carry the greater burden for reproduction, childcare and housework? How is women's role in reproduction still being exploited so restricting their opportunities for involvement in society outside the home and family? These questions affect the education of women and girls which, even in urban areas, is generally regarded as less important than a boy's. Female illiteracy is structured according to gender and is not the direct result of general social problems. General social problems interact with gender to exacerbate gender attitudes and practices which already exist.

Marxist theory has often been applied as a matter of convenience in contradictory ways. The most obvious is the expectation that women's liberation will come about as women participate in production. On the one hand, it has been used by the party to mobilize women when economic circumstances require it and on the other, it has been used by the Women's Federation when women have been sent home because they are no longer needed in the labour force, or are considered to be uneconomical sources of labour in a climate of economic rationalization. Women are then told that women's liberation will follow the liberation of the whole of society. Another flaw in the Marxist approach is the blind acceptance of its so-called 'scientific' methods of analysis which tend to confine research to the collection and analysis of statistics without regard for the ways in which statistical methods themselves are the product of social processes in which women's attributes and achievements are measured against male biased scales. It is no wonder that many women are designated as inferior to men. The 'poor quality of women' is often given as the reason for discrimination against women in reports by the Women's Federation.[86] Illiteracy statistics or low educational achievement are the main reasons given for the 'inferior quality' of many women.

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[86] Chen Muhua, op. cit., p.2; Shen Zhi, "Development of Women's Studies the Chinese way," *Chinese Sociology and Anthropology,* " Vol.20, No.1, p.22, (1987); Zhu Qing, op. cit., p.21, to name some.

The importance of the new discourse on gender is that it is now being created and carried forward by women. Women's liberation has, until recently, been carried out by men, and thus on men's terms, resulting in men retaining their advantage. Women have not usually challenged this and have gone along with it. Just being admitted to the world of human beings was a significant advance for Chinese women.[87] That the world they expected to enter was a male ordered world hardly occurred to them. As social objectives became secondary to economic considerations in the reform period, however, discrimination in employment in the cities and discrimination against unborn girls and the women who gave birth to them in the countryside opened the eyes of some women to the reality of having to compete in a world in which males were still the favoured ones. Gender, even if at first it was not recognized by that word, was recognized as something solid, something they were up against, in other words structured.[88] New contacts with women abroad provided a word for and some conceptual understanding of this 'structure'. Translating the word and the concept 'gender' into Chinese without infusing it with connotations of past ideologies has not been easy though. The Women's World Conference gave Chinese women a timely opportunity to listen to and talk with women from other countries as they too struggle with the meaning of 'gender' in their own societies.

Although official discourse on gender has always been promoted by women in the Women's Federation, they have been and are still obliged to follow the directives of the party, the majority of whom are men. The Federation therefore has not been in a position of power to contest issues within government policy which come into conflict with

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[87] Li Xiaojiang, "Economic reform and the awakening of Chinese women's collective consciousness," op. cit., p.371-372; Wan Shanping, op. cit., pp.455,459.

[88] Connell, R.W., *Gender and Power*, (Polity Press, Cambridge, 1987), p.92. Connell says that the "concept of structure is more than another term for 'pattern' and refers to the intractability of the social world. It reflects the experience of being up against something, of limits on freedom; and also the experience of being able to operate by proxy, to produce results one's own capacities would not allow. The

women's interests. Women's interests have remained subordinate to the development of the whole of society which, in reality, has meant that social arrangements in which men dominate are preserved. Although the Federation carries out various literacy and educational programs for women and administers funds such as the Spring Bud program, which helps girls in poorer areas with their schooling, its ability to challenge gender attitudes which cause these problems in the first place is limited by its role as a government body and the male monopoly of power at all levels of government.

If research on women's issues is to bear fruit in terms of equality of opportunity for both women and men, it will need to examine the way traditional gender ideologies have been preserved in modern policies and practices. A feminism 'with Chinese characteristics', that is, the development of a female standpoint which has the potential to challenge the ways in which men preserve and women are coerced into supporting certain advantages for men, will not develop within the constraints of rigid adherence to the Marxist view of liberation or a view that subordinates women's needs to the dictates of development during a period of economic construction. Women's circumstances may improve but they will not have achieved equal status with men. The end result will be little different from the position of women in capitalist states which have also preserved advantageous positions for men.

Finally, gender is not only a characteristic of western societies but of every society. The aim of developing tools for gender analysis is to be able to gradually piece together the different parts of the gender structure in a particular society. In China, female illiteracy is just one outcome of gender and cannot be fully understood outside the rest of the gender structure, however, neither is it possible to deal with the whole structure within the confines of one thesis. This thesis examines literacy and gender at the point where they

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concept of *social* structure expresses the constraints that lie in a given form of social organization (rather than, say, physical facts about the world.)"

intersect and explores the way social practices and power relations within each of these domains interact to produce female illiteracy. The next chapter begins this task.

6 GENDER AS IDEOLOGY

In Chapter Three, analysis of census data showed that female illiteracy is less a socio-economic or ethnic problem than a gender problem. Chapter Four's study of difficulties implementing basic education confirmed it as a gender issue. Chapter Five sought to show how gender as a concept is viewed in China and why gender analysis is still a relatively new idea to Chinese researchers. In this chapter and the next, I will discuss some of the ways in which gender is constituted in China – first, by examining gender as ideology and then, in Chapter Seven, by discussing marriage as a mechanism for regulating gender.

The first section of this chapter considers how the social interpretation of the sexed body becomes gender. These ideas will provide a basis in the sections which follow for understanding the different ways in which gender is constituted in traditional and modern Chinese culture. Although the discussion of gender ideologies in this chapter generally follows three different historical periods, it does not attempt to present a historical account of the development of gender ideologies, but uses some of the available literature to consider some important *ideas* which have contributed to the development of cultural perceptions of gender in China. These ideas will be important in the gender analysis of female illiteracy carried out in later chapters. The use of the terms 'traditional' and 'modern' in this chapter are descriptive rather than historical and recognizes that both kinds of practices can, and do, exist side by side. [1]

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[1] The notions 'traditional' and 'modern' are dealt with in more detail later.

6.1 Body, sex and gender

The first issue that needs to be addressed before considering gender ideologies in China concerns what is meant by 'body', 'sex' and 'gender'. All concepts have to take something as being understood and in the case of 'gender', the point of departure is usually 'the body' and the distinctions made between bodies on the basis of sex. The problem is that what is taken as solid and incontestable is not seen for what it really is – knowledge which has been 'produced'. The word 'body' conceptualizes something which has a material reality but what we actually *understand* that material reality to be is the outcome of a multitude of perceptions and experiences which can only be subjectively known.

Judith Butler's application of Foucault to this issue is very useful and her idea of 'sex' materializing through the "... forcible reiteration ... [of] regulatory norms" is well illustrated in pre-modern China.[2] In China, bodies have been less important than the operation of social categories through which power is used to regulate relationships at all levels of society and across all kinds of boundaries.

According to Foucault:

The notion of 'sex' made it possible to group together, in an artificial unity, anatomical elements, biological functions, conducts, sensations, and pleasures, and it enabled one to make use of this fictitious unity as a causal principle, an omnipresent meaning; sex was thus able to function as a unique signifier and as a universal signified.[3]

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[2] See Butler, Judith, *Bodies that Matter: on the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*, (Routledge, New York /London, 1993), pp.1-2. In the early part of the discussion here I use the word 'sex' in the same way that she (and Foucault) uses it. i.e. The word 'sex' refers to a *concept* (a set of ideas) formed around reproductive differences. Later, Butler replaces 'sex' with the notion of 'gender' (p. 5).

[3] Foucault, Michel, *The History of Sexuality*, Vol.1, (Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1984), p.154.

Foucault argues that sex is an effect, not an origin, and that it relies on discursive practices to determine what it means.[4] What about the material evidence of the sexed body then? Monique Wittig says that sex

> is taken as an 'immediate given', a 'sensible given', 'physical features', belonging to a natural order. But what we believe to be a physical and direct perception is only a sophisticated and mythic construction, an 'imaginary formation', which *reinterprets* physical features (in themselves as neutral as any others but marked by the social system), through the network of relationships in which they are perceived.[5]

That means what is *understood* to be 'sex' is actually a fabrication of individual and shared perceptions and experiences. Although there *is* a material body which has certain anatomical features, sex is a category which carries particular social meanings.

As a category, sex is an 'ideal construct', a 'regulatory norm' which makes the body culturally intelligible, Judith Butler says.[6] That sex is usually understood in terms of two mutually exclusive categories belies the reality that the boundaries are not nearly so clear. This is most obvious in those whose physical features are ambiguous or contradictory and who must be 'made' into one or other of the two sexes because there is no cultural space for such people. The problem of cultural unintelligibility can also arise in instances where clothing, manner and visible physical features give no clear indication of the sex of a person encountered, resulting in confusion and embarrassment on the part of the observer who feels unsure of how to behave towards that person.[7] On the other hand,

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[4] Moore, Henrietta, op. cit., p.81.

[5] Wittig, Monique, "One is not born a woman," in Nicholson, Linda (ed), *The Second Wave: A Reader in Feminist Theory*, (Routledge, New York/London, 1997), p.266. (Italics are mine.)

[6] Butler, Judith, *Bodies that Matter*, op. cit., pp.1-2.

[7] West, Candace and Zimmerman, Don H., "Doing Gender," in Lorber, Judith and Farrell, Susan A. (eds), *The Social Construction of Gender*, (Sage Publications, London/New Delhi, 1991), p.20-21. I have

a male transsexual, through hard work, can pass as female. The fact that he/she can do so, shows the power and the social nature of the regulatory norms while at the same time, revealing that there are gaps where the norms do not wholly define or delineate the boundaries of sex. Thus sex is both produced and destabilized by the reiteration of norms.[8]

Since anatomical differences are generally kept hidden from view, sex 'materializes' through other means, namely, through the constant reiteration of regulatory norms. This reiteration occurs through ritualized practices, producing a sedimentary effect which makes them appear 'natural'.[9] According to Wittig:

> We have been compelled in our bodies and in our minds to correspond, feature by feature, with the *idea* of nature that has been established for us.[10]

She says the terms 'men' and 'women' denote political categories, and not natural facts. She considers that the 'naming' of sex itself is an act of domination and compulsion in which social reality is created and legislated through discursive and perceptual means.[11] For example, the observation of the sex of a baby after birth (or that of an unborn child through ultrasound technology) immediately brings the child into the realm of language and kinship which affects his/her life as long he/she lives.[12] In some cases this knowledge will result in the violence of abortion, infanticide, abuse or discrimination. Wittig is not just referring to the naming of the sex of a baby, though, but the repeated 'naming' of

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been confused myself when presented with children whose sex has not been obvious because they were wearing 'uni-sex' clothing and hairstyles.

[8] Butler, Judith, *Bodies that Matter*, op. cit., p.10.

[9] Butler, Judith, ibid., p.10.

[10] Wittig, Monique, op. cit., pp.265, 267.

[11] Wittig, Monique, ibid., p.17.

[12] Butler, Judith, *Bodies that Matter*, op. cit., p.7.

sexual difference which eventually creates the impression that it is factual rather than the effect of language.[13] 'Difference' is socially constructed and requires constant reiteration of norms to be effectively maintained.

Does the realization that our understanding of 'sex' is an effect of discourse mean that the material evidence of the body should be ignored? When answering a question about bodies and essentialism, Gayatri Spivak is concerned that what is understood as a natural body in discourse is, in reality, a discursive body. There *is* a natural body, but in thinking about the body, there are many different conceptual possibilities as to what that body might be. She says that the body "... is mysterious and unreadable except by way of thinking of the systematicity of the body, value coding of the body".[14] The body that exists in the mind, is not the body as it exists in nature, but the product of *thought*. Although Marx was not considering the possibility that essentialism or idealism could extend to conceptualizations of objects in nature (such as the body) in his discussions about ideology, he was discussing the way ideas are substituted for real experiences. For example, he was concerned that abstract ideas such as 'liberty', 'property', 'law', 'justice', and so on, which represent the systematization of certain ideal experiences, are not the actual experiences of real people who live in specific situations at a particular time in history. What makes these ideas ideology, is using them as if they *are* the real thing.[15] The body, as a concept, is no different. The systematization or value coding of the body produces a discursive body in which male or female attributes have been essentialized. If what all female (or male) bodies apparently have in common with each other becomes an

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[13] Wittig, Monique, op. cit., p.115.

[14] Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty, "Gayatri Spivak with Ellen Rooney 'In a Word': interview," in Nicholson, Linda (ed), *The Second Wave: A Reader in Feminist Theory*, (Routledge, New York/London, 1997), p.372.

[15] Parekh, Bhikhu, *Marx's Theory on Ideology*, (Croom Helm, London, 1982), p.3.

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abstract notion of what is female (or male), what we are talking about is not a real body at all. Since there is no other way of *knowing* the body apart from thinking about it, then the body is open to interpretation, an important matter if the way it is perceived in another culture (such as China) is to be understood. That the body is bound by ideologies and that sex is always a particular version of sex, has repercussions for our understanding of gender.

According to the above arguments, it now seems that 'sex' and 'the body' are particular notions rather than the solid material foundations on which gender is thought to be constructed, and that neither can exist outside a social context and both have a social character regulated by norms. Butler argues that because

> gender consists of the social meanings that sex assumes, then sex does not *accrue* social meanings as additive properties but, rather, *is replaced by* the social meanings it takes on; sex is relinquished in the course of that assumption, and gender emerges

absorbing and displacing the term 'sex'.[16] If that is so, 'sex' can no longer be thought of as the 'natural' bodily given, with gender being the socially acquired meanings attributed to sex. The use of the word gender to include sex at least acknowledges that sex is also understood socially. Not everyone, however, understands gender and sex in this way.

The next task is to see how Butler's argument helps us understand how gender is constituted in traditional China.

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[16] Butler, Judith, *Bodies that Matter*, op. cit., p.5.

6.2 Traditional ideologies of gender

Before beginning the task of analyzing gender in China, the meanings of the terms 'Confucian' and 'traditional' need to be clarified as these two terms are often used, sometimes interchangeably, in discussions of social and cultural life in China. Neither term has a simple history and both can, and do, exist side by side with what is equally loosely referred to as 'modern'. According to Nathan Sivin, the term 'Confucianism'

> is used freely to lump together any number of quite different things: the teachings of Confucius and of the many intellectuals who claimed to elucidate his ideas; the imperial rituals, most of which originated in the upper levels of popular religion; the texts and doctrines promulgated by the State to be taught in schools; the officialdom of the empire, although only a small fraction of its members could be considered intellectuals; conventional landowners, scholars, or aristocrats, regardless of whether they aspired to official careers ...

More recently, the term has been used disparagingly within China to describe elite groups who oppose the new ideas and policies of innovators.[17] Furthermore, even within the narrower band of 'Confucianists', made up of Confucius himself (551-479 BC)[18] and those who expound his teachings, there are different kinds of Confucianism which make it necessary to identify the particular version being discussed.[19] 'Tradition', on the other hand, refers to shared knowledge and associated practices which have been handed down over a long period of time. Perhaps we should call 'tradition' those things usually lumped

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[17] Sivin, N., "Foreword," in Elman, Benjamin A. (ed), *From Philosophy to Philology: Intellectual and Social Aspects of Change in Late Imperial China,* (Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts/London, 1984), p.xiii. See also Makeham, John, "Harmony is the universal way," in Veitch, James (ed), *Can Humanity Survive? The World's Religions and the Environment,* (Awareness Book Company Ltd., Auckland, New Zealand, 1996), p.101.

[18] For consistency, the dates used in this thesis are those used by Fairbank, John King, in *China: a New History,* (The Belknapp Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge Massachusetts/ London, England, 1994). All dates for dynasties are approximations except for 256 BC onwards.

[19] I am grateful to John Makeham (Centre for Asian Studies, University of Adelaide) for clarifying some of these issues.

together as 'Confucianism', though, of course, tradition is not limited to the ideas and practices of elite groups, but includes aspects of popular culture which have been passed on. Finally, there is Chinese cosmology, the traditional Chinese world view, which forms a general philosophical foundation for making sense of life. Henderson says that cosmological ideas developed during the late classical period have had a pervasive influence, not only on the traditional arts and sciences, but also on the more elite branches of learning such as historiography, literary criticism, Neo-Confucian philosophy and mathematical astronomy.[20] These different facets of what can be jointly referred to as 'Chinese tradition' have affected the development of traditional gender ideologies.

According to Tu Weiming, Confucians see the 'body' as providing "... the context and the resources for ultimate self-transformation" and a Confucian education as involving the "... ritualization of the body".[21] This, he says, involves a process of becoming sensitive to "... an ever-expanding network of relationships" incorporating "... the family, neighbourhood, kinship, clan, state, and the world."[22] In this scheme of ideas, sex is an important signifier of social relationships, and the ritualization of the body is the process through which this signification is expressed, much as Foucault and Butler suggest. The 'body' in Tu's mind, however, is quite clearly a male body, though Margery Wolf says that, as a believer in the relevance of Confucianism to modern life, Tu holds that women can cultivate the 'self', despite their 'structural limitations'.[23] She says her conversations

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[20] Henderson, John B., *The Development and Decline of Chinese Cosmology*, (Columbia University Press, New York, 1984), p.xiv.

[21] Tu Weiming, "Embodying the universe: a note on Confucian self-realization," in Ames, Roger T., Dissanayake, Wimal and Kasulis, Thomas P. (eds), *Self as Person in Asian Theory and Practice*, (State University of New York Press, Albany, 1994), p.178.

[22] Tu Weiming, ibid., pp.180-181.

[23] Wolf, Margery, "Beyond the patrilineal self: constructing gender in China," in Ames, Roger T., Dissanayake, Wimal and Kasulis, Thomas P. (eds), *Self as Person in Asian Theory and Practice*, (State University of New York Press, Albany, 1994), p.253. She cites Tu Weiming, *Confucian Thought: Selfhood as Creative Transformation*, (State University of New York Press, Albany, 1985), p.144.

with Tu indicate that he views these so-called 'structural limitations' as cultural rather than biological. The fact that Confucian ideals have contributed to the cultural heritage in which these 'structural limitations' play an important role, however, does not seem to be a problem to Tu. [24]

In traditional China, after a child's sex has been identified the sexed body is less important than the subject positions that the child occupies. Through language and kinship expressed through ritual, a child learns to identify herself (himself) in a particular subject position. Althusser's notion of 'interpellation' of subjects through the operation of ideology is particularly relevant in understanding the way concrete individuals (real people) become concrete subjects in the context of the traditional Chinese family. [25] Although individuals, bodies, 'selfs' must exist, they are less real than the subjects produced through the performance of rituals. These rituals *(li)*, also referred to as 'protocols', are not solely concerned with the fulfillment of specific roles such as father, mother, son and so on, but, as discussed below, are enactments using language and gesture in accordance with the *yin* and *yang* of the cosmos. [26]

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[24] Wolf, Margery, ibid., p.254.

[25] See Althusser, Louis, op. cit., pp.130-132. Althusser writes: "ideology 'acts' or 'functions' in such a way that it 'recruits' subjects among the individuals (it recruits them all), or 'transforms' the individuals into subjects (it transforms them all) by that very precise operation which I have called *interpellation* or hailing ..." i.e. Individuals respond to the 'hailing' through of the operation of ideology (the sets of meanings associated with the context in which they are hailed) and identify themselves as the ones being addressed. For example, 'you are a girl' invokes particular sets of meanings which are already in existence before a girl is born, and they become the basis by which she recognizes that she is the one being addressed as a girl.

[26] Zito, Angela and Barlow, Tani E. (eds), "Introduction," in Zito, Angela and Barlow, Tani E. (eds), *Body, Subject and Power in China*, (The University of Chicago Press, Chicago/London, 1994), p.10.

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6.2.1 Gender as subject positions

Tani Barlow writes:

> What appear as 'gender' are yin/yang differentiated positions: not two anatomical 'sexes', but a profusion of relational, bound, unequal dyads, each signifying difference and positioning difference ... analogically.[27]

In other words, although gender is constituted in the dialectics of *yin* and *yang* and the enactment of the *li*, it does not depend on the male/female distinction, though this distinction is still considered to be a fundamental one. Hierarchies also exist between members of the same sex. For example, a son is *yin* in relation to both his parents, a daughter-in-law is *yin* to her mother-in-law, a younger brother is *yin* to an older brother. Thus a women can be *yin* in relation to her husband while being *yang* in relation to her son and her daughter-in-law. The *li* prescribes rituals through which each person is expected to maintain these differences. A wife has a particular set of instructions, as does a son and each of the other members of the family. A wife might also be a mother and a mother-in-law (or a daughter-in-law), each position having its own set of protocols or *li*. Gender is therefore a multi-layered, three-dimensional structure constantly in the process of construction on the shifting foundations of *yin* and *yang*.[28]

Yin and *yang* and the role of *li* in the family need to be understood in the wider scheme of Chinese cosmology and correlative thought. Because correlative thought involves drawing correspondences between heavenly bodies, the body politic and human life, there is perceived to be no gap between people and nature, no opposition between

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[27] Barlow, Tani E., "Theorizing woman," op. cit., p.259. ('Analogically' used here refers to the similar way all these dyadic relationships position difference.)

[28] Barlow, Tani E., ibid., p.261.

nature and culture, because there is nothing 'outside' the natural world.[29] The *li* or ritual is the means by which the correct relationships are maintained. Angela Zito refers to this as 'centering', 'hitting the centre' *(zhong)*, that means finding the correct separation between upper and lower, and inner and outer. In this way, *boundaries of difference* are created and brought under control. The enactment of the *li* becomes an important part of establishing the symbolic order.[30] The idea is that

> [p]eople actively [facilitate] ritual, which [is] the perfect model of resonance with the cosmos, and simultaneously [submit] to their own dissolution as part of its system of signs.[31]

Society therefore is not thought of as an external system to which one has to adapt, but rather, one's 'self' can only be constituted in the process of enacting the *li*. That is, the 'self' only evolves "... in the relation between the organic microcosm of the body and the social macrocosm of humanity" which itself, is a social microcosm within the universal macrocosm.[32] Gender, in traditional Chinese society, therefore cannot be conceived as a structuring of society primarily on the basis of sex because the processes which create social distinctions between males and females are the same processes that create hierarchies within relationships of the same sex, and indeed, between individuals and society at large, and between human society and the cosmos.[33]

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[29] Henderson, John B., op. cit., p.1; Zito, Angela, "Silk and skin: significant boundaries," in Zito, Angela and Barlow, Tani E. (eds), *Body, Subject and Power in China*, (The University of Chicago Press, Chicago/London, 1994), p.126, note 24.

[30] Zito, Angela, ibid., p.112.

[31] "Liji zhengyi," ["Verification of meanings in the Record of Rites"], Ruan Yuan (ed), *Shisanjing zhushu* [Notes and Commentaries on the Thirteen Classics], Vol.2, (conjoined 1816 edition with collation notes, Zhonghua Shuju, Beijing, 1980), pp.1423-1424. Cited in Zito, Angela, op. cit., p.112.

[32] Hay, John, "The body invisible in Chinese art," in Zito, Angela and Barlow, Tani E. (eds), *Body, Subject and Power in China*, (The University of Chicago Press, Chicago/London, 1994), p.65.

[33] This differs from western ideas about relationships which are based more on a separate autonomous 'self'. The Chinese view is that the self only emerges in the context of these dyadic relationships and through the appropriate roles they entail. See Ames, Roger T., "Reflections on the Confucian self: a response to Fingarette," in Bockover, Mary I. (ed), *Rules, Rituals, and Responsibility: Essays Dedicated*

Where do sex and the body fit in such a discourse? First of all, if we consider representations of the body in traditional art, medicine and the ritual *(li)*, we find quite a different conception of the body from that usually understood in the West.[34] In the ritual, the body is the sign-bearing surface for the production of 'self'.[35] The 'self' emerges *through* the performance of rituals in the context of dyadic relationships. The 'self' therefore does not exist as a *separate* individual, as it can in western thought. In traditional Chinese medicine, the body is understood to be a "... complex network of energized matter known as *qi*".[36] Judith Farquhar describes such bodies as unstable and prone to disorganization. The body which modern medical science takes as given, solid and stable, is viewed in Chinese medicine as being "... historical and constructed, ... in need of continued reinvention in the form of proper hygiene of eating, washing, sleeping, sexual practice, and feeling".[37] In traditional art the body is a 'dispersed' body rather than a solid body shaped by a skeleton and muscles.[38] The nude figure is largely missing from Chinese painting. Instead, the artist's brushwork is better able to represent the *qi* of the figure through the rhythms and movements portrayed in the folds of clothing. Not only are the physical movements of the body portrayed in this way, but so are psychological aspects. Moreover, because the body is a social body, it usually needs some kind of ornamentation, such as clothing, to provide it with social meaning. Similarly, erotic portrayal is usually

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to Herbert Fingarette, (Open Court, La Dalle, Illinois, 1991), pp.105-110 for a discussion of the difference between Chinese and Western conceptions of 'self'.

[34] Zito, Angela, op. cit., p.109-110.

[35] Zito, Angela, ibid., p.106.

[36] Zito, Angela, ibid., p.110.

[37] Farquhar, Judith, "Multiplicity, point of view, and responsibility in traditional Chinese healing," in Zito, Angela and Barlow, Tani E. (eds), *Body, Subject and Power in China,* (The University of Chicago Press, Chicago/London, 1994), p.93.

[38] Hay, John, op. cit., pp.44,51.

achieved using fully clad figures.[39] These three discourses, ritual, medicine and art, produce bodies which are unstable, always in process and always context-bound.

Second, in Chinese cosmology, the body's relationship with nature is not perceived as a biological relationship in the same way that modern science understands it. Rather, the body is seen to be a "... small-scaled ... universe in which all the forces of nature [are] present".[40] Its various parts, including articles of clothing, have correspondences in the natural world. For example, correlated with the features of the landscape, "... water and underground springs are the blood and veins; the earth is the skin; foliage is the hair; dwellings are the clothes; door and gate are the hat and belt". [41] Similar correlations are drawn between the functions of the various parts of the human body and the body politic. The *xin*, which is the 'heart-mind', functions as the 'sovereign ruler', while the *fei*, or lung system, serves as the 'prime minister'.[42] This is not just analogy or metaphor, but the whole organizational system of the universe is actually thought to exist in the workings of the human body and in the organization of human society.[43]

In these discourses concerning the body, we do not see an explicit relationship between the anatomical body and sex. As stated earlier, categories of sex are more concerned with making social distinctions rather than pointing out biological features.

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[39] Hay, John, ibid., pp.52-56, 62.

[40] I have omitted the words "model of the" which Berling uses because the word 'model' suggests that it *is* a copy or an analogy rather than something which is governed in exactly the same way as the universe. Berling, Judith A., *Syncretic Religion of Lin Chao-en*, (Columbia University Press, New York, 1980), p.96.

[41] Henderson, John B., op. cit., pp.48-49. Here he is quoting a passage from *Huang-ti chai-ching* [Yellow Sovereign's Site Classic] translated by Bennett, Steven, in "Patterns of the sky and earth: A Chinese science of applied cosmology," *Chinese Science*, No.3, (March 1978), pp.13, 21. Elaborate schemes in involving the human body were also developed during the European Renaissance. See Henderson, pp.54-58.

[42] Hay, John, op. cit., p.64.

[43] Berling, Judith A., op. cit., p.96. Cited in Henderson, John B., op. cit., p.48.

Historically, Chinese medicine has generally considered male and female bodies to be similar in structure.[44] The designation of males as *yang* and females as *yin*, as with the function of the *li*, has served to emphasize and maintain difference, in this case, sexual difference. It was not simply a matter of signifying anatomical differences, however, the hierarchical ascriptions given to *yin* and *yang* meant that men and women became political categories.

6.2.2 Gender and yin/yang theories

The asymmetrical relationship between *yin* and *yang* emerged sometime during the Zhou dynasty (1100-256 BC) when the two doctrines of '*yin* and *yang*' and '*qian* (heaven) and *kun* (earth)' merged. *Yang* was made to correspond with heaven, sun, ruler, man, father and husband, while *yin* was linked to earth, moon, minister, woman, son and wife. Particular characteristics associated with *yin* and *yang* also emerged whereby *yang* was linked to *gang* (vigour) to form *yanggang*, and *yin* was linked to *rou* (tenderness) to form *yinrou*.[45] It was considered natural that *qian* should dominate over *kun* as "... heaven is high and in the noble position; earth is low and in the humble position."[46] The flying dragon symbolized heaven *(qian)*, while the symbol for the earth *(kun)* was the strolling mare which only acted on orders.[47] The upper and lower positions of men and women were also extended to include inside and outside, providing the basis for the sexual

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[44] Dikötter, Frank, *Sex, Culture and Modernity in China*, op. cit., p.40.

[45] Du Fangqin, "The rise and fall of the Zhou rites: a rational foundation for the gender relationship model," in Min Jiayin (ed), *The Chalice and the Blade in Chinese Culture: Gender Relations and Social Models*, (China Social Sciences Publishing House, Beijing, 1995), pp.188-189.

[46] "Xici," Vol.I, *Zhou Yi* [Book of Changese of the Zhou Dynasty]. Cited in Du Fangqin, ibid., p.189.

[47] "Henggua," *Zhou Yi*. Cited in Du Fanqin, ibid., p.191.

division of labour.[48] Thus hierarchical relations were established between greater and lesser heavenly bodies, between higher and lower level political entities, and between men and women.

Later during the Han era (206 BC-220 AD) when the earliest and most systematized accounts of yin/yang and correlative theories were written down, Ban Zhao, a well educated woman in a family of scholars, wrote *Nüjie* (Precepts for women).[49] According to Lily Xiao Hong Lee, Ban Zhao intended that this work be a guide for educating women of all ages in the proper ways to behave.[50] Though the guide cannot be included in the exclusively male domain of Confucian writings, it was composed at a time when Confucian scholars sought to establish a moral code of social behaviour for regulating social relationships and creating a more orderly society. What Ban Zhao sets out is not an account of the way women actually lived, but a description of what she perceives to be the *ideal* woman, in other words, what women should strive to be. The influence of *Nüjie* during Ban Zhao's own lifetime was minimal, though it did receive both positive and negative comment amongst her peers. Not until the Ming Emperor Shen ordered that *Nüjie* be published along with the Empress Xu's *Neixun* did it gain any significant circulation. A little later, it became one of the *Four Books for Women* studied by literate women during the Ming-Qing dynasties (1368-1644, 1644-1912 respectively).[51]

According the Ban Zhao:

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[48] Du Fangqin, ibid., p.191.

[49] Women were not regarded as being 'scholars'.

[50] Lee, Lily Xiao Hong, *The Virtue of Yin: Studies on Chinese Women*, (Wild Peony, Broadway, Australia, 1994), p.23.

[51] Lee, Lily Xiao Hong, ibid., p.23. The others were: *Nü lunyu* by Song Ruozhao (Tang Dynasty) and *Nüfan jielu* by Madam Liu (Ming Dynasty).

> The Way of husband and wife is intimately connected with yin and yang, and relates the individual to gods and ancestors. Truly it is the greatest principle of Heaven and Earth, and the great basis of human relationships ... As yin and yang are not of the same nature, so man and woman have different characteristics. The distinctive quality of yang is rigidity; the function of yin is yielding. Man is honored for strength; a woman is beautiful on account of her gentleness.[52]

The 'nature' here is obviously social and political, not biological. The dichotomies higher/lower, outer/inner, rigidity/yielding, strength/gentleness attributed to men and women respectively aim to emphasize the *hierarchical* nature of sexual difference. Lee has categorized four kinds of control advocated by Ban Zhao in *Nüjie*,– 1) control over ideologies concerning women, 2) control over speech and behaviour, 3) control over divorce and remarriage and 4) control over a women's own ideology.[53] 'Control' here refers to the control by a person of superior rank, such as a husband, mother or mother-in-law, and self control. The first chapter titled "Lowly and weak" refers to the position of women which destines them to a life serving others. It was not a matter of merely being humble and deferring to others but a woman was also to "... endure insults and swallow smears, and constantly live as in fear". Ban Zhao wrote:

> Though a boy is born like a wolf, it is still feared that he may grow up to be like a worm, and yet though a girl is born like a mouse, it is still feared that she may grow up to be like a tiger.[54]

Thus it is clear that it was not really a matter of girls being born weak, but more a matter of being trained from birth to acquire these characteristics. If we take Roger Ames' point that Confucian distinctions do not represent dualistic opposites and that a "... *yin* is

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[52] Swann, Nancy Lee, *Pan Chao: Foremost Woman Scholar of China*, (Century, New York, 1932), p.84, 85.

[53] Lee, Lily Xiao Hong, op. cit., p.13.

[54] Ban Zhao, *Nüjie*. The entire text is contained in her biography in *Hou Han Shu*, (Zhonghua shuju, Beijing, 1962) j.84, p.2787. Cited in Lee, Lily Xiao Hong, ibid., p.13.

always 'becoming *yang*' and *yang* is always 'becoming *yin,*' just as 'day' is a 'becoming night' and 'night' is a 'becoming day'," then Ban Zhao's concern that boys may acquire 'weak' female characteristics and girls may acquire 'strong' male characteristics, in this scheme of ideas, seems to be logical.[55] Therefore, when *yin/yang* categories are used to make distinctions between women and men, the aim is to *create* 'difference' rather than to observe differences that may exist.

The categorization of 'woman' as *yin* and subordinate to the male *yang,* and ideally attributing her with being soft, gentle, submissive and tender in temperament, and weaker, more fragile and more vulnerable in body even then, it seems, was not enough. The practice of foot-binding ensured that it became so. This custom is thought to have begun during the Neo-Confucian revival of the Northern Song (960-1125 AD) and, although it first became popular amongst the women of the aristocracy, by the nineteenth century, somewhere between fifty to eighty per cent of women were binding their feet.[56] Men liked the tiny foot and the tottering dance-like gait that went with it because it symbolized a woman's delicacy and fragility and, as such, was considered to be "... a mark of gentle refinement and eroticism".[57] Besides its sexual allure, the bound foot was a symbol of a woman's capacity to suffer and obey, worthwhile qualities if she wished to earn the respect of a prospective mother-in-law. Many mothers thought that binding their daughters' feet was essential if they were to be able to marry well. Not only did foot-binding aim to make a woman's physical and mental weakness more visible, it also became

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[55] Ames, Roger T., op. cit., p.107.

[56] Eastman, Lloyd E., *Family, Field and Ancestors: Constancy and Change in China's Social and Economic History 1550-1949*, (Oxford University Press, New York/Oxford, 1988), pp.22-23. The extent to which women bound their feet varied from region to region and amongst different ethnic and cultural groups.

[57] Fan Hong, *Footbinding, Feminism and Freedom: the Liberation of Women's Bodies in Modern China*, (Frank Cass, London/Portland, Oregon, 1997), pp.45.

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a means of enforcing female chastity by restricting their freedom to move about. Fan Hong says:

> The bound foot transformed a woman into a fetish but it also enforced a social morality, established sexual boundaries and expressed social relations.[58]

If women were 'naturally' inferior to men there should never have been a need to make sure it was so.

What is interesting about the traditional discourse on body, sex and what we today refer to as gender, is that bodies and the presence of particular sexual organs are less important in the construction of gender than the establishment of power relations which regulate relationships at all levels of society and across all kinds of boundaries. Butler's notion that "... 'sex' is an *ideal construct* ... not a simple fact or static condition of a body, but a *process* whereby *regulatory norms* materialize 'sex' and achieve this materialization through a *forcible reiteration* of those norms" is clearly relevant.[59] In the enactment of the *li* we see ideals constructed around the category of 'sex' (and other social categories) whereby behaviour is regulated according to set norms enforced by the repetition of rituals. The difference between the *li* and other kinds of ritualized practices that regulate gender relationships elsewhere is that they are more formalized and used more consciously to instruct. It is not just a matter of passing on particular customs through unconscious means or imitative practices. A woman is *taught* the 'Three Obediences', for example, to ensure that she *becomes* submissive and, as a result,

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[58] Fan Hong, ibid., pp.45-48.

[59] Butler, Judith, *Bodies that Matter*, op. cit., pp.1-2. (Italics are mine.)

conforms to her *yin* nature.[60] Hence, just as Foucault suggests, gender becomes an effect of discourse rather than its origin.

So far this discussion has sought to understand some of the sources and meanings behind traditional gender ideologies which have developed over a period of several thousand years. No attempt has been made yet to explain how they have become an integral part of the general Chinese psyche and culture. The complex cosmology developed by scholars, such as Dong Zhongshu during the Han era, is unlikely to have been the main reason for the popularity of the rituals amongst ordinary people.[61] A brief look at the role of popular religion will show that these ideologies were not just a fabrication of scholarly ideas imposed from above. It will also show how women's reproductive role and domestic responsibilities assume a 'sacred' significance in the context of religious practice.

6.2.3 The sacred and the secular

Jordan Paper says that an enquiry about Chinese religion will usually illicit the response that China does not have a 'religion'.[62] He suggests that this is more a misunderstanding of the nature of what constitutes 'religion' than a fact and that asking, "To whom (or what) do you offer sacrifice?" is likely to bring forth a substantial and detailed description of behavior which would be labeled 'religious' anywhere else.

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[60] Zhu Xi refers to the following quotation which is attributed to Confucius: "Woman yields to man. For this reason virtue alone should not regulate her – there is also the Way of the Three Obediences. When she is with her family a woman obeys her father. When married she obeys her husband. When her husband dies she obeys her son. She never dares to follow her own inclinations." Zhu Xi and Liu Qingzhi, Chen Xuan, annotated, *Xiao xue jizhu* [Elementary Learning, with collected commentaries], Siku Biaozhu (1863), 11B. Cited in Hinsch, Bret, "Metaphysics and reality of the feminine in early Neo-Confucian thought," *Women's Studies International Forum*, Vol.11, No.6, 1988, p.597.

[61] Paper, Jordan, *The Spirits are Drunk: Comparative Approaches to Chinese Religion*, (State University of New York Press, Albany, 1995), p.30.

[62] Paper, Jordan, ibid., p.3.

Although Daoism (Taoism) is generally regarded as the indigenous religion, if a *Chinese* religion is recognized, Paper says that it has never been the dominant religion. He says that the *li*, for all intents and purposes, fulfills the same functions as religion in the West.[63] The secular nature of what could be termed 'religious' behaviour in the *li* is presumed only because its focus is 'this worldly' rather than 'other worldly' and there is no separate institutional structure such as a 'church' or an organized professional hierarchy such as 'priests' whose primary work is concerned with it.[64]

Though the rites are usually regarded as being 'secular', the concept of what is 'human', in Chinese eyes, has always included both the living and the dead. In fact, the traditional family is regarded as comprising ancestral spirits, those members still living, and those yet to be born.[65] Hence the importance of revering one's ancestors and fulfilling one's duty to produce off-spring, especially sons. Furthermore, the 'secular' and 'sacred' are actually one and the same in Chinese culture, with the political, the social and the 'religious' being inextricably intertwined. In light of this, we should not be too surprised to find that the family is regarded as 'sacrosanct' or that a woman's role in procreation and food preparation is considered to be foremost amongst her 'sacred' obligations. Concerning the latter, Paper says that food has always had extraordinary significance in Chinese culture, both socially and spiritually. An essential component of the ritual is the sharing and/or sacrificial offering of food which traditionally involves the spirits.[66] In addition to the feasting associated with the more intermittent but momentous life cycle

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[63] Paper, Jordan, ibid., pp.26-27.

[64] Mote, Frederick, "Yuan and Ming," Chang Kwang-chih (ed), *Food in Chinese Culture*, (Yale University Press, New Haven, Connecticut, 1977), p.203. Cited in Paper, Jordan, ibid., p.36.

[65] Paper, Jordan, ibid., p.37. See also Baker, Hugh D.R., *Chinese Family and Kinship*, (Columbia University Press, New York, 1979), pp.71-106, for a description of the place of ancestor worship in Chinese family life.

[66] Paper, Jordan, ibid., p.40.

rituals such as marriage and death, of seventeen year-cycle rituals documented in Beijing during the late nineteenth century, *all* involved the eating of special food or the sacrifice of food.[67] Sacrificial meals generally occurred, on average, twice a month. The home, too, has special significance. It does not just function as a dwelling place but also as a family 'temple' in that most sacrificial meals are prepared and offered there.[68] Paper says that clan temples (destroyed or confiscated during the Cultural Revolution) which were once the focus of larger family gatherings are usually recognized as being 'temples'. What has often been overlooked is that the main room of many Chinese homes was also furnished to resemble the main hall in the clan temple and basically functioned as the 'temple' for the smaller and more frequent family sacrifices.[69]

The special significance of rituals involving food, family and the home, means that changing traditional customs which are generally regarded as being central to Chinese culture and social life is not likely to be easy and this has proved to be the case. Parish and Whyte's study of rural life in Guangdong in the mid 1970s found that life-cycle and year-cycle festivities were still popular alongside new officially sanctioned festivities.[70] They conclude that rural people adapt to new circumstances when they consider it useful to do

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[67] Dun, Lichen, *Yenjing suishi ji* [Annual Customs and Festivals in Beijing], Translated by Derk Bodde (Henri Vetch, Hong Kong, 1936). Cited in Paper, Jordan, ibid., p.38.

[68] Paper, Jordan, ibid., p.41.

[69] "The furnishings are ... identical in the main hall of a dwelling and a temple. Against the wall facing the entrance is a narrow altar table – and partially under when not in use – is a square table on which offerings are placed during sacrifices. In a home, in front of the offering table is a rectangular or round table for dining. Chairs are placed against the side walls. This room functions as the family temple, dining room, living room, and reception hall, except in the multiple compound homes of the wealthy." Paper, Jordan, ibid., p.42. In the sumptuary principles in the Confucian Classics commoners were restricted in the performance of ancestral rites and were expected to use a room of their own home rather than having a separate shrine. See Ebrey, Patricia, "Education through ritual: efforts to formulate family rituals during the Song period," de Bary, Wm. Theodore and Chaffee, John W. (eds), *Neo-Confucian Education: the Formative Stage*, (University of California Press, Berkeley/Los Angeles/London, 1989), p.279.

[70] Parish, William L. and Whyte, Martin King, *Village and Family in Contemporary China*, (University of Chicago Press, Chicago/London,1978), pp.290-297.

so, but keep those practices which they regard as important and of value to them. They

suggest

> that worship activities are not simply survivals but that they have certain contemporary functions
> – for example, sanctifying family structure and authority, providing women with security in the
> 'alien' homes of their husbands, and comforting the aged in the face of the uncertainties of
> death.[71]

Parish and Whyte generally found that the continuance of such festivities had little to do

with poverty or poor political organization and more to do with ethnicity (i.e. being Han

or Hakka) and other local factors.[72] They say, "... villages with elaborate traditional

festival activities are not primarily the isolated backwaters with few party members and

low levels of family income," but are usually associated with well-off, non-cadre families

of 'good' class background. Family ties and obligations are the primary motivation for

much of the feasting and ancestral worship that takes place in many villages today.[73]

While Parish and Whyte found that there had been a shift away from an emphasis

on lineage and a greater focus on close kin and domestic celebrations, a later study carried

out in southern China during the mid 1980s showed that there has been a renewed interest

in lineage ancestral cults and clan temples. Furthermore, it was observed that the main

rooms of many homes have traditional altars on which incense is burned and food is

offered.[74] Thus it appears that neither modernization, improved economic conditions nor

the destructive actions of the Cultural Revolution have been able to eliminate these

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[71] Parish, William L. and Whyte, ibid., p.293.

[72] Parish, William L. and Whyte, ibid., pp.272-278. The Hakka tended to hold simpler celebrations.

[73] Parish, William L. and Whyte, ibid., pp.293 and 297.

[74] Potter, Sulamith Heins and Potter, Jack M., *China's Peasants: The Anthropology of a Revolution*, (Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp.224, 258.

'religious' customs.[75] The ideologies accompanying the special festivities, ceremonies or rituals associated with family life would therefore continue to reinforce traditional gender ideologies, while the rituals themselves would be an important means by which gender continues to be constituted. That these customs are still practised at the same time that more 'modern' gender discourses based on 'science' are being developed and promoted is an example of the way in which 'tradition' is not bound by a specific period of time. The newer 'scientific' discourse on gender in China is the subject of the next section.

6.3 Gender ideologies and 'science'

During the Republican period (1912-1949), as young intellectuals sought to discard traditional Chinese culture, which they regarded as an obstacle to modernization, there was an epistemological shift in scholarly circles from the traditional cosmological basis for social order to 'science'. 'Nature' is viewed as being impersonal, distinct from 'culture' and capable of being 'objectively investigated'.[76] The body acquires an importance it did not have before, especially with respect to women's health and reproduction. Medical science becomes the new authority for prescribing different social roles for women and men based on biological differences.

In traditional China, there was no biological science which involved the empirical study of organs and tissues, and medicine was more of an art based on the cosmological beliefs of a tiny literate elite who practised it, rather than a science.[77] The majority of the

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[75] Paper, Jordan, op. cit., p.46.

[76] Dikötter, Frank, *Sex, Culture and Modernity*, op. cit., pp.8-9.

[77] Sivin, Nathan, "Science and medicine in Chinese history," in Ropp, Paul S. (ed), *Heritage of China: Contemporary Perspectives of Chinese Civilization*, (University of California Press, Berkeley/Los Angeles/Oxford, 1990), pp.164-196.

population did not have access to the most qualified physicians and had to rely on less educated local healers, such as herbalists or shamans.[78] The development of the new modern scientific discourse during the Republican period, likewise belonged to elite intellectuals and had little impact on the majority of the population residing in rural areas, either in terms of benefits to their health, or in terms of social practice. The importance of the new discourse which emerges at this time mainly lies in the impact it has on health matters and social practice later in the PRC.

Frank Dikötter's study of 350 publications concerning sexual and reproductive matters which were produced within China during the Republican period provides an excellent overview of scholarly developments taking place at that time. The texts Dikötter examined came from a wide variety of sources and were not the products of just one field, such as medicine.[79] This new 'scientific' discourse was not just a mix of Chinese and western ideas, nor did it represent a veneer of modern scientific ideas thinly veiling traditional attitudes and values. He describes it as "... a body of knowledge in flux, characterized by interactions, overlaps and echoes, by constant change and endless combinations".[80] It also reflected changes that were already occurring in social and economic life under the Qing, including: new opportunities for young men and women to mix in the work place as well as to meet socially; the emergence of a literate culture amongst educated women; and a widening gap between the new culture of younger people

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[78] It is thought that shamans can ascend into the spirit world to request the spirits to assist human beings.

[79] Dikötter, Frank, *Sex, Culture and Modernity*, op. cit., p.8.

[80] Dikötter, Frank, ibid., p.12.

and the traditional culture of their older relatives.[81] As one would expect, most of these changes were occurring in the coastal cities. The countryside remained relatively unchanged. Rural people were generally viewed by authors as "... repositories of tradition", backward and ignorant compared to the enlightened, progressive modernity of city dwellers.[82]

Of most interest in this discussion is the move away from a cosmological basis for the subordination of women to the authority of science in which the body becomes the source of medicalized knowledge. As we have already seen, in traditional China the physical body was less important in determining gender roles than the subject positions that people occupied in the family, the wider community and ultimately, the cosmos. In the new scientific discourse this situation appears to be reversed. The result is that the emphasis on 'difference', so important in Confucian discourse, finds a new authority in the discourse of science. For example, differences in sex, race and age were discussed in the light of an obsessive concern with measurement and quantification in much the same way as it was in the West. The effect of this emphasis was to show that people of other races, women and children were less 'evolved' beings and that older women were pathologically degenerate, even to the extent of 'menopausal madness'.[83] The superior person therefore was the Han male in much the same way that the white male became the reference point in western discourse. In other words, those responsible for producing most of this new 'knowledge' represented themselves and their own kind as the 'ideal' human beings against whom all others were to be compared.

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[81] Dikötter, Frank, ibid., pp.14-19. These pages refer to the work of numerous authors who document the changes which had occurred.

[82] Cohen, Myron L., "Cultural and political inventions in modern China: the case of the Chinese "peasant"," *Daedalus*, Vol.122, No.2 (1993), pp.151-170.

[83] Dikötter, Frank, *Sex,, Culture and Modernity in China*, op. cit., pp.9, 46-47. See also Dikötter, Frank, *The Discourse of Race in Modern China*, (C. Hurst, London/ Stanford University Press, 1992).

Some authors of the texts examined by Dikötter promoted the idea that sexual difference was apparent in every aspect of the body and that men and women were therefore complementary. The study of female genitalia produced the following observations: a woman is the passive counterpart to man, man turned 'outside in', *nei* (interior) as opposed to *wai* (exterior); or, to put it another way, the female genitalia are 'concave', the inverse of the 'convex' male genitalia.[84] The physical evidence is used to show that the "... female sex is exactly the opposite of the male sex."[85] This opposition or complementarity, however, was not an equality of opposites. A woman's biology was thought to negatively affect her physical and mental development as her body sought to accommodate the inevitable role of motherhood, so depleting her of the resources necessary for other kinds of activity. Other writers viewed male and female bodies as similar with the two genders representing extremes of an otherwise neuter body. That is, before puberty, apart from some obvious differences in anatomy, boys and girls were seen as being basically the same, but after puberty, hormonal activity transformed the neuter body into adult male and female bodies.[86] While this allowed these writers to promote the idea of the 'universality of human nature', it still permitted them to believe that women were controlled by 'nature' in the form of hormones.[87] Dikötter says that these 'biologicalized' discourses also produced a tension between those authors who thought a

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[84] Dikötter, Frank, *Sex,, Culture and Modernity in China*, ibid., pp.22-23.

[85] Wang Chengpin, *Qingchun de xingjiaoyu* [Sex Education for Youth], (Xiongdi Chubanshe, Shanghai, 1939), pp.103-6. Cited in Dikötter, Frank, ibid., p.23.

[86] For example, Hu Zhenyuan, *Renti de shenghuo* [Life of the Human Body], (Shijie shuju, Shanghai, 1931), pp.116-117. Dikötter, Frank, ibid., p.150.

[87] Dikötter, Frank, ibid., pp.25, 153. For example, Guo Renji and Li Renlin, *Nüxing yangsheng jian [Mirror of Health for Women]*, (Shangwu yinshuguan, Shanghai, 1928), pp.33-34.

gender hierarchy was natural and those who believed that men and women were equal members of society.[88]

Although Dikötter says that there was a great deal of ambiguity about the nature of masculinity and femininity in this new discourse, he also says it is clear that most writers adhered to the notion that men and women should have different social roles based on their different biological characteristics.[89] To this end, drawings of male and female bodies, measurement of cranial capacity, and descriptions of the activity of hormones, were used to justify complementary and mutually dependent roles for men and women.[90]

> Human anatomy was claimed to sanction the new division of duties in which man was the brain, the worker in the public domain, and woman was the womb, the wife and mother of the private sphere.[91]

Motherhood was viewed as the 'natural' destiny of women.[92] All of a woman's physical resources were seen to be directed towards motherhood.[93] Menstruation produced weakness, instability, an inferior intelligence, emotional highs and lows, and made women 'primitive', even prone to crime.[94] Menopause did not bring respite from biological

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[88] Dikötter, Frank, ibid., pp.25.

[89] Dikötter, Frank, ibid., pp.24-25.

[90] Dikötter, Frank, ibid., pp.29-31, 34, 150-151, 39. For example, Chen Yucang, *Renti de yanjiu* [Research on the Human Body], (Zhengzhong shuju, Shanghai, 1937); Jiang Xiangqing, *Renti celiangxue* [The Science of Body Measurements], (Qinfen shuju, Shanghai, 1935); Hu Zhengyuan, op. cit.

[91] Dikötter, Frank, ibid., p.29.

[92] Dikötter, Frank, ibid., p.52. For example, Lin Yutang, *My Country and My People*, (John Ray, New York, 1935), pp.140 and 145.

[93] Chen Jianshan, *Renlei naosui zhi jinhua* [The Evolution of the Human Brain], (Zhengzhong shuju, Shanghai, 1947, p.88. Cited in Dikötter, Frank, ibid., p.34.

[94] Zhang Qiutao, *Qingnian jiankang zhidao* [Health Guide for Youth], (Dadong shuju, Shanghai, 1933), p.97; Zhou Guangqi, *Xing yu fanzui* [Sex and Crime], (Zhengzhong shuju, Shanghai, 1946), p.40. Cited in Dikötter, Frank, ibid., pp.41-42.

imperatives either, but had its own pathological and degenerative affects.[95] Thus the effects of one or other of puberty, pregnancy, menstruation or menopause, were thought to overshadow women's lives in such a way that meant they were best suited to lives of domesticity.

That women were allocated responsibility for reproduction and marital harmony was part of a modernizing discourse in which the production of healthy offspring was considered important to the well-being of the state. Dikötter says:

> The embryo, the mother, the married couple and the nation were thus related in a biological bond and a common social responsibility.[96]

This *ideally* included prenatal education and interference through medical supervision when necessary.[97] It is not until the establishment of the PRC, however, that official policies aimed at regulating sexuality and monitoring reproductive health are actually introduced and promoted widely amongst the whole population.[98] This includes the promotion of certain sexual attitudes and practices as 'correct', the implementation of a stringent birth control program, the emphasis on 'superior births' through a program of eugenics, and the use of sex education in schools to promote the official view on sexuality and reproduction.[99]

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[95] Guo Renji and Li Renlin, op. cit., Chen Jianshan, op. cit. Cited in Dikötter, Frank, ibid., p.34.

[96] Dikötter, Frank, ibid., p.95.

[97] Wang Chuanying (translator), "Xin taijiao" [New prenatal education], *Fünu zazhi*, Vol.4, Nos.1-2, Jan.-Feb., 1918; Song Jiazhao, *Taijiao* [Prenatal Education], (Zhonghua shuju, Shanghai, 1914, p.1; Song Mingzhi, *Taijiao* [Prenatal Education], Zhonghua shuju, Shanghai, 1914, p.5. Cited in Dikötter, Frank, ibid., pp.94-95.

[98] Dikötter, Frank, ibid., pp.180-181.

[99] Evans, Harriett, *Women and Sexuality in China*, op. cit., pp.7, 9, 12, 23, 56, 64, 151. Dikötter, Frank, ibid., p.184.

Before turning to the gender ideologies of the PRC, one more issue remains to be discussed in relation to the new scientific discourse on the body, sex and gender in China. This concerns the nature of 'science' itself and the alleged 'objectivity' of scientific research. The practice of science is itself shaped by particular paradigms which reflect the ideologies, agendas, methods, values and assumptions of the those who produce 'scientific facts'.[100] While Marx considered ideology to be the opposite to scientific truth, Foucault wrote:

> the problem does not consist in drawing the line between that in a discourse which falls under the category of scientificity or truth, and that which comes under some other category, but in seeing historically how effects of truth are produced within discourses which in themselves are neither true nor false.[101]

This means that *all* discourse, scientific or otherwise is no less subject to the effects of history than is Confucian discourse. Scientific knowledge was and still is produced by a small section of society, namely intellectuals, and the mythology of 'objectivity' belies the subjectivities of these people who produce this knowledge. So called 'scientific facts' cannot be known apart from the methods used or the values and assumptions of the scientists who produce them.[102] In earlier times, male scholars produced ideologies, including gender ideologies, which reflected their own perspectives and interests. Dikötter says the new scientific discourse in China was produced by various professional and social

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[100] Williams, Claire, op. cit., p.106.

[101] Foucault, Michel, "Truth and power," in Gordon, Colin (ed), *Power/Knowledge: Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, (Harvester Press, Sussex, 1980), p.118.

[102] Williams, Claire, op. cit., p.106.

groups who used the new knowledge "... to further their own careers and impose their own representations of social reality".[103]

This new interest in science was part of the May Fourth Movement, when young intellectuals, sons of the gentry, were seeking to overturn old attitudes and practices.[104] Science was to be the means by which tradition could be dismantled and a new culture and society founded. At the same time that this new scientific discourse was developing, the realization that 'women are also people' and the discovery by women themselves that 'we too are people' was also taking place. The possibility that women could have an independent personality arose within the wider context of the 'discovery of humanity'.[105] The question is, what did it really mean for women to be considered 'people'? Did it mean women could and should aspire to the same things as men, or were women to be regarded as equal but different from men? If the emancipation of women was seen in terms of reproductive health and the production of healthy off-spring in order to revitalize the race, as the reformer Liang Qichao thought it did, is the motivation behind the new scientific discourse that was emerging really any different from that of earlier discourses in which women's reproductive capacities were also controlled by others?[106]

The next section shows how the newer ideas based on a 'scientific' construction of gender inform gender ideologies in the PRC.

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[103] Dikötter, Frank, *Sex, Culture and Modernity in China*, op. cit., p.5-6.

[104] Chapter One has already discussed this.

[105] Shu Wu, "The discovery of the female: a brief outline of Zhou Zuoren's feminist theory," *Social Sciences in China*, Vol.11, No.3, (September 1990), p.32-33. The "discovery of humanity" in China is usually likened to the Enlightenment which took place in 16th century Europe when men's (women were not included in this case) faith in their ability to determine their own future replaced the authority of the church. Rationalism and individualism were emphasized over traditionalism.

[106] Dikötter, Frank, *Sex, Culture and Modernity in China*, op. cit., p.18.

6.4 Gender ideologies in the PRC

When the communists came to power their principal goals were to modernize the nation and change social and political relations. New gender ideologies became an important part of mobilizing women towards the fulfillment of political and economic goals and women's liberation was, and still is, primarily linked to women's participation in the paid work-force. The problems associated with this approach were discussed in Chapter Five of this thesis. The focus of this section is on what Harriet Evans refers to as "… the ways in which gender ideology has maintained spaces for the appropriation and exploitation of women's lives through a naturalized gender hierarchy".[107] As before, the emphasis will be on the role that conceptions of the body, sex and gender play in the maintenance gender of hierarchies. Before looking at these, I should point out that many traditional ideologies and practices still persist, despite being vigorously attacked. In the countryside, most people simply adapted to suit the situation when it was in their interest to do so, but strove to maintain those practices they considered to be important whenever they could.[108] What follows now is a brief summary and critique of some official ideologies which are important to the construction of gender in the PRC.

Three conflicting ideologies concerned with body, sex and gender have existed side by side in China since 1949. They concern the idea 1) that 'what men can do, women can do too', 2) that medical science shows that gender differences are rooted in biological differences; and 3) that all women want to marry and have children. These three ideologies are in large measure responsible for the continuing constitution of gender hierarchies in the PRC. Juxtaposed like this, the contradictions between them become clear.

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[107] Evans, Harriet, *Women and Sexuality in China*, op. cit., p.31.

[108] Parish, William L. and Whyte, Martin King, op. cit., pp.289-290.

Concerning the first ideology, the slogan, 'What men can do, women can do too', is based on a comment Mao Zedong made in response to the achievements of the 'Iron Girls' of the 1960s and 70s. These young single women had taken on difficult work or work traditionally allocated to males. Such women were held up as models to be emulated, but the reality was that married women's domestic responsibilities meant that most women could not be like them. It is also clear that men generally did not consider that these girls were the kind of women they wanted to have as wives.[109] Moreover, men were often not very happy about women encroaching on their territory. One locomotive engine driver was heard to say, "... Well if women can do this work, why should there be men at all?"[110] After the Cultural Revolution, many women and men, for different reasons, were happy to see the demise of this model and the idea that women should try to be like men.

Although the slogan 'what men can do, women can do too', used in the past to mobilize women for work outside the home during the most revolutionary periods is no longer used, the sentiment it expresses still holds true in that women, in order to achieve equal status with men, *must* do what men do. At no time has it been suggested that, to use Emily Honig and Gail Hershatter's words:

> 'whatever women comrades can accomplish' – caring for children, shopping, cooking, washing, cleaning *and* working fulltime – 'men comrades can too'.[111]

Similarly, while research into the status of women conducted in the PRC largely concentrates on making comparisons between women and men in terms of education, employment, income generation and political participation, recent studies which also

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[109] Honig, Emily and Hershatter, Gail, op. cit., p.25. See pp. 23-26 for a fuller discussion.

[110] See Croll, Elisabeth, *Changing Identities of Chinese Women*. Op. cit., pp.72-77 for a fuller discussion.

include investigations into the time men and women spend on housework and childcare show that women still spend much more time on household responsibilities than men. As a result, women are less able to give the same kind of attention to matters outside the home than men.[112] Thus the experience of marriage and family during the Mao era (and ever since) is that for women to be able to do what men do, they do not need to be equal, they actually have to be more capable than men.

The second ideology, however, uses biological differences to imply that the intellectual, physical and emotional characteristics of women are not just different but inferior to those of men.[113] For example, echoes of the earlier 'scientific' discourse are to be found in notions associated with the role that hormones play from puberty onwards in the intellectual development of girls.[114] Adolescence is still portrayed as a more difficult time physically and emotionally for girls than boys.[115] Menstruation is generally seen as having a negative impact on women and girls physically and emotionally.[116] Comparisons made between male and female bodies continue to concentrate on male strengths in terms of shape, size and strength and rarely on attributes such as flexibility and endurance in

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[111]   Honig, Emily and Hershatter, Gail, op. cit., p.25.

[112]   Shao Xiazhen, "90 niandai zhongguo yihun nannü de laodong fengong yu diwei de bijiao" ["A comparative study of status and the division of labour between married men and women in China during the 1990s"], in Sha Jicai and Liu Qiming (eds), *Dangdai Zhongguo funü diwei* [The status of women in Contemporary China], (Beijing Daxue Chubanshe, 1995), pp.245-246, 248. In chapter five it was pointed out that many women think that expecting their husbands to do more housework is demeaning to their masculinity.

[113]   Honig, Emily and Hershatter, op. cit., pp.14-23; Li Xiaojiang, "Economic reform and the awakening of Chinese women's collective consciousness," op. cit., p.366. See also Evans, Harriet, "Defining difference: the 'scientific' construction of sexuality and gender in the People's republic of China," *Signs*, Vol.20, No.2, (Winter 1995), pp.357-394.

[114]   Dikötter, Frank, *Sex, Culture and Modernity in China*, op. cit., pp.34, 153; Honig, Emily and Hershatter, Gail, op. cit., pp.16-17; Evans, Harriet, *Women and Sexuality in China*, op. cit., p.64.

[115]   Dikötter, Frank, ibid., pp.152-153; Honig, Emily and Hershatter, Gail, ibid., p.18; Evans, Harriet, ibid., pp.39, 62.

[116]   Dikötter, Frank, ibid., p.41; Evans, Harriet, ibid., p.67.

which women excel.[117] In other words, the 'scientific' discourse on sexual difference continues to construct women as negatively affected by the demands of their reproductive functions such that their performance in other areas is perceived as being poorer than that of men, regardless of any evidence to the contrary. Though this discourse was still in its formative stages during the 1950s and officially absent during the Cultural Revolution when androgyny was the socialist ideal, it has been widely promoted in the school curriculum and popular literature in the eighties and nineties.[118]

In the third ideology, biological imperatives are thought to dictate that all women will eventually become mothers and the bodily effects of puberty, menstruation, pregnancy and lactation mean that women are 'naturally' suited to home-making and child rearing. Women continue to carry primary responsibility for reproductive health in the belief that giving birth to healthy children is their 'natural' duty.[119] A woman's reproductive capacity is not seen as belonging only to her, but it is a domain of state interest and intervention.[120] Reproductive health, sex education and birth control programs target women and girls much more than they do men and boys. In schools, sex education programs not only give students biological information, but they also propagate the notion that girls are primarily responsible for matters of sexual hygiene and behaviour. Information on contraception or

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[117] Dikötter, Frank, ibid., pp.31, 34; Honig, Emily and Hershatter, Gail, op. cit., pp.17-18.

[118] Evans, Harriett, *Women and Sexuality in China*, op. cit., pp.34-41. Evans says that during the Cultural Revolution when the Iron girl model was being promoted, there was little in the official press on sexual matters. However, she points out that fictional accounts of students who were sent to the countryside suggest that the views of the 1950s, in which medical science promotes "hierarchically ordered sexual and gender differences" in keeping with traditional *yin* and *yang* ideas, continued to prevail during this time. Her examination of the official discourse after the Cultural Revolution also indicates that these earlier views of the 1950s have become the basis for the discourse since the 1980s. Thus, it seems that revolutionary activity did little to change people's attitudes towards gender matters. See Evans, Harriett, "Defining difference," op. cit., p.364.

[119] Dikötter, Frank, *Sex, Culture and Modernity in China*, op. cit., p.94; Evans, Harriet, *Women and Sexuality in China*, ibid., pp.43, 51, 155.

[120] Dikötter, Frank, ibid., p.95; Evans, Harriet, ibid., pp.152, 156.

sexual intercourse is not included in the high school curriculum, however, lest it encourage experimental sexual behaviour amongst young people.[121] Male reproductive health is seen to revolve around the preservation of bodily vitality through the conservation of semen and the control of unproductive sexual acts such as masturbation, whereas female sexuality focuses on fertility, fertility control and reproductive health. Men retain their integrity as individuals much more in this discourse than women whose reproductive capacities are viewed as belonging to the state.[122] Although women are frequently referred to as being the 'masters of reproduction', in reality, they are treated as 'targets'.[123] Evans says that in this discourse, the female is made the "... signifier of social and familial order".[124]

In Chinese society, where female marriage is almost universal and motherhood is automatically assumed, fertility control, whether it is in connection with 'improving the quality of the population' or regulating population growth, has subsumed all other interests of women.[125] The former is achieved through monitoring and eliminating inherited disabilities and the latter, through contraceptive use, sterilization and abortion. Besides obligatory premarital check-ups to determine the suitability of prospective marriage partners, abortion is used to eliminate defective fetuses.[126] Abortion, however, is also frequently used as a measure for restricting family size and thereby, population

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[121] Evans, Harriet, ibid., p.38.

[122] Evans, Harriet, ibid., p.165.

[123] Zhu Chuzhu (et al.), op. cit., p.117.

[124] Evans, Harriet, *Women and Sexuality in China*, op. cit., p.81.

[125] Evans, Harriet, ibid., p.169; Croll, Elisabeth, "A commentary on the new draft law on eugenics and health protection," *China Information*, Vol.8, No.3, (1993/1994), pp.32-37. Cited in Evans, Harriet, ibid., p.151.

[126] Evans, Harriet, ibid., p.152.

growth. In this respect, it intrudes upon the bodily integrity of all women of child-bearing age, if not as a reality already experienced, then as an ever present threat. With national surveys in 1987 and 1990 showing that 45.6 per cent of married women had had an abortion, a third of these having had two or more, almost half of all married women have already been directly affected.[127] These rates do not include those women who manage to conceal pregnancies successfully and who are no less directly affected. Abortion is especially traumatic for women who are 'persuaded' to abort a pregnancy that is wanted and a somewhat desperate choice for women who are pressured by families to produce a son.[128] That this is a problem is evident in the official birth ratios which in 1993 were 114.1 male births for every 100 female births.[129] Baby girls who are fortunate enough to be part of the planned birth program, who were not drowned, neglected or abandoned, grow up receiving conflicting messages. As women, they find themselves designated mothers and wives before any other occupation and constantly reminded that the biological imperatives of motherhood make them less able to compete with men in education and employment. On the other hand, they are often not permitted to begin or proceed with the pregnancies for which their bodies apparently have been 'so compellingly' preparing them. On top of this, many also have to endure family pressures to produce the son who is so highly valued in Chinese culture.

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[127] *US News and World Report*, (19/9/1994). Cited in Evans, Harriet, ibid., p.157.

[128] Zhu Chuzhu. [et al.], op. cit., pp.105-108.

[129] Gu Baochang and Roy, Krishna, "Sex ratio at birth in China, with reference to other areas in East Asia: what we know," *Asia-Pacific Population Journal*, Vol.10, No.3, (1995), pp.17-42, (Table 1). The disparity has gradually increased from 107.4 in 1980, peaking at 116.1 in 1991, and falling to 114.1 in 1993. Internationally, the norm is 105-107. Zhu Chuzhu. [et al.], ibid., p.170.

Women's bodies, Evans suggests, are absent in this discourse, lost in the plethora of abstractions such as fertility, fertility control and reproductive health.[130] They are metaphor, not substance, signs or symbols for political and ideological values.[131]

> [W]omen are accorded with little - if any – positive value as autonomous persons ... being little more than having a particular sex and a gender fixed by it, qualified by different degrees of physical and mental health, to be deployed in the service of state policy.[132]

> [They] appear not as persons in such contexts, but as the vessels and self-sacrificing agents of demographic control, bound by patriarchal structures of power."[133]

How can the body be 'absent' in a discourse which all too obviously starts with the body? If we consider Spivak's comments about the discursive nature of 'the body', this becomes clearer. First, the body can only exist as a sign in a particular discourse. When the word 'body' is invoked it is always a particular kind of body. In the political discourse of fertility, fertility control and reproductive health, the female body is a reproductive body in which certain attributes are emphasized. It is an essentialized body by virtue of the selective nature of the discourse and, as such, it is an ideologically produced body. The discourse does not produce real historical bodies. There is also another body produced in this discourse. It is the collective bodies of women, that is, the body of fertile women who are designated responsibility for producing the next generation.

Second, the discourse which produces these bodies uses the authority of science which is itself a practice which carries its own ideologies about what kind of knowledge it produces or acknowledges and the methods and assumptions it uses. This scientific

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[130] Evans, Harriet, *Women and Sexuality in China,* op. cit., p.165.

[131] Evans, Harriet, ibid., p.165.

[132] Evans, Harriet, ibid., p.156.

[133] Evans, Harriet, ibid., p.160.

discourse which represents women's bodies as inferior to those of males; which portrays female intelligence as being affected by the biological imperatives of reproduction; and which allocates child rearing and domestic work to women and girls on the basis that they are more naturally suited to it, is based on the selective use of scientific techniques to support particular social objectives. This same discourse also uses genetics to marginalize devalued social groups such as poor farmers and minorities.[134] For example, inbreeding, which is believed to be the result of backward customs amongst peasants and minorities, is blamed for a higher incidence of congenital defects in rural areas, while other factors, such as a lack of iodine or folic acid in the diet of peasant women, receive little or no attention. Neither are the poor health services for pregnant women in the countryside compared with those available in coastal cities considered to be a factor.[135] Traditional notions also find their way into the new discourse. For example, the linking of the best time for conception to the seasons and the idea of a 'biological clock' which synchronizes the body with the environment; the connection of traditional ideas of 'balance' and 'excess' with the avoidance of hot and cold or spicy foods during pregnancy; the association of some birth defects with social disorder, and natural disasters, or the moral character and emotional disposition of the pregnant woman, to name a few.[136] Such ideas mean that the pregnant woman continues to bear the brunt of the blame for defects because she is seen as having failed to protect the foetus from environmental influences. The common belief in China that the natural sciences do not belong to the realm of ideology because they do not have a class nature, is clearly fallacious.

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[134] Dikötter, Frank, "Reading the body: genetic knowledge and social marginalization in the People's Republic of China," *China Information,* Vol.13, Nos.2/3, (Autumn/Winter 1998/1999), p. 13.

[135] Dikötter, Frank, *Imperfect Conceptions,* op. cit, pp.142-144, 179.

[136] Dikötter, Frank, ibid., pp.126-128, 132, 146-147.

The epistemological shift from the 'Confucian' paradigm to the 'scientific' paradigm has made little difference to the way gender hierarchies are constructed in China because the construction of such hierarchies depends less on the epistemology used than the interests of those who produce it. Science is appropriated to legitimate a new and modern, and therefore more acceptable, form of regulating social and moral behaviour.

6.5 Conclusion

This chapter began by considering how the materiality of the body and the markings of sex can only be understood through discourses which rely on specific cultural and historical contexts for their meaning. The understanding arrived at is the effect of discourse, it can never depend on mere physical evidence. The 'body' and 'sex' as they exist in the mind are ideas, products of thought, their creation is the result of a myriad of perceptions and experiences which are social in origin. 'Gender' is the term which encompasses all these social meanings as well as the practices which are derived from them. According to Butler:

> Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being.[137]

The fact that these regulatory norms need to be repeated indicates that gender is unstable. Such an understanding of gender allows us to see that it is not nature or biological differences that determine gender attitudes and practices but the *meanings* ascribed to them. Because gender is social, a variety of interpretations are possible and they can vary

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[137] Butler, Judith, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, (Routledge, New York/London, 1990), p.33.

from place to place and from one historical period to another. Those responsible for the production of ideas play an important role in the production of gender ideologies and whether or not these gender ideologies change depend to some extent on how much these people are determined to defend their interests.

An examination of some important traditional gender ideologies in China shows that sex is a sign which plays a fundamental role in establishing a person's subject position within sets of dyadic relationships, but once this has been established, anatomy is less important than the discipline required to symbolize and maintain the 'correct' social distinctions within those relationships. Ideally, this occurs through ritual behaviour or *li* which functions as regulatory norms. The body is no longer the reference for justifying particular roles for men and women, cultural factors define what these roles should be. These roles are not usually understood in the usual sense of 'performing' or 'playing' roles, rather, a person is thought to *be* the sum total of 'his' roles.[138] In the course of learning and repeating certain acts, the body is 'ritualized'. It becomes a sign bearing surface on which meaning is bestowed rather than being the source from which meaning is derived. In this scheme, the social nature of gender is clearly apparent, as is the means by which it is regulated.

With the introduction of the new 'scientific' discourse on sex, biology becomes the basis for justifying different social roles for women and men. The bodily markings of sex still establish a person in a particular subject position, but medical science uses biology to establish norms which are considered to be 'natural' and 'scientifically proven'. The problem with this new discourse is that it does not recognize the role that cultural factors

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[138] Rosemont, Henry Jr, "Right-bearing individuals and role-bearing persons," in Bockover, Mary I. (ed), *Rules, Rituals and Responsibility: Essays Dedicated to Herbert Fingarette*, (Open Court, La Salle, Illinois, 1991). 'His' is used here because the Confucian 'person' was male, nevertheless, there were also rituals for women.

play or the subject positions of the people involved in the production of this new knowledge. Furthermore, it fails to see that science is a practice which is selective in the methodology it uses and the kind of knowledge it produces which means it is limited in its explanatory capacity.[139] In this new discourse, the body is essentialized and behaviour is aligned with biological cycles to determine what is 'normal' without considering the extent to which behaviour relies on cultural values. Despite this blindness to the role that culture plays in determining behaviour, new 'scientifically' couched gender norms are used as the reference for normalizing social behaviour and practices. Thus new ideas are produced about the nature of sexual difference using science as the new authority, but instead of transforming gender relations, this new knowledge becomes the basis for justifying them as 'natural'.

Butler writes:

> Gender is ... a construction that regularly conceals its genesis; the tacit collective agreement to perform, produce, and sustain discrete and polar genders as cultural fictions is obscured by the credibility of those productions – and the punishments that attend not agreeing to believe in them; the construction "compels" our belief in its necessity and naturalness.[140]

One of the ways in which this is clearly evident is marriage. In China, remaining single in order to pursue a career is very difficult, even for city women. First, the older single woman is usually referred to as *da guniang* (big daughter or big girl), showing that marriage is still considered to be the rite of passage to becoming an adult and to being designated a woman. Second, an unmarried woman's household registration generally remains with her parents, making it difficult to acquire a home of her own. Third, older

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[139] For example, science concerns itself with the material world. It is unable to comment on aesthetics, for example, except from its own limited perspective.

[140] Butler, Judith, *Gender Trouble*, op. cit., p.140.

single women have to put up with gossip, prejudice and continual pressure to marry so that some women, in the end, marry just to be treated as normal human beings.[141] The demands of marriage, especially the expectation to be a 'virtuous wife and good mother', make pursuing a career very difficult for a woman. A recent city survey found that men perceive the ideal wife to be "... beautiful, tall, healthy, soft, kind, well-mannered, loyal, virtuous and one who is skilled in domestic crafts (e.g. sewing, cooking and so forth) and can take care of children".[142] These are 'traditional' ideals.[143] There is a feeling amongst many city women that women lose a lot more in marriage than men do who, they say, lose very little and gain much.[144]

Marriage is a very important *mechanism* through which many traditional notions of gender are maintained. This aspect of marriage is discussed in the next chapter. Chapter Seven also draws the main elements of both Chapters Six and Seven together in a theoretical model derived from Bourdieu's practice theory to show how gender mechanisms are established and maintained. It also demonstrates the role that literacy has played in this development.

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[141] Croll, Elisabeth, *Changing Identities of Chinese Women*, op. cit., pp.158-159. Older single men are also pressured to marry.

[142] Jankowiak, W.R., *Sex, Death and Hierarchy in a Chinese City*, (University of Columbia Press, 1993), p.168. Cited in Croll, Elisabeth, ibid., p.157. This is the result of a recent city survey.

[143] 'Traditional' refers to values here not a period of time.

[144] Croll, Elisabeth, *Changing Identities of Chinese Women*, op. cit., p.161.

7 GENDER, POWER AND THE POLITICS OF LITERACY

The focus of the last chapter was on gender ideologies. In this chapter it is on *mechanisms*, gender structuring devices – more specifically, those connected with marriage. There are two reasons for focusing on marriage, one is that marriage is the single most pervasive factor affecting everything else in Chinese women's lives, the other is that literacy practices and marriage are inextricably linked.

Throughout this chapter, I look at the patrilineal, patrilocal, patriarchal model of marriage – the general outline of this model, its strategic role in establishing the symbolic order and regulating social life, its place in the subordination of women, and the CCP's attempts to transform marriage practices. From Bourdieu's practice theory I establish a theoretical model for analyzing the role marriage plays in structuring gender relations in traditional Chinese culture. I then use aspects from Foucault's definition of 'power' to analyze the way marriage and literacy become strategies for maintaining these gender relations and, in the process, synthesize together the two aspects of Bourdieu's and Foucault's theories used. The chapter divides into three parts. The first part examines patrilineal, patrilocal, patriarchal marriage in traditional China. This is followed by a theoretical analysis of the development and role of this form of marriage. The third part then looks at the CCP's efforts to reform marriage practices before reapplying the theoretical model to the situation after 1949.

7.1 The regulation of gender through marriage in traditional China

The patrilineal, patrilocal, patriarchal model of marriage in China has been and still is responsible for producing very different experiences of marriage and family life for men and women. Elisabeth Croll suggests that until this issue is addressed, inequality between males and females is likely to remain a problem.[1] Although this pattern of marriage practice is most prevalent in rural areas, the ideologies which support it there are the same ones which impact the employment and educational opportunities of girls and women in urban areas. In this section I will briefly outline this model of marriage and discuss some of the mechanisms which work to ensure its survival. What is described is a 'model' or 'form' of marriage, *not* the actual marriage practices of specific groups of people in particular locations or precise times in history. Patricia Ebrey's article, "Women, marriage and the family in Chinese history," is a useful starting point.[2]

7.1.1 Patrilineality

Ebrey describes patrilineality as involving

the use of patrilineal surnames, the worship of recent patrilineal ancestors, the belief in the need for a male heir to continue the sacrifices, and the organization of kinsmen on the basis of common patrilineal descent.[3]

In other words, it is a system of kinship based on descent through the male line in which males are the defining elements of the social structure. Ancestor worship derives from the belief by the ruling clans in ancient times that they were descendants of mythic beings or

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[1] Croll, Elisabeth, *Changing Identities of Chinese Women*, op. cit., p.92.

[2] Ebrey, Patricia, "Women, marriage and the family," in Ropp, Paul S. (ed), *Heritage of China: Contemporary Perspectives on Chinese Civilization*, (University of California Press, Berkeley/Los Angeles/Oxford, 1990), pp.197-223.

[3] Ebrey, Patricia, ibid., p.200.

deities who had become powerful spirits after death.[4] Evidence from bronze vessels used during the Shang period (1750-1040 BC) indicate that sacrifice and divination (consulting spiritual ancestors for advice) was practised by the Shang and that patrilineal descent was an established feature of the royal family. By the time ancestral rites had become popular amongst ordinary people, their mythical origins were less important than the ceremony and behaviour. Their spiritual significance, evident in the belief in ghosts and an afterlife, still remains strong today amongst rural people.[5] Patrilineal descent therefore is an essential component of the rituals associated with ancestor worship. In respect of surnames, Ebrey says that there was no systematic use of surnames, or family names, during the Zhou era (1100-256 BC), but where they were used, *xing* usually defined the set of people one was not supposed to marry, in other words, a clan name, while *shi* referred to a local family name. Not until the Qin emperor wanted to register the whole population as part of his campaign to unify China in 221 BC, were the various clan or family names registered and used to establish official surnames. These surnames were then referred to as *xing* and the expectation was that they would be passed on down through male descendents. From the Han on, the spread of ancestor worship plus the ability to identify male lineages strengthened the desire amongst the people for maintaining an unbroken line of descent through the males of the family.

The use of patrilineal surnames has been important in the promotion of ideologies and practices based around patrilineality and important in the subsequent devaluation of women.[6] Traditional naming practices is one of the ways in which this occurs. The usual practice was to give a boy a clan name, a generation name and an individual name at birth,

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[4] Paper, Jordan, op. cit., p.31.

[5] Ebrey, Patricia, "Women, marriage and the family," op. cit., p.201.

[6] Ebrey, Patricia, ibid., p.201.

whereas a girl was usually given a number and an informal child's name. Only the number and 'female' was written in the clan record books of her natal family.[7] When she married, the record book for her husband's clan recorded her family membership as the wife of a particular son. Autobiographical accounts of young women who rebelled against these customs and left their parents' homes during the early part of the twentieth century show that one of the first things they did was to acquire a full name, or even a entirely new name, as a sign that they considered themselves to be equal in status to their brothers.[8] Their new name symbolized their claim to full status as people in a culture which traditionally only regarded sons as being people. Ancestor rituals also relegated girls to the status of non-persons in their natal families because, unlike their brothers, they were not permitted to take part in these ceremonies. One woman remembers how she felt when, as a girl, she was told she could not participate but could only watch from the far end of the hall. She says, "... This was my family and my home and yet I did not really belong. I felt unaccountably and unjustifiably shut out."[9] Patrilinealty also ensures that failure to give birth to a son who can bear a husband's name and perform the necessary ancestor rituals, as well as maintain an unbroken line of male descendents, not only has traumatic consequences for the wife who has given birth to yet another daughter, but also for the daughter born. This daughter is often left in no doubt about her unwanted status as she grows up.[10] Finally, patrilineality also encourages the practice of patrilocal marriage.

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[7] Croll, Elisabeth, *Changing Identities of Chinese Women*, op. cit., p.29.

[8] Croll, Elisabeth, ibid., p.30.

[9] Wong Su-ling, *Daughter of Confucius: A Personal History*, (London, 1953), p.119. Cited in Croll, Elisabeth, ibid., pp.30-31.

[10] Infanticide or neglect was the traditional means of ridding the family of unwanted children, especially unwanted daughters.

7.1.2 Patrilocal marriage

In the Confucian Book of Rites *(Liji)* marriage was regarded as a bond between two surnames specifically for the purpose of producing filial sons who can fulfill their ritual duties in the ancestral temple and carry on the family line.[11] Usually this means that a bride moves from her natal home and village to become part of the groom's family in his village, hence, the term patrilocal marriage. The significance of this move becomes clear in the ritual and the terms associated with the wedding day when the groom goes to fetch the bride and bring her to what is regarded as her 'true' home.[12] The difference in meaning in the characters used for the verb 'to marry' for men and women makes this clear. For men, the character 取 *(qu)*, meaning 'to fetch', is drawn above the character 女 *(nü)* for 'woman', like this 娶, to illustrate the fact that the groom goes to fetch a woman. For a woman, the female character 女 *(nü)* is drawn in front of the character 家 *(jia)*, meaning 'home', to make 嫁, suggesting that when she marries she is going to her 'true' home. 嫁 *(jia)* is usually preceded by the character 出 *(chu)* which means 'to go out', signifying that when a girl marries, she moves out of her natal family.[13] That the groom goes to fetch the bride is a sign that he will be the active agent in the marriage while she is expected to be passive. In terms of *yin/yang* cosmology, he is like Heaven while she is like the passive Earth which yields its fruit.[14] Because marriage is not merely the joining of two individuals, but the joining of two families, it involves the ancestors and the rest of the

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[11] *Liji* [Book of Rites], ch.44. Cited in Keheller, Theresa, "Confucianism," in Sharma, Arvind (ed), *Women in World Religions,* (State University of New York Press, Albany, 1987), p.141.

[12] Ebrey, Patricia, "Women, marriage and the family in Chinese history," op. cit., p.203; Keheller, Theresa, ibid., pp.141-142.

[13] Teresa Keheller describes these differences in terms of *qu* for the groom which she says means 'to go out and fetch someone', and *gui* for the bride which she says means 'to return home'. Keheller, Theresa, ibid., p.142.

cosmic order and must be performed 'correctly'. Traditionally, the bride and groom do not know each other as the family's interests are considered more important than the wishes of the two people involved.[15] While the groom's life hardly changes when he marries, the experience of marriage is "... a moment of discontinuity, dislocation and rupture like no other" for the bride.[16]

Before a girl marries, her whole future is oriented towards marriage and because she will 'marry out' of her natal family, she is regarded as a transient member without any status in it. Sons are the permanent members of the family so, not surprisingly, everything is invested in sons. Popular sayings, such as "... 'a daughter married is like water poured out the door', 'a daughter belongs to somebody else's family', 'investing in a girl is a loss' and 'a family with daughters is a dead end family' " show the extent to which patrilocal marriage affects a girl's status and opportunities while living in her natal family.[17] That a girl has no status in her natal family is problematic should she die before marriage. Ritually speaking, she has no family and there is no family altar on which her tablet can be placed, or burial place nearby where her 'soul' might be put to rest.[18]

After marriage, the first few years are often the most traumatic because the new bride receives very little emotional support from her husband; faces a sexual adjustment for which she is commonly ill-prepared; has to learn to live in a household composed of complete strangers; and very often, must try to please an implacable mother-in-law. Even after marriage, her place in the family is not really secure until she has produced a child of

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[14] Keheller, Theresa, ibid., p.141.

[15] Eastman, Lloyd E., op. cit., p.25.

[16] Croll, Elisabeth, *Changing Identities of Chinese Women*, op. cit., p.37.

[17] Croll, Elisabeth, ibid., p.95.

[18] Eastman, Lloyd E., op. cit., p.28.

her own. Her future lies in establishing her own 'uterine family', especially through the birth of sons.[19] As the mother of sons, she will achieve some status in the household, not only because she has ensured the continuance of her husband's family lineage, but also because her own children, especially her sons, become the only *real* family she will ever have. Her own sons will be permanent members of her close family and they will, at some time in the future, bring home daughters-in-law over whom she can expect to exert some power. Thus a husband's strong emotional and filial attachment to his mother which results in a lack of support for his new bride means that she will seek that emotional support from her own children, especially her sons.[20] When one of her own sons eventually marries she, like her mother-in-law before her, will do everything she can to prevent her new daughter-in-law from usurping her place in her son's affections.[21] In this way the cycle is repeated.

7.1.3 Patriarchy

Ebrey links patriarchy, the power of fathers, to the distribution and control of family property. She suggests there are four basic features to Chinese patriarchy and they concern: 1) property, especially land, which belongs to the family and not to individuals; 2) the fact that property can only belong to males and, on the death of a father, must be divided equally amongst the surviving sons; 3) the legal authority given to fathers over women and children, including: arranging marriages, selling their children or disposing of their labour; and 4) the belief that women are morally and intellectually inferior to men,

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[19] See Wolf, Margery, *Women and the Family in Rural Taiwan*, (Stanford University Press, 1972), p.37; and Eastman, Lloyd E., op. cit., p.28, for a discussion on the Chinese woman's 'uterine family'.

[20] Sangren, P. Steven, "Female gender in Chinese religious symbols: Kuan Yin, Ma Tsu, and the 'Eternal Mother'," *Signs*, Vol.9, No.1, (Autumn 1983), p.14.

[21] Eastman, Lloyd E., op. cit., p. 28.

meaning that they need to be under male control.[22] Traditionally, patriarchy has meant that women have no rights to property, or their own labour, fertility or person and are considered to be a form of property which can be bought, sold or exchanged.[23] Marriage is the main transaction of this kind, though an economically straightened or morally dissolute father or husband may sell a daughter or a wife into prostitution, or as a slave or concubine.[24]

The mercenary aspects of marriage have typically involved a 'bride price' (betrothal gifts given to the bride's family) and a dowry which is sent with the bride to the groom's family. Because most records of such transactions before 1949 do not separate out what each side had to pay (bride price, dowry, wedding feast costs and various other gifts), there is no systematic information available for analysis. Parish and Whyte suggest, however, that the usual practice appears to have involved an 'indirect dowry', that is, more than what is given by the groom's family as a bride price to the bride's family is sent back with the bride when she marries into the groom's family. According to Parish and Whyte:

> Bride prices were strongly correlated with class, but ever larger bride prices among not-so-poor, and middle, and upper-middle peasants primarily went to pay for ever larger dowries which were returned at the time of marriage. It was only among the very poor that there was primarily a bride price with a minimal dowry, while among the rural elite dowries predominated, with these families trying to preserve both their own status and that of their daughters.[25]

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[22] Ebrey, Patricia, "Women, marriage and the family," op. cit., p.204.

[23] Croll, Elisabeth, "The exchange of women and property: marriage in post-revolutionary China," in Hirschon, Renée (ed), *Women and Property – Women as Property*, (Croom Helm, London & Canberra/St. Martin's Press, New York, 1984), p.44.

[24] Stacey, Judith, op. cit., p.44.

[25] Parish, William L. and Whyte, Martin King, op. cit., p.182.

The dowry was usually an ostentatious display of the status and wealth of the bride's family, or in the case of poorer families, an attempt to avoid the stigma of 'marriage by purchase' which is associated with having only a bride price.[26]

Land ownership was the most important incentive for keeping sons living together on the ancestral property. The ideal of a large joint family living together, however, was really only achievable amongst the wealthy. A poor rural family was more likely to comprise around four to six people because the equal division of land amongst sons, as well as the scarcity of land, tended to limit large accumulations of land by one family. Disease and famine also tended to limit the size of the family.[27] Land ownership was an important reason for the practice of patrilocal marriage. In this way, each of the facets, patrilocality, patrilineality and patriarchy, reinforce each other. The subordination of women is not only an outcome of such a family structure, but essential to it.

7.1.4 Minor forms of marriage

Space permits only a brief reference here to other models of marriage, the most common of these being uxorilocal marriage and marriage by adoption. Uxorilocal marriage involves the groom marrying into the bride's family, usually because the bride has no brothers, to preserve the male line of descent in her natal family. This can be arranged in one of several ways, for example: the groom may break all ties with his own family to go and live in his wife's family, his children will then belong to his wife's family; or he may stay in his wife's family for an agreed time following marriage until a certain number of children are born and then, after that, be free to leave; or a family may adopt a son from a

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[26] Croll, Elisabeth, "The exchange of women and property," op. cit., p.47.

[27] Fairbank, John K., "The nature of Chinese society," in Schurmann, Franz and Schell, Orville (eds), *Imperial China: The Decline of the Last Dynasty and the Origins of Modern China – the 18th and 19th Centuries*, (Random House, New York, 1967), p.41.

relative's family or purchase an unrelated boy from another village. In any case, such an option does not always offer a satisfactory solution because the groom cannot always be relied upon to remain loyal to his new family and he is often regarded as an outsider amongst the other men in the village.[28] Marriage by adoption involves taking in a small girl and bringing her up with a view to marrying her to one of the sons of the family. This has some advantages for the prospective groom's family. Brother-sister taboos which usually develop mean that the bride and groom are less likely to become emotionally intimate; there are no wedding expenses; and the bride is also more likely to be compliant with her mother-in-law because she has been brought up in the family. There may or may not be a simple wedding ceremony. Nothing more may be involved than the bride and groom being told at a particular time after the girl begins menstruating that they must sleep together.[29]

Other variant forms of marriage include *qianqin* where a bride is captured by a groom, occasionally with her parents' consent; the abduction and selling of a young woman to a prospective groom in a distant region; and concubinage. All except concubinage have persisted into the post-Mao period.[30] The shortage of marriageable women, the inability of some poorer families to find the necessary betrothal gifts demanded of a groom's family, or the lack of an appropriate person to initiate the necessary introductions have encouraged the persistence of these practices. None of these alternative forms of marriage really challenges the ideal or the practice of patrilineal, patrilocal, patriarchal marriage because each of these forms of marriage is devised to

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[28] Eastman, Lloyd E., op. cit., p.30-31.

[29] Eastman, Lloyd E., ibid., p.29.

[30] Honig, Emily and Hershatter, Gail, op. cit., pp.278, 288. Whether or not these practices continued during the Mao era is not clear, however, resistance to marriage reform in many places indicates that it is likely that these practices did persist to some degree, albeit on a reduced scale. (Marriage reform during the Mao era is dealt with later in this chapter.)

preserve the core element of the dominant form of marriage – the maintenance of male lineages in situations where 'normal' marriage would otherwise not be possible.

The next task is to understand more about how the ideology and practice of patrilineal, partilocal, patriarchal marriage is maintained. To do this, it is necessary to deal with some theoretical issues first.

7.2 A theoretical model of gender relations

7.2.1 Bourdieu's theory of practice

Bourdieu's theory of practice offers a framework which has some useful aspects for understanding how particular social practices are maintained. His theory begins with the concept of the *habitus*, a set of dispositions which is responsible for generating practices and which is itself produced through practice.[31] These dispositions – ways of seeing the world through particular gendered, cultured, class positions – are inculcated or ingrained into a person in such a way that makes them seem 'natural', inclining that person towards certain kinds of behaviour, without strictly determining them.[32] Bourdieu says:

> The *habitus*, a product of history, produces individual and collective practices – more history – in accordance with the schemes generated by history.[33]

This means, he says, that there is a need to study how the social conditions which generated these practices in history were constituted in order to relate them to the social

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[31] Bourdieu, Pierre, *The Logic of Practice*, (Polity Press, Cambridge, 1990), pp.52-53.

[32] Thompson, John B. (ed), "Editor's introduction," in Bourdieu, Pierre, *Language and Symbolic Power*, (Polity Press, Cambridge, 1991), p.13.

[33] Bourdieu, Pierre, *The Logic of Practice*, op. cit., p.54.

conditions in which they are currently being employed.[34] For feminists, it means analyzing "… larger structures of domination that make up the content within which a particular power relation [between women and men] is able to emerge."[35]

7.2.2 Applying Bourdieu's theory of practice to the Chinese situation

In her concluding chapter of *Gender and Power in Rural North China*, Ellen Judd reflects on the relevance of Bourdieu's theory of practice as she has attempted to apply it in the context of rural China.[36] Bourdieu, she says, locates the concept of 'practice' between 'structure' and 'habitus', with habitus being both "… a structured and a structuring element generating structure through practice." She suggests that there is a space in Bourdieu's theory, however, for another conceptual area which approximates the Chinese concept of 'custom'. Unlike the "habitus or (largely tacit) custom or pre-law" which functions at the unconscious level, Judd says, 'custom' in China refers more to the way people consciously

> create and recreate strategies and accommodations with which they negotiate their way in the fractures of the social order. And through custom, the conflicting demands of the official social order are articulated, in however shifting or contradictory a fashion, with the imperatives of everyday life.[37]

In China, she says, custom has become a means of enabling people to negotiate their way between dominant models and the mechanisms of habitus.

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[34] Bourdieu, Pierre, ibid., p.56.

[35] Allen, Amy, "Foucault on power: a theory for feminists," in Hekman, Susan J. (ed), *Feminist Interpretations of Michel Foucault,* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), p.267.

[36] Judd, Ellen R., *Gender and Power in North China,* op. cit., pp.254-257.

[37] Judd, Ellen R., ibid., p.255.

Judd's use of 'custom' derives from field studies conducted between 1986 and 1990 where she found that the people she interviewed adhered to the formal model of the patrilineal, patrilocal, patriarchal family as the 'explicit' norm, negotiating this norm through other 'implicit' customs which allowed a greater flexibility in actual practice.[38] For example, in the course of asking questions about household structure in three villages in Shandong, she unexpectedly discovered married women who were absent from their marital families *(pojia)* and living with their natal families *(niangjia)*. Some other young married women were living in their husbands' families, but they returned daily to their natal families. Upon further enquiry, she discovered that this was the custom *(xiguan)* or tradition *(chuantong)*, a kind of "… shared practical knowledge" which, the women interviewed said, was not inconsistent with the formal model. These customs did not involve the young married couple taking up residence in the wife's family or becoming members of that family, the women still belonged to their marital families. These customs allowed the women and their families, according to circumstances, a flexibility to negotiate their way between the formal model and the practical needs of everyday life. She says:

> Customary practices address dimensions of women's social relationships in a model that is not attentive to them. … These customary practices reinforce the model in structuring the active role of women, who are indispensable to it, in modes – such as respect and care for aging parents – that do not challenge the model and may actually stabilize or strengthen elements of it.[39]

In other words, these customs reinforce the formal patrilineal, patrilocal, patriarchal model at the same time that they undermine some of its authority. They survive because they are not systematized or publicly expressed, even though they are referred to as being 'according to the custom'. They meet a variety of familial needs amongst which aging

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[38] Judd, Ellen R., "*Niangjia*: Chinese women and their natal families," *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol.48, No.3, (1989), pp.525-544.

[39] Judd, Ellen R., ibid., pp.538-539.

parents who have no sons to support them is but one. In this instance, because of the resistance of men to 'marrying in' to the wife's family, and the resistance of the men in the wife's village to men who marry in, men support such customs because it allows the formal model of marriage to survive intact. At the same time, women gain a degree of power and agency that is denied them in the formal model, without ever really challenging it. Apart from uxorilocal marriages, women officially belong to their husbands' families and their primary obligation is to that family. Nevertheless, Judd's interviewees said that the expectation is that daughters should give assistance to their own parents if there are no sons to give it, providing they do not live too far away.

Thus these 'customary practices' exist within a loosely defined and flexible framework that is usually referred to as 'custom' in which solutions to a variety of practical problems (such as caring for an aging parent, adjusting to marriage etc.) can be worked out in acceptable ways commonly practised by that community.[40] Custom has also enabled people to carry on their daily lives in the face of considerable change and uncertainty over extended periods of time in which social cohesion has been followed by fragmentation and order has alternated with disorder.[41] It also allows for considerable cultural diversity from region to region as well as between neighbouring villages. What is permissible in one community may not be an acceptable in another. Hence, in one place uxorilocal marriage may be an acceptable way of providing for family succession where there are no sons, but it is not readily accepted in another place. According to Ebrey and Watson:

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[40] Judd, Ellen R., *Gender and Power in Rural North China*, op. cit., p.255.

[41] Judd, Ellen R., ibid., p.256.

A major component of what made people consider themselves Chinese – and identify others as outsiders and non-Chinese – was adherence to fundamental aspects of a "Chinese" family and kinship system.[42]

'Custom' makes this possible.

In the next part, I propose to use Bourdieu's analogy of a game to construct a framework for analyzing gender relations in traditional China. This analogy has the capacity to model the evolution of a social field so that the mechanisms which perpetuate certain ideologies and practices, and the interests and strategies which promote them, become clearer. Analogies and models do not include much detail, nor are they concerned with explaining variations. Their explanatory value lies in their ability to simplify a complex situation so that it can be understood more easily. Aspects from both Chapters Six and Seven will be used in the application of this model to the Chinese situation.

7.2.3 Bourdieu's analogy

Bourdieu writes:

In a game, the field (the pitch or board on which it is played, the rules, the outcome at stake, etc.) is clearly seen for what it is, an arbitrary social construct, an artefact whose arbitrariness and artificiality are underlined by everything that defines its autonomy – explicit and specific rules, strictly delimited and extra-ordinary time and space. Entry into the game takes the form of a quasi-contract, which is sometimes made explicit (the Olympic oath, appeals to 'fair play', and, above all, the presence of a referee or umpire) ... [43]

It seems here that the kind of game Bourdieu is referring to is one which has a *fixed* set of rules that one must abide by, and that entry to the game involves an implied agreement to

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[42] Ebrey, Patricia Buckley and Watson, James L., *Kinship Organization in Late Imperial China 1000-1940*, (University of California Press, Berkeley/Los Angeles/London, 1986), p.xi.

[43] Bourdieu, Pierre, *The Logic of Practice*, op. cit., p.67.

play the game according to those rules. There are other kinds of games, however, games that children make up as they go along. Such a game, like all games, needs some kind of goal, boundaries and constraints (structure) to make it coherent and give it its character. It might involve something as simple as playing a game of 'spies' in the backyard at night, playing a ball game where the ball must not touch the ground, or 'playing schools'. In such a game, decisions have to be made about who will do what, or be what, and maybe even who will be excluded from the game. The game will probably start simply with a few rules, with other rules being added to clarify situations as they arise. This kind of game tends to be cooperative rather than being overtly competitive. There is usually no need for a referee because the game will most likely proceed using some form of consensus. Nevertheless, a hierarchy of players often emerges, consisting of those who make most of the decisions, those who are able to influence these decisions to some extent, those who are content to accept the decisions made by others, and those who may have very little influence over the way the game develops. Others may be admitted to the game after it begins if they are a friend, are sufficiently popular, or it is thought advantageous to admit them. Finally, the game will only last as long as enough of those playing want to keep playing it. The kind of game in Bourdieu's analogy actually seems to be more like this kind of 'made-up-as-you-go-along' children's game in the light of what he says next.

> In the social fields, which are the products of a long, slow process of autonomization, and are therefore, so to speak games 'in themselves' and not 'for themselves', one does not embark on the game by a conscious act, one is born into the game, with the game; and the relation of investment, *illusio*, investment, is made more total and unconditional by the fact that it is unaware of what it is. ... The earlier a player enters the game and the less he is aware of the associated learning ..., the greater is his ignorance of all that is tacitly granted through his investment in the field and his interest in its very existence and perpetuation and in everything

that is played for in it, and his unawareness of the unthought presuppositions that the game produces and endlessly reproduces, thereby reproducing the conditions of its own perpetuation.[44]

Bourdieu's reference to the long process of 'autonomization' here refers to the way mechanisms, that is, self perpetuating devices which produce habitual responses, develop over time. A social field develops rather like a children's made-up game, but over a much longer period of time. In the case of the game, its development becomes 'a game in itself'. Every player has a vested interest in the *way* such a game develops and how changing the rules of the game might advantage or disadvantage him or her as well as the overall direction or ambience of the game. The social field differs from a game, however, in that a person does not choose to enter it, he or she is born into it. People are therefore not usually aware of what their investment in the field entails, of what their interests are in the existence and perpetuation of that field, or what the stakes are. Their investment in the field is more likely to be total and unconditional the earlier they become part of it. In this respect, he says, it is similar to the way children are completely unaware of the rules of grammar and their own personal investment in the process of learning their mother tongue.

There are several aspects to this game analogy which are useful for modeling gender relations in China. First of all, there are two levels of play at work in the social field which are also to be found in 'made-up-as-you-go-along' games. Described in terms of a game, there is the game proper which is being developed and another 'game' going on behind the game which is not part of the game proper. This other 'game' which determines *how* the game proper develops (i.e. who can make the rules and by what authority etc.) is also going through a process of development. The game proper which acquires distinct characteristics and rules is the product of the other 'game' which is primarily concerned with the play of power and the development of strategies and mechanisms of power which

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[44] Bourdieu, Pierre, ibid., p.67.

produce the game proper. These two different levels of play are interwoven. In applying the analogy to the social field, I will call the game proper the 'cultural field' and the 'game-behind-the-game' the 'strategic field'.

7.2.4 Applying the analogy to the Chinese situation

The cultural field

If we now return to the social field in China, we see that the cultural field has developed distinctive characteristics and rules. In his book, *From the Soil: The Foundations of Chinese Society*, Chinese sociologist Fei Xiaotong describes the distinguishing characteristics of Chinese society which can be briefly summarized in the following way. Chinese society is made up of "... webs woven out of countless personal relationships."[45] As we have already seen in Chapter Six of this thesis, these relationships are 'dyadic relationships' between individuals based on differences in seniority and gender.[46] This patterning of society Fei labels *chaxugeju* – *cha* meaning 'difference', *xu* meaning 'order', *geju* meaning 'pattern'.[47] He says:

> Some may wonder why the concrete social relationships, such as gods and ghosts, monarchs and subjects, fathers and sons, and husbands and wives, are placed in the same category as the abstract positional types, such as the noble and the base, the intimate and the unconnected, the remote and the close, those above and those below. In fact, the basic character of traditional Chinese social structure rests precisely on such hierarchical differentiations as these. Therefore, the key to understanding networks of human relationships is to recognize that such distinctions create the very patterns of Chinese social organization. In the *Book of Rites*, it is written,

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[45] Fei Xiaotong, *From the Soil: The Foundations of Chinese Society*, (University of California Press, Berkeley/Los Angeles/London, 1992), p.78.

[46] Hamilton, Gary G. and Wang Zheng, "Introduction: Fei Xiaotong and the beginnings of a Chinese sociology," in Fei Xiaotong, ibid., p.28.

[47] Hamilton,, Gary G. and Wang Zheng, ibid., p.16.

"Toward the intimate, there is only intimacy; toward the respected, only respect; toward superiors, only deference; between men and women, only differences; these are the things that people cannot alter." This means that the framework of social structure is unchangeable; what is changeable is only the use to which the framework is put.[48]

In other words, Fei is suggesting that changing this framework would involve destroying the distinctive character of Chinese society. If he is right, it might be like trying to change a ball game in which the ball is thrown, to one where no hands are used at all and the ball can only be kicked. By changing the most distinguishing characteristic of the game, the arena, the rules, the skills required, the physical characteristics of the players, and so on – that is, the whole fabric of the game – might also need to change so that in the end, the new game hardly resembles the old one, except for the fact that it is still a ball game. *If dyadic relationships based on difference are what makes Chinese society distinctly 'Chinese' then*, according to this logic, making it a more egalitarian society would undermine its unique Chinese character. It would also suggest that the subordination of women is an essential component of what makes Chinese society 'Chinese', an aspect that Fei, from his own male perspective, does not address.

The next important aspect to be found in the game analogy is the role that the process of 'autonomization' plays – that is, the way mechanisms develop. There are several such mechanisms at work in the social field in traditional China. First of all, there are rules which, unlike laws, operate through ritual.[49] Ritual is a structuring mechanism which works at the unconscious level to produce the habitus, and at the conscious level to produce discipline. The habitus produces relatively automatic responses to situations,

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[48] Fei, Xiaotong, *From the Soil*, op. cit., pp.65-66.

[49] See Chapter Six in this thesis for the discussion of ritual *(li)*.

discipline produces self surveillance and the surveillance of the behaviour of others. In respect of the former, Fei says:

> Rituals are sustained by personal habits. It is as if there were ten eyes watching you and ten fingers pointing at you all the time. You cannot help but follow the ritual, even if you are all by yourself."[50]

In respect of the latter, each person has an obligation to supervise others and to allow others to supervise them. If everyone is doing their part supervising those beneath them or under their authority then, logically, there should be no need for the government to do anything, he says.[51] Ideally, there should be no need for law, litigation or interference from outside. Women practice self surveillance and, amongst themselves, a surveillance of each other. Men, amongst men, do the same. This is not so much a form of policing as a process of education. Such education begins in early childhood and has nothing to do with schooling, but is a process of molding or socialization. The aim of this education is not to tell people how or what to think, but what to do and what kind of person they are to be. Only after the patterns are so thoroughly ingrained that they become 'natural', might the 'logic' behind them be explained.[52] For girls and women, this molding means a lifelong inculcation of *yin* dispositions and behaviour.

Marriage belongs to both the cultural field and the strategic field. In the cultural field, it has assumed specific characteristics which are maintained through particular practices. Traditionally, the patrilineal, patrilocal, patriarchal model of marriage is structured on the *yin/yang* principle in which males are marked as active agents and females are designated as passive; men lead and women follow; men own property while

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[50] Fei Xiaotong, *From the Soil,* op. cit., p.99.

[51] Fei Xiaotong, ibid., pp.109.

[52] Ebrey, Patricia, "Education through ritual," op. cit., pp.277, 279.

women are a form of property. Patrilineality promotes practices such as the maintenance of lineages, ancestor worship and patrilocal marriage. Within each of these, other practices such as polygamous marriage, naming practices, female infanticide, foot-binding, marrying up, widow chastity and so on, proliferate. They are practices in the sense that they are maintained and reproduced in response to a particular kind of structured situation and, themselves, help to maintain that situation. There are also other kinds of practices, 'customary practices', which offer some strategic flexibility by undermining some of the authority of the model, but they never really challenge it.

The strategic field

The strategic field is most concerned with the play of power and the strategies used to form the distinctive character of the cultural field and the processes which automate it. Foucault describes power

> as the multiplicity of force *relations* immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization; as the *process* which, through ceaseless struggles and confrontations, transforms, strengthens, or reverses them; as the *support* which these force relations find in one another, thus forming a chain or a system, or on the contrary, the disjunctions and contradictions which isolate them from one another; and lastly, as the *strategies* in which they take effect, whose general design or institutional crystallization is embodied in the state apparatus, in the formation of the law, in the various social hegemonies. ... [Power] is produced from one moment to the next, at every point, or rather in relation from one point to another.[53]

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[53] Foucault, Michel, *The History of Sexuality Volume One:* op. cit., pp.92-93. (The italics are mine.)

When referring to China it would be more appropriate to use the word 'ritual' instead of the word 'law' as traditional Chinese society is ruled by ritual rather than 'Law' in the western sense.

The words, *relations, process, support* and *strategies* have been highlighted in the above quotation as they represent key aspects of the strategic field. *Relations* here refers to the power relationships which develop in the strategic field to produce the cultural field. They are the forces responsible for the production of the symbolic order in which males are super-ordinated and females are subordinated. There are two ways in which this occurs in traditional China. One involves the literati (male scholars so named because of their concern with the production of text) and the other concerns popular practice. For example, scholars were responsible for formalizing ritual practices and the ideologies that support them so they could be used as mechanisms of control amongst the upper classes.[54] Differences in seniority, gender, and status were emphasized so that each person had a precise place in the social order and certain obligations to fulfil. Records from the Song period (960-1279) onwards indicate that these formalized relationships, along with the ideologies supporting them, were actively communicated to ordinary people through lectures, pictures, songs or poems, enactments and so forth.[55] The flow of ideas, however, was not all one way. Evidence suggests that the literati also incorporated views and

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[54] Du Fangqin, "The rise and fall of the Zhou rites," op. cit., p.172, 208-209; Paper, Jordan, op. cit., p.33; Ebrey, Patricia, "Education through ritual," op. cit., p.279.

[55] Mair, Victor H., "Language and ideology in the written popularizations of the *Sacred Edict*," in Johnson, David, Nathan, Andrew J. and Rawski, Evelyn S. (eds), *Popular Culture in Late Imperial China*, (University of California Press, Berkeley/Los Angeles/London, 1985), pp.327-333. He cites some examples which appear to indicate that such activities have been carried out by officials during the last 1000 years.

practices common amongst the wider community into their writings.[56] Ebrey provides one example where this occurs. She says:

> I see no evidence at all that ideological motives led Confucian scholars to promote worship at graves. Rather, those concerned with classical ritual forms tried to find ways to accommodate practices that had become popular.[57]

These elite scholars felt that the stability and cohesiveness of ordinary families who shared communal property and participated in group rituals promoted a spirit that was lacking in their own class which tended to be more concerned about the development of family lines.[58] According to Johnson, Nathan and Rawski:

> The intellectual and spiritual world of the scholar or official in late imperial times was not utterly alien to the peasant or laborer, nor was the reverse true.[59]

The combination of hierarchical relations emphasizing differences in gender, seniority and status, along with ancestor worship and the desire to preserve male lineages, therefore served to strengthen male-based kinship networks and the subordination of women at *all* levels of Chinese society.

In regard to the *process* of transforming, strengthening or reversing gender structures and the ideologies that support them, we see from the above how some gender ideologies were communicated and consolidated. This also included more formal attempts

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[56] Ebrey, Patricia Buckley, "The early stages in the development of descent group organization," in Ebrey, Patricia Buckley and Watson, James L. (eds), *Kinship Organization in Late Imperial China 1000-1940*, (University of California Press, Berkeley/Los Angeles/London, 1986), pp.17, 23.

[57] Ebrey, Patricia Buckley, ibid., p.23.

[58] Ebrey, Patricia Buckley, ibid., p.39.

[59] "Editors' preface," in Johnson, David, Nathan, Andrew J. and Rawski, Evelyn S. (eds), *Popular Culture in Late Imperial China*, (University of California Press, Berkeley/Los Angeles/London, 1985), p.xiii. The interaction between the large number of gentry and elite scholars who lived in rural villages and towns is discussed more in the next chapter of this thesis.

at inculcating certain values, attitudes and beliefs by the ruling class. One of the ways in which this was done was through the teaching of rituals. The production of text by the literati played an important role in *formally* encoding the symbolic order into Chinese culture through the stylization of behaviour into rituals. This ritual, which took the form of language and enactments, then became a non-literate means of transmitting and reinforcing certain ideologies, including gender ideologies.

The high regard for the literati and text is, at least in part, associated with the way the written word itself became a fetish.[60] John Fairbank says,

> Chinese language had the character of an institution, rather than a tool, of society. Men worshiped it, and devoted long lives to mastering even parts of its literature, which was a world of its own, into which one might gain admittance only by strenuous effort. The Chinese writing system was not a convenient device lying ready at hand for every schoolboy to pick up and use as he prepared to meet life's problems. It was itself one of life's problems.[61]

The script, as well as the text, had a kind of magical mystery to the uninitiated. Meaning was not only produced in the content of the text, but *through* the text. For example, the characters in the Chinese script, unlike the letters of an alphabet, are units of meaning.[62] (Many characters are also composed of simpler parts which also convey meaning.) A single character may also have several meanings, with the result that understanding only

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[60] Zito, Angela, op. cit., p.114.

[61] Fairbank, John K., "The Chinese written language," in Schurmann, Franz and Schell, Orville (eds), *Imperial China: The Decline of the Last Dynasty and the Origins of Modern China – the 18th and 19th Centuries,* (Random House, New York, 1967), p.66.

[62] The nature of the Chinese script means that every character has to be memorized separately. Unlike the alphabetic scripts which have a limited number of graphs (*letters* in English) which combine to make up any number of words, the Chinese script uses the morpheme as its smallest unit of meaning. Each morpheme is represented by a graph (*character* in Chinese). Two morphemes with different meanings may be pronounced the same way, but they will have different graphs. This means there are thousands of graphs. The *Zhong Hua Dictionary* contains over 50,000 graphs. Because of this, learning to read has always tended to focus on learning characters. The preoccupation with the learning of characters, however, does not necessarily mean that one is able to read. See Sampson, Geoffrey, op. cit., for a discussion on the structure of the Chinese script.

comes when the context in which they are used is understood. Even then, the meaning may only become completely clear if one is aware of all that which is not actually said, but is taken as already being understood. (While much of this is still true today, written Chinese was extremely terse until it underwent reform during the last century.) Thus becoming fully literate amounted to a gradual initiation into all the different levels of meaning contained in both the script and the literature.[63]

To cope with the difficult task of learning thousands of different characters, a type of pedagogy developed whereby characters were learned by focusing on the components of a character and devising rhymes or stories as an aid to memory.[64] While this is educationally sound practice, it also becomes a mechanism for transmitting traditional gender ideologies that are encrypted into the script itself. Many characters which incorporate the female 女 (nü) character nowadays still convey such ideologies.[65] Kate

Burridge and Ng Bee-Chin group terms which contain this character into four major categories – kin terms denoting women (31%); terms which refer to objects and activities typically associated with females (10%); terms reflecting ideal feminine physical attributes (30%); and negative terms associated with immoral or negative qualities (20%).[66] Within the first category, there are terms used to address women of different age groups which "... encode considerable information about their age and/or marital status, and also make indirect reference to their child bearing capacities." Burridge and Ng Bee-Chin point out that male address forms do not encode this kind of information. In the second category,

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[63] This is true for all languages, but it is especially so for Chinese.

[64] Burridge, Kate and Ng Bee-Chin, op. cit., p.133. Hodge, Bob and Kam Louie, op. cit., p.145.

[65] The nü character usually becomes the 'radical' – the element used to locate the character in the dictionary.

[66] Burridge, Kate and Ng Bee-Chin, op. cit., pp.123-132.

the use of the *nü* character denotes female activities associated with their biological role, sexuality, and marriage. The third category contains characters associated with stereotyped female attributes such as 'grace' and 'beauty'. The denigration of women is most apparent in the fourth category where the female *nü* character is used in terms associated with 'dishonesty', 'untrustworthiness', 'malevolence', 'weakness of character', and so on. Besides these groups, there are other characters incorporating the *nü* radical, such as *hao* (good), *an* (peace), *miao* (excellent), which have positive meanings but which also clearly transmit gender ideologies.[67] For example, the character 好 *hao* (good) contains 女 (*nü*, female/woman) and 子 (*zi*, child). The 子 character, however, traditionally refers to sons.[68] 'Good' must therefore mean having a woman and sons – obviously good from a male perspective. A similar analysis of the script shows that *yin/yang* gender ideologies are also encoded in words which use the *yin* character.[69] This suggests that becoming literate must involve some degree of indoctrination into traditional gender ideologies.

Next, some degree of *support* amongst the population is needed for a common set of cultural values to materialize. As stated above, the formalized ritual developed by the literati reflected some of the practices of ordinary folk considered by these scholars as worthy of emulation by the upper classes. Furthermore, opportunities to improve one's social position tended to motivate those of lower status to emulate those above them. Finally, the delegation of authority through bureaucrats and patriarchal heads of families

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[67] Burridge, Kate and Ng Bee-Chin, ibid., p.121.

[68] Burridge, Kate and Ng Bee-Chin, ibid., p.121. Hodge, Bob and Kam Louie, op. cit., p.155.

[69] See Burridge, Kate and Ng Bee-Chin, op. cit., pp.134-136 and Hodge, Bob and Kam Louie, op. cit., pp.146-150 for a discussion of this.

would also have helped to generate support for the maintenance of social order through kinship and ritual. That is not to say there was never any resistance. At the personal level, ritual was used to subdue the will, a process which involved constant correction. Fei says,

> We Chinese do not use the term *will* in reference to a child's personality, because the process of education does not require that a child's will be recognized.[70]

Moreover,

> the amount of correction a child gets in one hour would exceed the criticism an adult would receive in one year. To be a citizen under the most tyrannical king is no worse than being a child with the most loving parents.[71]

Children do not enter the world with a natural desire to comply with a particular social order, he says, meaning that there is always conflict and resistance which must be overcome. At the social level too, there were many disruptive forces at work such as foreign influences, poverty, commercial activity and ethnic influences which also tended to produce what Foucault refers to as 'disjunctions and contradictions'.

An interesting example of women's resistance *and* complicity which actually involves literacy is 'women's script writing' *(nüshu)* found amongst the peasant women of Jianyong County in Hunan. The script is based on a phonetic syllabary invented by the women for their own use and which only these women are able to read.[72] Anne McLaren says that this script

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[70] Fei Xiaotong, *From the Soil*, op. cit., p.116.

[71] Fei Xiaotong, *Shenyu zhidu [Systems of Reproduction]*, p.101. Cited in Fei Xiaotong, ibid., p.116-117.

[72] McLaren, Anne, "On researching invisible women: abduction and violation in Chinese women's script writing," in Finnane, Antonia and McLaren (eds), *Dress, Sex and Text in Chinese Culture*, (Monash Asia Institute, Australia, 1999), op. cit., pp.164, 169.

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is not the product of a female imitation of genres from the dominant (male) culture, but consists of the orally-transmitted lore of generations of women, who by the norms of the age were 'unlearned' and 'illiterate'.[73]

Through this script women found a way of encoding and transmitting ritualized grievances in a culturally acceptable form amongst other women outside the family who could give moral support and sympathy. In stories written in the script, women are often presented as strong and resistant to intimidation by men. Women's script writing, however, does not represent a 'discourse of resistance', McLaren says, but a "... ritualised expression of a feminine code of endurance in adversity".[74] It was a peculiarly feminine form of literacy which became a means of encoding feminine behaviour according to *feminine* interpretations of the prevailing gender norms.[75] Although women's script writing was actively practised well into the twentieth century, it had little relevance after 1949 in the 'new' society where the new communist regime had abolished old marriage customs, proclaimed that men and women were equal, and espoused a commitment to universal literacy.[76]

Finally, marriage and literacy practices play a *strategic* role in the process of establishing and maintaining the symbolic order and the mechanisms that ensure its continuance. The *Book of Rites [Liji]* says:

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[73] McLaren, Anne, ibid., pp.170-171.

[74] McLaren, Anne, ibid., p.171.

[75] McLaren, Anne, ibid., p.165.

[76] McLaren, Anne, ibid., p.178.

> The discrimination between man and woman bestows *meaning* on the roles of husband and wife, then on the affection between father and son, and then on the correct relationship between lord and minister.[77]

Patrilineal, patrilocal, patriarchal marriage gave practical expression to the symbolic order in which males were designated the markers of that order. It had a vital role in establishing the order of succession through lineages, the place of residence and the ownership of property. It uses biological reproduction as the basis for social continuity, and kinship as the model for all social relations.[78] Literacy was another way of making distinctions between men and women. Although there were literate women in some scholarly families, the saying, "… [o]nly the virtuous man is talented; only the untalented woman is virtuous" arose out of a concern by Ming scholars (1368-1644) that women may develop notions of independence if they became literate.[79] As the prerogative of males, literacy became an important means through which male scholars established what *they* considered to be cultural norms. These were then transmitted to the rest of the population through non-literate means. Thus patrilineal, patrilocal, patriarchal marriage and literacy became strategies for maintaining the subordinate position of women in traditional China. The next task is to see how these gender arrangements develop in the PRC.

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[77] "Hunyi" ["Marriage"], *Liji [Book of Rites]*, cited in Sun Xiao and Pan Shaoping, op. cit., p.232. (The italics are mine.)

[78] Fei Xiaotong, *From the Soil*, op. cit., p.120.

[79] Handlin, Joanna F., "Lü K'un's new audience: the influence of women's literacy on sixteenth-century thought," in Wolf, Margery and Witke, Roxane (eds), *Women in Chinese Society*, (Stanford University Press, California, 1975), p.28. While some scholars regarded women as lacking the intellectual capacity to become 'literate' there was also a fear that literacy would empower women and give them the ability to do things that would not accord with men's interests.

7.3 Reforming marriage practices in the PRC

This section begins with an account of the CCP's efforts to reform marriage practices. It will show that this difficult task was undermined by other political objectives as well as resistance by those who sought to defend their own personal and family interests. It concludes with an analysis of the situation using the game analogy developed in the second section.

When the CCP came to power, it recognized that changing a traditional society into a more modern, egalitarian and productive society *must* involve changing marriage customs. First of all, traditional marriage and kinship patterns allocated power to the patriarchal heads of families who organized the labour of younger members to suit the needs of the family rather than the interests of the state.[80] Therefore it was necessary to free both men and women from restrictive marriage practices if they were to be able to contribute economically to the development of the nation. Second, the opportunity to participate in the labour force, it was argued, would liberate women and enable them to acquire a new social status based on their economic contribution.

The new Marriage Law promulgated in 1950 was designed to give both men and women freedom of choice in marriage, and both the right to divorce and inherit property, as well as spelling out responsibilities of parents and children towards each other. The passing of the Law was followed by marriage reform campaigns to publicize the law and to acquaint people with their rights. When interviewing older women and men about their first hand experiences of the marriage reform campaigns, however, Ellen Judd and Margery Wolf each found that these women either attributed very little importance to

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[80] Johnson, Kay Ann, op. cit., p.97.

these campaigns or they could not remember such a campaign ever occurring.[81] This can be explained by the poor implementation of the reforms in many rural areas and resistance on the part of many male cadres who were supposed to be carrying them out. Apparently these men felt that the reforms were a threat to the integrity of their own marriages and family life.[82]

Kay Ann Johnson suggests that the laws for land reform and marriage reform were promulgated about the same time and both were supposed to be carried out together. She says that one "... redistributed property and power in the villages" while the other "... redistributed property and power in the family". Land reform, however, was given priority over marriage reform for a variety of reasons. First, those implementing land reform thought that other issues such as marriage reform should be dealt with only in areas where land reform had already been completed. The potential for the marriage reforms to cause divisions amongst the peasant ranks, it was argued, may distract attention away from the struggle against the landlords.[83] Second, mobilizing women for production and ensuring they, along with men, received their share in the redistributed land was considered more important than dealing with marriage issues.[84] Without marriage reform, however, any land that was allocated to women, in reality, became the property of their families because women themselves were still 'owned' by their families. Thus land reform did not benefit women in the same way that it did men, because traditional family structures still

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[81] Judd, Ellen R., "Reconsidering China's Marriage Law campaign: toward a de-orientalized feminist perspective," *Asian Journal of Women's Studies*, Vol.4, No.2, (1998), pp.8-26; Wolf, Margery, *Revolution Postponed*, op. cit., p.21.

[82] Parish, William L. and Whyte, Martin King, op. cit., p.159; Johnson, Kay Ann, op. cit., p.130.; Judd, Ellen R., "Reconsidering China's Marriage Law campaign, ibid., pp.18-19.

[83] Johnson, Kay Ann, op. cit., pp.102-104.

[84] Judd, Ellen R., "Reconsidering China's Marriage Law campaign:," op. cit., p.14; Johnson, Kay Ann, ibid., p.104.

interfered with their ability to control such land, as it did any wealth that their labour produced.[85]

In rural villages where marriage reform was carried out, there was considerable resistance to it from villagers.[86] This was particularly so when dealing with divorce and the breaking of betrothal arrangements. There were three obstacles in the way of women who wanted a divorce – the husband, the mother-in-law and the cadre, with the cadre being the most difficult to overcome.[87] With respect to the latter, most women lived in their husbands' villages and cadres more than likely had some family connection with the husband being divorced. The cadre's job was also complicated by having to carry out marriage reform while making sure he did not lose the support of the people.[88] Furthermore, a government directive was issued which criticized cadres for using methods which tended to disrupt production and social stability. This, together with the pressure from village men who were worried about losing control of the women in their families meant it was generally easier to back off from marriage reform, especially if there was no real pressure coming from above to carry it out. In fact, county and provincial officials often did little to help cadres at the village level. Rather than wanting to reform marriage practices which challenged male authority, they preferred to think that the traditional marriage system would disintegrate along with the traditional economy and that it was useless to try and change the traditional customs of a largely resistant peasant population. Hence cadres at the village level were often left without appropriate training and advice about how to deal with problems. If male cadres found carrying out marriage reform

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[85] Johnson, Kay Ann, ibid., pp.110-112.

[86] Johnson, Kay Ann, ibid., p.121.

[87] *Renmin ribao* 29/9/51. Cited in Croll, Elisabeth, *Changing Identities of Chinese Women*, op. cit., p.98.

[88] Johnson, Kay Ann, op. cit., p.121.

difficult, women cadres who undertook reform work, encountered even greater problems. Unlike the men, they often had to put up with slurs against their moral character because of their involvement in new public roles which were considered inappropriate for respectable women. It should not be too surprising therefore that early investigative reports showed progress across the country was extremely variable, with little, if anything, being achieved in some places. The same reports also found that many cadres had not taken even the most preliminary steps towards implementing marriage reform.[89]

In addition to problems within the Party itself about the priority and importance of marriage reform, some women also opposed reform. After the chaos of the war with Japan and revolution within the country, many rural women wanted family stability and security, rather than more disruptions to family life. Older women who had already served out their traditional role as daughters-in-law resisted change as they approached the time when they could enjoy some power in the family as mothers-in-law. These women, however, found that they were the ones being targeted rather than the patrilineal, patrilocal, patriarchal model of marriage which was responsible for defining their role and status in it. In an extreme case, a mother-in-law in Hunan province was sentenced to death for her daughter-in-law's suicide. Neither the victim's husband, nor the family system which promoted the intolerable circumstances that led to her death, were considered.[90] Women who were brave enough to try and break a traditionally arranged betrothal or obtain a divorce found themselves even more vulnerable than before to family discipline. Violence, suicides and murders abounded because women were not adequately supported in their attempts to obtain a divorce or break a betrothal.[91]

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[89] Johnson, Kay Ann, ibid., p.130-136.

[90] Johnson, Kay Ann, ibid., pp.124-127.

[91] Croll, Elisabeth, *Changing Identities of Chinese Women*, op. cit., p.98; Johnson, Kay Ann, ibid., p.130.

In 1953, a more systematic and better prepared attempt was made to carry out marriage reform. Nevertheless, there was still controversy within the Party about how it should be conducted. Three successive government directives were issued, each one urging more caution about the way marriage reform was to be carried out. Evidence suggests that cadres who had been reluctant to carry it out in the first place, took the last of these directives as license to call the campaign off, while those who had been more enthusiastic about the work became discouraged by what appeared to be a retreat by the government.[92] Ultimately, while the marriage reform campaigns did educate many in the population about the Marriage Law, the difficulty of changing entrenched attitudes towards marriage and family life in rural areas meant that the Party leadership looked more and more to changes in women's economic circumstances to bring about the desired result. The National Committee for implementing the Marriage Law also recommended the use of more regular measures at the local level rather than the larger political marriage reform campaigns. These included: training for cadres, village 'mediation teams' and teachers; making education on the marriage reform policy part of the curriculum in junior middle schools; using selected families and couples as models to emulate; and publicizing the Marriage Law during normal political activities.[93] When the marriage reforms concluded in late 1953, it was reported that only 15 per cent of the country had been penetrated to any significant degree; 60 per cent had carried out some publicity but had not really made much impact on attitudes towards freer marriage and gender equality; and

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[92] Johnson, Kay Ann, ibid., pp.138-143.

[93] Johnson, Kay Ann, ibid., p.149.

25 per cent of the country had received very little coverage at all. Female suicides and murders as a result of marital disputes were still a problem.[94]

Judith Stacey suggests:

[m]ost of the traditional family values and practices which survived China's socialist revolution are not anachronisms; they were actively defended through a process that gave them new and sounder structural support.[95]

Not only were they defended, they were *used* to achieve revolutionary goals. This is confirmed in Parish and Whyte's survey conducted in the mid-1970s. They found that the system of household registration which restricted the movement of males away from their native villages, while permitting women to move when they marry, not only left patrilocal residence unchallenged, but actually supported it. The focus of families remained patrilineal, with husbands' parents, brothers, sons and the children of sons consistently outnumbering wives' parents, sisters, daughters and daughter's children in a household. Furthermore, education and economic development, rather than supporting change, generally made traditional marriage practices easier, with men in the most advantageous positions being inclined to marry at a younger age and pay higher bride prices, even when the marriage involved choosing their own partners. Bride prices, in fact, became more important as a woman's economic value increased because her labour became more valuable to her natal family. Her family therefore expected the bride price to take account of the fact that the prospective husband's family was buying the right to her labour. Rather than liberating her, a young woman's new economic value served to strengthen mercenary marriage. When it came to divorce, patrilineal rights were usually defended with a woman

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[94] Meijer, M.J., *Marriage Law and Policy in the Chinese People's Republic*, (Hong Kong University Press, 1971), p.309. Cited in Parish, William L. and Whyte, Martin King, op. cit., p.159.

[95] Stacey, Judith, op. cit., p.258.

tending to receive only that property and those children (if she received any at all) her husband's family was willing to let her have. If she was young, and her husband's family had not recouped the bride price through her labour, her natal family was frequently expected to pay it back.[96] This was problematic if it had already been spent on acquiring a wife for one of her brothers.

Collectivization, Stacey says, also worked to preserve the traditional patrilineal, patrilocal, patriarchal family structure because whatever was earned by family members was paid to the patriarchal head. Moreover, since the only way the family could recruit labour was through marriage and producing offspring, patrilocal marriage became the principal means by which a family could increase its labour force and thereby, increase the number of work-points it could earn.[97] In short, collectivization, the government's system of household registration, and the need to promote strong rural families for producing the necessary agricultural surplus required for financing industrialization in the First Five Year Plan all served to reinforce traditional family bonds and hierarchies.[98]

The large number of women seeking divorce after the marriage reform campaigns of the early 1950s prompted a change in emphasis on divorce as a mechanism for liberating them from unhappy marriages to an emphasis on trying to salvage poor marriages and working on them to make them better.[99] Thus it became even more difficult to divorce than before. After the promulgation of the new Marriage Law in 1981[100],

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[96] Parish, William L. and Whyte, Martin King, op. cit., pp.131-199.

[97] Stacey, Judith, op. cit., pp.206-208.

[98] Johnson, Kay Ann, op. cit., pp.150-151.

[99] Evans, Harriett, *Women and Sexuality in China*, op. cit., p.196.

[100] *The Marriage Law of the People's Republic of China* states: "Divorce is granted when husband and wife both desire it. Both parties should apply for divorce to the marriage registration office. The marriage registration office, after clearly establishing that divorce is desired by both parties and that appropriate measures have been taken for the care of any children and property, should issue the divorce certificate

however, divorce was made easier for women. Nevertheless, many divorced women find

that they are socially ostracized as single women, with the result that they often prefer to

stay married, even in very difficult circumstances.[101] Furthermore, a divorced woman often

encounters many problems, not the least of which is obtaining separate housing.[102] The

new Marriage Law also spelt out children's responsibilities towards aging parents.[103] This

has resulted in a renewed emphasis in families on filial duties. Unfortunately, although the

Law addresses the responsibilities of sons *and* daughters, it has been used by some for

blaming daughters-in-law in family disputes, with daughters-in-law being made responsible

for household harmony. There are also instances where local authorities have targeted

daughters-in-law. In one rural village, meetings specifically for daughters-in-law were held

in order to publicize the changes concerning the obligations of younger people towards

their elders contained within the Marriage Law and the Constitution.[104] In this way,

patrilocal marriage often becomes the means whereby men delegate their own

responsibilities of caring for their elderly parents to their wives.

Some studies investigating patterns and trends in marriage practices during the

1980s indicate that traditional patterns have generally prevailed in rural areas. William

Lavely and Xinhua Ren's use of sample survey data on marriage practices in four

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without delay." (Article 24) "When one party insists on divorce, the organizations concerned may try to effect a reconciliation, or the party may appeal directly to the people's court for divorce. In dealing with a divorce case, the people's court should try to bring about a reconciliation between the parties. In cases of complete alienation of mutual affection, and when mediation has failed, divorce should be granted." (Article 25) (Adopted at the Third Session of the Fifth National People's Congress on September 10, 1980.)

[101] Croll, Elisabeth, *Changing Identities of Chinese Women*, op. cit., p.159.

[102] Hung, Jean K.M., "The family status of Chinese women in the 1990s," *China Review 1995*, (The Chinese University Press, Hong Kong, 1995), p.12.19.

[103] "When children fail to perform the duty of supporting their parents, parents who have lost the ability to work or have difficulties in providing for themselves have the right to demand that their children pay for their support." (Article 15) *The Marriage Law of the People's Republic of China*, 1980.

[104] Honig, Emily and Hershatter, Gail, op. cit., pp.169, 171.

provinces in 1985 and 1987 (Hebei, Shaanxi, Shandong and Guangdong), although not as informative as ethnographic studies, indicates that the most common form of marriage is still patrilocal and that there has actually been a rise in patrilocal marriage since 1950. This was accompanied, however, by a general decline in patrilocal co-residence, most notably during the 1970s.[105] Stevan Harrell's study of three villages in the far south of Sichuan shows that traditional marriage patterns have changed little, with patrilocal marriage being popular where it was historically popular, and uxorilocal marriage being an acceptable alternative where it had always been acceptable. He found that although bride prices and dowries appear to have decreased during the collective era, like Parish and Whyte, he found that they have gradually increased, along with improved incomes, during the 1980s.[106] Deborah Davis and Stevan Harrell suggest that the new Marriage Law passed in 1980 to strengthen and make the law more workable actually encouraged some retrogressive practices. For example, the lowering of the official age when one can marry, they say, meant the new minimum requirements were lower than actual practice during the Cultural Revolution. Furthermore, they point out, there were more under-age marriages and child betrothals during the 1980s. They also criticize the law for giving insufficient attention to the problem of wedding expenses as evidenced in a dramatic rise in bride prices and lavish dowries during the 1980s.[107]

In terms of choosing a marriage partner, the Survey carried out by the All China Women's Federation and the State Statistical Bureau in September 1990 shows that

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[105] Lavely, William and Ren Xinhua, "Patrilocality and early marital co-residence in rural China, 1955-1985," *The China Quarterly*, Issue 130, (1992), pp.378-391. Patrilocal co-residence refers to married couples living with the husbands' parents. Patrilocal marriage refers to all marriages where women marry into the husband's family, regardless of the actual living arrangements.

[106] Harrell, Stevan, "Aspects of marriage in three south-western villages," *The China Quarterly*, Issue 130, (1992), pp.323-337.

amongst married women under the age of thirty years, 6.2 per cent of urban women and 23.4 per cent of rural women said that their parents had arranged their marriages, 17.4 per cent of urban women and 22.9 per cent of rural women's marriages were decided by the couple and their parents together, with 76.0 per cent of urban women and 52.3 per cent of rural women deciding on their own marriage partner.[108] When comparing data for younger and older women and urban with rural, there has been a steady trend towards more women choosing their own partner in both urban and rural areas. However, there is still a clear disparity between the rates for urban and rural women. For example, the survey results indicate that the turning point when the majority of women have chosen their own partners is the mid to late 1950s for urban women, while it is the early to mid 1970s for rural women.[109] There is no data indicating whether marriages were patrilocal or not, which is a fairly serious omission given that patrilocal marriage tends to be an important factor affecting the treatment of women and girls in rural areas. Myron Cohen's field work in a rural village in Hebei (1986-87) and rural areas near Shanghai and Chengdu (1990), however, found that most marriages were patrilocal with a family economy based on the strict pooling of income.[110]

Finally, one serious problem affecting married women in rural areas concerns the large number of married men who leave their wives and children in the village while they go off and do temporary work in the cities. Since permanent residence, access to the better jobs, proper schooling and adequate housing are generally denied those with a rural

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[107] Davis, Deborah and Harrell, Stevan, *Chinese Families in the Post-Mao Era*, (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1993), p.10.

[108] Women's Studies Institute of the All-China Women's Federation, *A Review of the Social Status of Women in China*, (New World Press, Beijing, China, 1995), based on data on pp.227-230.

[109] Women's Studies Institute of the All-China Women's Federation, ibid., p.228.

household registration, most men in this situation prefer to leave their families at home. As a result, wives end up having to manage all the household and family responsibilities while their husbands are away from home, as well as having to do most of the farm work, all without much moral or practical assistance from their husbands.[111] One report attributes the high suicide rate amongst rural women in China to their heavy work load, loneliness, unequal treatment and a general lack of respect. Those who are most vulnerable are not necessarily the poor but, more often, are the better educated women living in reasonably affluent rural areas. It appears that education has opened their eyes to what their lives might be, only to heighten the frustration they feel with the restricted life they end up leading as married women.[112] The suicide rate in rural areas is three times the rate for urban areas, most of them being young women. In fact, 56 per cent of the world's female suicides (around 500 per day) occur in China. It is the only country in the world where female suicide outstrips male suicide.[113] Family pressure to produce sons is also a factor contributing to the large number female suicides in rural areas.

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[110] Cohen, Myron L., "Family management and family division in contemporary rural China, *The China Quarterly*, Issue 130, (1992), pp.357-377. My own interviews in Fufeng County indicated that patrilocal marriage was the norm there.

[111] MacLeod, Lijia, "The dying fields," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, (23/4/1998), pp.62-63; Hung, Jean K.M., op. cit., p.12.12.

[112] MacLeod, Lijia, ibid., pp.62-63.

[113] American Foreign Policy Council, *China Reform Monitor*, No. 171, (23/2/1999); World Bank, World Health Organization and Harvard University, *The Global Burden of Disease*, (Harvard University Press, 1996), and comments attributed to Canadian psychiatrist, Michael Phillips, both cited in MacLeod, Lijia, ibid., pp.62-63.

7.4 Conclusion

In concluding this chapter, I return to the game analogy used earlier in this chapter to show how the cultural field and the strategic field have developed over the last fifty years.

The cultural field

With respect to the cultural field, it is clear that despite the official change from a traditional cosmology to a Marxist cosmology, the deeply ingrained belief that "... between men and women, there are only differences" continues to guide gender expectations and practices. Chapter Six showed that whereas these differences were originally attributed to cosmological beliefs about the order of the universe, they now find their authority in 'scientific facts'. Women are assigned and assume primary responsibility for biological reproduction, care of children and most household chores on the basis that they are most 'naturally' suited to these roles. As a result, many men continue to delegate most of the responsibility for household matters to their wives, leaving themselves free to pursue goals outside the home unfettered by the daily demands of home and family responsibilities. Biology becomes the means for justifying this arrangement, with the *yin/yang* principle being reworked in biological terms. In the newer 'scientific' discourse, women are still regarded as physically, mentally and emotionally inferior to men. Thus the notion of 'difference' which Fei described as basic to the social structure in traditional China appears to have survived as far as gender is concerned.

How is this ideology 'automated' in practice? In traditional Chinese society, ritual became an important structuring device for inculcating and maintaining certain gender attitudes and practices. In modern China, ritual is replaced by 'scientifically' couched regulatory norms. These regulatory norms receive their authority from the notion that

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science is based on 'fact' and therefore can reveal 'truth'. Science is not recognized as a socially constructed discourse, no less affected by the biases of those who produce 'scientific' knowledge than those who produce other kinds of knowledge. Thus the traditional notion that 'between men and women, there are only differences' now receives some support through the reiteration of regulatory norms based on so-called 'scientific facts'. Differences *between* women and men are given more attention than differences *among* women and *among* men. The fact that men and women actually share many common attributes and people of the same sex often differ considerably is generally overlooked in this discourse. Thus the first way the gender ideology is 'automated' is through regulatory norms. The second way occurs through patrilocal marriage.

Patrilocal marriage continues to play an important role in structuring gender relations in most rural areas. As before, it serves to preserve male lineages and male networks. Women are not part of the lineage system at all, apart from being the mothers of sons. When a woman marries and relocates to another village, her opportunities for developing political and economic networks of her own are much more limited than those of men because she is a newcomer to the village and because she does not have same kind of the supportive ties through kinship that are so necessary for advancing political and economic opportunities.[114] Patrilocal marriage is both a product of and a mechanism for reproducing a symbolic order in which males are the signifiers of that social order. It involves a set of moves, privileges and opportunities which systematically disadvantage women and result in their devaluation. Nevertheless, affinal ties are becoming more important and a woman's status is enhanced if she lives close enough to her natal family after marriage to receive their support, and to be able to support her family when

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[114] See Jacka, Tamara, *Women's Work in Rural China: Change and Continuity in an Era of Reform*, (Cambridge University Press, 1997), especially pp.182 and 194 for a discussion of the impact of patrilocal marriage on the ability of women to build up networks in the post Mao era.

needed.[115] In this respect, customary practices play an important role in allowing flexibility, while ensuring that the dominant patrilocal model still survives.

The strategic field

If we now turn to the strategic field which is concerned with the play of power and the strategies used to preserve or change the cultural field we find that the sex of those responsible for instigating the new social order is still predominantly male. Not that there were no females with the capacity to fulfill such roles. There were many capable women who were eager to participate in political work. Male resistance within the party as well as amongst the population, however, meant that party leaders did not want to antagonize their male supporters. In the formative stages, this resulted in the energies of these women being channeled into women's organizations; or being directed by male leaders into areas such as recruiting and propaganda work, work which men deemed appropriate for women; or silenced, as was the case of the writer Ding Ling who criticized communist men for the way they treated women.[116] When the CCP came to power, male resistance continued to be a problem. The end result was that a traditional male hierarchy was institutionalized into the party organizational structure. Women who were able to reach positions of power in the party usually did so because they were married to prominent men. Even then, if their husbands were in the highest positions of power, they tended to become figureheads rather

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[115] Han Min and Eades, J.S., "Brides, bachelors and brokers: the marriage market in rural Anhui in an era of economic reform," *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol.29, No.4, (1995), p.857; Judd, Ellen R., "*Nangjia:* Chinese women and their natal families," op. cit., pp.525-544.

[116] Lee, Lily Xiao Hong and Wiles, Sue, op. cit., pp.116-117, 174-175. Ding Ling's article written in 1942 for *The Liberation Daily* titled "Thoughts on Women's Day 8th March" attacked the Party for placing women in a 'no-win' situation. Women are under constant pressure to marry, she said, and if they do not marry, they become a target for rumour. When they do marry and have children, they are criticized if they hold political positions and have someone else care for their children, however, if they stay home to look after the children, they are labeled 'politically backward'. Should they be labeled 'politically backward', their husbands then have grounds to divorce them.

than holding the real positions of power.[117] That is not to say they were ineffective in their respective positions, but to say that the critical decision-making processes and the real positions of power remained firmly in the hands of men.

In the light of the above, it is not surprising that when marriage reform met similar resistance from rural males inside and outside the party that the campaigns were abandoned. The expectation that traditional marriage practices would gradually disappear as economic circumstances changed, however, has not resulted in a move away from patrilocal marriage in rural areas. Part of the reason for this is that the CCP used traditional practices, such as patrilocal marriage, to achieve political and administrative goals. The fact that the household registration system restricted the movement of males away from their native villages, while it enabled women to transfer their registration to another village after marrying is such an example. By cementing patrilocal marriage into the new situation, it virtually ensured the continuation of other attitudes and practices, such as the preference for sons, the devaluation of women and girls, mercenary marriage, and less importance being given to the education of girls. Furthermore, women do not have the same opportunities as men to build useful networks or advance to positions of authority in the village because patrilocal marriage often involves relocating to another village where they lack the appropriate knowledge and connections needed. Thus the *power relationships* responsible for the production of the symbolic order at all levels of society in traditional China have not basically changed.

What about the *processes* used to transform traditional attitudes and practices? Chapter Two showed that the role of ritual was replaced by ideological remolding. This process used many of the same methods used to teach rituals, but this time, to transform

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[117] Lee, Lily Xiao Hong and Wiles, Sue, ibid., pp.202-203.

the habitus and disciplines inculcated by traditional rituals to a different set of dispositions which would produce the new 'socialist person'. Through the endless repetition of slogans, through constant correction, by continually practising the appropriate behaviour, a person was expected to be transformed. Self surveillance and supervision by others also played an important role in developing the 'correct' thought and behaviour. This kind of 'education' therefore retained a traditional emphasis on non-literate methods for shaping a person's outlook and behaviour.

Literacy, nevertheless, still had an important role to play. The primary motivation for implementing literacy programs and mass schooling was essentially ideological and political. Apart from bureaucratic needs for literate personnel who were capable of reading party directives, disseminating information and writing reports, it became another means of indoctrinating the population with the ideals of the revolution and the new social order. For this reason it was also necessary to encode the ideology and the way the new organizational structures worked in primers and text books to be used in literacy classes and schools. This literacy, however, was a limited literacy. Mao's distrust of intellectuals and his insistence that book learning be linked to production was as much associated with his fear of 'revisionist' tendencies and competing ideologies as it was with the need to get the economy going. As for women and girls, while many were very enthusiastic to become literate, traditional male biases meant that literate females were regarded as less important than literate males who were needed to fill administrative positions and maintain records of the family's work-points.

The lack of priority given to female literacy is also reflected in the lack of concern about issues raised by women during the process of script simplification in the 1950s. Language reform committees dismissed requests to replace the female *nü* radical wherever

it expressed negative qualities with other semantically appropriate or gender neutral radicals. They argued that the gender ideologies originally associated with these terms were no longer relevant and therefore, would gradually be forgotten over time.[118] The use of mnemonic aids which focus on the various components of a character and the constant repetition involved in memorizing characters, however, is likely to reinforce traditional gender ideologies encoded in the script.[119] Thus not only was the request to have characters which continue to portray females as inferior to males ignored, but the actual process of becoming literate is likely to reinforce that view.

What kind of *support* did the government's initiatives for transforming gender relations find amongst the population? It appears that changes which tended to support traditional attitudes and practices usually received support, while those that challenged them often met with resistance. For example, medical science was seen to reinforce the view that males and females are 'mutually complementary'. Women's reproductive biology appears to affect them physically, mentally and emotionally, justifying the division of duties between males and females according to traditional beliefs. On the other hand, there was considerable resistance to marriage reform from many rural men and women. Men objected to the women in their families attending meetings where marriage reform was discussed and women who tried to end difficult marriages encountered opposition. There also were many women who wanted family life to return to normal after the disruptions of war and revolution. They did not want family life to be further disrupted by marriage reforms which attacked traditional practices.

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[118] Burridge, Kate and Ng Bee-Chin, op. cit., p.138; Hodge, Bob and Kam Louie, op. cit., p.145.

[119] Hodge, Bob and Kam Louie, ibid., pp.144-145.

Government *strategies* for bringing about a change in gender relations are also contradictory. On the one hand, there is legal support for equality between women and men provided in laws such as *The Marriage Law of the People's Republic of China* and the *Law of the People's Republic of China on the Protection of Rights and Interests of Women*[120]. On the other hand, women's issues as a whole have been subordinated to other 'more important' political and economic issues. The resistance encountered as women's organizations tried to help women in rural areas access the provisions of the new Marriage Law during the marriage reform campaigns is an example. Here, the need to avoid antagonizing male support for the party or interrupt production took precedence over women's concern to avoid a traditionally arranged marriage or obtain a divorce. Another example is that all discourse on women has been developed and controlled according to an economic and political agenda in which women's liberation is to be achieved through participation in the labour force. The expectation is that the situation for women will improve as economic conditions improve. There is plenty of evidence, however, indicating that this is not necessarily what happens. In fact, improved economic conditions often result in families spending their better incomes on more lavish traditional festivities and demanding (or paying) higher bride prices or dowries. Finally, we see contradictions in rural areas where government policy on family planning clashes with traditional preferences for sons, resulting in the devaluation of women and girls. Distorted sex ratios at birth and unusually high female suicide rates are evidence of this conflict.

Chapters Six and Seven illustrate how developments that have occurred in two aspects of gender, gender ideology and marriage, have either supported or challenged traditional attitudes and practices, and accordingly, met with acceptance or resistance. In

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[120] *The Law of the People's Republic of China on the Protection of Rights and Interests of Women*, adopted at the Fifth Session of the Seventh National People's Congress on April 3, 1992.

both cases, the outcome is the same in that the male symbolic order has been preserved. The disparities illustrated in literacy data are a reflection of this symbolic ordering. There is another symbolic system reflected in the literacy data, that of being 'urban' or 'rural'. The next chapter considers what it means to be rural, and how being rural affects women and the development of female illiteracy in rural areas.

8 RURALITY, GENDER AND LITERACY

So far I have discussed gender and literacy issues without giving much consideration to the difference that being 'rural' makes. Before we can begin to discuss this issue, however, we need to ask – what do we mean by 'rural', and – is there such a thing as 'rurality'? These are two questions which have been the subject of debate for more than thirty years.[1] Does the term 'rural' refer to a geographical space, a way of life, an identity, or is it set of characteristics, a social category or a position in a symbolic order? I suggest it can refer to any or all of these things because the term 'rural' is a discursive sign. What it means depends very much on the kind of discourse in which the term is being deployed.[2]

In China today 'rural' is an official category, an administrative classification which may have little to do with where one actually lives or one's occupation.[3] Many 'rural' people live in cities for long periods of time, albeit on an officially 'temporary' basis, and many people who are classified as 'urban' live permanently in country towns.[4] Moreover, many 'rural' people work in factories, shops and offices alongside others whose classification is 'urban' and do the same kind of work (often for less pay and longer

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[1] For example, Falk, William W. and Pinhey, Thomas K., "Making sense of the concept rural and doing rural sociology: an interpretive perspective," *Rural Sociology*, Vol. 43, No.4, (1978), pp.547-558; Halfacree, K.H., "Locality and social representation: space, discourse and alternative definitions of the rural," *Journal of Rural Studies*, Vol.9, No.1, (1993), pp.23-37; Murdoch, Jonathan and Pratt, Andy C., "Rural studies: modernism, postmodernism and the 'post-rural'," *Journal of Rural Studies*, Vol.9, No. 4, (1993), pp.411-427; and Pratt, Andy C., "Discourses of rurality: loose talk or social struggle," *Journal of Rural Studies*, Vol.12, No.1, (1996), pp.69-78.

[2] See Halfacree, K.H., ibid., pp.23-37; and Pratt, Andy, ibid., pp.69-78 for a discussion on this issue.

[3] Potter, Sulamith Heins, "The position of peasants in modern China's social order," *Modern China*, Vol.9, No.4, (October 1983), p.474.

[4] Mallee, Hein, "China's household registration system under reform," op. cit., pp.1-29.

hours).[5] Some households may even contain both 'urban' and 'rural' family members.[6] Unlike other social categories, such as 'class', political background or social status which were usually passed on through the father, the classification 'urban' or 'rural' is inherited through the mother.[7] Furthermore, it is not easy for a 'rural' person to be reclassified as 'urban.' The question is – what kind of discourse is it that has led to the official classification of people into two mutually exclusive categories called 'urban' and 'rural'? Why is it difficult to change one's classification from 'rural' to 'urban', and why is there a hierarchy of urban/rural classifications where being 'rural' is usually regarded by the general population as being the least desirable? On the other hand, why did so many people living in cities in traditional China want to identify themselves as 'rural' and regarded themselves as only being 'sojourners' in the city?[8] Why did they consider that their permanent homes were in the countryside and why was it important to them that they be buried there in their native places?[9] What kind of discourse was it which regarded being 'rural' as desirable?

In this chapter, I intend to delve below the surface of what appear to be economic and political issues related to rural status that affect female literacy to focus on the

[5] Jacka, Tamara, *Women's Work in Rural China*, op. cit., pp.176-179.

[6] Cohen, Myron L., "Cultural and political inventions in modern China," op. cit., p.159. Such cases may occur where farmland is acquired for an urban factory and an agreement is struck whereby a certain number of individuals from the village are to be hired. Their status is registered as *nongmin zhuan jumin* (peasant changed to urban resident). See also Jacka, Tamara, ibid., pp.133-134 and Appendix 1, pp.198-210 where a man holds urban registration and works as an industrial or administrative worker while his wife has a rural registration and works in the village. Both of these instances tend to occur in suburban counties. Should a woman outside the suburban counties be married to a man with an urban registration she will more often than not stay in the countryside because of the difficulty of obtaining long term work in the city without an urban registration.

[7] Potter, Sulamith Heins, op. cit., p.469; and Whyte, Martin King, *City Versus Countryside in China's Development*, (The Australian National University, Canberra, 1995), p.19.

[8] Skinner, G William (ed), *The City in Late Imperial China*, (Stanford University Press, California, 1977), p.266.

[9] Goodman, Bryna, *Native Place, City, and Nation: Regional Networks and Identities in Shanghai, 1853-1937*, (University of California Press, Berkeley/Los Angeles/London, 1995), pp.1-46.

deployment of the term 'rural' and the social effects produced by its deployment. The chapter has three parts. The first part discusses 'rurality' as ideology in terms of how particular discourses which deploy the term 'rural' motivate people's actions. The second part is concerned with the effect these discourses have on females, while the third part focuses on the everyday reality of being female in the rural village and how this affects the development of literacy.

8.1 Rurality as ideology

The word 'rurality' is a relatively new term which sets out to encapsulate some kind of 'social reality' which is *thought* to be 'rural'. Murdoch and Pratt suggest, however, that

> the attempt by academics or policy-makers to *impose* a 'definitive' rural domain is itself an exercise of power, privileging one definition of society, and thus one set of social relations over another.[10]

When politicians and academics lump people together in a homogeneous group under the label 'rural', they do not take account of the many different ways in which people may deploy or identify with the term 'rural', but impose a single perspective which is designed to serve political, social or academic objectives. In Marxist terms, when the term 'rural' is used as if it *were* a particular social reality or it is used to produce certain social effects then it becomes ideology.[11] Intellectuals and political elites in China have played an important role in defining what it means to be 'rural' in both traditional and modern China

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[10] Murdoch, Jonathan and Pratt, Andy C., op. cit., p.423. (Italics are mine.)

[11] See the earlier discussion in Chapter Six (this thesis) on Marx's idea of ideology being the substitution of abstract ideas for real experiences.

and the different kinds of discourses deploying the concept largely reflect their interests. It is much more difficult to determine what the concept of 'rurality' might have meant to commoners in traditional China because their views were not recorded. There are, however, some interesting discourses developing today amongst ordinary people who have been designated 'rural' by others.

This section sets out to explore some of these different discourses in order to understand what 'rural' means to those who deploy the term. It begins by exploring the link between being 'rural' and being 'Chinese' in traditional China. It looks at contradictions which emerge in this discourse where elites portray rural commoners as 'beastial' because of their closeness to nature, and as 'moral' and 'uncorrupted' for the very same reason. It examines architectural and ceremonial symbols found in cities which link urban life to rural life and studies the role that agriculture has played in the development of Chinese culture and the establishment of state power. It also considers the importance of 'native place' and the notion of 'sojourning' in constituting a 'rural' identity in urban China. In all of these discourses, 'rurality' is seen to have situated meanings which depend on the discourse being invoked and the perspective of those using it.

8.1.1 Rurality in traditional China

In the first chapter of his book *From the Soil: The Foundations of Chinese Society*, Fei Xiaotong says:

> Chinese society is fundamentally rural. I say that it is fundamentally rural because its foundation is rural. Several variations have arisen from this foundation, but even so, these variations retain their rural character.[12]

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[12] Fei Xiaotong, *From the Soil*, op. cit., p.37. (Translated from *Xiangtu Zhongguo*, (Sanlian Press, Hong Kong, 1986) by Gary Hamilton and Wang Zheng.) Fei was writing at a time when many urban based writers and academics became interested in doing surveys and writing about the countryside.

This book (and the lecture notes from which it was originally derived) set out to define the unique characteristics of Chinese society for a Chinese audience during the 1940s at a time when coastal cities in China were becoming more and more Westernized.[13] Fei says he "... concentrate[s] exclusively on rural society and on those so-called hayseeds, the people living in the countryside" in this book because they "... are truly the foundation of Chinese society". His goal is not merely to describe country life for city folk, but to acquaint them with their 'rural' roots and help them understand how the distinctive nature of Chinese society is derived from these 'rural' roots.[14] At the same time, he uses his own experience and understanding of Western society as a kind of foil or antithesis to make the special characteristics of Chinese society stand out more.[15] Thus from a Chinese perspective, the West is the 'other', not a bench mark against which Chinese society is to be measured but rather, that which Chinese society *is not.* It is in this context that Fei says that Chinese society is 'fundamentally rural', not because the majority of the population lives in the countryside.

It is clear from what Fei says that he is not thinking of 'rural' as a geographical space or an administrative category but as a kind of life. Understanding the principles governing rural life, he says, is the key to understanding the special characteristics of Chinese society. As Gary Hamilton and Wang Zheng put it, in Fei's eyes, "... rural China is a metaphor for all of Chinese society".[16] Based on earlier ethnographic studies in which he sought to understand rural life in the same way that rural people themselves understood

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[13] Hamilton, Gary G. and Wang Zheng, "Introduction," op. cit., p.1.

[14] Fei Xiaotong, *From the Soil,* op. cit., p.37.

[15] Hamilton, Gary G. and Wang Zheng, "Preface," in Fei Xiaotong, *From the Soil: The Foundations of Chinese Society,* (University of California Press, Berkeley/Los Angeles/London, 1992), p.viii.

[16] Hamilton, Gary G. and Wang Zheng, "Introduction," op. cit., p.16.

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it, Fei in this book "... attempt[s] to abstract concepts from concrete phenomena in order to understand the phenomena better".[17] In doing so, Fei aimed to establish a theoretical basis for understanding Chinese society because he believed that any attempt to change it needed to take account of the structuring principles which have made it what it is.[18] 'Rural', in this sense does not mean 'not urban' but refers to the nature of Chinese society itself. Thus 'rural', as Fei sees it, is connected to the conception of what is distinctly and traditionally 'Chinese'. Fei says:

> China is undergoing a rapid transformation that is changing a fundamentally rural society into a modern one. The way of life that has been cultivated in rural society is now giving rise to abuses. Created by strangers, modern society cannot incorporate the customary basis of rural society. Rejecting the customary ways of rural life, modern people denigrate everything rural. The rural village is no longer a place to which successful people want to return.[19]

To Fei, urban China represents a changing China, a China which is rejecting its own unique character and way of life and becoming Westernized.[20] In other words, 'urban' is becoming something that 'rural' is not, which then must mean that it is also becoming less 'Chinese', according to his way of thinking.

To understand the basis for the link made between 'rurality' and 'Chineseness' we need to set aside the idea of an antithetical 'urban/rural' dichotomy, at least for the moment, in order to see what 'rural' might have meant in traditional China. Although China has a long history of urban development, we are told that urban life was intimately

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[17] Fei Xiaotong, *Xiantu Zhongguo*, op. cit., pp.ii-iii. Cited in Hamilton, Gary G. and Wang Zheng, "Introduction," ibid., p.8.

[18] Hamilton, Gary G. and Wang Zheng, ibid., pp.14-15.

[19] Fei Xiaotong, *From the Soil*, ibid., p.44. See Lu Xun's *Guxiang*, [Hometown] where he is struck by the bleakness of rural life and how different it is from his childhood memories.

[20] Hamilton, Gary G. and Wang Zheng, "Introduction," op. cit., p.16.

connected with rural life. The 'rural' was everywhere, it was all encompassing. Mote describes Chinese cities as knots of the same material rather than distinctly different kinds of entities which are superimposed on a 'rural' fabric.[21] That is not to say that urban life did not differ at all from life in the countryside, he says, but rather, rural life, not city life was the defining factor in Chinese civilization. Two examples where this is so are: the symbolic as well as practical role of agriculture in Chinese culture, and the 'ploughing-weaving' symbolism and imagery which became the basis for the gender division of labour and the justification for distinctly different roles for men and women.[22]

The symbolic importance of soil and agriculture to the city is evident in the layout of cities and in the attention afforded the god of the soil. From Zhou times, every village, town and city had its own localized god of the soil *(tudi-gong)* and earth-mound *(gongshe)*.[23] It was the place where fertility rites were performed, and sacrifices which ensured that natural forces worked harmoniously for the good of the local community were carried out. In state capitals, the public earth-mound and its earth god was also the state's guardian god before whom the vows and covenants of rulers were made and sacrifices before and after military campaigns were conducted. Also known as the altar of land and grain, it became a symbol of state power, the demise of which was frequently

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[21] Mote, F.W., "The transformation of Nanking, 1350-1400," in Skinner, G William (ed), *The City in Late Imperial China*, (Stanford University Press, California, 1977), p.105.

[22] Luo Suwen, *Nüxing yu jindai Zhongguo shehui* [Women and Modern Chinese Society], (Shanghai Renmin Chubanshe, 1996), pp.9-17; and Wright, Arthur F., "The cosmology of the Chinese city," in Skinner, G William (ed) *The City in Late Imperial China*, (Stanford University Press, California, 1977), p.33. (The 'ploughing-weaving' symbolism and imagery associated with the gender division of labour will be discussed in more detail in the next section.)

[23] Wright, Arthur, F. ibid., p.39.

referred to in texts as being "... the ruin of their altars of earth and of crops".[24] In the layout of capital cities, the altar of land and grain was usually paired with the ancestral temple[25] (also a symbol of state power) and built within the city walls.[26] That the altar to the land and grain was still of central importance in late imperial times is clearly evident in the layout of Beijing which was built during the Ming dynasty (1368-1644).[27] Fei also refers to the continuing relevance of the village earth god to rural people during the early part of the twentieth century.[28]

According to Mote, there was no significant psychological or cultural difference between urban and rural society.[29] Neither was there a 'corporate identity' or 'citizenship' associated with living in a city. He says that cities and towns exhibited much the same fundamental characteristics as the countryside which surrounded them. Religious temples were located in the both the city and countryside, with many of the most famous temples being located in the countryside. Styles of architecture, dress, food and drink, means of transport, and so on were not very different. Many of the private academies which were

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[24] Maspero, Henri, *La Chine antique*, [Ancient China], (Imprimerie nationale, Paris, 1955), pp.138-143, and Chavannes. Éduoard, "Les Dieu du sol dans la Chine antique," [The sun gods of ancient China], appendix to *Le T'ai Chan: Essai de monographie d'un culte chinois*, (E. Leroux, Paris, 1910), pp.437-525. Cited in Wright, Arthur F., ibid., p.39. Also see Wright pp.37-47 for the cosmological and symbolic importance of the layout of the city.

[25] This was the ancestral temple of the emperor's family.

[26] The city walls symbolized the Earth which was originally thought to be square. It was therefore natural that the altar to the god of the soil was inside the walls, unlike the Altar to Heaven which was built outside the city wall. Heaven symbolized universality or 'naturalness'. Wright, Arthur F., ibid., p.47; and Feuchtwang, Stephan, "School-temple and city god," in Skinner, G William (ed) *The City in Late Imperial China*, (Stanford University Press, California, 1977), p.595.

[27] Wright, Arthur, F., ibid., p.71.

[28] Fei Xiaotong, *From the Soil*, op. cit., p.38. Parish and Whyte's interviewees, however, said that most of these shrines had gone or were in disrepair in the villages of Guangdong where they came from. The interviews were carried out in 1973-74 in Hong Kong. Parish, William L. and Whyte, Martin King, op. cit., p.284.

[29] Mote, F.W., "The transformation of Nanking, op. cit., p.103; and Mote, Frederick W., "The city in traditional Chinese civilization," in Lui, James T.C. and Tu Wei-ming (eds), *Traditional China*, (Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1970), pp.42-49.

the most important centres of learning and literate culture were located in villages and remote rural areas. Similarly, some of the most important publications were printed in villages on properties belonging to scholar-officials or literati and important libraries were often located in their homes.[30] People moved freely in both directions between the cities and surrounding countryside, fulfilling bureaucratic duties, carrying out commercial activities and maintaining kinship ties.[31] As time went by, city dwellers did gradually acquire what Mote refers to as "... attitudes and characteristics associated with the city" but he says that they still "... did not fall into two widely divergent spheres that we can label the urban and the rural".[32] Skinner supports this view, saying that cultural cleavages between classes, occupations and regions were far greater than any cleavage between cities and the surrounding countryside.[33] Agriculture was regarded as the fundamental means of producing wealth, with the wealth generated from agriculture belonging to the whole community. Wealth generated through other means, it was thought, could only be enjoyed by some at the expense of others.[34] Chinese culture did not belong only to the literate elite but, according to Skinner, "... the cultivated and the popular were inextricably interpenetrated".[35] Fei's assertion that the nature of Chinese society is fundamentally 'rural' therefore appears to be substantiated in practice.

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[30] Mote, F.W., "The city in traditional Chinese civilization," ibid., pp.42-47.

[31] Murphey, Rhoads, *The Fading of the Maoist Vision: City and Country in China's Development*, (Methuen, New York/London/Toronto, 1980, p.23.

[32] Mote, F. W., "The transformation of Nanking," op. cit., pp.106, 117.

[33] Skinner, G. William (ed), *The City in Late Imperial China*, (Stanford University Press, California, 1977), p.269.

[34] van der Sprenkel, Sybille, "Urban social control," in Skinner, G William (ed), *The City in Late Imperial China*, (Stanford University Press, California, 1977), p.611.

[35] Skinner, G. William (ed), op.cit., pp. 264-265, 716 note 11.

There were some, however, who did not see that being 'rural' was the defining factor that made Chinese society distinctly 'Chinese'. Generally, the Confucian tendency, especially that developed by Mencius (372-289 BC), was to distinguish between those who governed (*junzi* – men of noble or virtuous character, gentlemen) and the ordinary people who lived in the countryside (*yeren* – uncultivated people).[36] The natural order was regarded as being chaotic and destructive and those who lived close to nature were usually viewed as being more prone to brutality and disorder. According to Mencius, the role of those who governed was to 'civilize' or 'humanize' the countryside.[37] The work of country people was to feed the *junzi* whose work it was to create order in the countryside.[38] Although the *junzi* may, and often did, live amongst the ordinary people, they also congregated in the capital to perform their administrative duties. By living in rural villages and towns amongst the people they were expected to be exemplars of 'humanity'. Officials were also expected to teach the local people how they should behave. This might be carried out through a variety of literate means (novels, handbooks, etc.) and non-literate means (lectures, story-telling, recitations, plays, etc.).[39] Thus cities came to symbolize the humanizing influence of government radiating out into the countryside. According to Chang Sen-Dou, over eighty local capital cities came to have *yang* in their names (e.g. Huaiyang, Fenyang, Songyang, Liuyang), while there were less

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[36] Watt, John R., "The yamen and urban administrators," in Skinner, G William (ed) *The City in Late Imperial China*, (Stanford University Press, California, 1977), p.724 note 3. Anthropologists have criticized the idea of a superior culture belonging to the educated scholar because it suggests a 'great tradition/little tradition' dichotomy in which there was some separation between the culture of the elite and the commoner. The discussion which follows here needs to be seen in the light of the statement "the cultivated and the popular were inextricably interpenetrated" cited above. It is the perception by the *junzi* of the difference between themselves and commoners which is the focus here.

[37] Watt, John R., ibid., p.356.

[38] Watt, John R., ibid., p.724.

[39] Johnson, David, "Communication, class, and consciousness in late imperial China," in Johnson, David, Nathan, Andrew J., Rawski, Evelyn S. (eds), *Popular Culture in Late Imerial China*, (University of California Press, Berkeley/Los Angeles/London, 1985), p.39.

than ten with *yin* in their names (e.g. Huaiyin, Jiangyin).[40] The *yang* influence of the rulers who lived in these cities was expected to shine out from the city into the countryside like the rays of the sun.[41]

Although the *junzi* were to carry the humanizing influence of government to the people in the countryside, distinctions between those who ruled and the common people were still to be maintained. The *Liji* (Book of Rites) states that "... [r]ituals do not go down to the commoners".[42] Rituals were developed primarily for royalty and the nobility and were graded according to one's official status. For example:

> In the Classics commoners were quadruply restricted in the performance of ancestral rites. They were not to have family shrines *(chi miao)* but to use a room of their house for rites; they were not to make sacrifices *(chi)* but only offerings *(ch'ien)*; they were not to go back several generations, as the generational depth of rites was based on sumptuary principles, ranked from the Son of Heaven down to commoners; and they were only to make four offerings a year, one in each season.[43]

Not only were commoners and artisans excluded, educated 'gentlemen' who did not hold office might also be excluded. It wasn't until the Song (960-1279 AD) Neo-Confucianists became concerned about the influence of Buddhism and Daoism (Taoism), which they considered was undermining the values and practices of Confucianism, that they then gave

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[40] Chang Sen-dou, "The morphology of walled capitals," in Skinner, G William (ed), *The City in Late Imperial China,* (Stanford University Press, California, 1977), p.87. See also Wright, Arthur F., op. cit., pp.37, 64.

[41] Wright, Arthur F., ibid., p.73. Chang Sen-dou also points out that yang means 'north of the river' and 'south of the mountain' which is significant in that Han Chinese cities in both cases faced south towards the non-Han peoples. This was both a strategic position and a symbolic position, with the latter indicating the direction of the colonizing influence of the Han people. *Yang* is also associated with the sun and *yin* is associated with shade.

[42] *Liji* 1:16a. Cited in Ebrey, Patricia, "Education through ritual," p.279.

[43] Ebrey, Patricia, ibid., pp.279-280.

some attention to the ritual practices of commoners.[44] In order to promote Confucian family rituals some compromises were made to lift some of the restrictions outlined in the Classics so that the whole population could follow the same basic rules. Ebrey says that distinctions between upper classes and commoners then, in all probability, were achieved through scale and degree rather than through kind.[45] She says:

> Teaching ritualized behavior was not only recognized as a good method for educating children, but was also, from early times, seen as a way of civilizing *(hua)* rural folk deemed backward or insufficiently "Chinese."[46]

At first, the adult population was to be taught the outward forms of life-cycle ceremonies (coming of age, weddings, funerals, ancestral rites) so that relationships could be properly regulated (especially male/female relations) and Confucian values and practices would gradually be absorbed. In this way ordinary people would acquire a sense of sharing in a common 'Chinese' heritage. From the Han (202 BC-220 AD) to the Qing (1644-1911) attention was given to inculcating a set of dispositions which were regarded by the literati as being 'Chinese'.[47] They thought that if the correct relationships were maintained, order would be created, resulting in harmony and prosperity.[48] In this scheme, the common people were regarded as being like 'children' who were 'culturally immature'. Officials were expected to be like 'parents' *(fumuguan)* passing on Chinese ideals, values and practices to ordinary folk.[49] Thus 'Chineseness' was a quality seen by

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[44] Ebrey, Patricia, "Women, marriage, and the family in Chinese history," op. cit., p.211.

[45] See Ebrey, Patricia, "Education through ritual," op. cit., pp.278-306 for a discussion of this development.

[46] Ebrey, Patricia, ibid., p.278.

[47] Ebrey, Patricia, ibid., pp.278-279.

[48] Feuchtwang, Stephan, op. cit., p.593.

[49] Watt, John R., op. cit., 362; and Sun Xiao and Pan Shaoping, "Order and chaos: the social positions of men and women in the Qin, Han and Six Dynasties period," in Min Jiayin (ed), *The Chalice and the*

the ruling class as something they had and which commoners need to acquire. In this instance, 'Chineseness' is not linked to 'rurality' but class.[50] In fact, in this discourse rural people were seen as lacking the necessary qualities which would make them recognizably 'Chinese'.

Finally, 'rural' is a discursive sign associated with 'sojourning'. Although many people lived in the city for extended periods of time or even spent most, if not all of their lives there, they considered themselves to be 'sojourners'.[51] Sojourners still thought of themselves as 'rural' with their real homes in the countryside. Sojourning tended to promote an idealized picture of the countryside, though the reality was usually not nearly so pleasant.[52] When in the city, scholar-officials[53] often wrote longingly and somewhat romantically of the countryside, contrasting it with "… the 'anthill' or 'dusty net' of the city".[54] In fact, one official's view was that

> [g]oodness develops only in the village, evil in the city. The city is the place of commerce and
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> trade. People relate to one another only with the aim of making profits. They are superficial and

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Blade in Chinese Culture: Gender Relations and Social Models, (China Social Sciences Publishing House, Beijing, 1995), p.231.

[50] There was no 'peasant class' in traditional China in the same sense as there was in Europe. Cohen says that *nongmin*, which usually translates as 'peasant', is a modern invention associated with Marxist and non-Marxist perceptions of peasants in the West. See Cohen, Myron, "Cultural and political inventions in modern China," op. cit., pp.154-157 for a discussion of this issue.

[51] Skinner, G William (ed), op. cit., pp. 265-266 and 538-540.

[52] Goodman, Bryna, op. cit., p.9 note 13.

[53] The *junzi* may reside in the countryside amongst the common people and 'sojourn' in the cities in order to perform their administrative duties. See Watt, John R., op. cit., p.724, note 3.

[54] Murphey, Rhoads, op. cit., p.23; and Whyte, Martin King and Parish, William L., *Urban Life in Contemporary China,* (University of Chicago, 1984), p.11.

pretentious. As a result, the city is a sink of iniquities. The village is different. There people are self-reliant and have deep emotional ties with each other.[55]

Thus rural life was usually regarded as 'the good life' and, accordingly, the happiest people lived in the countryside, including the great sages.[56] There seems to have been a discrepancy between ideology and practice, between the *idea* of the idyllic countryside and the attractions of the city, however, which is one reason why, beginning in the sixteenth century, more and more rural elite took up permanent urban residence.[57] Nostalgic reminiscences of the countryside usually overlooked the harsh realities of peasant life.

By identifying himself as a mere 'country fellow' or a 'rustic simpleton' before his peers, an educated gentleman was not necessarily denigrating rural people or being unduly modest. These gentry liked to identify themselves with what they perceived to be the 'innocence' and 'superior morality' of the farmer which, they thought, came from his 'earthy' nature.[58] This attitude seems to contradict the notion of the farmer's closeness to nature making him more prone to barbarism and therefore in need of the 'humanizing'

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[55] Lu Tzu-chun, complier, *Ch'ao-lien hsiang-chih* [Village gazetteer of Ch'ao-lien] (Kwangtung), (Lü-Kuang Hsin-hui Ch'ao-lien t'ung-hsiang hui, Hong Kong, 1954), p.54. Cited in Murphy, Rhoads, ibid., p.24. This statement is attributed to Ku Yen-wu (1616-1682).

[56] Murphey, Rhoads, ibid., p.24.

[57] Skinner, G. William (ed), op. cit., p.266. Another reason is the increasing lawlessness and uprisings that were occurring in rural areas during the Qing.

[58] Mote, F.W., "The transformation of Nanking," op. cit., 106; Kirby, R.J.R., *Urbanisation in China: Town and Country in a Developing Economy 1949-2000 AD*, (Croom Helm, London/Sydney, 1985), p.6; and Zhang Yingjin, *The City in Modern Chinese Literature and Film: Configurations of Space, Time, and Gender*, (Stanford University Press, California, 1996, p.14, 17. Mote tells us that traditionally, 'peasant' was not a pejorative term and though peasants were sometimes viewed as being 'rustic', that is "humorously unsophisticated", rural values and circumstances were not denigrated. Mote, F.W., "The transformation of Nanking," op. cit., p.103. Farming was regarded as an honourable occupation, unlike that of the merchant who was traditionally despised by the gentry. Kirby, R.J.R, p.6; van der Sprenkel, op. cit., p.611; and Zhang Yingjin, ibid., p.15. Myron Cohen's inquiries have led him to conclude that the term *nongfu*, which was translated 'farmer' in the first Chinese-English dictionaries, was probably the most common term used. Cohen, Myron, "Cultural and political inventions in modern China," op. cit., pp.167-168 note 10.

influence of government. According to Skinner, "... there was an urban jungle and a rural jungle in the mind of the literati, as well as a rural idyll and an urban utopia".[59] A similar tension was felt by intellectuals living in the city during the early years of the twentieth century. Zhang says that these intellectuals

> display[ed] an attitude of 'cultural superiority' over their innocent but ignorant country folk; [but] they [were] constantly disturbed by the sense of 'moral inferiority' that comes with their knowledge and the power ... acquired in their urban sojourns.[60]

One of the ways that sojourners sought to overcome this tension was to form native place associations which linked city dwellers (businessmen, apprentices, students, clerks, aspiring officials) to their native places in the countryside. The concept of native place *(jiguan, sangzi, laojia, yuanji, guxiang)* became an essential aspect of a sojourner's identity.[61] It connected a person spiritually to the place where his ancestors were buried as well as linking him to living members of the larger family group. Although one's residential address might change, a native place identity did not change because it was inherited from one's ancestors. Most city dwellers would try and visit their native place regularly in order to maintain kinship ties. Perhaps the most important expression of this link with one's native place was the desire by city residents to be buried in the soil where their ancestors were buried. Back in their native place they could expect to receive the proper rites of ancestor worship.[62] The desire to cultivate this sense of native place identity while temporarily residing in the city was one reason why sojourners who came from the same place tended to congregate in the same locality. Eating native foods,

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[59] Skinner, G. William (ed), op. cit., 268.

[60] Zhang Yingjin, op. cit., p.17.

[61] Goodman, Bryna, op. cit., p.4.

[62] Goodman, Bryna, ibid., pp.4-7; and Skinner, G. William (ed), op. cit., pp.545-546, 752 notes 51 & 53.

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speaking one's own language and keeping up local customs was thought to play an important role in avoiding the spiritual pollution of the city and maintaining links with the countryside.[63] Native place sentiment was regarded not only as being 'natural', but also 'morally excellent' or 'virtuous' and fostered by native place associations as part of 'being Chinese'. The linking of 'Chineseness' with the emotional ties of native place also became a means of "... constitut[ing] and strengthen[ing] the larger polity of China".[64]

In modern China we see the close ties between city life and country life being disrupted, first, by the arrival of foreigners who introduce different kinds of ideas about the relationship between cities and the countryside and second, by the establishment of the household registration system which works to curb rural to urban migration. We also find some continuities. For example, the contradiction between rural commoners being 'bestial' and being 'moral' and 'uncorrupted' seen in traditional China bears some similarities with notions of 'peasants' being 'backward' because they are poor and ignorant, and being 'revolutionary' for the same reason. In more recent times, we see that those who are designated 'peasant' (by others) have developed their own discourse of 'peasantness' as a means of positively asserting their own identity and developing access to power. In each of these newer discourses 'rurality' continues to have situated meanings associated with particular discourses which reflect the interests of those who use them.

8.1.2 Rurality in modern China

The close relationship between rural and urban communities was disturbed by the arrival of the colonizing nations of the West during the nineteenth century. Small towns and villages along China's coast and rivers quickly grew into large cities in their new role

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[63] Goodman, Bryna, ibid., p.8-9.

[64] Goodman, Bryna, ibid., pp.12-13.

as gateways for foreign trade. Western-styled schools, hospitals, trade unions, newspapers, and so on sprung up in cities and many educated Chinese began to dress in Western clothing.[65] Increasing lawlessness in rural areas during the late Qing also resulted in many rural people, elite as well as commoners, moving to the cities for safety reasons. The influx of rural migrants in search of jobs, inflation and crime, however, contributed to relatively chaotic conditions and all sorts of social problems in urban areas.[66] Along with these changes, new ideas, including Social Darwinism and Marxist theory, presented a different picture of the nature of historical progress, one in which the 'peasant economy' is regarded as inferior to an economy based on industry.[67] Confronted with the technological superiority and political strength of the nations of the West, many urban Chinese regarded the rural population as 'backward' *(luohou)* and an obstacle to national development.[68] At the same time, traditional anti-urban sentiment amongst rural people, including the rural gentry, increased. Many felt as Fei Xiaotong did that "… the growth of great urban centres [was] like a tumor from which China [was] suffering".[69]

When the communists came to power in 1949, outside observers were interested to see whether a communism which had been nurtured in the Chinese countryside was able to avoid the urban biases associated with developing economies elsewhere. Whyte's study of this issue, however, has led him to conclude that

[65] Whyte, Martin King, "Town and country in contemporary China," *Comparative Urban Research*, Vol.10, No.1, (1983), p.10.

[66] Whyte, Martin King and Parish, William L., *Urban Life in Contemporary China*, op. cit., p.14.

[67] Kipnis, Andrew B., "Within and against peasantness: backwardness and filiality in rural China," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol.37, No.1, (1995), pp.113-114.

[68] Cohen, Myron L., "Cultural and political inventions in modern China," op. cit., p.154.

[69] Fei Xiaotong, *China's Gentry: Essays in Rural-Urban Relations by HsiaoTung Fei*, (University of Chicago Press, Chicago/Illinois, 1953), p.138.

the policies and practices adopted during the period from the 1950s to the 1970s profoundly favoured urbanites and systematically disadvantaged China's rural population. Indeed, in certain respects an urban bias developed in more extreme forms than are visible in other developing societies or even in the Soviet Union. This is perhaps the supreme irony of the Chinese revolution – that rural revolutionaries who were committed to combatting urban bias ended up institutionalising precisely that bias in extreme and deep-rooted forms.[70]

He then outlines five ways in which this urban bias was primarily seen. These are: an increasing gap in incomes; barriers to rural-urban migration which also helped to weaken kinship ties between urban and rural relatives; the institutionalization of two different kinds of organizational systems; the stigmatization of 'peasants' and the practice or 'sending down' urban people to less urban localities as a form of punishment; and a growing gap in culture and customs (for example, customs associated with death and marriage).[71]

At the heart of this urban-rural divide is the household registration system, instigated in the early 1950s and designed to restrict rural migration to urban areas. Though many practical reasons for implementing the household registration system have been cited: the need to stem the tide of peasants migrating into the cities putting pressure on urban resources; the inability of industrialization to provide enough jobs; the problem of maintaining social order in the face of rising urban unemployment; the need for peasants to remain in the countryside producing food; the desire to keep them away from the corrupting influences of the city; and so on – there were also ideological and political concerns.[72] On the political side, Whyte suggests that the CCP's fear of and antagonism

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[70] Whyte, Martin King, *City Versus Countryside in China's Development*, op. cit., p.4.

[71] Whyte, Martin King, ibid., pp.6-24.

[72] Whyte, Martin King, ibid., pp.24-27; Kipnis, Andrew B., "Within and against peasantness," op. cit., p.116; and Potter, Sulamith Heins, op. cit., p.467.

towards the previously Guomindang controlled cities led to its leaders being concerned to establish a secure base in the cities by ensuring that conditions in cities were stable and that urbanites had little reason to complain. This would have been difficult to do in the more chaotic conditions that would have developed with uncontrolled rural to urban migration.[73] Ideologically, there was a shift from the traditional belief in agriculture as the primary source of the country's wealth to the Marxist notion that a nation's wealth and strength is ultimately derived from industrialization. As a consequence, ideological primacy was given to the urban proletariat.

The household registration system gradually evolved during the 1950s and was finally embodied in law in the *PRC Regulations on household registration* in 1958.[74] The regulations were published in 1959 and became

> a means of identifying every citizen, registering all changes in status, controlling all changes of residence – whether temporary or permanent – and provid[ed] the basis for the distribution of rationed food and goods – without valid registration documents, rations [were] unobtainable. Nor could an unregistered person find regular employment. Changes from rural to urban residence status require[d] elaborate documentation.[75]

Although the regulations did not formally state that rural residents were to be kept out of the cities, notes accompanying the regulations make it clear that this was the general intention.[76] The tightening of urban controls was a measure taken to stem the tide of rural

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[73] Whyte, Martin King., ibid., p.25.

[74] Mallee, Hein, "China's household registration system under reform," op. cit., p.2.

[75] Potter, Sulamith Heins, op. cit., p.476.

[76] Luo Ruiqing, "Guanyu zhonghua renmin gongheguo hukou dengji tiaoli caoan de shuoming" [Explanatory notes on the Regulations for Household Registration of the People's Republic of China], *Zhonghua renmin gongheguo fagui huibian* [Collection of Legislative Documents of the People's Republic of China], (Falu Chubanshe, Beijing, 1959), p.212. Cited in Potter, Sulamith Heins, ibid., pp.477-478.

people flooding into the larger cities during the early part of the Great Leap Forward (1958-1960).[77] These regulations became the basis for controlling rural to urban migration until the early 1980s.[78] While urban residents were being provided with housing, jobs with an assured income, employment opportunities for several family members, health care, subsidized grain, and so on, 'peasants' had to find their own housing, had no assured income, were expected to sell grain to the state well below market value, and could not stave off hunger and poverty in hard times by finding non-agricultural work in other places.

Despite this very obvious urban bias, CCP propaganda represented 'peasants' to both rural and urban populations as the 'backbone of the 1949 socialist revolution', the 'revolutionary class', the 'advanced class', the 'elder brother'.[79] In this way, the party sought to circumscribe the expectations and demands of urban populations while encouraging the peasantry to be content with their lot. The latter's poverty was viewed as a means of increasing their 'class feelings' *(jieji ganqing)* and therefore their 'redness'.[80] By regarding them as 'poor and blank', Mao in particular saw them as unspoiled by the 'bourgeois' ideas and vested interests of intellectuals and therefore more amenable to being fashioned into a new revolutionary society. Their 'backwardness' was an asset because it represented a 'moral purity' that those with greater learning lacked.[81] Nevertheless, not all 'peasants' were considered revolutionary. Former landlords and 'rich

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[77] White, Lynn T. III, *Careers in Shanghai: the Social Guidance of Personal Energies in a Developing Chinese City, 1949-1966,* (University of California Press, Berkeley/Los Angeles/London, 1978), pp.169-170.

[78] Mallee, Hein, "China's household registration system under reform," op. cit., p.2. The Cultural Revolution saw a relaxing of controls on rural to urban migration. White, Lynn T. III, ibid., p.153.

[79] Kipnis, Andrew B., "Within and against peasantness," op. cit., pp.119-120.

[80] Kipnis., Andrew B., ibid., p.120.

[81] See Meisner, Maurice, op. cit., pp.213-215 for a discussion of Mao's idea of the population being 'poor and blank'.

peasants', though they had become poor since land reform and were included in the group called 'peasants', were hindered as potential revolutionaries by their 'bad' class background'.[82]

The 'objectification' of groups of people – 'peasants', intellectuals, women, youth – has been at the heart of Chinese politics since the CCP came to power.[83] In the case of 'peasants', various contradictory images have been produced at different times, each one reflecting the perspective of those who produced it and the purpose which it was designed to serve. In each instance, peasants are homogenized into a single group which is deemed to be distinctly different from urban people.[84] Although there always were party leaders whose view of the 'peasantry' was different from that of Mao, it is not until after 1978 when the economic reforms were introduced that we see these views come to the fore. The portrayal of 'peasants' as 'backward', 'feudal', 'traditional', 'superstitious', 'ignorant' and 'passive' by intellectuals before 1949 becomes the basis for the representations of peasants in the Reform era.[85] Official speeches, television, radio and newspapers continually disseminate this view amongst the entire population.[86]

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[82] Cohen, Myron L., "Cultural and political inventions in modern China," op. cit., pp.157-158.

[83] Kipnis, Andrew B., "Within and against peasantness," op. cit., pp.119, 122. Kipnis uses the word 'objectification' to refer to "the process of making an imagined community real by the very act of characterizing it." People are homogenized into a supposedly coherent group and made objects of party initiatives. The objectification of groups of people in this way is not unique to China.

[84] Kipnis, Andrew B., ibid., p.115.

[85] This also reflects the increased importance of intellectuals in the development of reform policies. See Barlow, Tani E., "Zhishifenzi [Chinese intellectuals] and power," Dialectical Anthropology, Vol.16, Nos.3-4, (1991), pp.217-218; and Kipnis, Andrew B., ibid., p.122.

[86] Kipnis, Andrew, "(Re)inventing li: koutou and subjectification in rural Shandong, in Zito, Angela and Barlow, Tani E. (eds), Body, Subject and Power in China, (University of Chicago Press, Chicago/London, 1994), p.207.

One of the social effects produced as a result of this negative objectification of 'peasants', according to Andrew Kipnis, is the "reassertion of 'tradition' *(chuantong)*".[87] In the village of Fengjia, Shandong, he observed what others have called a 'revival' of tradition and what he prefers to call a '(re)invention' of *li* because it is completely modern and concerned with what it means to be a 'peasant' today.[88] The new *li*, he says, becomes a means by which 'peasants', who have been 'objectified' through the political and ideological discourses of the party and urban intellectuals and marginalized by the urban/rural household registration system, positively assert themselves as active 'subjects'. The *li* has a symbolic function and a practical function. Not only does it become the means of consolidating relationships within the village or building *guanxi*, it also is the means by which those designated 'peasants' assert a positive 'peasantness' in the context of a larger imaginary group called 'peasants'.[89]

According to Kipnis' study, whether or not villagers participate in this reinvented 'tradition' generally depends on how *they* view their status as 'peasants', 'non-peasants' or potential 'non-peasants'.[90] For example, though some villagers are still officially designated 'peasants', they regard themselves as 'non-peasants', that is – 'advanced' *(jinbu)* rather than 'peasants' who are 'backward' *(luohou)* – and therefore they do not

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[87] See both of Kipnis, Andrew B., "(Re)inventing *li*," ibid., and Kipnis, Andrew, "Within and against peasantness." op. cit., for a detailed discussion of his argument.

[88] Sui, Helen F., "Recycling rituals: politics and popular culture in contemporary rural China," in Link, Perry, Madsen, Richard and Pickowicz, Paul G. (eds), *Unofficial China: Popular Culture and Thought in the People's Republic*, (Westview Press, Boulder, San Francisco/London, 1989) also suggests that the re-emergence of 'traditional' rituals is a modern phenomenon which is concerned with coping with their present situation. See Chapter 6 of this thesis for earlier discussion concerning the importance of rituals in more recent times. Rituals are also used as conspicuous statements of wealth by the newly rich.

[89] Kipnis, Andrew, "(Re)inventing *li*," op. cit., p.211. Kipnis talks about the role of *koutou* as a kind of *li* which constitutes *guanxi* between people by declaring them members of the same hierarchically constituted group. In his field work in Shandong he saw *koutou* performed at weddings, new year festivities, funerals, and during ancestor worship. Its role seems to be to generate meaning or feeling in the context of developing networks and building guanxi.

[90] 'Peasant' here is synonymous with being designated 'rural'.

participate in these reinventions of *li*. Young people at school who still may have the opportunity of obtaining non-peasant household registration through high educational achievement are also reluctant to participate.[91] On the other hand, the village party secretary affirmed his position in the village as a fellow 'peasant' through the rituals associated with *koutou* during new year celebrations.[92] Kipnis suggests that the objectification of 'peasants' as backward fails to recognize that these 'peasant and proud' people are modern, that is – their practices are not relics of the past but (re)inventions expressive of their situation in the present. In constituting 'peasantness', villagers actively contest negative objectifications, taking pleasure in the very practices that others scorn.[93] 'Peasantness' has also become a strategy whereby those designated 'peasants' not only seek to subvert the modernizing discourse of elite intellectuals and political leaders, it has also become a means of constructing themselves as subjects "... in reaction to (within and against) the classifying practices of the party-led state", he says.[94]

The general expectation has always been that the classification of the population into 'urban' and 'rural' would no longer be needed when the transition from socialism to communism took place.[95] The theory was that the rural proletariat would replace the

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[91] A 'peasant's' ability to change his/her household registration status to 'non-peasant' has varied according to the political situation. From 1958-1978, this was most likely to be achieved by being members of the 'poor-peasant' association and a member of a 'red' class. Since 1978, modernization has increased the need for experts, with the result that education has become the principal means by which a 'peasant' could change his/her household registration. Kipnis, Andrew B., "Within and against peasantness," op. cit., p.118.

[92] See also "Old rituals in a new China (Communist Party cracks down on religious revival)," *The Economist (US)*, Vol.340, No.7979, (August 17, 1996) p.31(1). The article reports the government's concern about local officials participating in new year temple ceremonies. Fujian. Gansu, Zhejiang, Guizhou and Shanxi provinces are also reported as having a 'revival' of Confucian rituals, with the most conspicuous of these being in the countryside.

[93] Kipnis, Andrew, "(Re)inventing *li*," ibid., pp.214-215.

[94] Kipnis, Andrew, ibid., p.202.

[95] Potter, Sulamith Heins, op. cit., p.466.

'peasantry'. The separation of the rural population from the urban population was considered to be an intermediate measure needed only because China lacked the wealth necessary for incorporating 'peasants' into a system where the state owned the means of production.[96] Since the instigation of the rural reforms, 'peasants' have been exhorted to 'get rich' and thereby transform themselves into the new rural proletariat.[97] Yet, despite their greater productivity and wealth in recent years, 'peasants' continue to be lumped together in one large amorphous group and portrayed as 'backward'.[98]

While there is no sign of the transition from socialism to communism, there has been some talk of phasing out the urban/rural distinction, though no specific agenda appears to have been set out for this to occur.[99] In the meantime, some provisions for buying urban household registration have emerged whereby wealthy peasants might invest their capital in urban ventures. Under certain conditions 'peasants' already living in towns and engaged in non-agricultural work have also been able to obtain an urban household registration.[100] Since the introduction of identity cards in 1985, people have been able to move around the country more freely, resulting in a large floating population of between 80-100 million people living in China's cities on a temporary basis.[101] Despite the presence of rural people in cities, the psychological gap is as wide as ever, with rural workers

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[96] Potter, Sulamith Heins, ibid., pp.474-475.

[97] Kipnis, Andrew, "(Re)inventing *Li*," op. cit., p.206.

[98] Anagnost, A., *National Past-times: Narrative, Representation and Power in Modern China,* (Duke University Press, Durham, 1997), p.121; Cohen, Myron L, Cultural and political inventions in modern China," op. cit., p.166; and Zhou, Kate Xiao, *How the Farmers Changed China: Power of the People,* (Westview Press, Boulder, Colorado/ Oxford, 1996), p.xxiii.

[99] Kipnis, Andrew B., "Within and against peasantness," pp.118-119, note 15. He refers to reports in the Chinese press in the winter of 1994 here.

[100] Mallee, Hein, "China's household registration system uner reform," op. cit., pp.14-15.

[101] Whyte, Martin King, *City Versus Countryside,* op. cit., p.32.

constantly reminded of their inferior status and urban people fearful that crime and other social problems are increasing with the influx of rural migrants.[102]

While urban people still tend to view rural people as backward, a survey conducted in Tianjin and the surrounding rural area in 1990 focusing on modern attitudes such as planning rationally and solving problems through scientific means found that rural people in Tianjin were more modern than their urban neighbours.[103] Those conducting the survey postulated that urban people tend to be more fatalistic and dependent whereas the rural reforms have encouraged rural people to be more resourceful.[104] This resourcefulness, which has generally been overlooked by academia in both China and the West, says Kate Xiao Zhou, has occurred because urban intellectual and political elites propagate their own biases which inform Western thinking.[105] She says, that in such writing Deng Xiaoping is given credit for initiatives which were in fact taken by rural people themselves.[106] In the wake of Mao's death and the uncertainty which followed, she says, groups of farmers began making deals with local cadres so that increasing numbers of families took over running various enterprises and, as long as they fulfilled obligations to the collectives plus a little bit for the obliging cadre, they were free to dispose of the remaining profits. Gradually groups of farmers gave way to families running enterprises. According to Zhou, *baochan daohu* (turning over production to the household) was initiated by farmers themselves and is responsible for the rise in productivity that occurred around that time. She says:

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[102] Whyte, Martin King, ibid., p.35.

[103] Inkeles, Alex, Broaded, C. Montgomery and Cao Zhongde, "Causes and consequences of individual modernity in mainland China," (unpublished paper, 1995). Cited in Whyte, Martin King, *City Versus Countryside*, op. cit., p.36.

[104] Whyte, Martin King, ibid., p.37.

[105] Zhou, Kate Xiao, op. cit., p.11.

During this period, the Beijing government was locked in factional struggle over the succession to Mao, and the confusion provided an opportunity for farmers' deal making to spread. When the rapid increase in farm productivity attracted the attention of central leadership in the early 1980s, the reform faction within the government tried to take credit for the farmer's achievements by institutionalizing *baochan daohu*.[107]

The success of the farmers' initiatives was the result of what Zhou refers to as "... a spontaneous, unorganized, leaderless, nonideological, apolitical movement". She says that the strength of this movement was its spontaneity and the fact that it did not involve any form of organized resistance. Farmers simply 'leached away' government controls in the countryside, as well as in the cities where they went to sell their produce.[108] In the meantime, intellectuals and political elites continued to portray 'peasants' as ignorant and illiterate.[109] Zhou's portrayal of farmers as people who use initiative and ingenuity tends to support the findings of the Tianjin survey. She says that farmers chafed under a system which 'feudalized' them as 'peasants' and took away their initiative. David Zweig says that Zhou, and Kelliher who holds a similar view to Zhou, overlook the role that local officials and reformers such as Wan Li and Zhao Ziyang and even Deng Xiaoping had in not restraining the farmers' initiatives.[110] Wherever there was resistance on the part of conservative provincial leaders and local officials, farmers were not able to decollectivize. Nevertheless, Zweig's says:

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[106] Zhou, Kate Xiao, ibid., pp.6-7.

[107] Zhou, Kate Xiao, ibid., pp.xxi-xxii.

[108] Zhou, Kate Xiao, ibid., pp.4, 9, 15. Other authors holding similar views include Kelliher, Daniel, *Peasant Power in China: the Era of Rural Reform, 1979-1989*, (Yale University Press, New Haven, 1992); Watson, Andrew, "The family, land use and accumulation in agriculture," *Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs*, Vol.17, (1987); Zhou Xuegang, "Unorganized interests and collective action in communist China," *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 58, (February 1993), pp.54-73; and Zweig, David, *Freeing China's Farmers: Rural Restructuring in the Reform Era*, (M.E.Sharpe, New York/London, 1997), p.13.

[109] Zhou, Kate Xiao, ibid., p.xxiii.

[110] Zweig, David, op. cit., pp.14-15, see also p.32, note 40.

[t]ransforming institutions and dismantling Mao's collective property on their own were remarkable feats for a rural population that was long viewed by many as passive, disorganized, a veritable "sack of potatoes" in regard to an imposing state authority. Any explanation must recognize that farmers pushed for decollectivization; this was no orchestrated plan that sprang from the mind of Deng Xiaoping, Zhao Ziyang, or Wan Li."[111]

These events support Cohen's assertion that the creation of the 'peasant' in China had less to do with the real character of rural people than it did with "… an elite antitraditionalism that formed a moral claim to political privilege and power" and "… the elites' conceptions of their own role in China's polity and society".[112]

To sum up, while exploring the meaning of the term 'rural' in traditional China might seem to be somewhat irrelevant given the clear distinction made between 'urban' and 'rural' in China today, it is necessary to put modern discourses, including the idea of allocating an 'urban' or 'rural' *hukou* (household registration), in some kind of cultural context. The first thing that becomes apparent is that, whether in traditional or modern China, intellectuals and political elites have been important in defining what being 'rural' means and the deployment of the term has more often than not reflected their interests. Second, in both traditional and modern China, 'rural' is not merely a descriptive term but a term which carries considerable symbolic significance.

In traditional China, many of the elite regarded rural life as the ideal life. No matter where one lived, one's roots were in a particular village somewhere in the countryside. 'Sojourners' congregated together in the cities, speaking their native languages, eating their local dishes and observing their own customs in order to avoid the spiritual pollution

[111] Zweig, David, ibid., p.13.

[112] Cohen, Myron L., "Cultural and political inventions in modern China," op. cit., p.166.

of the cities. In this discourse, rural life was also ideally linked with being 'Chinese'. On the other hand, some intellectuals and ruling elite saw the countryside as a chaotic place and the peasant's closeness to nature as a barbarism which needed 'humanizing' or 'civilizing'. Creating a truly 'Chinese' society for them required officials and those elite who lived in rural villages to show through example and instruction how the lower orders of society should behave. This included teaching them to maintain proper distinctions between people.

In early modern times, a variety of discourses deploying the term 'rural' developed. Some intellectuals, including Fei Xiaotong, were especially concerned that a 'modern' society was an increasingly Westernized society which rejected Chinese tradition and the characteristic rural life that went with it. Others, modernizers, regarded rural people as 'backward' and an impediment to progress and survival in a modern world. When the CCP came to power, it brought with it Marxist notions of progress in which the 'peasant economy' is to be superceded by an industrial economy and rural people, who were now referred to as 'peasants' *(nongmin)*, are less important than the urban proletariat. Although Mao was to elevate the 'peasant' to being 'the revolutionary class' the restrictions of the *hukou* system which denied those classified as 'rural' privileges afforded those categorized as 'urban' ended up creating a two-tier system in which those designated as 'rural' are in effect, second class citizens. Although rural people now have a greater mobility than they did under Mao, migration involving a transfer of *hukou* to 'urban' is still not possible for most rural people. In response to this situation, some 'peasants' are developing a discourse of their own in which their classification as 'rural' is being turned into a sign of power as well as a position of resistance. In this discourse, 'tradition' is being 'reinvented' as a means of networking and developing *guanxi* as well as becoming a way of constituting one's identity in the village. This is not simply a revival

of traditions belonging to a static society from the past, but a modern attempt to generate power 'at the extremities' (as Foucault puts it) in order to cope with the new challenges associated with contemporary society.[113] In each of the examples cited in this chapter so far, 'rural' is a discursive sign which varies according to the discourse being deployed and the interests of those using it for its meaning. The task of the next section is to discuss how 'rural' discourses such as these intersect with gender.

8.2 Gender and rurality

The importance of 'rural' discourses in defining gender relations in China should not be under-estimated. For example, it is in the context of his assertion that 'Chinese society is fundamentally rural' that Fei Xiaotong places the notion, 'between men and women, there are only differences'.[114] These differences, he says, are based on their distinctly different experiences of biological reproduction.

This next section sets out to show some of the ways in which being 'rural' creates a set of social conditions which interact with the social interpretation of biological difference (gender) to produce a further set of conditions for females. First, it considers examples of how 'rurality' interacts with notions of biological difference to produce symbolic representations of both in folk lore and the Chinese script. It then discusses how this symbolic representation is expressed in practice through the gender division of labour and patrilocal marriage and how some women have found ways of manipulating these restrictive practices to gain benefits for themselves. It also shows how the notion of

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[113] Foucault, Michel, "Two lectures," in Gordon, Colin (ed), *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, (Harvester Press, Brighton, UK, 1980), pp.97.

[114] Fei Xiaotong, *From the Soil*, op. cit., pp.37 and 93.

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'sojourning' in cities reflects some of the ways in which being 'rural' affects males and females differently. The discussion in this section then leads into the third section which presents the experiences of young women who encounter difficulties with their schooling because they are 'rural' and female.

8.2.1 Symbolic representations of 'rurality' and gender

The association of male/female differences with rural life, and agriculture in particular, is apparent in folk lore and in the development of the Chinese script. For example, the Chinese character 男 *(nan)* for 'man' incorporates the field 田 *(tian)* and strength 力 *(li)*. The latter, in the light of archaeological evidence and ethnographic studies of minority groups such as the Zhuang who still use simple farming methods, is now thought to resemble the shape of the plough ⺈ rather than the upper arm as previously thought.[115] The character for woman or female originally appeared as a woman kneeling down with both hands crossed in front of her chest e.g. 母 or 女. Whether this represents a woman in a submissive position or a woman squatting down to cook or attend to children is not known, but scholars have generally favoured the former view. The character for mother was basically the same but was distinguished by the presence of nipples e.g. 母 or 女.[116] According to Chinese historian Luo Suwen:

> the emphasis for the male was on the superior position of operating a plough, while the female sex was viewed as outstanding at nurturing children, an aspect which included managing household affairs and having a respectful (or submissive) servant image.[117]

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[115] See Lindqvist, Cecilia, *China: Empire of the Written Symbol*, (Harvill, London, 1991), p.165; and Luo Suwen, op. cit., p.10 for a discussion on the characters discussed here.

[116] Lindqvist, Cecilia, ibid., p.42; and Luo Suwen, ibid., p.10.

[117] Luo Suwen, ibid., p.10.

The idea of the man outside ploughing and the woman attending to her work inside the house has its roots in the mythology and imagery of the herd boy and weaving girl. Following the development of Chinese agriculture, the man became a farmer rather than a herdsman and accordingly, the imagery changed to incorporate him ploughing. As the Han people spread southwards from the Yellow River area, the indigenous peoples were 'civilized' by being taught Chinese agriculture and Han culture (both of which were regarded by the Han as being superior). That the idea of the man outside ploughing and the woman inside weaving *(nan geng nü zhi)* was also used to transmit gender ideologies associated with the sexual division of labour is evident in the numerous regional variations of these stories which evolved between the Han and Ming dynasties.[118]

8.2.2 The gender division of labour

Though the proportion of the male population who ploughs today is much smaller, the gender division of labour which this pattern of traditional agricultural life instigated is still basically intact. Men are considered to be responsible for affairs outside the home while women are expected to take care of what goes on inside the home *(nan zhu wai, nü zhu nei)*. What 'inside' and 'outside' represents, however, has changed in recent times as more and more men leave farming for "... more prestigious industrial jobs", leaving women to carry on with farming which is "... now regarded as the least desirable form of employment". In her study of women's work in rural China, Tamara Jacka concludes that the boundaries of 'inside' and 'outside' work have merely shifted so that agricultural work becomes an extension of domestic work which is now regarded as 'inside' work.[119] She argues that women's biological characteristics and domestic responsibilities are used to

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[118] Luo Suwen, ibid., pp.13-14.

[119] Jacka, Tamara, *Women's Work in Rural China*, op. cit., p.193.

justify farming as suitable work for women today. Whenever women and men work together in the fields, however, certain jobs are usually regarded as men's work on the basis that the work is too physically demanding for women. For example, Margery Wolf found that men in Fujian regarded ploughing paddy fields using water buffalo as heavy work and therefore unsuitable for women. Carrying fifty-pound bags of chemical fertilizer out to the fields, however, apparently was suitable.[120] Similarly, men monopolize machinery (e.g. tractors) because using machinery is regarded as 'skilled' work. Women are usually left to do the 'less-skilled' and more mundane, tiring kinds of work.[121] While there has been a significant trend towards the feminization of agriculture in the 1980s and 1990s, in poorer coastal areas or under-developed inland areas where alternative forms of employment are scarce, women are less likely to be involved in agricultural work. What is interesting is that women's biological characteristics and domestic responsibilities are used to justify "... keeping women *on* the land" in the first scenario and "... keeping them *off* the land" in the second.[122]

That is not to say that rural women themselves do not also use the notion of 'inside' and 'outside' work and 'biological characteristics' to their own advantage. For example, they often prefer the greater flexibility of farming to full-time paid work in a local factory because they can fit it around their domestic chores and childcare responsibilities.[123] The development of domestic sidelines *(jiating fuye)*, has also allowed women the same kind of flexibility. Kate Zhou says that women took up household

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[120] Wolf, Margery, *Revolution Postponed*, op. cit., p.84.

[121] Jacka, Tamara, *Women's Work in Rural China*, op. cit., pp.127-128.

[122] Jacka, Tamara, ibid., p.136. See also Beaver, Patricia D., Hou Lihui and Wang Xue, "Rural Chinese women: two faces of economic reform," *Modern China*, Vol.21, No.2, (April 1995), pp.205-232 for two examples of the way these discourses work.

[123] Jacka, Tamara, ibid., p.135; Wolf, Margery, *Revolution Postponed*, op. cit., p.107.

sidelines in the 1970s in order to avoid the long hours involved in collective work.[124] She says, some even took sick leave or tried to conserve their energy during collective work so that they could do more work at home. Thus they were able to develop other ways of earning an income which permitted an autonomy and flexibility not normally found in male-defined work spaces. Judd suggests that the development of domestic sidelines became "... a practical strategy spontaneously devised by rural women and later advocated by the Women's Federations as legitimate".[125] As a result, sideline production is still generally regarded as 'inside' work and an extension of domestic work, though it may include any of a range of activities from vegetable or fruit growing and animal husbandry, through to a variety of services and handicrafts.[126] The income earned from such work may be small or it may actually be a substantial part of the family's income.[127] Until more recently, the low status and 'invisibility' of domestic sidelines has meant that they are often overlooked by both women and men as important sources of family income.[128] As for domestic work, the laughter that accompanies responses to the question of who does most of this work indicates that both men and women still consider it to be women's work, *'of course'.*[129]

Thus it is clear that notions of what is 'inside' and 'outside', 'heavy' and 'light' and 'skilled' and 'unskilled' work is symbolic and has more to do with the status of the person doing the work than the imperatives of biological difference, though biological

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[124] Zhou, Kate Xiao, op. cit., p.206.

[125] Judd, Ellen R. *Gender and Power in Rural North China*, op. cit., p.237.

[126] Jacka, Tamara, *Women's Work in Rural China*, op. cit., p.146.

[127] Jacka, Tamara, ibid., p.151.

[128] Jacka, Tamara, ibid., p.145.

[129] Jacka, Tamara, ibid., pp.101-102; Judd, Ellen R., *Gender and Power in Rural North China*, op. cit., p.44. My own interviews also confirm this view. (Fufeng, March 1998)

difference is used to justify these divisions. Patrilocal marriage is another practice which expresses gender relations in the 'rural' context.

8.2.3 Patrilocal marriage and marriage migration

Traditionally, patrilocal marriage is tied to the symbolic construction of 'place' in rural society. As we saw in Chapter Seven, it was associated with land ownership and the desire to keep sons living together on the ancestral property. A woman moved from her natal family where she had no permanent place, to her husband's family where her place in the family was only established through giving birth to sons. Through language and experience, patrilocal marriage was the ultimate symbol of 'woman's' secondary place in rural society. In chapter seven, we also saw that after the Communist Party came to power, several of the government's initiatives, including the household registration system, actually strengthened patrilocal marriage with the result that it continues to be the most common form of marriage practised in rural China today. Though marriage laws may have given women a greater say in who they will marry, patrilocal marriage continues to cement a woman's secondary place in rural society, encouraging a preference for sons and limiting the investment of family resources in daughters, especially education. Furthermore, a woman has little choice but to marry, otherwise she has no 'place', practically or symbolically, in rural society.

Nevertheless, some rural women have found that they can use patrilocal marriage, and the transfer of household registration that goes with it, as a strategy for moving from poorer rural locations to more desirable rural locations.[130] In these cases women are not passive participants but actively use institutional, historical and socio-cultural constraints

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[130] Fan, C. Cindy and Huang Youqin, "Waves of rural brides: female marriage migration in China," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, Vol.88, No.2, (1998), pp.227-251.

to find new ways of improving their social and economic positions. Typically, these women have a 'rural' household registration, and are poorly educated and unskilled.[131] Marriage is the only real option they have for improving their circumstances. While a rural registration cannot be changed to an urban registration through marriage, the fact that a woman can shift her rural registration from one rural locality to another has made location an important factor in choosing a spouse for many women.[132] Uneven economic development between regions means that men in more desirable locations – namely, the eastern coastal areas – become attractive future spouses, despite the fact that these men are often older, poorer, less educated or may even be physically or mentally handicapped.[133] In other words, these are men who, for one reason or another, have difficulty in finding a bride locally. Although these bride migrants usually go to the poorer areas of richer provinces, they have achieved a move up in the spatial hierarchy and, though it seems that they are not necessarily significantly better off economically, they still see it as an opportunity for improving their situation.[134] Men and women looking for a spouse in another province usually meet through kinship or other social networks, through go-betweens or through advertisements.[135]

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[131] Fan, C Cindy and Huang Youqin, ibid., p.233.

[132] Fan, C Cindy and Huang Youqin, ibid., p.232.

[133] Fan, C Cindy and Huang Youqin, ibid., pp.234-235, 240.

[134] Fan, C Cindy and Huang Youqin, ibid., pp.239, 246.

[135] A survey of 4106 wives who had migrated through marriage to Xiao County in northern Anhui between 1980 and 1987 revealed that there were 914 from Sichuan, 801 from Shaanxi, 120 from Gansu, 86 from each of Yunnan and Henan. Local officials of the Women's Federation in Xiao County were of the opinion, however, that the actual figure for wives who had migrated was likely to be many more than the survey actually showed. Of those surveyed, 75 per cent claimed that they were 'sold' through a process of negotiation involving some degree of deception on the part of marriage brokers, 15 per cent had been persuaded to come by friends who were happy with the outcome of their own marriages, and the remaining 10 per cent had 'sold themselves', probably using marriage brokers. The ages of the women ranged from 16 to 50, with 20 per cent being under the age of 20, the legal age for marriage. Though the survey reported that the outcomes of such marriages were generally positive, some of the women, 14 per cent, complained that they were mistreated by their husbands. This included locking them up at night or following them when they went shopping because they were afraid that they might run away. Migrant brides usually have a lower status than local brides because they lack the support of nearby kin and are

For rural women who are better educated, the restrictions of the household registration can be negotiated through finding temporary work in cities and large towns and thus, engaging in a new form of 'sojourning'.

8.2.4 Sojourning[136]

In traditional China, sojourning was distinguished by certain gender, age, and occupational characteristics. Cities were predominantly male spaces, and although the urban gentry were more likely than any other group to have their families (including concubines and maid-servants) with them, the proportion who did was still generally quite small. Highly distorted gender ratios resulted from the preponderance of clerks, students and those aspiring to be officials (all males) who also lived in the gentry section of the city, together with the merchants, apprentices and surplus rural labour living in other parts of the cities.[137] Young men from farming families whose limited land resources could not support all the males in the family were often sent to find employment in the city. They would return only briefly to the village in order to get married or to participate in family festivities. Sometimes, they might return 'home' on a more permanent basis later when they had saved enough money to buy land, or to take over the farming after the death of a father or brother, or to retire.[138]

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unable to contribute new and useful political and economic contacts for their husband's families. Though Anhui is one of the poorer provinces lying to the east, the shortage of marriageable women, too many 'older' men who were still unmarried and the high costs involved in marrying a local woman are the main reasons for the high number of migrant brides in northern Anhui. Fan, C Cindy and Huang Youqin, ibid., p.235, 243; Unpublished internal report of the Xiao County Women's Association. Cited in Han Min and Eades, J.S., "Brides, bachelors and brokers," pp.856-861. ('Older' in this context usually means close to or over the age of thirty.)

[136] I use the term 'sojourner' here to save confusion with permanent migrants such as female marriage migrants or those who acquire an 'urban' household registration through educational achievement or other means.

[137] Skinner, G. William, op. cit., pp. 533-534.

[138] Whyte, Martin King, and Parish, William L., *Urban Life in Contemporary China*, op. cit., p.11.

The floating population in modern China, so-called because these people can only have a temporary residential status while in an urban area, also has certain gender, age and occupational characteristics. A review of various surveys investigating migratory trends carried out by Chinese researchers in 1990, 1993-1994 and 1994 suggests that the majority of rural labour migrants are male, but that the proportion of female migrants is increasing (e.g. the proportion of males to females was 3.75:1 in 1988, 3.22:1 in 1991, and 2.59:1 in early 1994), with the proportion of males to females varying according to age, region and occupation. Most of these migrants are young, with 70-80 per cent of them being under the age of thirty. Though the surveys did not pay much attention to destination, it is thought that around 70-80 per cent of them went to urban areas.[139] The length of their stay also depended on gender and occupation, with young women tending to stay for longer periods at one time than men.[140] Kinship ties to native place played an important role in securing jobs, as they did in traditional China. The household registration system generally ensured that most of these migrants returned to the countryside. The circulatory movement of migrants between cities and countryside was generally viewed by the authors of the surveys as having a positive effect on rural villages, with the new skills, ideas and experience as well as the capital these migrants accumulate helping development in rural areas.[141] Nevertheless, the combination of the gender division of labour, patrilocal marriage customs and household registration result in quite different 'sojourning' experiences for rural men and women.

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[139] Mallee, Hein, "In defence of migration," pp.115-117, 120. See also Fan, C. Cindy and Huang Youqin, op. cit., pp.239, who found in their analysis of the 1% sample of 1990 census data that 69.6% of intra-provincial and 47.1% of inter-provincial female industry/business migrants went to cities.

[140] Mallee, Hein, ibid., p.121.

[141] Mallee, Hein, ibid., p.124.

'Doing rural and gender' in the city

According to Jacka, most rural women engaged in waged work tend to work in local industries near their homes. Those who work further away are usually young and single, working for a few years in these jobs before they get married. Men usually work in heavy industry, construction or transportation, usually for months rather than years at any one time. Women often end up working in jobs such as: catering, waitressing, maids in hotels, nannies and home help, jobs which can be viewed as extensions of their roles as wives and mothers. Those who work in urban industries generally work in unskilled jobs in light industries for long hours and poor wages. Nevertheless, young women can usually earn more by working in the cities than they otherwise could if they stayed in their home villages.[142]

The reasons why these women go to the cities to work are many and varied. Most are attracted by the money they can earn which can help their families or be used to set

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[142] Jacka, Tamara, *Women's Work in Rural China*, op. cit., p.165. Sun Xiaomei's survey showed that of 329 migrant women interviewed in Beijing in 1993, 91 worked in sales, 66 worked in hotels and 172 were employed in people's homes as *baomu* (domestic workers or nannies). Those working in retail earned somewhere between 150-250 yuan per month while those working as waitresses or in catering usually earned between 100-200 yuan. Most of the *baomu* earned between 50 and 100 yuan with food and accommodation usually being provided. The majority of the respondents were single and aged between seventeen and twenty-five years. One eighteen year old *baomu* interviewed earned 200 yuan which, she said, was considerably more than her whole family's combined monthly income. She said she remitted most of what she earned back to her parents. The work that these young women do is not without problems. For example, there is no set wage scale, no limit to the hours worked, no assurance of days off, nor any regulation by a government department. Employers who take on young women recruited by '3.8 household service companies' set up by branches of the Women's Federation sign contracts which define some of these aspects, though in practice, there is not much that can be done to enforce the conditions agreed to when they are violated. ('3.8' stands for March 8th which is International Women's Day.) Sun Xiaomei, "Beijing *baomu*: taking Beijing people's money and doing Beijinger's work," in Dutton, Michael (ed), *Streetlife China*, (Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp.132-144. In her interviews with forty young rural women working in Hangzhou in 1995, Jacka found that they mainly worked in silk and textile factories, or as waitresses, escort women or prostitutes. There were also a few nannies and sales people. She found that these young women were very conscious of and resented the different treatment they received because they were 'outsiders' and 'peasants'; because of the poverty in the places they came from and the poor education they had received; because they were doing the jobs that the locals did not want to do; and because they were young and female. They also resented the household registration system which denied them the good jobs, housing and generally, opportunities for a better life. Jacka, Tamara, "Working sisters answer back: the representation of self-representation of women in China's floating population," (Conference paper presented at the 5th conference of the "Chinese Studies Association of Australia held at the University of Adelaide, July 16-18, 1997), pp.6, 8-10.

themselves up in business when they return to the countryside. Others want to see the 'big lights' of the cities and have some fun, while some others want to escape the boredom of the village, traditional gender expectations, or leave an unsatisfactory marriage. While most expect to return to the countryside, the longer they stay in the city, the less likely it is that they want to go back to village life.[143] Most young women do usually return to their home towns and villages and marry. Their experience of city life, however, often means that they are less satisfied with the options available to them back in their villages. For example, if they were betrothed before they went to the city, they often feel that the person chosen by their parents is unsuitable, given their different experience and new outlook on life. They are then faced with trying to get out of the arrangement or maybe reluctantly going ahead with it. Others may become engaged after returning to the village and have some choice in the matter, but as married women, they find that village life is not as materially satisfying and too confining compared to city life. Some may have met their partner while working in the city. These men may, but not necessarily, have a better understanding of the expectations of these women.[144] Finally, because any children a couple have will acquire the household registration of their mother, city men are reluctant to marry rural women. This will occasionally occur, however, if the prospective husband, for some reason, is unable to find a wife in the city.

In each of the examples in this section we see how discourses incorporating the notion of 'rurality' intersect with gender and how they affect females in particular. First, the traditional notion, 'between men and women, there are only differences', is part of a rural discourse as old as Chinese society itself. The imagery surrounding the ideal of the

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[143] Jacka, Tamara, "Working sisters answer back," ibid., pp.11-13.

[144] Sun, Xiaomei, op. cit., p.138.

'man ploughing and the woman weaving' is part of this discourse where differences are given greater significance than similarities. The gender division of labour might have begun as a convenient arrangement associated with an agricultural society, but it acquired a significance that had less to do with real differences between men and women or 'biological characteristics' than the status of the work or the status of the person doing the work. That the boundaries established in relation to 'inside/outside', 'heavy/light' and 'skilled/unskilled' work are relative and can shift, and what was once inappropriate for women to do because of their different biological characteristics is now regarded as appropriate, points to these boundaries being symbolic rather than concrete since biological differences do not change.

Patrilocal marriage, like the gender division of labour, gives practical expression to symbolism associated with 'rurality' and gender – in this instance, through the construction 'place'. Only a son's place in the family is permanent and the whole experience and the language associated with patrilocal marriage is concerned with moving a woman to her 'place' in her husband's family. In this arrangement, a woman's place is always secondary, a factor which has long affected her status and her opportunities for education. Many women, especially poorly educated ones, have sought to improve their position through using patrilocal marriage and the concessions made for it within the household registration system to migrate to another area. Although they usually lack status within their new villages, having married older, poorer men and because their natal families are too far away to provide useful affinal links, some women still consider the fact that they have been able to improve their position in the spatial hierarchy created by the household registration system makes the move worthwhile.

Other better educated women have been able to find temporary work in urban areas. The type of work, the duration of the stay, marital status, educational background

and age of these temporary residents has distinctive gender characteristics. The majority of these 'sojourners' are under the age of 30, with 70-80 per cent of them being males. Except where husband and wife are working together (usually in food related businesses), the duration of stay varies, with women tending to stay longer than men at any one time. In terms of occupation, women are more likely to work in light industries or types of work which use their domestic skills, while men tend to work in construction, transportation and heavier industries. Women usually remain in the village once they marry whereas marriage usually makes little difference to whether men sojourn or not. Male and female sojourners usually have a junior high school education or higher. This compares with primary school education or less for female marriage migrants, with some of these even being illiterate.[145]

Thus we see in symbol and in practice how traditional and modern conceptions of rurality and gender interact. The next section will illustrate how this affects the educational opportunities of girls in terms of a woman's 'place' in rural society and the role that the gender division of labour and patrilocal marriage play. It then goes on to show how encounters with educated women and girls from the city suddenly make rural girls aware of what they could become if only they could go to school. Finally, it describes the way one rural teenage girl and two young women negotiate with their parents to try and get them to agree to letting them start, or continue with, their schooling. In each instance, we see how the politics of being female is worked out in these rural homes in everyday life.

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[145] See Mallee, Hein "In defence of migration," op. cit., pp.108-140 for a more detailed summary of these characteristics. There was no reference to educational levels by gender. The reference to female marriage migrants comes from Fan, C. Cindy and Huang Youqin, op. cit., pp.238-239.

8.3 Reading , writing and the politics of everyday life

The stories used in this section come from a book titled *Chuangzao pingdeng: Zhongguo xibei nütong jiaoyu koushushi* [Creating Equality: An Oral History of Girl's Education in Northwestern China].[146] Accounts of young women and girls aged 11-20 years have been selected from this book, partly because my own interviewees do not include this age group, and partly because they provide some very graphic examples of the issues which affect the educational opportunities of girls. [147]

Lying in the North West of China, Ningxia, Gansu and Qinghai are less economically developed than provinces to the East, with Ningxia and Qinghai also having substantial minority populations. All of the interviewees from Ningxia and Qinghai belong to minority groups whereas those from Gansu are most probably Han.[148] According to data from the 1990 census, the average per capita income GDP per month in these provinces was less than 1500 yuan and illiteracy levels were amongst the highest in the country.[149]

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[146] Yang Liwen (ed), op. cit. These oral histories were collected in Ningxia, Gansu and Qinghai during field work carried out by scholars from the Beijing University Women's Studies Centre and researchers from the Ningxia, Gansu and Qinghai provincial and regional education research bureaus. The stories are based on recorded interviews, with the original transcripts being edited to form continuous text. See p.421 for description of the methodology used. The translations are my own.

[147] My own interview material is presented in the next chapter.

[148] Only one interviewee mentions her nationality, which is Han Chinese. Since the authors have taken the trouble to indicate a minority nationality in the titles of the Qinghai and Ningxia interviews when it does not appear in the text, it is reasonable to assume that the interviewees from Gansu are Han Chinese.

8.3.1 Woman in her 'place'

Earlier in this chapter, we saw how patrilocal marriage plays an important role in constructing 'place'. Such a construction reinforces the inferior position of women in the family and results in the trivialization of women's work. In the accounts that follow, we see how these attitudes and practices affect the education of girls.

Zhong nan qing nü

Crucial to the rural family in China is the woman in her 'place' in the home and yet, it is in the home that the notion *zhong nan qing nü* (men are superior to women) receives its legitimation. The gendered nature of literacy practices, including access to schooling, is also an expression of power relations in the home because it is the place where men receive their authority to rule over women. Nowhere is this better seen than in the importance given to educating sons over educating daughters. Nineteen year old Xu Linchun discusses the importance of *zhong nan qing nü* in restricting girls' access to schooling in her village in Gansu.

> The feudal and backward idea that 'males are superior to women' *(zhong nan qing nü)* is still extremely pronounced amongst our people here. More or less everybody reckons boys are the backbone and legitimate heirs who must take their place in the family and carry on with ancestral sacrifices. [They] want to do everything possible to make sure [the boys] go to school so as to bring credit to their ancestors and be people who acquire wealth on which their family can depend. Regarding girls, they always reckon that sooner or later they will become other people's people, the only requirement being to 'sit on the kang and sew and get off the kang to go into the kitchen'. As for the business of educating girls, they see it as unimportant. When forced to send girls to school they are pretty half hearted. Therefore, the girls who have gone to school muddle

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[149] See Chapter Three of this thesis *Table 3.1.*

along for two or three years and then virtually all of them stop going. Only a very few of them are promoted from primary school to middle school. Of course, there are also people who are determined to send their girls to school, however, the number of these is very small. In the last few years there have been a few changes for the better and there are more girls going to school, however, I myself have already passed the age for going to primary school.[150]

In Xu's village the association of reading and writing with patrilinealty and ancestor worship is an important factor contributing to the gendering of literacy. The gender division of labour – which places women 'inside' the home doing relatively 'trivial' work that does not require much in the way of literacy, and patrilocal marriage – which destines girls to being 'other people's people' whose education is not worth investing in, are structural features in Xu's village which also contribute to the gendered nature of literacy practice. Her description of these attitudes as 'backward' and 'feudal' indicate that she, like those promoting the official view, considers these practices to be relics of the past. Hence she does not understand that they fulfil symbolic and strategic functions in the present.

Seventeen year old Hui girl Zhang Demei says that *zhong nan qing nü* is also responsible for her missing the chance of going to school. One of four children in her family she says:

> My eldest brother is a middle school graduate and does manual labour at home (on the farm), my two younger brothers are studying at primary school. I am the only girl, but I have never been to school. Ever since I was five years old I have looked after my younger brothers. When I turned eight I began shouldering heavy burdens of house work which were not appropriate for my age. On top of that, I was lumbered with some customary rules which said things like nine year old

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[150] Yang Liwen (ed), ibid., pp.223-224. Hereafter the sources of the quotations will appear as a page number immediately after the text and not as separate footnotes.

girls are not allowed to appear in public or show their face, much less meet strangers.... 'Males are superior to females' *(zhong nan qing nü)* and backward customs caused me to miss the opportunity of going to school and to submit to all of my parents' arrangements. (p.109)

Zhang tells her story after attending literacy classes at the village school and it is probable that the terminology she uses while relating her story, including *'zhong nan qing nü'* (a Han Chinese expression), was learned during the two years she was going to these classes. The fact that she chooses to use the term nevertheless indicates that she believes it represents the situation in her home where males are given priority over females, and she attributes it with being the main reason she has missed out on going school. Thus having to assume household duties at an early age and look after her younger brothers was not the principal reason she missed out on going to school but merely the practical expression of this sentiment.

Who will do the household chores?

The nature of domestic work, the belief that it is 'women's work', that it is not as important as other work, and that it is 'inside' work plays an important role in limiting the educational opportunities of women and girls.[151] Girls are expected to carry a relatively heavy load of domestic responsibilities at an early age, with some girls in rural areas being kept home from school altogether and others having their education cut short. At the age of twenty, Gao Heihei from Gansu reflects on the fact that she was the one in her family who did not have the opportunity to go to school as a child but ended up staying home to do the housework.

My mother's ideas are rather conservative, all according to the old customs and traditions. The requirement for my sisters and I is that we should do housework well, other matters do not

warrant much attention. ... Amongst the five of us sisters, I am the third to eldest, the two older ones have married out while the two younger sisters have already graduated from junior middle school, I am the only one who has never been to school. I do the household work. Apart from doing some farm work in the fields with my sister-in-law, most of the housework falls to me. Every day as soon as it is light I have to light the stove to get my parents their tea, sweep the yard, the house and the household furniture clean, and feed the pigs and chickens. I also have to cook the two meals in the middle of the day and in the evening. When these house chores are all done, I've been so busy I'm dizzy, my brain cannot think of anything else. (p.228)

Clearly, housework is women's work in Gao's home. As the fourth child in a family of at least six children, and with a mother who was often sick, she never started school at all but found herself responsible for most of the household chores. She asks herself:

Why didn't my parents send me to school? Or was it because I wasn't willing to go? (p.229)

but is unable find a clear answer to the question and bemoans the fact that the opportunity has passed.

The allocation of the more mundane tasks such as household chores and certain kinds of farm work to women means that many rural parents do not see the need to send their daughters to school. When Lu Geya (Qinghai) turned seven, and wanted to go to school, she says:

My mother's face changed and angrily she said: "Girls stay at home, it is not necessary for girls to go to school, you will not be able to find a husband after going to school!" My father also said: "What use is there in girls going to school, you'll learn bad things, you girls [should] help your Mum do her work in the house, wait on the men, this is the duty of our Hui women." From then on I dared not bring up the subject of going to school again. (p.369)

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[151] Jacka, Tamara, *Women's Work in Rural China*, op. cit., See pp.101-102 for her discussion of the definition of domestic work in rural China.

Apart from the perception that women and girls do not need to be able to read, one of the reasons some parents are reluctant to educate their daughters is their fear that young women will not accept the drudgery of housework and farm life.[152] Another is that they will lose control of their daughters.

Little mothers

Daughters are not only kept home to help with the household chores, but also to look after younger brothers and sisters. The burden of household work that twelve year old Tibetan girl Xiu Maocuo's mother had to cope with meant that looking after her younger brother and sister became Xiu's job.

> Altogether, there are five people in my family, Dad, Mum and a younger sister and younger brother. Dad is like all the other men in the village. Everyday, apart from grazing animals, he drinks wine, rides horses, shoots arrows and wrestles. Mum is like all the other women in the village. Besides helping Dad with the animals, she milks the cows, makes butter, carries water, makes tea and cooks meals. Strenuous housework has made her so tired that her back became bent early. Looking after my brother and sister became my job. As far as I can remember, before my eyes the whole day long is Mum's bustling figure. In my ears all the time was my younger brother and sister's crying voices. That's how things seemed until I was nine years old. (p.373)

While Xiu's father's time includes establishing his 'place' in the hierarchy of the village, her mother is responsible for all of the domestic work and the more repetitious jobs outside the house. The only way she can cope is by allocating the task of minding the younger children to her daughter. Xiu's mother has not needed reading and writing in her daily life so neither of her parents see any need for Xiu to go to school. For some girls like Xiu, Lu and Gao, doing housework and looking after younger siblings means missing out on school altogether, but for others, it means that they start school late. Even then, this

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[152] Rai, Shirin, " 'Watering another man's garden'," op. cit., p.29.

may only occur after teachers and local authorities have intervened. Such was the case of eleven year old Ma Xiaoling (Ningxia).

> My family has six people, in my native place we were so poor that we really could not stay [there] any longer, so Dad moved the whole family to the present town Weizhou and borrowed someone else's house to live in. [We] depended on Dad and Mum digging licorice root and picking wild herbs to support the family and provide for my older and younger brothers' schooling. I only went to school for one year and now do the cooking, wash pans and look after my younger brother at home! (p.115)

Though her family was very poor, poverty did not stop her parents from doing everything they could to make sure her brothers went to school. On the other hand, Ma's schooling, was cut short so her mother could go out to work. She says that when the school principal came to see why she was not attending school, her mother told the principal:

> "It's not that I won't let her go to school, but there are real difficulties in the family, she must do the cooking and look after her younger brother, the main thing is – we have no money." (p.116)

Ma was more fortunate than many girls in this position in that special provision was eventually made by the school so that she could return to school.[153]

8.3.2 Why can't I go to school?

During the 1980s, some girls aged 8-15 in Guanxi province were reported in the *Nongmin Ribao* as going on strike and refusing to do housework unless their parents allowed them to go to school.[154] Not all girls feel that they can take such drastic action, but that does not mean that the desire to go to school is any less. The next few stories

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[153] Her brother was able to attend the pre-school classes at the girls' school which Ma was going to.

[154] Rai, Shirin M., "Modernisation and gender," op. cit., p.124.

deal with girls who, having seen the difference an education makes to urban women and girls, desperately want to go to school themselves.

I want to go to school

Ma Xiaoling tells the story of one occasion when out of curiosity she went with her mother to the school to see some visiting women professors from Beijing and sees, possibly for the first time, how different life could be. She says she looked at these educated women and the girls sitting there in the classroom with envy. One of the professors saw her standing there and came over to talk to her. After discovering she was not attending school, this professor then gave her some pens and suggested that she tell her father that she wanted to go to school. She says:

> I wanted to go to school badly and, like those girls in the classroom, study and have fun, but this was not possible. ... I ... had another look at the two pens which were pressed between my damp fingers and slowly walked towards home. From that day on, I couldn't eat and slept badly. That lady's *(ayi)* words kept coming back in my ears all day long: "I want to go to school, I want go to school." When the two pens were taken by my brothers, I cried my heart out. (pp.115-116)

Nevertheless, she did not stop asking her mother if she could go to school. Ma's mother told the school principal when she came to visit:

> "... ever since that lady from Beijing came and gave her pens and told her to go to school, every day since then, she has been pestering me to go to school. Sometimes she sleeps half the night then suddenly turns over and sits up and says over and over again: I want go to school, I want to go to school...." (p.116)

The stark contrast between the kind of life her little bit of schooling offered her and the opportunities available to women with the education and expertise of these visiting professors disturbed Ma. Xiu Maocuo was similarly troubled.

I want to be like them

Xiu recounts an occasion when her father took her to a fair near Qinghai Lake.

[T]his was the first time I had been any distance from home. At the fair, I saw so many people all at once and there were all kinds of motor vehicles. Lots of girls my age, all dressed very prettily, sang and danced. There were some city girls who had come too, they were absolutely dazzling. They all seemed to be so happy, some talked, some laughed, however, I couldn't understand what they said, but I really admired them.

When we returned home, I suddenly developed the idea of going to school, I wanted to spend my time like those girls. As soon as I mentioned it to my father, however, I had to put up with him stamping and swearing. (pp.373-374)

She also relates another occasion which further strengthened her resolve to go to school.

Once our wind electricity generator broke down and we had no electricity, my father found a lot of 'skilled people' to come and have a look, but none of them could fix it. Later a county cadre came to the township, a pretty lady who fiddled with it for a moment and quickly fixed it while the others didn't know what to do at all. When I was handing her some tea with milk, the lady touched my head and asked me what grade I was in at school. I left very quietly and went to the sheep pen and cried. I felt really depressed.

My intention became even stronger, I really wanted to be like that lady, become an educated person with a bright future. However, every time I raised it with my father, what I got in return was a lecture. My mother would only heave a sigh and weep. (p.374)

Xiu persistently asked her father if she could go to school, but each time she asked, he would not consent. Even when the local school teacher visited her home to try and persuade him to let her go, he stubbornly refused. It wasn't until the village head and the Buddhist Lama came that he changed his mind. Xiu says:

it seems that Dad was a little afraid of them. Although in his heart he wasn't very willing, he still

agreed. (p.374)

Village politics can sometimes transcend household politics.

Outside looking in

Girls living in isolated rural villages may not always be aware of the better

educational opportunities enjoyed by city girls, but the differences between themselves

and other children in the same village cannot be missed. Lu Geya says that when she was

seven years old,

> the village had a school but all the students were boys. Along with other small children my age, I
>
> could only watch them for awhile as they read in a loud voice and then go and play with a hoop
>
> for awhile. I thought school was better than being in the house. I too wanted to go to school.
>
> (pp.368-269)

Lu was the seventh child and only girl in her family. By the time she was seven years old

her two eldest brothers had already married. She says that her eldest brother traveled

around the country doing business and was aware of some of the changes that were taking

place elsewhere. He was the one who eventually persuaded her parents to send her to

school. After she started school, a few other girls from the neighbourhood also started. (It

is quite likely that the teacher may have been able to persuade some other parents to send

their daughters to school once Lu started.) Lu says:

> School life fascinated me. I was like a flying horse, so much freedom! However, a huge number
>
> of girls in the village who were the same age as me had not been to school. They hid at the
>
> school gate the whole day watching us studying and playing games. As soon as we called to
>
> them, they left in fright like a flock of birds in which a stone has been thrown. Before long, I
>
> said: "Why don't you come in, school is better than home. The teacher teaches us to read lots of
>
> characters, tells us stories, does physical education with us and plays games." Their eyes lit up,

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Lu seems to have forgotten why she herself was once a girl who could only stand outside the gate and watch. Not only was she more fortunate than these girls, but she was also luckier than one of her classmates who no longer came to school. According to Lu, this girl said:

"My Mum says, girls are surrounded by cooking pots and going to school is totally useless." (p.370)

8.3.3 Stopping and starting school

In the next few stories we see how a woman's 'place' at home doing domestic chores is often used in parents' arguments against letting their daughters start or continue with school.

Dropping out of school

Gao Caiqin in Gansu not only started school late (aged nine) because she had to stay home and look after her younger brother, but she was forced to drop out in the second semester of her second year of junior middle school despite doing very well. She says that when she started in junior middle school there were fifty-four students in her class, but only fifteen of them were girls. A year later, there were only four girls left. Around seven or eight dropped out about the same time as she did and their circumstances were very similar to her own. Gao says she will never forget the events that led up to her dropping out of school.

Six days after the lunar new year in the afternoon, I had finished the winter holiday homework and started to rule up [my] notebook in preparation for the start of school. Just then my father walked over and asked me: "What are you doing?" I said, "Ruling up [my] notebook to use

during the school term." Dad then said, "Who is letting you go to school? I no longer have the money to provide for you." I thought Dad was probably joking and didn't take any notice. After tea, I leant over the table and was writing the last part of a holiday diary. Keeping his eye on me as he came over and panting with rage, Dad scraped my [text] books and exercise books from the top of the entire table onto the floor. I was stunned. My mum was very angry and argued with my father, [then] got up and went to her brother's house. Only my younger brother and myself remained at home. My father lost his temper with us, gave my brother money to sign up for school and ignored me. Only then did I realize that my father was not going to let me go to school and I was unable to hold back the tears. (p.232)

Gao's family circumstances were reasonably good compared with many others in the village, she says, but her father had recently invested in a hand tractor and had borrowed a lot of money. Her mother normally paid for the children's education by selling eggs, but due to sickness, had not been able to keep chickens that year. Though her mother managed to borrow all but eight yuan needed for Gao's school fees, her father refused to give her any money, no matter how small the amount. She goes on:

Dad said he wouldn't hand over anything. He said if everyone has gone, who will do the household chores? We ordinary folk in the village have a kind of saying. What use is there in girls going to school? It's better to let them learn how to work early. (p.233)

Lack of money was not the main reason for Gao's father wanting her to leave school. Even when her class teacher came and told him she would pay the school fees, Gao says:

my father said he would have nothing to do with it, said he wanted me to go and work in the fields. In fact lack of money was one reason, another reason was that he wanted me to be like the majority of girls and go to work. (p.233)

Hence her father wanted to keep her in her 'place' and the shortage of money or the money she might be able to earn was not the main reason for refusing to let her go on with her schooling. Because she started at the age of nine, Gao would have been around fifteen

years old at the time, meaning that her parents were no longer legally obliged to send her to school. After a year of trying to get her father to change his mind, she gave up when she saw how much it was upsetting her mother. She says:

> From then on, I did what my mother did. During the day at home I did housework and farm work. In the evenings I helped my younger brother do his homework. (p.234)

Despite having to stay home, Gao has been able to use many of the things she learned at school. Like other people who have had an education, though, she does not want to stay home for the rest of her life doing farm chores. She hopes that one day she will be able to learn some skills and run a business. Even better still, she thinks, would be to have the opportunity of returning to school and going on with her studies. At least Gao has a few different options for the future, which is more than some other girls have. Xu Linchun, (cited earlier) found her options were very limited without any schooling.

Nineteen and in primary school

Nineteen year old Xu was in grade three and attending the local primary school when she was interviewed. She says that conventional ideas and poor vision stopped her from going to school. Although her poor vision was remedied with a pair glasses, her parents thought that she only needed to learn to cook and sew, marry a husband from a good family and have children. They also thought that learning dressmaking would be a good way for her to earn an income. Her illiteracy, however, turned out to be a debilitating handicap.

> The reality of going and studying dress-making is not as easy as you think, it is all involved with patterns and numbers. I am a person who doesn't know Arabic numerals at all [so] how am I able to know the measurements of a pattern? I couldn't understand lots of the instructions, the teacher explained, but I could not understand. The teacher tried very hard to teach [me], I studied

hard, but I still failed the exams. Not having the basic (objective) literacy requirement [means] a person is stumped. In reality, they cannot learn dress-making and must put up with the misery of being illiterate and uneducated.

I was utterly miserable and felt that life had no meaning. I really wanted to die. My morale was also extremely low and at first I got the sulks. When my parents saw my bad temper, it seems that they too were crushed and fretting. They were also probably thinking that it would not be good to look for a husband's family for me, and discussed the problem of what to do with me. (p.224)

Xu repeatedly asked her parents to allow her to go to school and in the end, they consented. The story has a happy ending, with her parents supporting her studies and encouraging her to go on with her schooling for as long as she can. Twenty year old Gao Heihei is another young woman sitting in a classroom of very young children. Her request to go to school was prompted by a traumatic experience when, after becoming separated from her sisters in the city, she had no idea where either her sisters or the car might be.

I couldn't figure out the direction of the parking station where the car was parked at all. The street was full of people, however, there wasn't a trace of [my sisters] amongst the crowd. I could ask someone, [but] I couldn't understand a word they said. The street corners and entrances to lanes all had signs with characters written on them, but I did not know a single character. I couldn't recognize anything. I was so worried my heart was pounding like crazy. There was no point in waiting for [my sisters] to come. Only by running around like a headless chook[155] did I find them by accident, looking here and looking there, in the end I found them. All of my companions were next to the car which was about to leave. After they saw me, my face covered in perspiration, they all laughed loudly, blaming me for carelessly running off! Making some wisecracks they also mocked me. In my heart I was not only angry but also ashamed. I really felt bad, but couldn't say anything. While we were on the way home, they were talking and laughing in the car, but I sulked without saying anything at all. The words; "The road signs are written

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[155] She says 'fly' but the equivalent in English would be 'chook'.

clearly enough, one look and you can find the car park," which they had said, jabbed straight into my heart. (pp.228-229)

As a result of this experience, Gao resolved to learn to read and write. She says that when she first brought up the subject with her mother, her mother was astonished.

"You are already a 20 year old person, it's really time to find a husband, moreover what about the household odd jobs!" (p.229)

Gao then made a bargain with her mother. She told her:

First, during the next three years, if anyone comes to talk about marriage you are to refuse them, wait until I've been to school for three years, then arrange my marriage. Second, I will do all my household odd jobs properly, without any delay. Third, do not let me be illiterate and support my studies. My mother saw I was determined and gave her consent. (p.229)

Gao says that these three suggestions are promises which she has kept since starting school. She gets up even earlier than before to do her household work before going to school and when she comes home, she still cooks the evening meal. The teachers have been very supportive, giving her some extra tuition when they have time. Village gossip, however, has been a problem.

The worst thing I have to put up with from people is the comments from a few people with nothing better to do. Some say "a big person going along to school with [young] children, she's a person who doesn't know any shame." Others say: "a young woman going to primary school is shirking her household work." There is also ridicule and talk which is hard to take. Whatever they discuss together, I try not to let it get to me and with one mind and heart get on with my studies. (p.230)

As a young woman whose behaviour has departed from the 'norm', Gao has received much criticism from other women. To them, her illiteracy is less of a problem than not

doing what *they* think someone of her age and stage in life should be doing. In other words, she ought to know her 'place'.

8.4 Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to understand what being 'rural' in China means and how the deployment of the term 'rural' and all that goes with it interacts with gender and literacy to produce female illiteracy in rural China. Female illiteracy in rural areas is bound up with two symbolic systems, one which involves distinctions made between 'urban' and 'rural' and the other which is based on distinctions made between males and females. Literacy data directly reflect these two sets of relations, with literacy practices and access to educational opportunities being the prerogative of the dominant group in each system.

First, better access to education is generally associated with a hierarchical structure administered by the household registration system which places centrally administered cities (Beijing, Shanghai, Tianjin) at the top, progressing down through large cities, small cities, and towns, to rural villages at the bottom. Although the household registration system originally classified people as 'rural' if they lived in the countryside or if their occupation was associated with agriculture, after its establishment, it became an inherited category and could only be changed with difficulty. Designed originally to limit the growth of cities where limited resources were being channelled during industrialization, it has led to the development of a two-tier system in which those with urban registration enjoy access to opportunities (including education) not available to the vast majority of the population who are rural. In addition to the effects of this structure, uneven economic development across the country also means that educational opportunities become poorer the further west one goes. The young women and girls

interviewed in Ningxia, Gansu and Qinghai whose stories are presented in the last section live in rural villages in north-western China and are, therefore, on the bottom rung of the 'urban/rural' ladder. Consequently, it is not surprising that the contrast between the expertise and status of the women professors from Beijing which is at the top of the ladder and Ma Xiaoling's one year of schooling was particularly striking. Xiu Maocuo, who had never been to school, was similarly dazzled by the young school girls from the city who came to perform at the nearby fair. Such a contrast is the effect of a discourse of difference which has been institutionalized through the household registration system.

Second, this discourse of difference uses words like 'backward', 'feudal', 'ignorant' and so on in much the same way that *zhong nan qing nü* is often used to sum up gender relations. Whereas *zhong nan qing nü* leaves us in no doubt about whose interests are being served, words like 'backward' appear to refer to behaviour when, in fact, the word 'backward' is a relative term which begs the question of – backward….in relation to whom?' and – 'why?' That Xu Linchun and Zhang Demei use these words when interviewed indicates that they have absorbed the terminology of urban intellectuals and political leaders who impose their version of social reality upon rural people. Xu and Zhang's own experience of social reality is the product of two systems which both work to preserve the interests of the dominant group (urbanites/males) at the expense of the dominated group ('peasants'/females). To be 'rural' and female is to be at the bottom of a social hierarchy in which being 'urban' and male means being at the top. Thus we see the intersection of 'urban/rural' with gender clearly expressed in the visible differences between Xu and Zhang's experience and that of the women and girls they saw from the city.

Third, as restrictions on freedom to move about the country have gradually lifted, rural people, men and women, have been able to take advantage of new work opportunities in urban areas. This has produced a number of gender effects as the household registration system meshes with the gender division of labour. Apart from the more obvious ones associated with men and women doing different kinds of work, women, once they marry, usually stay in the village attending to family matters and farm work. Under the household registration system 'rural' people are not entitled to the same benefits as 'urban' people even when both reside in the city. Married women who are 'rural' now do the more mundane farming tasks which are deemed to be suitable because they can fit them around their domestic chores and minding children. Thus instead of being liberated from the drudgery of housework by having men share more of it, we see men deferring more family responsibilities to women and liberating themselves from the more mundane aspects of farming. Women find little use for their education and virtually no time to use their literacy skills. Furthermore, when their daughters reach school age, it often coincides with the time when these responsibilities are heaviest. The fact that these mothers have little use for literacy in their own lives every day means they see a girl's education as being less important than a boy's and, accordingly, deal with the problem of too much work by allocating some of it to their daughters and not to their sons. Thus these girls may start school late and, even then, still be expected to carry a considerable load of household chores, have their schooling cut short, or simply not go to school at all. On top of this, some parents limit their daughters' education because they fear that women who have had an education are likely to be less amenable to the drudgery of housework and farm chores. As Gao Caiqin puts it:

> The only thoughts that people who have had an education have is that they are unwilling to work a whole lifetime doing farm work in the countryside.[156]

It is also likely that parents fear that their daughters will be less compliant. Hence Lu Geya's mother's reaction:

> Girls stay at home, it is not necessary for girls to go to school, you will not be able to find a husband after going to school.[157]

Fourth, the household registration system and patrilocal marriage mesh together to construct 'place'. The household registration system is basically designed to keep rural people in their 'place', that is, in the countryside. Intersecting with this are gender practices which are designed to keep women in their 'place' which is, as it always has been, at home doing domestic work and minding the children. As we saw in Chapter Seven, the instigation of the household registration system and collectivization cemented patrilocal marriage by restricting the movement of males away from their own villages while providing the means for women to move to their husbands' villages. Although the government now encourages more men to go and live with their wives' families, the continuing popularity of patrilocal marriage still ensures that a woman's 'place' in the family is secondary to that of the males. This means that there is less incentive to educate daughters than sons. We saw from the stories in the final section of this chapter that *zhong nan qing nü* was mentioned specifically in two young women's stories, nevertheless, in the stories of girls and young women who did not refer to this saying, it was clear that a daughter's education could be sacrificed to enable a mother to go out to work or to relieve her of her endless household burdens or to look after siblings. On the other hand,

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[156] Yang Liwen (ed), op. cit., pp.234-235.

[157] Yang Liwen (ed), ibid., p.369.

parents usually made sure their sons went to school, even if family finances were severely stretched.

Thus it is that we see how the deployment of the term 'rural' produces a set of conditions which engage with gender, another set of conditions, to create circumstances in which 'rural' females are at the bottom of the social hierarchy. Poor access to educational opportunities and female illiteracy reflect the two conditions of being female and being 'rural', with being 'rural' contributing to the institutionalization of traditional gender attitudes and practices in modern practice. The literacy data analyzed earlier in chapter three clearly reflect this situation.

9 GENDERING LITERACY – A FIELD STUDY

The analysis presented so far has argued that the *disparities* between males and females apparent in literacy data indicate that female illiteracy is a product of gender relations. In traditional Chinese culture, gender is an integral part of a larger discourse of 'difference' in which hierarchical distinctions are made on the basis of sex and seniority. Chapters Six and Seven explore two ways in which traditional gender attitudes and practices have been preserved in such a way as to undermine attempts to bring about male/female equality. Chapter Eight then shows that, rather than eliminating hierarchical distinctions, the Chinese government has created a new hierarchical system based on 'urban/rural' distinctions. Not only does literacy data reflect the differences in opportunities available to children in urban and rural areas, but it also displays the effects produced through the interaction of two symbolic systems based on gender and 'urban/rural' differences. This chapter uses the results of interviews carried out in Fufeng County in rural Shaanxi to explore the extent to which these issues which have been raised in earlier chapters are reflected in the daily lives of rural women.

The chapter begins with a brief description of the county and the work done in implementing nine-year basic education and adult literacy programs. This provides a context for the presentation of interview material which follows. Most of this interview material comes from interviews with village women and is presented grouped in the following way – a general profile of the women and their family circumstances; their own experiences with respect to literacy and education; and the nature of women's work in the home and its relationship to the development and maintenance of literacy. A short section based on interviews with teachers follows before the chapter concludes.

Figure 9.1: **Map showing Fufeng County and Shaanxi Province**

Scale - *1:200,000*

Zhen – town
Xiang – township
Cun - village

Source: Fufeng Xian Remin Zhengfu, *Cailiao huibian: Shaanxi sheng pinggu yanshou Fufeng xian puji jiunian yiwu jiaoyu ji fucha saochu qingzhuangnian wenmang gongzuo* [Collection of Data: the Shaanxi Provincial Assessment of Nine-year Compulsory Education in Fufeng County and Inspection of Literacy Work Amongst the Young and Middle-aged], 1996.

9.1 Introduction - placing the interviews in context

Shaanxi Province divides into three geographical regions: the northern Loess Plateau region, the southern Hanzhong basin and the central Guanzhong region around the Wei River *(Weihe)*. The Wei River valley has special historical importance as it is usually regarded as the birthplace of Chinese civilization. Not only was it the home of the Western Zhou (1040-771 BC), Xi'an (formerly Chang'an) and nearby Xianyang were dynastic capitals, making the region the political and cultural centre of China for much of the time until the end of the Tang dynasty (906 AD). The area around Xi'an has many important historical sites, not the least of which is the army of terra cotta warriors fashioned during the time of Qin Shihuang (221-210 BC). More recently, Yan'an in the north achieved fame as the place where the CCP established a territorial base and tried out many of its early policies before assuming government in 1949.

Fufeng County shares Shaanxi's rich history. Located in the western part of Guanzhong in Baoji prefecture (see *Figure 9.1*), it boasts a number of historical sites. Famen Temple *(Famensi)*, built around 200 AD, is a popular tourist destination. The historic Wei River forms its southern boundary, while the deep loess soil, which was so conducive to the development of intensive agriculture by the Zhou people, gradually rises until it reaches the high mountainous regions of the north. The county covers an area of 750 square kilometres of which 690,000 mu[1] is farming land that can be irrigated.

Today, Fufeng is one of China's important grain producing areas, with the main crops being wheat, corn and rape-seed. The main cash crops are apples and peppers, with pigs, sheep and poultry dominating in the area of animal husbandry. Factories producing

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[1] 15 *mu* = 1 hectare.

plastics, transformers, cement and paper are the principal industrial enterprises.[2] At the end of 1996 the county population stood at 436,829, of whom 406,933 (93.2 per cent) were designated 'agricultural' and 246,982 (56.5 per cent) were designated 'rural'.[3] According to one county government official there are no large industries so that the per capita income is not high when compared to other areas within the Baoji prefecture. The per capita net income for peasants[4] was 1106 yuan in 1996 which was a little below that of 1165 yuan for peasants across the province. The per capita income for workers was 3840 yuan.[5] Because peasants make up the majority of the population and their contribution to public funds is relatively small, the county has a large public debt and is regarded as being relatively poor.[6] It is one of 70 subsidized counties in Shaanxi Province.[7]

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[2] Zhonggong Fufeng Xianwei Fufeng Xian Renmin Zhengfu, "Zai Shaanxi sheng yanshou Fufeng xian 'liang ji' gongzuo huibaohui shang de zhici" [Address at the meeting reporting on the Shaanxi Provincial assessment of work on 'the two basics' in Fufeng County], in Fufeng Xian Remin Zhengfu, *Cailiao huibian 1996*, p.i. (The 'two basics' are – the establishment of nine-year compulsory education, and the elimination of illiteracy amongst the young and middle-aged.); and Fufeng Xian Tongjiju, *Guanyu 1996 nian guomin jingji he shehui fazhan de tongji gongbao* [Statistical Bulletin Relating to the National Economy and Social Development in 1996], (15/3/97), pp.1-3.

[3] 'Agricultural population' *(nongye renkou)* – refers to all those in the countryside engaged in agriculture, forestry, animal husbandry, sideline production and fishing, as well as those under the administration of townships *(xiang)*, but not including townships themselves, and all sorts of other people not directly engaged in agricultural production and dependents. 'Rural' *(xiangcun renkou)* refers to the population which usually resides within the jurisdiction of the county (but does not include towns). *Shaanxi tongji nianjian 1997* [Statistical yearbook of Shaanxi 1997], pp.58, 61. Many of the agricultural population reside in towns but are engaged in the above occupations thus they are designated 'agricultural' but not 'rural'.

[4] 'Peasant' *(nongmin)* is the term used in the official statistical data.

[5] Fufeng Xian Tongjiju, *Guanyu 1996 nian guomin jingji he shehui fazhan de tongji gongbao*, op. cit., pp.7-8; *Shaanxi tongji nianjian*, op. cit., p.193.

[6] This is confirmed in Fufeng Xian Tongjiju, *Guanyu 1996 nian guomin jingji he shehui fazhan de tongji gongbao*, op. cit., p.1.

[7] See also Fufeng Xian Saomang Lingdao Xiaozu Bangongshi, "Tigao renshi tian cuoshi, jixu saomang bu tingbu" ["Improve awareness and take additional measures, continue eliminating illiteracy and do not let up"], in Fufeng Xian Remin Zhengfu, *Cailiao huibian 1996*, p.44.

9.1.1 The implementation of 9-year compulsory education

Fufeng County has five towns *(zhen)*, 10 townships *(xiang)* and 205 villages *(cun)* and according to an education bureau report, at the end of 1996 there were 218 primary schools, 22 junior middle schools, 2 vocational middle schools, 4 senior middle schools, 1 teacher training school and 15 agricultural technical schools.[8] The literacy rate amongst those aged between 15 and 45 in the county in 1995 was reported as being 98.7 per cent with an illiterate or semi-literate population of 2,575 out of total population of 192,753 in this age-group. Of the whole population aged 15 years and above (286,029 people), the literacy rate was 93 per cent.[9] In September 1995 after inspection, the county was recognized as having met the national criteria for establishing nine-year compulsory education and the targets set for literacy amongst the young and middle-aged (i.e. illiteracy fell below 5 per cent in this group) and it was declared to be a county which has eliminated illiteracy. This received considerable publicity in local and provincial newspapers, as well as on provincial television, and resulted in visits to the county by national and provincial educational authorities.[10]

From 1993 to 1995 there was a gradual increase in county funding for education which exceeded the increases in county income, reflecting the strategic importance and priority status given to education and literacy work. (See *Table 9.1.*) In line with the increased emphasis on education, there were moves to: increase publicity concerning the compulsory education laws and enforce the law; improve educational organization and

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[8] Fufeng Xian Renmin Zhengfu, "Fufeng xian shishi 'liang ji' gongzuo qingkuang huibao" ["Report on the situation of the implementation of work on the 'two basics' in Fufeng County"], in Fufeng Xian Remin Zhengfu, *Cailiao huibian 1996*, p.1.

[9] See also Fufeng Xian Saomang Lingdao Xiaozu Bangongshi, "Tigao renshi tian cuoshi, jixu saomang bu tingbu," op. cit., p.42.

[10] Fufeng Xian Renmin Zhengfu, "Fufeng xian shishi 'liang ji' gongzuo qingkuang huibao," op. cit., pp.1-2; and Fufeng Xian Saomang Lingdao Xiaozu Bangongshi, ibid., p.42.

management; ensure that teachers and school principals receive proper training; strengthen

enrolments and stem drop-outs; and promote the positive aspects of schooling.[11]

Table 9.1: **Educational funding in Fufeng County 1993-1995**

Year	County income (yuan)	Increase (%)	Education Funding (yuan)	Increase (%)	Proportion of county income spent on education (%)
1993	21,462,000	35.3	12,183,000	18.1	32.1
1994	22,655,000	5.56	13,911,000	14.2	35.2
1995	24,290,000	7.2	18,765,000	34.9	39.0

Source: Fufeng Xian Remin Zhengfu, *Cailiao huibian,* p.59.

Table 9.2 shows the official enrolment rates, graduation rates and drop-out rates in

Fufeng County as of 1996 and how they compare with those for the rest of Shaanxi

Province and for the whole of China.

Table 9.2: **Enrolment, graduation & drop-out rates in primary and junior middle schools in 1996**

Region	Primary schools			Junior middle school		
	Enrolment rate (%)	Graduation rate (%)	Drop-out rate (%)	Enrolment rate (%)	Graduation rate (%)	Drop-out rate (%)
Fufeng	99.98	99.0	0.1	97.7	96.0	1.4
Shaanxi	99.24	N/A	1.95	88.56	N/A	4.84
National	98.8	92.6	1.3	82.4	49.8	3.47

Sources: Fufeng Xian Remin Zhengfu, *Cailiao huibian,* (November 1996), pp.48, 51;
Zhongguo jiaoyu nianjian 1997, pp.729-732; *Zhongguo Jiaoyu Fazhan Chengjiu 1992-1997,* p.1; *National Report for EFA 2000 Assessment,* p.52.

This data suggest that the measures taken during the early 1990s have been astonishingly

successful and the usual problems that confront educational authorities in other places

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[11] Fufeng Xian Renmin Zhengfu, "Fufeng xian shishi 'liang ji' gongzuo qingkuang huibao," op. cit., p.2; Luo Zhiheng (Fufeng Xian Jiaoyu Jujuzhang), "Zhuazhu jiyu jiji jinqu quanli yi fu cujin 'liang ji' dabiao gongzuo" ["Grasp the opportunity to positively forge ahead and spare no effort to go on advancing the work of reaching the standards set for the 'two basics' "], in Fufeng Xian Remin Zhengfu, *Cailiao huibian 1996,* p.21; and Baojishi Renmin Zhengfu, "Fufeng Xian Renmin Zhengfu guanyu shishi 'liang ji' gonzuo de zicha baogao" [Report on the work of self assessment of the implementation of the 'two

have largely been overcome in Fufeng. It is a pity that there are no references or separate figures for males and females to indicate how girls fare compared with boys, especially in relation to junior middle school graduation rates, drop-out rates and opportunities for senior middle school education. The rate for completing nine-years of compulsory education was reported in 1996 as being 94.9 per cent and the literacy rate for those aged 15 years was deemed to be 99.9 per cent. Amongst school-age children who are disabled the enrolment rate for those aged between 6 and 13 years was 88.6 per cent and for those at middle school level, it was 90.6 per cent.[12]

9.1.2 Literacy work

Though the development of nine-year compulsory education was the main focus of the county's literacy efforts, the elimination of illiteracy amongst adults was also addressed. According to official figures, the illiteracy rate in Fufeng County in 1978 was 20.5 per cent. The rate fell to 8.1 per cent in 1980, for which the county received a provincial government commendation award.[13] In 1988, Fufeng was recognized as having achieved the national criteria for 'advanced counties for the elimination of illiteracy' (*saomang xianjin xian*).[14] Following the International Literacy Year in 1990, the county government, in line with the national government's three directives to 'block, sweep and

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basics' by the Fufeng County People's Government"] in Fufeng Xian Remin Zhengfu, *Cailiao huibian 1996*, pp.48-49.

[12] Fufeng Xian Remin Zhengfu, *Cailiao huibian 1996*, op. cit., p.56.

[13] There is no indication in the reports to show whether these early percentage rates refer to those aged 15 years or more or whether they are based on the criteria used in the 1982 census where percentages for those aged 12 years or more were used. Fufeng Xian Saomang Lingdao Xiaozu Bangongshi, "Tigao renshi tian cuoshi, jixu saomang bu tingbu," op. cit., p.42.

[14] The regulations set by the State Council in February 1988 included reaching literacy rates of 85% in rural areas and 90% in urban areas amongst those aged between 15 and 40 years. Commendations for achieving these goals were made during literacy conferences held in Beijing in November 1988 and Lanzhou in September 1989. Refer back to Chapter Three in this thesis for government regulations and targets set during different years.

'raise', moved to eliminate illiteracy from amongst those aged between 15 and 45 in order to fulfill the second of these directives.[15] To this end, files containing literacy data were updated; the leadership and management of literacy programs was improved; school facilities were made available during out-of-school hours; and teachers were mobilized.[16]

Since 1995, after meeting the provincial government's standard and being recognized as a county which has eliminated illiteracy, the local county decided to focus on the third of the three directives, that is, on post-literacy work. In terms of organization, one person and a deputy were appointed to oversee literacy and post-literacy work in the county, and small groups and offices were set up in each of the education, public finance, farming and animal husbandry, the Communist Youth League and the Women's Federation departments to carry out literacy work. In addition, each town, township and village also established small groups of literacy workers. The county adult education office appointed someone to supervise literacy work across the county and each town or township appointed three cadres and a special cadre to take responsibility for literacy work in their area. During the summer vacation of 1996, all 286 cadres and 388 primary school teachers in the county were involved in literacy consolidation work. Funding for this work came from subsidies of around 30/40,000 yuan received from the provincial government because the county is considered to be a poor county, and each town and township in the county provided 5 per cent of their rural education funds. All of the local town and village governments organized schools for the teaching of literacy and technical

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[15] This is referred to earlier in Chapter Three of this thesis. The 'two basics' in the Fufeng County reports include 'blocking' i.e. the universalization of nine-year compulsory education, and 'sweeping' i.e. the elimination of literacy.

[16] Fufeng Xian Renmin Zhengfu, "Fufeng xian shishi 'liang ji' gongzuo qingkuang huibao," op. cit., p.11.

skills. Rural technical schools also put on classes, teaching 85 per cent of rural young people and newly literate adults one or two useful skills.[17]

In terms of content there were four different ways in which literacy was combined with some other study. They included combining – 1) literacy with technical skills, 2) knowledge with the study of law and government policies, 3) elementary literacy and then improving it and 4) becoming literate with socialist thought education. In the course of learning frequently used characters and basic arithmetic, reading books and newspapers, and doing accounting, studying notices and receipts, and being able to write letters and notes, participants also learned about: farming, animal husbandry and forestry, how to throw off poverty and become wealthy, the political situation, family planning and the law, proper student behaviour, how to improve the general social atmosphere, knowledge for daily living and other more general knowledge.[18] The county supplied textbooks and the villages supplied pens and homework books and distributed the textbooks amongst all those involved in the courses. Altogether, 1089 young and middle-aged people were recognized as having become literate and there were 63,514 person attendances for 1860 sessions teaching agricultural technical skills.[19]

Apart from the need to consolidate literacy skills and teach additional skills, this work was a response to the need to try and reach the remaining illiterates and semi-literates and provide them with opportunities to become literate. These people were generally older, often carried heavy burdens, and were usually dispersed. Thus it was fairly

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[17] Fufeng Xian Saomang Lingdao Xiaozu Bangongshi, "Tigao renshi tian cuoshi, jixu saomang bu tingbu," op. cit., p.44.

[18] Fufeng Xian Saomang Lingdao Xiaozu Bangongshi, ibid., p.45.

[19] Fufeng Xian Renmin Zhengfu, "Fufeng xian shishi 'liang ji' gongzuo qingkuang huibao," op. cit., p.12; and Fufeng Xian Saomang Lingdao Xiaozu Bangongshi, ibid, p.44.

difficult to organize activities for them. A lot of them, it was reported, were women.[20]

What is interesting and a little surprising, is that this is the only reference specifically referring to females in all of these educational reports. If there is a disproportionate number of female illiterates or there are girls who are still experiencing problems with their schooling, one might expect that there would be some mention of it. In respect of the latter, it is only in the context of a 1996 Women's Federation report describing some of its activities that we learn that one of the things they did to support the county's efforts to implement nine-year compulsory education was to raise funds to help some female drop-outs return to school.[21]

To summarize, Fufeng is a relatively poor county with most of its population being involved with agricultural production. County education reports indicate that it has worked hard to implement nine-year compulsory education and that it appears to have been remarkably successful in this endeavour. With respect to literacy, the county was recognized in 1995 as having achieved the national government's set target of 95 per cent for those aged between 15 and 45 years, and was reported as actually achieving 98.7 per cent. Since then, it has been working on post literacy activities in order to consolidate and maintain literacy levels amongst the adult population hand in hand with the teaching of various useful skills and knowledge which can accelerate economic development. The main problem with the reporting of educational and literacy work in the county is that almost nothing is said on the subject of female literacy or any special problems with girls' opportunities for education. The next section seeks to address this issue.

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[20] Fufeng Xian Saomang Lingdao Xiaozu Bangongshi, ibid, p.43.

[21] Shi Fulian, *Fufeng xian funü lianhehui 1996 nian gongzuo zongjie baogao* [Report summarizing the work of the Fufeng Women's Federation in 1996], (30/12/96), p.11.

9.2 General profile of the interviewees

The ages of the interviewees ranged from 16 to 85 years.[22] There was only one who was under twenty with the majority being aged between 21 and 50 years. *Table 9.3* shows the age profile of the respondents.

Table 9.3: **Age profile of interviewees**

Age	15-20	21-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	61+
No. of interviewees	1	16	18	12	7	5

The women came from five rural villages and from Fufeng (the county seat). In Zhaozhai cun there were 5, Xindian cun 7, Xiquan cun 13, Changmingsi (cun) 7, Taibai cun 7, and in Fufeng itself there were 20, making a total of 59 women interviewed. Of these 49 were taped, with 5 interviewees not wanting to be taped, one leaving to attend to a child, one having to return to work, 2 recordings accidently being deleted and one interview which missed being recorded. Therefore, not all of the interviewees were asked all of the questions.[23] Of those in Fufeng, 15 of the 20 interviewees were engaged in agricultural production or growing vegetables, or had close family members who were. All of the interviewees were Han Chinese, with all of the town and village officials interviewed saying that there were no minority groups in their area.

9.2.1 Incomes

Rough estimates of the family's total income are likely to be fairly unreliable because they do not take account of the sources of income, the number of people

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[22] See Appendices *Tables 11.5* to *11.7* for more detailed information on the interviewees.

[23] In tables where data is collated, the number of respondents answering a question will be indicated where that number is not the total number of interviewees.

generating income and the family structure. Furthermore, the public nature of the interviews is also likely to have affected what the interviewees were prepared to disclose. *Table 9.4* shows income levels according to the answers given.[24]

Table 9.4: **Estimates of gross family incomes**

Place	Official estimate (yuan)	Interviewees' estimate (yuan)**	Range* (yuan)
Fufeng	None available	11,400	5,000-20,000
Zhaozhai cun	12,000-20,000	10,000	All said around 10,000
Xindian cun	5,200	6/7000	4/5000-10,000
Xiquan cun	6/7000	7/8000	5/6000-8/9000
Changmingsi (cun)	7/8000	6/7000	5/6000-8/9000
Taibai cun	None available	9000	3/4000-15/16000

*According to interviewees. ** Averaged.

It is clear, if the respondents' estimates are somewhere near the mark that there is a considerable range in incomes between interviewees, especially in Fufeng and Taibai cun.

More meaningful is the interviewees' response to questions about their own personal income. Of 20 respondents who said that they had no personal income, 13 mentioned that the family was engaged in some kind of sideline. In most cases, their husbands were farmers and the sidelines involved farming or animal husbandry. On the other hand, another 10 who said they were engaged in similar sidelines and farming cited a figure which represented their personal income. In all but one of these, their husbands were not farmers but did other work. The personal income these women said they earned varied from a very low 500 yuan to 2/3000 yuan annually. Another 5 women who gave a figure for their own personal income were self-employed as hairdressers, dress-makers or

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[24] There were 44 who gave estimates of their family's incomes, 8 were dependents, 6 could not give an estimate and 1 had left. Six of the dependents in Fufeng were being supported by sons and their families with two of these also receiving a pension of around 200 yuan per month.

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noodle makers and earned an income of between 200-500 yuan per month, while another 5 had salaried work at a local factory and earned between 260 and 300 yuan per month. There was also a woman who said she worked as a cleaner in a factory, earning 200 yuan per month, and another woman who cooked for the local school teachers and earned 5/600 yuan annually. Three other women worked with their husbands in family businesses, one in a medicine shop, another selling cloth and the other preserving eggs. Only the woman working in the medicine shop said she had a personal income which she estimated as being 4/500 yuan per month. It appears then that the interviewees generally regarded themselves as having a personal income when their work was salaried or distinctly different from that of their husbands.

9.2.2 Household structure

As *Table 9.5* shows, most households consist of two or three generations living together, with three generations being most prevalent.[25]

Table 9.5: **Number of generations living together by place**

No. of generations	1	2	3	4
Fufeng	1	5	10	1
Zhaozhai cun			5	
Xindian cun		2	5	
Xiquan cun		8	3	
Changming si		5	1	
Taibai cun		1	6	
TOTAL	1	21	30	1

According to town/township officials, this is generally the pattern in the villages within their jurisdiction. When the data is broken down according to age in *Table 9.6* we see that few of the younger interviewees live in households with only two generations, of these –

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[25] In this table and the next 4 older interviewees living in the same households as a younger interviewee were not included, two interviewees did not answer this question.

one was unmarried and living with her own parents, and two were married but had not started their families.

Table 9.6: **Number of generations living together by age of interviewee**

Age	1	2	3	4	Total
15-20 yrs		1			1
21-30 yrs		5	8	1	14
31-40 yrs		9	9		18
41-50 yrs		6	5		11
51-60 yrs			6		6
61+ yrs	1		2		3

That means there were only three 'nuclear families' consisting of interviewees and their children. All of the two generation households in the 31-40 and the 41-50 age groups were 'nuclear families', indicating that young couples did not usually set up on their own until after 30 years of age. The pattern therefore seems to be a patrilocal marriage with the young couple living with the husband's family. From around 30 years of age, some (around 50 per cent) move out and establish their own homes while the remainder continue to live with the husband's parents.

In most cases, the official head of the household is male, though several town and village officials said that it was women who were 'really in charge', a point which aroused a great deal of laughter from all present (males and females). One official said that women were quite powerful now because men have too many other worries to be concerned with the day to day running of the household. *Table 9.7* indicates very clearly that there are very few female heads of households in the homes of the interviewees.

Table 9.7: **Relationship of head of household to interviewee according to age of interviewee**

Age	15-20	21-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	61+
Total in age group	1	16	18	12	7	5
Father	1	3				
F-I-L		7	2			
Husband		5	16	11	4	
Son					2	4
Mother		1				
Self				1	1	1

In the one case where the household was headed by the mother, the family structure was atypical in that she was head of a family that comprised herself and her husband, her daughter and son-in-law, as well as both his parents and an unmarried sister. Of those interviewees who were the head of the household, one lived on her own, but there does not appear to be any practical reason for the other two being designated as head, such as all the males of the family working away from home. What is interesting is that these latter two women are both illiterate. According to town and village officials, a significant number of married men (ranging from around 30 per cent to "most men") find work in other places, usually in Baoji or Xi'an, with some going as far afield as Guangdong and Shanghai. They generally return during busy times, otherwise the women do most of the farming which, according to one official "... does not involve much". Only five of the interviewees said that their husbands lived and worked elsewhere most of the time, with another two saying that they used to. This could be one reason why the majority of interviewees said that the household head was male, though all but one of those whose husbands did work away from home still said that their husbands were the head of the household. In the case of the one whose husband was not the head of the household, her father-in-law was head.

9.2.3 Marriage and family

Of the total number of interviewees only four were unmarried. *Table 9.8* shows that marriages arranged by parents are the most prevalent form of marriage even amongst the younger interviewees.

Table 9.8: **Marital status and circumstances of marriage**

Age	15-20	21-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	61+
Married		13	18	12	7	5
Unmarried	1	3				
Marriage was arranged		6	10	9	7	5
Parents, with agreement		1	1			
Go-between		2	2			
Free choice		4	5	3		
Bride price &/or dowry		7	10	6	2	1
No bride price or dowry		6	8	5	4	3
Don't know				1	1	1

The 'no bride price' category includes free choice marriages.

Only 4 out of 13 in the 21-30 age group and 5 out of 18 in the 31-40 age group claimed to be 'free-choice' marriages. Nevertheless, there is a gradual trend towards free choice marriage amongst the respondents from a position of having no choice at all amongst those over fifty years of age to one where around 30 per cent of those aged 21-30 years have chosen their spouse themselves. On the other hand, some kind of financial arrangement was involved in more than half of the marriages in the two youngest groups of interviewees which, when compared with those in the older groups, indicates a trend where economic transactions associated with marriage have increased rather than decreased.

While patrilocal marriage is the predominating pattern, *Table 9.9* indicates that most of the interviewees' marital homes were less than five kilometres from their natal homes.

Table 9.9: **Distance of the natal home from the marital home**

Less than 1 km	1-5 km	6-10 km	11-20 km	21-40 km	Another county	Another province
12	32	2	3	2	2	1

One said 'a long way' and did not specify the distance.

Closer inspection of data indicates that age had no significant impact on whether a respondent came from further away.[26] Only one person came from another province and two from another county, meaning there was very little marriage migration into the county amongst the interviewees and that this pattern has been maintained for some time. The increasing economic importance of marriage arrangements, including marrying locally, may be linked to the need to develop strong affinal links as an economic strategy and may also account for the continuing involvement of parents in arranging marriages.

Although village officials said that most married couples have one child, or two children if the first one is a girl, *Table 9.10* reveals that the pattern amongst interviewees was actually two or three children.

Table 9.10: **Number of children by interviewee's age**

No. of children	Age of interviewees				
	21-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	61+
None	2				
1	5		1		
2	6	12	6		1
3		6	5	3	1
4				3	1
5					1
6					1

One interviewee had left.

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[26] See Appendices *Table 11.7.*

Only one has settled for a single child in the long term and none settled for two girls. Since three of the five women in the 21-30 age group with one child have girls, they will more than likely take up the option of trying again for a boy. (See *Table 9.11.*)

Table 9.11: **Order of children by interviewee's age**

Children	Age of interviewee		No. where second-born is boy/girl	
	21-30	31-40	boys	girls
None	2			
1 boy	2			
1 girl	3			
1 boy, 1 girl	2	1		3
1 girl, 1 boy	3	7	10	
2 boys	I	4	5	
2 girls, 1 boy		4		4
1 boy, 2 girls		1		1
1 girl, 2 boys		1	1	
Total	N/A	N/A	16	8

Other age groups are not relevant to the discussion here so they have not been included. See Appendices *Table 11.7* for details of the other respondents.

It is possible that they might try again if their next child is also a girl if they follow the same pattern as those in the 31-40 age group, despite the considerable penalties and pressures put upon them by authorities. Furthermore, there were nine interviewees aged between 21 and 40 who have more than one child despite the first child being a boy. Although the idea that 'having a girl is the same as having a boy' has been promoted throughout the county, and many interviewees said that there is little difference between boys and girls, there is an observable sex imbalance amongst the children of interviewees. While it is minimal (9 boys to 8 girls) in the 21-30 age group, it is clear in the other age groups, with 23 boys and 19 girls in the 31-40 age group. Bearing in mind that some in the younger age group may go on and have another child in the hope of having a boy,

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there is still the potential for the imbalance in this group to increase. Figures in *Table 9.11* also indicate that more second borns are boys which could indicate some sex selection intervention.[27]

The question is, does this bias represent a practical necessity or does it have a cultural basis? The continuing popularity of patrilocal marriage would suggest that it has a practical basis. The close proximity of the interviewees' natal homes and the economic and social importance of maintaining affinal links, however, would tend to alleviate some of the need for such a bias. That patrilocal marriage is quite clearly the norm amongst the interviewees, that a substantial number of marriages were arranged and involved economic exchanges, that there are few female heads of households, along with a relatively strong preference towards having sons indicate that cultural factors play an important role in the families of these women. Having said this, the fact that a number of respondents had another child even though their first child was male also suggests that the ideal family is considered to be two children, preferably one of each sex. At least one child, however, should be a boy.

9.3 Literacy and education

In respect of literacy, 23 of the 59 interviewees considered themselves illiterate or semi-literate. This includes one 85 year old who said she could read and write when younger but had not been able to do so for some time now because of poor eyesight. When the numbers of women in each age group are compared to the number of illiterates in each group displayed in *Table 9.12* it appears that the spread of compulsory education

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[27] There are also more instances where girls are born first which is difficult to explain.

is having a significant impact on stemming the production of new illiterates amongst school-age children with most illiterates being over 40 years of age.[28]

Table 9.12: **Number of illiterates in each age group.**

Age	15-20	21-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	61+
Illiterate or semi-literate	0	0	3	8	7	5

In terms of educational levels, *Table 9.13* shows that all of those under the age of 30 years graduated from primary school and that the three in the 31-40 age group who said they were illiterate, had very little or no schooling.[29]

Table 9.13: **Level of primary school education**

Age	No schooling	Grade 1-2	Grade 3-4	Grade 5-6	Graduate*
15-20 yrs					1
21-30 yrs					16
31-40 yrs	1	1	1		15
41-50 yrs	4	3	2		3
51-60 yrs	5		1		1
61+ yrs	4	1			

* Completed primary education.

When asked why she did not go to school one of these women replied:

There were five children, the family did not let me go. The family's circumstances were difficult so they didn't let me go to school. Only two went to school, the other three didn't go to school. (No.24)

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[28] The number of interviewees is too small to be sure that there are no problems with schooling at all.

[29] The apparent discrepancy between *Tables 9.12* and *9.13* occurs because one in the 41-50 age group who went to school for 1-2 years, said she is literate and one in the 51-60 age group who is a primary school graduate said she is now illiterate.

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She also says that the nearest primary school was five kilometres away.[30] Only her elder brother and youngest sister went to school.[31] By the time her youngest sister went to school, the family probably did not have to support so many children at school and it was likely that there was a school nearby by then.

Another interviewee said:

> When I was young, my two elder sisters were grown up. One of my sisters....after my sister went to work....I had one older brother,....(clears throat)....because my brother was good at school at the time.....in the end I was already not going anymore, it was me who had to do all the household chores. My older brother went to school and my two older sisters also went. (No.10)

In other words, she only had one brother whose education could not be sacrificed and with one of her sisters starting work, she had even more jobs to do around the house. Thus no formal decision was made to stop her schooling because the burden of housework was already keeping her home. As a result, she only attended primary school until grade three or four. In her case, the school was not far away, only about 250 metres. Even though she said that boys and girls in her family were treated the same with respect to schooling and household chores, it is clear the gender division of labour in the family meant girls did most of the housework. That her father was a senior cadre and literate, and that this occurred at the time of the Cultural Revolution, a time when school enrolments across the country were increasing, does not seem to have made much difference in this family. She said that she cannot read and can only write her name now.

Of the twelve interviewees aged 41-50, eight regarded themselves as illiterate and one interviewee who only went to school until grade two said she could read and write. This woman said she dropped out of school because a lot of children were dropping out at

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[30] She was originally from Henan.

the time, though she gave no reason why this was so. Aged 44 years, we can only surmise that she would have dropped out of school around 1961-62 when school enrolments were affected by the events of the Great Leap Forward and the famine which followed. It is possible that she could have maintained or even improved upon the literacy she had acquired in her two years of schooling, but she was reluctant to do the second part of the interview, possibly because of the number of people present in the room at the time, and this question could not be followed up.

9.3.1 Schooling and gender

One of the interesting things to emerge from a closer look at some of the interviews is the women's perception of their treatment by their parents. For example, one of the older women aged 57, in the course of answering a question about her parents' views towards bringing up boys and girls said, "... They viewed boys and girls as being the same," and when she was asked whether boys and girls in her family received the same treatment she said that they did. The interview goes on.

Interviewer: Then all your brothers and sisters went to school?

Interviewee: Er....they all went

Interviewer: They all went?

Interviewee: Mm....

Interviewee: But you didn't....you didn't go to school, isn't that so?

Interviewee: I was the only one who didn't go to school.

Interviewer: All the others went to school?

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[31] She does not say whether the other two children who did not go to school were boys or girls.

Interviewee: My older brother, my younger brothers and my sister all went....they are all junior middle school graduates. They all went to school.

Interviewer: Ah, then did you have to stay home to look after your younger brothers and sisters, is that it? In your previous family?

Interviewee: At that time I had to look after my younger brothers and sisters. That's how it was then. ....ah....at that time the food was cooked in a canteen, so I would help look after the children.

Interviewer: This is the reason why you didn't go to school is it?

Interviewee: It was because I had to look after the children that I wasn't allowed to go to school. (No.22)

During the course of the interview she does not seem to perceive that her treatment is different from that of her brothers and sisters. The fact that her sisters went to school, as far as she was concerned, meant that her parents did not treat boys and girls differently. Keeping one daughter home to do household chores and look after the younger children was a fairly common occurrence when she was growing up. Another woman about the same age had a similar experience. She also said that her parents were of one mind in their treatment *(yixin duidai)* of boys and girls and showed no preference at all. The interview continues.

Interviewer: Then before in your home, ah, you and your brothers and sisters did the work, or did you do more housework in your family?

Interviewee: Me, it was me who did the most housework. I was the eldest so I did more work.

Interviewer: You did more?

Interviewee: Yes.

Interviewer: Then in your family your...er...brothers ...ah... all went to school but you didn't go? So they received....

Interviewee: They both went.

Interviewer: ...their educational opportunities were greater than yours, isn't that so?

Interviewee: Yes, the other two went to school, my two brothers went to school.

Interviewer: But you didn't go?

Interviewee: I was in the house providing for them all! I did [this] for them all until my sister-in-law married into the family. (No.57)

Thus she also does not seem to see that she was treated differently from her brothers. This is an important issue because 'equal treatment' appears to mean that they are treated equally well in the context of the prevailing gender expectations and does not necessarily mean that the expectations for boys and girls is the same. On the other hand, some other women are more conscious of the different treatment they received even if they have difficulty in expressing it. When asked what her parents' views were with respect to bringing up girls one 50 year old said while laughing, "... I don't know how to say it!" After being encouraged to try she goes on to say:

When I was a child, at that time, all of us Shaanxi folks thought males were more important than females *(zhong nan qing nü)*, we all loved boys. With regard to girls we were all not too....you know....(clears her throat) ... Back then, I had lots of sisters. Besides, my mum said, I had lots of brothers too ... the fact that I was the middle one was not so good and so I didn't go to school. ... All my brothers and sisters went to school. My elder brother, I have already told you, did (of course). In those days everybody loved boys, all of my older and younger brothers went to school. (No.1)

This woman did attend school for two years so she is explaining why her schooling was cut short. Another contributing factor, she says, was her mother's ill health which meant her mother was unable to care for the children.

The bias towards boys is not just based on the practical need for a son to help with the farm work or to care for parents in old age, but it also has a cultural basis. One 64 year old woman explains:

> Ai, my....my parents had several girls, three girls, they didn't have a son and....er....they wept bitterly. (laughs) During a festival holiday, they....they would not stir for several days and would weep bitterly....angry. (No.16)

Not only did it mean that they had no sons to help with the farm work, they also had no son who could participate in the family rituals during particular festival periods. Hence, her parents stayed indoors, angry that they could not celebrate like everyone else. She says that there was no school in her village anyway and neither she nor her sisters went to school. Another interviewee aged 60 describes her own father's attitude towards having daughters.

> Oh....back then my Dad did not like girls, he liked boys! At that time it was 'love boys and not girls' *(bu ai nüzi, ai nanzi)*. Anyhow, I had lots of sisters, oh! Boys, my Dad back then got boys a bit late. As for girls, it was only after having six sisters that a boy was born. Eleven children, but he did not want any of the girls, cast them off. I remember it all (laughs), he disliked them very much, useless! He only got the two of my brothers later. (No.7)

Table 9.14 provides a summary of reasons why interviewees did not start or continue with their primary schooling. Quite clearly, the reasons shown below the dotted line affected girls specifically. Three of those above the line – being too poor, a parent ill or dying, or a large family – also tended to single out girls, not only because parents thought that their education could be sacrificed, but because they were required to take on more household chores or look after younger siblings.

Table 9.14: **Most common reasons for not starting or continuing with primary schooling**

Age/Reasons	15-20	21-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	61+	Total
Too poor			2	3	5	2	12
Parent ill/ died				2	1	1	4
Did not want to go			1				1
Everyone was dropping out				2			2
Large family			1	3	2		6
Girls didn't go to school						2	2
Had to care for siblings				1	2	1	4
Too many household chores			1	3	2		6
Males more important				3	2		5

Some people gave more than one reason.

In the case of a forty-five year old interviewee, her mother became ill and died when she was nine years old and her grandmother took charge of the children.

My grandma favoured boys most strongly, as for girls she was....er....(laughs). I was so busy at home I didn't go to school. Of my brothers and sisters, my older sister still went to school for four years, my brother, the only boy, was always outside, he was allowed to go out all day to school even though his schoolwork was very poor, but I had to stay home the entire day to cook for them all. When I was big enough I had to cook all day for everybody, whatever they all wanted I had to run and get. When I was really small, I was in the house all day, one day meant three meals, I had to cook for everyone. My grandma didn't make the boy do anything at all, the only one (of course). I....she....my little sister was the very youngest, too young to do anything at all. (No.56)

When we look at the thirty-six women who completed their primary school education we see in *Table 9.15* that four who graduated did not go on to junior middle school, two did not complete their junior middle schooling, while 25 graduated. Most of the latter group fall between the ages of 21 and 40 indicating that more girls have been

able to take advantage of nine-year basic education. Only four, however, went on to senior middle school or specialized secondary school *(zhongzhuan)*.[32]

Table 9.15: **Highest level of schooling after primary school**

Age	Primary graduate but did not go on	Attended junior middle school	Junior middle school graduate	Senior middle school graduate	Zhongzhuan graduate
15-20		1 (at school)			
21-30	2	1	12		1
31-40	1	1	10	3	
41-50			3		
51-60	1				
61+					

Amongst some of these informants the same themes emerge in the interviews, especially the idea that boys and girls receive equal treatment from their parents even though it is clear that this is not always so. For example, a 30 year old when asked about her parents' views on bringing up boys and girls said that the three children in her family, herself and two brothers, were treated the same, though it is clear that 'the same' meant according to the different expectations of boys and girls.[33] Once again, the gender division of labour in the household meant that the girls generally did housework while the boys worked in the fields. When asked whether she thought the girls did more than the boys she said that it worked out to be "... basically the same." With regard to the level of schooling, she says:

> Interviewee: I...those two [brothers] were senior middle school [graduates], I was a junior middle school (graduate).

> Interviewer: Your brothers are senior middle school [graduates]?

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[32] One was still at junior middle school.

[33] 'The same' seems to mean fair treatment, i.e. not favouring or being harsh towards either gender.

Interviewee: Those two are senior middle school [graduates].

Interviewer: They both went to senior middle school, huh?

Interviewee: Yes, I was the only one at middle school [level].

Interviewer: When you had gone through junior middle school, did you want to go to senior middle school?

Interviewee: I...er...ai....

Interviewer: What happened?

Interviewee: My exams at the time were really hard, a few people passed but there were several girls who didn't pass, I felt bad so I didn't go on.

Interviewer: Then...then why did you do poorly in the exam, was it because the household....there was too much housework or ....?

Interviewee: No. ....er....usually in the exams, lots of boys who passed were admitted, [but] there were few girls, a lot less, several girls were not able to pass the exams. [I] felt bad and didn't want to go on. The opportunities to qualify were a bit limited. So I didn't go on.

Interviewer: So lots of boys were admitted to the school, but few girls were admitted?

Interviewee: Boys usually study well.

Interviewer: They do well. Why was it that you didn't do well?

Interviewee: Hey, school's really hard. (Laughs.)

Interviewer: Er...You had lots of housework or something?

Interviewee: ....er....there was a great deal of housework. I....after going to school and studying, when I came back [home], I still had to help with the cooking, do housework and help with the washing. (No.40)

This interviewee attributes poor performance in the examinations by girls, including herself, to the 'fact' that boys are generally able to study better than girls. Because she believes that the work boys do outside is roughly equivalent to the work that girls do inside the house, she does not see that the constant demands of housework, which can go on after dark, may leave girls with less time to study at home. The 'great deal of housework' that she had to do, plus her poor performance in school examinations, also probably contributed to her dislike of school.

On the other hand, some other junior middle school graduates were conscious that they were not treated the same. One aged 36 years says:

> Generally, my parents' [attitude] is that boys are important (of course), girls are not important.[34]

When asked how this was apparent when she was growing up, she went on to say:

> It was definitely apparent with respect to the education of boys or it showed when they went out and got some form of employment, then [my parents] took most care of the males. [As far as they were concerned] girls [just] did a few things of their own in the house. (No.34)

Nevertheless, she says that all the children in the family, boys and girls had "... basically the same education". Another interviewee aged 21, when asked her parents' views about bringing up boys and girls, answers:

> It was definitely....(laughs)...it was definitely males are superior to females *(zhong nan qing nü)*. (Laughs again.) Oh in my opinion they loved boys! Oh boys can do whatever they like, girls can't manage any work at all! (No.15)

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[34] Chinese: *nanhai shi zhongyao me, nühai bu zhongyao me.*

Despite this observation about her parents, she runs her own dressmaking business and earns a reasonably good income of 4/500 yuan a month. A 38 year old senior middle school graduate, answering the same questions, says:

> I was the eldest in my family, there was a younger sister and three younger brothers. I had to look after [them]. (Laughs.) My parents were a bit biased towards the boys, they both....both loved the boys! (No.44)

She goes on to say that all the children in her family are senior middle school graduates but none of them did well enough to go any further. On the other hand, another interviewee, a 36 year old junior middle school graduate, said that she thought her parents actually preferred her.

> I was the eldest, I was preferred, I think that my parents especially loved me. Mm. (Laughs.) Compared to the boys, I was loved the most, I... it was because I was the eldest. When I was small my health was poor.

When asked how she knew that they preferred her most she replies:

> Like eating, for example, and another thing was the clothes I wore. They were all....another one was I was also a girl, my brothers were boys, the clothes I wore were a bit better than theirs. (No.43)

She said that all the children in her family are at least junior middle school graduates. Her brothers are either junior middle school graduates like her, or specialized secondary school graduates. Her younger sister is a university graduate. Thus it seems that the perceived parental preference, be it for boys or girls, in these cases had a less deleterious effect on the education of the children in the natal families of these interviewees than the unrecognized bias in the families of the interviewees who said that their parents treated

them all the same. This could reflect a greater compliance with parents' expectations amongst those women who were less aware of bias.

One of the interviewees, an illiterate woman 60 years of age is of the opinion that education makes a difference to the way girls perceive problems. She thinks that unlike her, they would have a better understanding of what their parents said when their children ask questions like:

> "Mum, why do you make me go with Dad to the fields to work? Why do you let my brother....these are the things I often said....why do you let my brother not go to the fields to work? Not do work?"

and receive answers like:

> "You are a girl, we can't provide for you. We can't provide for you, we want the same for you. Your Mum and Dad don't have the money, we can't provide for you. We have three students to provide for, we can't provide [for you]." (No.17)

The three students were her brothers. Two of her brothers received a junior middle school education, while her youngest brother only went to grade four. She did not go to school at all and her younger sister only went for one year.

> They couldn't provide for us so we didn't go. They said what use was there in girls going to school? That was it, so we didn't go. They couldn't provide for us. That was the real situation.

According to her way of thinking, educated girls would understand the problem which, as she saw it, was that her parents could not provide schooling for all of their children. If girls are singled out and do not go to school, however, how could they become educated and, accordingly, understand the problem of provision? In fact, the questions she asked as a young uneducated girl reveal that she was well aware of the discrimination being made between herself and her brothers. Although poverty produced the dilemma of not being

able to afford schooling for all the children in the family, it was cultural expectations and the everyday practices built on these expectations that decided it should be girls rather than boys who could afford to miss out on schooling. The responses of these interviewees clearly indicate that traditional gender biases had an impact on these women no matter what level of education they eventually achieved.

9.3.2 Adult literacy

We have already seen that there were 23 interviewees who had very little or no schooling, with one of these saying that she is literate, and one primary school graduate saying she is now illiterate. *Table 9.16* shows that of the 23 interviewees who say they are illiterate, 10 have never attended a literacy class.

Table 9.16: **Illiterates' attendance at literacy classes**

Age	15-20	21-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	61+
Illiterate			3	8	7	5
Attend literacy class				4	6	3
Not attend literacy class			3	4	1	2
Graduate					1	1

The most common reason interviewees gave for not attending literacy classes was that they were simply too busy with household chores and looking after children to go. Amongst those who said that they went to classes but dropped out, in some cases quite early, it was also the most common reason given. All 13 of the interviewees who had been to literacy classes, including the two graduates, said that they had either forgotten everything they had learned or they could only remember a few characters. One interviewee who had not been to literacy classes (aged 37) was uncertain how literacy could benefit her.

> Interviewer: If you yourself...ah, you yourself were able to read and write, how do you think it might have helped you? Have a think.
>
> Interviewee: .....
>
> Interviewer: Do you think it would be useful, eventually? If you could read and write would it be useful sooner or later, what do you think?
>
> Interviewee: It would be useful.
>
> Interviewer: Then how would it help you? If you could now read and write.
>
> Interviewee: ...I can't say...
>
> Interviewer: If you....mm....could read...ah, what do you think you could do? What things could you do?
>
> Interviewee: ....when [she] can read, she can go out and do something, it will be handy [for] her, the characters [she] knows. (No.24)

By replacing 'I' with 'she', her final answer suggests that she is unable to say how it might be of benefit to herself personally but she recognizes that it might be useful for others, though she is still unable give any specific examples. Later in the interview she says that literate women sometimes read a book or newspaper but they do not write because they do not have time and, from her observation, writing does not have any use in their everyday lives. The reason she gives for not going to literacy classes is that she is too busy. On the other hand, another interviewee (age 39) says that if she could read and write her circumstances would be very different.

> Ah...because I... not....haven't been to school and can't recognize characters, I can't do calculations at all so [when I'm] doing the shopping or something I can't work things out. I have to wait till the children come home to [go shopping], this is how it is. (Laughs.)

In contrast to her own situation, she says:

When girls can read and write, they can study well, knowing things is good. Take me, I am illiterate and don't know anything. People down the street and people in the city can recognize everything when I can't recognize anything. It's beneficial. The more characters you know, the more you recognize the characters. The more you study, the better it is.

She is of the opinion that educating a girl

is without exception good for her personally because she has money to spend, she is relaxed, she can do something for the country, it is all good. She can go to university and leave the countryside, she will also live better, every aspect is better. (No.10)

Despite her strong opinions on the benefits of literacy and education she did not go to literacy classes because, she says, there was no class for her to attend. She does not seem to be aware of the literacy efforts which were carried out in the county during the early 1990s which specifically targeted people like her. One interviewee aged 47 is also sure that her circumstances would be better if she was literate.

I am illiterate, my three children, I provided for them so they could be junior middle school graduates. I am illiterate, it is very difficult, I can't...can't...can't do calculations at all and I don't...don't recognize any characters so I can't do anything.

She thinks if she was literate she would be able to run a business and keep accounts. Nevertheless, even though she went to literacy classes she has forgotten everything she learned and can only write her name. She reckons:

Those women who are illiterate are very busy, they are busy with housework. As farmers, women are busiest, sometimes while minding the children they have to do the housework. They don't have time to read or become literate ... (No.11)

A fifty year old interviewee also says she was always too busy to attend literacy classes, but her view is:

> if I could read and write I would no longer be like a peasant, I would be wise....much wiser, I could study lots of things. I could study the characters, peasants would then be like the clever people....(laughs)....I think when you don't have education you aren't as good as educated people. This is my feeling but I am ignorant. (No.1)

For her, education would increase opportunities for peasants to become like those in the cities who are well educated. Another interviewee (aged 41) spoke of the practical benefits of literacy to farmers.

> The words you want, if you write words that you know and after writing them do what they say....in the farming it's usually technical words you need to be confident in writing....when the appropriate month comes you know what to do, you don't ask other people. If you aren't able to write the words you want, when it's a certain month of the year, the month to spray with insecticide or the month [the trees] flower, you are not confident in doing things, you still have to ask others, ask other people. (No.12)

In this case, the interviewee did attend literacy classes and is able to read very simple texts but can only write a few characters because she has forgotten most of them. She says she has to ask others to write them down for her.

One interviewee aged 47 considered that she was too old to learn to read and write. After being asked whether she would like to be able to read books and newspapers she responds:

> Interviewee: Ai...but I can't. When you're old can you still study? The only thing I can really do is look after the children, can I still [learn] to read or write? No, not at all, it's not possible!

The interview continues.

> Interviewer: Why?

Interviewee: Eh?

Interviewer: Why? Do you think reading books and newspapers is useless?

Interviewee: Ah!

Someone else: She's getting on in years.

Interviewee: I'm getting on in years, my memory is gone. I'm getting on in years, my memory is

gone..........Let others study I don't want to. Already I can't absorb things if I

study, so I don't study. (Laughs.) (No.52)

Being too old or mentally slow was a reason given by two town officials for women not

attending literacy classes, however, at 47 years this woman would not have been outside

the targeted age groups for literacy activities in the county during the early 1990s. She

said she did not go to any literacy classes because she had to look after her three children

who have since grown up. Now she feels that looking after her grandchildren is all she can

do.

> If you haven't learned to read and are not skillful at figures, you can't do anything.

This observation does not convince her of the benefits of going to a literacy class to

acquire these skills but seems to contribute to the lack of confidence she is already feeling

which, along with being too busy, is preventing her from attempting to become literate.

9.3.3 Daughters of illiterates

A comparison of literacy levels of the parents of literate interviewees with illiterate

interviewees in *Tables 9.17a* and *9.17b* indicates that there were no illiterate interviewees

whose parents were both literate. The number of literate interviewees where both parents

were illiterate, or where fathers were literate and mothers were illiterate, however, is

noteworthy.

Table 9.17a: **Literacy levels amongst the parents of literate interviewees**

Parents	Age of interviewees					
	15-20	21-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	61+
Both literate		4	3			
Father lit./ Mother illit.	1	5	3			
Father illit./ Mother lit.			1			
Both illiterate		6	5	3		

Table 9.17b: **Literacy levels amongst the parents of illiterate interviewees**

Parents	Age of interviewees					
	15-20	21-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	61+
Both literate						
Father lit./ Mother illit.			1	2	1	2
Father illit./ Mother lit.						
Both illiterate			1	3	6	2

A total of 49 interviewees were asked this question during the taped part of the interview.

Thus it appears that illiteracy amongst the parents of interviewees is less important than age, and that the recent development of basic education has had a greater effect than the educational background of the parents of the interviewees. In fact, we have already heard one interviewee saying that she made sure all of her children received a junior middle school education because she did not want them to be illiterate like herself. Another interviewee 45 years of age has similar feelings.

> I didn't go to school, which I have since regretted, and I certainly want my daughter to study well now. ... I send my daughter to school, with an education a girl can go out and do things for the country, this is excellent. ... For her personally, whatever she studies, if she puts her mind to whatever she studies it will always be beneficial. In the future it will always be beneficial to whatever she does in the house. ... When she leaves home I won't have to worry about her. Her brothers, the two of her brothers resisted and didn't want to go back to school, her two brothers both didn't go. I definitely want my daughter to finish senior middle school. ... Because I didn't

go to school...ah...my...my father, my family, none of them went to school, ... this struck me extremely hard. (No.56)

A 65 year old interviewee was also keen for her children to have an education so they would not be like her.[35]

My two children were both willing to go [to school]. I wanted both of mine to go, you can leave the country side so you go [to school]! I was not able to go so I wanted my children to go to school, oh! If you study well you're OK. ... Now in the countryside it's been....it's been mechanized, those machines, people who've been to school are basically OK. Take me here, I haven't been to school, can't do anything. ... (Laughs.) Look....look at me, I am completely illiterate. I look at the children who've been to school, they can do everything,! I let my daughter go to school and she did well, passed the exams and then left the countryside. (No.19)

These women are very aware of the benefits of an education for their children, especially the possibility of them being able to transfer their household registration from 'rural' to 'urban' through doing well enough at school to go on to university. This explains why having illiterate parents is not necessarily linked to illiteracy amongst the younger generations.

9.3.4 Literacy use

A surprising number of literate interviewees amongst those aged 21-40 said that they do not read much, and an even greater number said they never or seldom write anything. *Table 9.18* shows that writing has little place in the everyday lives of many of these women.[36]

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[35] Her daughter was more interested in finding a job than continuing with her studies beyond junior middle school.

[36] There were 21 women who spoke about their personal reading habits and 21 who spoke about the amount of writing they did. Some of these women spoke about both aspects while others only spoke about one. Thus the figures are not a rigorous quantitative summary of the situation, but have been included here because they show some interesting trends amongst younger women. This information was imparted

Table 9.18: **Literacy use amongst literate women aged 21-40**

Frequency	Reading	Writing
Never	1	6
Seldom	7	10
Sometimes	6	
Often	7	5

The relevance of literacy in the everyday lives of women can be summarized very briefly in the words of some interviewees.

... We here in the countryside don't write much. (No.43, age 36)

... Now everybody....everybody is busy doing business, there's no time for writing at all. (Laughs) (No.2, age 26)

... It's not that they are too busy, women....ah, family women usually....men write a lot, women seldom write, I can't give a reason for it. (No.3, age 27)

... If I write it's when I'm at work, after I go home I don't have time to write. After I go home I have to do farm work! During work [I write]. (No.29, age 28)

... Writing, most people....most people don't write. (No.18, age 35)

... Mm....I seldom write. After the children come home on Saturdays and Sundays I help them, teach the children their characters. Usually I don't write. ... Apart from teaching the children, there's very little reason to write. (No.40, age 30)

... Now, for me writing has no use at all. (No.46, age 30)

... Ai....there's nothing to write that concerns me so I don't write at all. (No.39, age 38)

... I often write. When I'm at work....at work I often need to write. (No.31, age 22)

during the taped part of interviews which was more concerned with listening to what these women had to say than gathering material for a quantitative survey.

... Usually I write things to do with work. I try to find out what our family planning situation is...ah, fill in report forms ...ah, also carry out women's work...ah, these things...oh! (No.49, age 50)

Of five women who said they often write, four said it was in connection with their work but apart from that, they seldom write. Nevertheless, not everyone uses writing in connection with their work even when book keeping would appear to be essential. For example, a self-employed hairdresser earning 3/400 yuan a month does not write anything in relation to her business. When asked why she did not write at work she replies:

Interviewee: Oh, my work, like - I cut hair, I don't need to write, writing is completely irrelevant!

Interviewer: Then your hairdressing, is it your own hair dressing salon or is someone else's?

Interviewee: It's my own business...oh, my own business.

Interviewer: Don't you generally keep accounts? Do book keeping?

Interviewee: I don't keep accounts. (No.45)

Likewise, the self employed dressmaker earning 4/500 yuan a month cited earlier says:

Usually I do this work and there's nothing at all to write. I don't write anything. (No.15)

The most obvious problem that arises because women do very little writing is that they soon begin to forget the characters. A 23 year old housewife and farmer is an example of what happens.

Write? (Laughs.) Writing....the situation is I seldom write, nowadays it's like that, I don't write. I don't go to school anymore so I write very little!

[T]here are some characters I've written before I can't remember anymore, however, no matter what, I can recognize them, usually almost as soon as they come up then I can think of them, I

> don't really forget them. Oh, I can't forget them. (Laughs.) Just the ones I'm not very familiar with, that's all. (No.51)

Another young housewife and farmer 25 years old has a similar problem.

> A few characters I haven't retained I still forget. (Laughs.) I start to write but then can't write them. (No.53)

She says she seldom writes, she does not have time. Both of these interviewees are junior middle school graduates. A 40 year old housewife and farmer who is a senior middle school graduate is an example of what may happen to women who rarely do any reading or writing.

> Now after 15 or 16 years when I come across characters I could read, I don't know what they mean any more. When I pick up a pen, sometimes some characters I can write, while some characters I can't remember at all. ... This is how it is, if I haven't practised or studied them I can't remember them at all. (No.47)

Reading fares a little better than writing, with some women saying that they like to read. One interviewee already cited above as forgetting some characters says she writes very little but she likes to read.

> Interviewee; I like...I like to read magazines. (Laughs.)

> Interviewer: Mm...what sort of magazines?

> Interviewee: I subscribe to "Women's Life" and "Every Family Things".

> Interviewer: "Women's Life"?

> Interviewee: Yes.

> Interviewer: What else?

> Interviewee: Also...."Family....Family Life".

Interviewer: Do you read often?

Interviewee: Not often....when I have time....I....have....have spare time then I read. I read books.

Interviewer: Er....do you have much spare time?

Interviewee: Yes. (No.53)

Though this interviewee reads for enjoyment, some others do not like reading at all. For example, another interviewee aged 30 says:

Interviewee: When I have time I read, but I don't like reading.

Interviewer: Don't like to read?

Interviewee: No.

Interviewer: (Laughs.) Why don't you like to read?

Interviewee: There's too much housework, besides I don't like to read.

Interviewer: If you had time huh, what books would you read?

Interviewee: Read books, I seldom read books. I really love watching television. (Laughs.)[37] (No.40)

This interviewee finds no pleasure in reading, which means that her dislike of reading is likely to increase as time passes and she loses some of her reading skills.

Some women read in connection with their work, but rarely for enjoyment. For example, the next interviewee (aged 38) when asked whether she reads much responds:

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[37] Every interviewee has either a black and white or coloured television in her home and watching it seems to be a popular past-time as the next section shows.

Er....No, not often. ... I'm busy ah! Also those of us born in the countryside....reading is ....er...reading is....we buy books on apple growing that are widely available, when...when there's a need we read. However, we usually read very little. For example, putting insecticide on the peppers and apple trees....using insecticide. We only read when we need to put out this insecticide. When there's no need we don't read much at all. (No.39)

Another interviewee (aged 22) says:

Aiya! It seems that at work I do a lot but when I leave work and go home, I have too much housework and I don't have time to read. (No.32)

She is unmarried and her work in a local factory demands some reading, but if she follows the pattern of many of the other married interviewees who stay home to do household chores, farming and look after their children she, like them, may end up doing very little reading. One interviewee who is illiterate herself sums up the situation according to her own observations.

Few [women in this village] read.....because they don't have time, they are far too busy with housework and don't have time at all. They are also really busy with farm work, they don't have time to read the newspaper. They only drill the children with their characters after the children come home from school, teach the children to recognize the characters, help the children with their homework, tutor the children for awhile. Women do not read newspapers and books, they don't have time to read.

She also says they rarely write

because they don't have time. After waiting for the children to come home from school they cook something for them and as soon as they've eaten it, [the women] go to the fields to work. They are so busy they do not have time for writing. They only have time for their children, to drill the children with their characters. (No. 10)

Since interviewees often mention how busy they and other women are, we should look at what they say keeps them so busy all day.

9.4 The nature of women's work in the home

9.4.1 Everyday activities

The two charts on the next page are based on descriptions of a full day's activities[38] and show that, whether it is the total number of times which certain activities are mentioned *(Figure 9.2a)* or the total number of women who mention them *(Figure 9.2b)*, the order of precedence is the same, except for watching television. When the data for *Figure 9.2a* is then broken down further by age in *Figure 9.3*, we see that cooking, serving or eating food assume greatest prominence, punctuating other everyday activities for women as a whole, and for women in every age group. Only the youngest group of women (group a) mentioned paid work or working in their own business as often as cooking, serving or eating food, and the eldest group (group e) referred to looking after children (usually grandchildren) more.[39]

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[38] Interviewees were asked to describe the activities of a complete day from the time they get out of bed in the morning until they go to bed at night. To make the task easier and to anchor their thoughts in a 'real' day they were asked to think of what they did 'yesterday'. These descriptions were transcribed and the number of times each activity was referred to put into tables which became the basis for charts which show the relative importance of the tasks in the minds of the respondents. The charts do not show the actual number of times the tasks were performed. (See Appendices *Table 11.8* for details.) For example, many interviewees cook three meals during a single day, however, the number of times this was actually mentioned indicates the relative importance of cooking in punctuating the day's activities to those who mentioned them. Some interviewees mentioned a particular task frequently while others did not mention it at all. Because of this, and the small sample involved, this kind of analysis is prone to some distortions especially in group five where there are only four women. Where this occurs, some explanation will be given.

[39] This needs to be qualified in respect of the older group of women because there were only four interviewees who did this part of the interview and there was only one of these who was responsible for looking after grandchildren, though she does say that there are many other women in the same position as herself. Two other women in this group of interviewees were in their mid-eighties and were themselves

Figure 9.2a: **Total number times certain every-day activities mentioned**

Figure 9.2b: **Total number women mentioning certain everyday activities**

Cleaning/tidying
Children
Washing
Cooking/serving/eating
Caring sick/elderly
Farming/animal husbandry
Paid work/sideline
Knitting
Reading
Watching TV   *Recreation*
Resting
Going for walk

'looked after'. The extent of differences between women in this group is not surprising given that it is a group which covers a very wide age range.

Figure 9.3: **Number of times certain everyday activities were mentioned by age group** (Recreational activities are pulled out for clarity, though 'knitting' could also be considered as work.)

9.3a: **Group 1: 21-30 years** (N=15)

Legend:
- Cleaning/tidying
- Children
- Washing
- Cooking/serving/eating
- Caring sick/elderly
- Farming/animal husbandry
- Paid work/sideline
- Knitting
- Reading
- Watching TV — *Recreation*
- Resting
- Going for walk

9.3b: **Group 2: 31-40 years** (N=14)

9.3c: **Group 3: 41-50 years** (N=9)

9.3d: **Group 4: 51-60 years** (N=6)

9.3e. **Group 5: 61+ years** (N=4)

As one 37 year old interviewee put it:

> When I get up in the morning I do the cooking. The children aren't up so I get up and go and cook something for grandma [at her place]. After I get back, then I sweep the house and cook something for the family. Coming or going it's all cooking, is there anything else to do?

She says that at harvest time when she's busiest

> you have to be outside doing the harvesting but when you come home you still have to do the cooking, you still have to eat when you're busy! (No.24)

On the other hand, the cooking may be shared by the women in the family so that the younger women can go out to work. This is the case of a 35 year old interviewee who works with her husband selling cloth during the day.

> At present I get up in the morning, then...er...get the children ready. I make the children get up in the morning, six o'clock they get up, then I cook something for the children. After the meal is cooked and eaten I get the children off to school. When they've gone to school I tidy up the house a bit, do the cleaning and give it a sweep. When I've finished tidying up, about eight or nine o'clock I'm able to....er....go to the market to sell cloth...er...er...I go there for the whole day. In the middle of the day I make sure the children have something to eat, only in the afternoon do they hurry home to eat tea. That's my whole day, it's very simple!

When asked whether she cooks the evening meal she says:

> Ah, when I return in the afternoon my mother-in-law has [already] done the cooking. In the middle of the day, it's my mother-in-law who cooks something for the children. There are two children to cook for. (No.18)

Her mother-in-law (aged 65) describes what happens from her perspective.

> Ah...after I get up in the morning, his (her grandson) mum cooks something for the children. This means I can get on with tidying the house a bit. His mum then waits for the children to go,

then I go to buy vegetables for the children, his mum doesn't go to the market, I buy the vegetables for the children. When I return, I cook the midday meal for the children. After I've finished cooking the midday meal, I go out in the afternoon to sit around for awhile with the [other] old folks for a bit of entertainment, oh! When I come home, then I cook something for the children. The children, these days the children need a lot of supervision. His mum is not home all day. Now in the middle of the day I have to be at home, if I'm not home, the children run amok. When they come home they have homework to do, nowadays after going to school, they still have to do homework, when they come home they bring some homework to do. I have to see that they do it properly, make sure they eat the food I've cooked. Their dad is busy all day....er....usually has too many things to do to [to pay attention] to the children. Their mum sells cloth all day....er....now in the middle of the day I have to take responsibility for these things!

Later she says many of the other women her age are like her.

The whole day is taken up minding children for their daughters-in-law! They do the washing, dry it for them and do the cooking. [Their daughters-in-law] still aren't home so they do the cooking for them. ....Looking after the children, this is the main thing. (No.19)

She is not able to read or write herself, but she says that those her age who can do not read or write because, like her, they are too busy minding their grandchildren. These three interviewees illustrate the arrangements in the homes of many of the interviewees, with cooking being the most important activity punctuating the days of women between the ages of 31 and 60.

Attending to children is the second most mentioned activity which occupies women in groups one to four after cooking (and paid work in group one). While some women like the mother-in-law of the cloth seller consider child-minding to be relatively demanding work, another interviewee (aged 26) does not regard household chores and child minding as 'work'. When asked what she does all day, she says:

Interviewee: As I said, I don't have anything to do the whole day, only look after two children.[40]

Interviewer: That is to say, in the morning you get up.....[give us] a bit of an outline.

Interviewee: In the morn....in the morning I get up and do the cooking, after I've done the cooking and had something to eat, the children get up and I help them get dressed, then I don't do anything. In my spare time I do some knitting and wash clothes. That's all I do all day, other than that, I don't do anything.

Hence it appears that looking after children and washing clothes are not 'work', according to her way of thinking. She is adamant that she does nothing all day, even in the busy season. When asked which season is the busiest she does not answer the question at first but simply reiterates what she said before – that she doesn't do anything all day. Yet, later on in the interview when talking about whether she liked to read she says:

....er.....at the moment I have children, I don't usually do any reading. ... Looking after the children leaves me with no time for reading. (No. 54)

Another young mother (aged 23) also does not seem to think of child minding as work.

Each morning, that is the whole day I do....the main thing I do is cooking, just cooking, when I'm free, I look after the children,[41] mind the children, these things are....ah....I do washing....do some washing....wash clothes, do housework (of course). During the day there's not a lot [to do] it's minding the children, now I have a child and look after the children. In other words, we do the housework together[42]. Then, there's nothing at all to do. (No.51)

Child minding is something she does when she is 'free' or when she has 'nothing at all to do'. Later, she too says she does not have time to read or write anything because she has to look after children. On the other hand, the cloth selling mother (mentioned above) says:

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[40] She has two sons aged 2 and 3.

[41] She has a one year old and she helps look after her divorced brother-in-law's child.

... after I return from selling cloth all day I'm frantically busy, ... the days are short. Each aspect that has been learned by the children must....I still have to go through it with them and make sure they've got it. I have to supervise their studies, this means I'm really busy...ah! (No.18)

Thus she does not consider attending to her children's studies as something she does when there's nothing else to be done. It is an important part of her day's activities.[43]

Further examination of the data indicates that women aged 31-50 (groups b and c) have the least amount of leisure time, while elderly women (group e) have the most. An example of an interviewee in group c who gives the impression that she has to rush through her day is a 42 year who runs a sideline business making noodles.

In the morning I get up and sweep the yard straight away, this is all housework (of course). After sweeping the yard I quickly cook breakfast and then sometimes I will make noodles. The period of time after I get up until midday is fairly busy. In the backyard we keep two pigs and chickens so I hurry to feed the pigs and the chickens and cook something for the children. Also....er....also there are the old folks, a meal must be served up promptly for the old folks, then I tidy up the house a bit. Anyway, the time after I get up in the morning is fairly busy. In the afternoon it's a bit more relaxed. At midday, as you know, the children come back from school at 12 o'clock so I have to cook some lunch quickly. In the middle of the day ... if there are a lots people wanting noodles, I'm frantically busy. Sometimes I'm doing things in the house and the people wanting noodles come and call me. I have to rush between [the two jobs]. (Laughs.) I don't have any spare time at all. Then in the afternoon up until 4 or 5 o'clock I have a little bit of spare time. When evening comes, then the children return from school and I have to cook them something to eat straight away, that's something mainly for the school children, then you....then you are stuck there. Usually in the evening it's not until after 10 o'clock that I can go to bed, only then can I get some rest. Each day is busy. In the evening I have still more work to do, wash clothes, do a bit of tidying up around the house, that's right isn't it. Don't have ....don't have

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[42] She and her mother-in-law.

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> any spare time. Sometimes there's also work that needs to be done in the fields ... there's the weeding, tilling the ground ... it's also pretty busy. In the afternoon I might have to hurry out to the fields too. (Laughs and then clears her throat.) (No.4)

She says she's even busier in June when the wheat must be harvested and the corn planted. Women are busy doing housework, engaged in businesses, trying to earn a living, "... they are all orientated towards money (now)," she says, they do not have time for reading and they rely on talking rather than writing.

Interviewees in groups b and c were also more likely than the other groups to be involved in farming. For example, a 40 year old interviewee describes her day.

> I get up in the morning and because the children go to school, I cook something for the children first. After I've done the cooking, I sweep the house inside and outside, then I clean up and put things in order, clear up, oh! [Then] I start work. Sometimes it's doing work for other people, sometimes it's here in the fields, that's so! Sometimes I'm engaged in construction work, sometimes I'm in the field doing that work (farm work). That's what I do each day, it's endless cycles), it's always like this. ... When....when I'm busiest I work an extra shift in the evening,....ai....an extra shift threshing the wheat. It's do the harvesting, clear the land, cultivate the land, haul the manure, put the manure out. That's the busy season. Summer is the busiest season....at night, see, it's doing some outside work, thresh the wheat, do the winnowing, we struggle to bring the wheat in when there's a bumper harvest. (No.47)

Despite being a senior middle school graduate, she does little reading and even less writing because she is too busy and was cited earlier as having forgotten some characters. There are other interviewees also involved in agricultural production, such as the cloth seller, who say that farming does not take up much of their time.

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[43] Several interviewees mentioned that they spent their evenings 'drilling' their children and helping them with their homework.

Farming? We here [in this village] do farming, but there's not much farming to do. Now the farming is all mechanized, so it's not all that busy. In summer when farming is at its busiest, at most, it is only for one week. It's all completed in a week. We employ others to harvest the wheat, do the harvesting, or get a machine to do the harvesting, during the day. The first day we dry the wheat and in the evening we work overtime to thresh the wheat. The second day we dry the [threshed] wheat. See, we finish it all in three or two days! (No.18)

This contrasts sharply with the previous interviewee who, it appears, does a lot more farm labour and does not mention mechanization at all. Another interviewee who is a full-time housewife and farmer is of the view "...until harvest it's not all that busy here," nevertheless, reading is not one of her pastime activities. (No.39) The only regular reading she does is associated with helping her children do their homework. Occasionally she may look up information on apple growing but she says this does not occur often.

Finally, caring for the sick and elderly occupies more time in groups b, c and d. Two interviewees, one in group b and one in group c, mention having to prepare meals for elderly relatives and two interviewees in group d mention that they had to care for sick husbands. In group e, two interviewees (including an 84 year looked after by the interviewee in group c) and another aged 85 years, are cared for by their daughters-in-law. The 84 year old says:

I don't do anything, my...er...er...legs hurt, also my hearing is bad, so my daughter-in-law does everything, I can't do anything.[44] (No.5)

The 85 year old said something similar.[45]

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[44] This interviewee had bound feet and was sitting on the kang at the time of the interview, where it appears she spends a considerable part of her day.

[45] She too had bound feet.

> I can't do anything, also I'm not allowed to do anything. She (her daughter-in-law) doesn't dare let me do anything, she's afraid I'll trip and fall. (No.6)

A sixty year old interviewee (group d) talks about her day in which caring for her sick husband is an important part of her activities.

> I get up in the morning....er....and give the yard a sweep,....er....then I get my old man *(lao Han)* dressed. My old man is sick, I have to get him dressed. After getting my old man dressed, he goes out into the yard for a stroll while I cook my old man something. After I've cooked something for my old man and he's eaten it, I lock the door and go out with my old man for a long walk, go walking with my old man to get some exercise. It's like this, take him outside for a walk. When it's....when it's 8 o'clock, these last two days have been really cold so we didn't go out until 9 o'clock. ... We both (go out), I have to take my old man, so I go for a walk. After strolling around for an hour or so we come back. After we get back we have a rest and my old man drinks some tea and rests for awhile. Then at 12 o'clock, I give my grandchild, who's been at school, something to eat. I cook lunch, when it's eaten we go again. These things, all day we go walking ... the whole day it's get up, then it's like this. (No.7)

When she is not out walking she says she does some housework. She also has to attend to people who rent rooms in their guest house. The other interviewee (No.55) in group d not only does most of the cooking and housework in her family, which includes her son, his wife and their two children, but her retired husband also needs her assistance. In addition, she is responsible for looking after her two grandchildren. These two interviewees, one a primary school graduate, both attended literacy classes but can remember very little now. The 60 year old who rents out rooms says she has forgotten most of what she learned but is still able to do some arithmetic. Thus what she has retained is what has been useful to her everyday life. The primary school graduate says that she recognizes very few characters and even if she could, she's "... too busy to read now". The noodle maker who

also looks after her elderly in-laws gives the last word on the situation for her, and others like her.

> Look, from the time we get up at six in the morning right up until nine or ten o'clock at night we are busy. It's washing, tidying, we don't waste a minute then we go to bed.....Think about it, where is the time to study or to write [anything]. (Laughs.) (No.4)

9.4.2 Views on who should do the household chores

When asked whether boys and girls should both do household chores, the majority of women said that they both should, but when pressed further with specific illustrations or asked whether their own children shared the work in the house, there were many qualifications about what this meant in reality. For example,

> Interviewer: Do you personally think girls....boys like girls should help with the housework?
>
> Interviewee: The same, basically the same.
>
> Interviewer: Then in your family do the boys and girls both do the work?
>
> Interviewee: Boys do very little and the girls do a lot. The girls do the cleaning while the boys can go to the fields. (No.12 age 41)

Another interviewee also thinks that boys and girls in her own family do the same household chores, but when asked if her son (aged 15) helped with the cooking, the washing or cleaning, she said that her son did not usually do housework. After then being asked whether this was because she did not ask him to do it or whether he was unwilling to do it, she answers:

> Usually it is because I never get him do it, also he won't do it. None of my children usually....do it, you ask them but they don't do it. (Laughing.) (No.42 age 42)

Although she makes it clear that her son does not do housework, she goes on to say that the girls (aged 10 and 12) will not even help her when asked, meaning housework is clearly seen to be the mother's responsibility in her family. Another interviewee says:

> Ai....my view is that girls do more housework, boys....boys don't do it.....girls are good, as soon as they are born they do it. (Said while laughing.) As soon as a boy is born he is off running around and can't do it. (Laughs.) My view is that girls do more and boys do less. (No.10 age 39)

Some interviewees said that the girl was the eldest child and was expected to do more because she was the eldest. For example,

> I'm a bit biased towards the boy because he is small, whatever needs doing I get my daughter to do it. (Laughs.) The child still does some [chores], but doesn't do much because he is young. (No.34 age 36)

Her daughter was thirteen and her son was ten at the time of the interview. If at the age of ten her son is still not doing much in the house and she considers her daughter is much better at housework, her son will probably continue to do very little housework when older. Another interviewee who has a daughter (14 years) and two sons (11 and 10 years) says:

> They both help do it. Doing...er...my daughter is the eldest, the older one can do a bit more, the younger ones are still small.

After being asked if they will do more when they are a little older she says they certainly will, however, when asked if that includes some cooking or washing clothes her response is:

> Doing the cooking, generally when they've grown up all the cooking is....it's not like that at all. It's the girls who mostly do....definitely do the cooking. When it comes to the farm work, the boys do more. (Of course) (No.44 age 38)

All but one of the above interviewees' answered the question about boys and girls doing housework by saying they should 'be the same', but when this was pursued further 'the same' generally meant 'according to the usual gender expectations', as it did in another part of the interview which dealt with their own treatment as children. There were other interviewees who also stated their own personal views on this subject quite clearly.

... I think ... girls definitely should do more (housework), boys should definitely work outside! (No.15 age 21)

... They can both help do the housework ... Each of them should do it. (Laughs.) Cooperatively do it, they can work in the fields and they can also work in the house. (No.29 age 28)

... I think whoever has the time should do it, that's my view. (No.45 age 27)

... I reckon females do the housework. (Laughs.) ... The males go to work, also they are seldom home. (No.53 age 25)

... (Laughs.) I believe ... in any case when boys reach.....reach seventeen or eighteen, they usually aren't at school any more, that's so isn't it? They have to go and learn a trade. They have to go out to work, don't they? Girls have to do the housework at home. Generally the girls do the housework. Boys don't usually do it ... The boys are generally able to work in the fields and do the heavy work. (No.54 age 26)

... (Laughs.) In any case boys don't do housework. ...er...I feel they should myself, but the boys in the family don't do it. (Laughs.) ... They can't do it. (No.27 age 35)

... I think it's the same. Take my three...three children, If I'm doing housework whoever comes home helps me do it. Similarly, when I'm in the field working they all go, ah! They are equal, they all get treated equally. (No.43 age 36)

... Mm....It's usually best to get....get....I think that it's only natural to get the girls to do the housework. (Laughs.) It goes without saying that boys never help you with the housework. (No.14 age 41)

From this collage of voices we can hear that housework is still generally regarded as the province of females in the minds of many of these interviewees and whether they think boys should do more in the house, the reality is that they seldom do.

Before concluding this chapter it would be useful to include some teachers' views on gender difference as they, like parents, are likely to have considerable influence on the development of children's attitudes towards gender and thus, the gendering of literacy.

9.5 Teachers views on gender difference

The main focus of the interviews undertaken in Fufeng County has been on gender attitudes and practices and their effects on the development and maintenance of literacy amongst rural women. Because of the constraints of time I concentrated mainly on interviewing village women and interviewing teachers was secondary to this task. Thus the sample of teachers and school principals is very small: eleven primary school teachers in two schools and eight junior middle school teachers in one school.[46] This means that the presentation of the data below is not the result of a comprehensive survey and therefore can only note some interesting features related to gender which have become apparent in these interviews.

9.5.1 Primary school teachers

The first of the two primary schools, *Taibai Zhongxin Xiaoxue*, is a rural village school which, at the time of the interviews, had an enrolment of 360 students (including pre-school children), 60 per cent of whom were boys. Of the 17 teachers in the school, 7

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[46] The principals were mainly interviewed for general information about the three schools rather than their views on gender.

were male and 10 were female. The principal said that the attendance rate was excellent and that all the graduates of the previous year (1997) went on to junior middle school, which was only about one kilometre away. He said children usually start school at the age of six or seven, with six year olds spending one year in pre-school. School fees at the time were 24 yuan per semester. The second school, *Xiguan Yifu Xiaoxue*, is a relatively new school which the county is developing as a model school. It had an enrolment at the beginning of 1998 of 1003 students, 508 of whom were boys and 495 were girls. There were 38 teachers: 11 males and 28 females. This principal also said that attendance rates were excellent (100 per cent) and that all the children in the graduate class of the previous year went on to attend the junior middle school which was only a short distance down the road. The children usually begin school when they are six years old, with many already having been to kindergarten and pre-school. School fees were 30 yuan per semester at the time. Neither of the school principals could provide any figures for children who had dropped out of school. *Table 9.19* shows the age and sex of the primary teachers interviewed.[47]

Table 9.19: **Age and sex of primary school teachers interviewed** (N=11)

Age	21-25	26-30	31-35	36-40	41-45	46-50
No.	2M/2F	2M/2F		2F	1M	

Of special interest at this point in a chapter concerned with the effects of gender on the development and maintenance of literacy are teachers' responses to questions about their perceptions of the relative strengths and weaknesses of boys and girls in areas such as: ability, learning difficulties, behavioural problems, concentration, motivation, the ability or willingness to follow instructions, bookwork and so on. Although focusing on possible differences does itself tend to influence answers by suggesting that there may be

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[47] See Appendices *Table 11.9* for details on primary teachers' circumstances.

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differences, it was still possible for teachers to take a stance that there is little or no difference between boys and girls in regard to a particular aspect and, indeed, one primary school teacher's view was that individual differences were greater than any differences between the sexes with respect to ability, and two middle school teachers thought that there were no substantive differences between the sexes in junior middle school. Nevertheless, there are some observable trends when teachers' views are tabulated according to the themes and terms they generally used.

Figure 9.4: **Primary school teachers' perceptions of girls' and boys' character strengths/ weaknesses**

9.4a: **Boys**

9.4b: **Girls**

	Active/lively
	Bold/strong character/extroverted
	Others (all positive)
	Unruly/noisy/don't pay attention
	Careless
	Naughty/difficult to manage

	Conscientious/careful/disciplined
	Quiet/attentive/good concentration
	Obedient/dependable/easy to manage
	Gentle/refined
	Others (positive & negative)
	Timid/introverted
	Not lively

Summarized under the heading of 'character strengths and weaknesses' in *Figure 9.4,* the first very distinctive feature to emerge is an apparent negative perception of boys

by teachers. [48] This negativity, however, needs to be seen in the light of following statement made by one of the teachers.

> Boys and girls each have their own characteristics. Girls are obedient and clever, however, in some respects when they encounter problems, they are not as penetrating as boys. For example, handling problems, they are timid, afraid of things, but boys are different in this respect. Although they are naughty, they are at the same time brave. Compared with girls, they have more spunk. (No.6)

Thus what seem to be negative attributes amongst boys may sometimes be viewed by teachers as positive attributes. Nevertheless, many teachers considered that the more 'sedate' and 'reliable' characteristics of girls tend to mellow some of the more disruptive influences of boys making classes more manageable for teachers. According to one teacher:

> If boys are put in the one class, you would need an experienced teacher to manage them because such a class would not be easy. This is because boys are somewhat troublesome. (Laughs.) (No.5)

Another is of the opinion that

> if there are lots of boys, their characters are comparatively strong, so there tends to be a lot of fighting. If the proportion of boys and girls is about the same, it seems that this problem suddenly lessens. (No.9)

Teachers also thought that having boys and girls together in the same class had positive effects such as:

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[48] What is charted is the number of teachers who ascribed particular characteristics to boys or girls. 'Others' refers to characteristics which were only mentioned by one teacher. In respect of boys it includes –take the initiative, positive, persevere and interested (there were no negative characteristics mentioned by only one teacher). In respect of girls it includes – willingness to participate, able to express feelings, settled, and, on the negative side, no initiative and don't persevere.

[G]irls are able to use their attentiveness to influence boys and cause the boys to change their careless bad habits. They can help each other. With respect to activities, boy's bravery and liveliness can also influence the girls. (No.6)

When it comes to cleaning the classroom

jobs that need the physical strength of the boys in the class, such as doing the cleaning, shifting tables and carrying water, boys are better than girls. Girls' physical strength is less. They work wiping a few tables and sweeping the floor, these more delicate jobs, they do them much better than the boys. (No.8)

This latter view does not take account of the fact that girls in upper primary school classes are often bigger and more developed than boys of the same age.

The idea of males and females being 'mutually complementary' is very prominent. This is apparent in the different kinds of character strengths and weaknesses attributed to boys and girls in *Figure 9.4*. In fact, characteristics at the top of each list in the legend of the figure can be paired with characteristics at the bottom of the other list to form a sets of dichotomous relationships (e.g. 'naughty/difficult to manage' (boys) and 'obedient/dependable/easy to manage' (girls). There is no overlapping of characteristics between boys and girls, no instance where, for example, a teacher describes boys as conscientious or girls as naughty. Furthermore, the expectation that boys and girls can learn from each other is also based on the idea of interaction between 'opposites', with the 'positive' characteristics of boys and girls ameliorating the 'negative' characteristics of the other. One teacher summarizes the general view of the teachers.

If boys and girls are together in the one class, you can bring out their mutually complementary [attributes]. Boys have some good points that girls can study and boys can study girls' good points, ... (No.11)

Thus it appears that the notion that males and females are 'opposites' or 'mutually complementary' is frequently reinforced by teachers in the classroom. *Figure 9.5* summarizes primary school teachers' views on the reasons for having boys and girls in the same class. [49]

Figure 9.5: **Reasons for having boys and girls in the same class** *(primary school teachers)*

- Mutually complimentary
- Learn from/help/influence each other
- Reflect society
- Learn about opposite sex
- Activities better
- Easier to manage
- Others

When it comes to academic ability, the first point that needs making is that it is difficult to separate academic performance from character strengths and weaknesses. For example, teachers say that it is because girls are more conscientious, diligent and careful when doing their work, they do better than boys whose boisterousness tends to mean they give less attention to their studies.

> Usually when you give [girls] a homework assignment, they will complete it, furthermore, what they do is done well. Boys in this respect are not as good, however, boys' brains are comparatively clever. The reason girls always do well is because they are diligent. (No.4)

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[49] What is charted is the number of teachers who ascribed particular characteristics to boys or girls. 'Others' refers to characteristics which were only mentioned by one teacher, these include – practise life skills, learn about sexual division, it's natural, better atmosphere and class more dynamic. The category 'mutually complementary' also includes the number of teachers who said that boys and girls were physically complementary and/or whose personalities were regarded as being complementary.

> [G]irls' ability to remember things is strong, they also recall things fairly quickly. As for boys, they are rather too fond of playing around. After they learn something, they don't study, then forget it. The teacher cannot force them to go and do it, they are forgetful and in no time they just forget it. (No.10)

This, teachers say, also affects what they are good at doing.

> Take language classes for example, female students are relatively conscientious and dependable when compared to boys. Their language achievements are better than those of boys. (No.2)

In respect of mathematics:

> the teacher's questions in the classroom, especially those that need one to use one's brains, it's mostly the boys who answer them all correctly, it also shows in the difficult test questions in the back of the book. And questions testing intelligence, usually it's the boys who do them correctly. There aren't any girls who get them right. However, in the everyday homework – for example, in the relatively easy questions, or the mixed operations questions, needing conscientiousness to do but the difficulty is not too great – not many boys do them correctly. The majority getting them all correct are female students. (No.7)

Thus girls are generally regarded as being better at doing the things which involve effort, such as – memorizing and doing assignments but boys are thought to do better where the work is more intellectually demanding or involves solving problems rather than needing diligence.

9.5.2 Junior middle school teachers

The third school, *Fufeng Chengguan Chuzhong* is a large junior middle school in the centre of Fufeng (county seat) having an attendance at the time of around 1500 children of whom around 900 were boys and 600 were girls. There were 100 teachers at

the school – 44 males and 56 females.[50] The principal said that just under half of the previous year's (1997) graduate class went on to senior middle school, a little over 20 went on to specialized secondary school *(zhongzhuan)*, 10-20 per cent stayed down to repeat the year, some went on to vocational school *(zhigao)*, and a few started work. Children start at this school between the ages of 12-15 years, reflecting the fact that children begin primary school at different ages. He said that about 80 per cent of the students were from rural areas and that school attendance rates were excellent (100 per cent). This school, like *Xiguan Yifu Xiaoxue* is being developed as a model school and receives special funding from the county. Student fees were 45 yuan per semester at the time of the interviews. *Table 9.20* shows the age and sex of the eight junior middle school teachers interviewed.[51]

Table 9.20: **Age and sex of junior middle school teachers interviewed** (N=8)

Age	21-25	26-30	31-35	36-40	41-45	46-50
No.	1F	1M		2M/3F	1M	

When a similar summary of 'character strengths and weaknesses' is put together in *Figure 9.6*, many of the same characteristics attributed to boys and girls by primary teachers *(Figure 9.4)* are similarly attributed by junior middle school teachers.[52] Once again, there are more negative characteristics assigned to boys than girls. Apart from conscientiousness and diligence which were not mentioned at all, the general picture is similar with boys being given what are usually thought to be the 'stronger' attributes. Two

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[50] The principal attributed the fact that there were more female teachers than males to salaries being too low to interest males and that many of the teachers were the wives of cadres and town officials.

[51] See Appendices *Table 11.10* for details of junior middle school teachers' circumstances.

[52] What is charted is the number of teachers who ascribed particular characteristics to boys or girls. 'Others' refers to characteristics which were only mentioned by one teacher. In respect of boys it includes – extroverted, strong principles and, on the negative side, poor concentration. In respect of girls it

teachers said that there were no noteworthy differences between boys and girls. One of these who said that having boys and girls together in the same class meant they could help each other was unable to be more specific about what she meant. The other teacher said that urban/rural differences and differences between families were greater than any differences between the sexes. When asked about the advantages of having boys and girls in the same class, however, she replies:

Figure 9.6: **Junior middle school teachers' perceptions of boys' and girls' character strengths/weaknesses**

9.6a: **Boys**   *9.6b:* **Girls**

Boys legend:
- Active/lively/exuberant
- Interested/curious/tries things
- Tough/persevere
- Others (positive & negative)
- Unruly/play around/not sensible
- Naughty/difficult
- Careless
- Do not try/do not persevere

Girls legend:
- Careful
- Quiet/good concentration
- Steady/dependable
- Gentle/soft/refined/sedate
- Others (positive & negative)
- Timid/introverted

[B]oys and girls in respect of life and natural dispositions, there are still definite differences, this is a natural phenomenon. By having boys and girls together, without noticing it they are an encouragement [to each other]. Moreover, boys tend to be a bit careless, girls are a bit more refined, so they are able to overcome their weaknesses by learning from each other. (No.2)

includes – sensitive, interested, lively and, on the negative side, distracted by boy/girl relations, rigid and don't persevere.

Hence her view still fits within the general scheme described by most of the other teachers and illustrated in the figure above even though she says that other differences are more noticeable.

We also see some of the same themes emerging in the reasons for having boys and girls in the same class *(Figure 9.7)*, such as 'mutually complementary' and 'learning, helping or influencing each other', but there also appear to be some new ideas, such as: the need for balanced development, avoiding the creation of divisions, and making progress together.[53]

Figure 9.7: **Reasons for having boys and girls in the same class** *(junior middle school teachers*

Mutually complimentary
Learn from/help/influence each other
Balanced development
Avoid creating division
Make progress together
Easier to manage
Others

Closer examination of the context in which these new ideas are used, however, reveals that they are still tied to the first two. For example, 'making progress together' is linked to 'learning from, helping or influencing each other'. Teachers who mention the need for a 'balanced development' do so in the context of talking about mutually complementary characteristics where the influence of the other helps to avoid 'lopsided' development. For example,

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[53] 'Others' include – compete with each other, learn about the opposite sex, reflect society, and boys and girls are basically similar.

> [I]f girls were put in one class, (they) would easily become feminized and continue to have a soft personality, no toughness. (No.5)

The 'creation of divisions' is seen to occur if boys and girls with their mutually complementary characteristics are separated. Thus the idea that males and females are 'mutually complementary' still underlies all of the reasons given for having boys and girls in the same class in the different terminology used by primary and junior middle school teachers.

With regard to academic performance, teachers still generally thought that girls did better than boys because boys' studies were affected by their tendency to play around while girls were more focused. There were some qualifications, however, such as some girls in junior middle school being distracted by romantic notions. One teacher says:

> there may be boys who give them a note, at that time girls' hearts are easily influenced, easily distracted ... (No.5)

This affects their studies, she says, and they do not do as well. Another qualification concerns the perception that boys are better at science and mathematics, while girls are better at languages. Attributes ascribed to boys include being quick thinkers, able to think logically and work with abstract concepts. Girls, on the other hand, are attributed with having better memories, good imaginations and better study habits. Although some teachers were quite emphatic about the complementary nature of the different abilities of boys and girls, two teachers did not consider there were important differences in academic ability and one said that differences only became apparent when students reached their third year at junior middle school.[54] Nevertheless, it is clear the general view of junior middle school teachers is similar to that expressed by primary teachers.

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[54] The reasons for this are usually assumed to be related to changes at puberty which are thought to affect girls more than boys. See earlier discussion on this in Chapter Six, section 6.3.

Interviews with teachers and school principals reveal some important matters relating to gender. The first point concerns the substantial gender imbalance in two schools (one primary school and the junior middle school) where the enrolment rates given by the two principals indicate that boys outnumbered girls to the extent of 3:2.[55] (In the third school there was only a slight bias towards boys.) This must indicate that either: a preference for boys has resulted in fewer girls than boys being born; or, girls are not receiving the same opportunities for education as boys. When the data for children born to the village women interviewed are collated in *Table 9.21* we see that there is a clear bias towards boys.

Table 9.21: **Number of male and female children of interviewees**

Age of interviewee	21-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	61+
Boys : girls	9:8	23:19	17:11	15:12	11:4

The figures for interviewees aged 21-30 years are not relevant because these women have not completed their families and the children they already have are not usually of school-age. The figures in the next two age groups, however, are relevant because most of these women have completed their families and their children are of school-age. If these two groups are combined we find that 40 out of a total of 70 children (57 per cent) are boys. In respect of opportunities for education, there are some interesting features. The first is that the age range for children starting school varies between six and nine years of age for the children already at school which also means that there was a similar age range in the various school grades. Of those children between the ages of six and nine who were still

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[55] As stated earlier, at Taibai Zhongxin Xiaoxue, there were 360 children enrolled in the school, including pre-school children. When asked what proportion were boys and girls, the principal said that around 60% were boys and 40% were girls. In the case of the junior middle school, there were 1500 children, of whom 600 were girls and 900 were boys. These are extraordinary figures, given that all the

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not at school, three six year old boys were considered to be too young and two girls and one boy aged seven, and one girl aged eight, were still at kindergarten. All of those aged between 15-18 years were at junior middle school, senior middle school or technical school. There was only one boy and one girl aged 15 still in primary school and no children in this age group who had started work. Although there may be a slight tendency for girls to start school later than boys, there appear to be no girls whose education was cut short because they left school as soon as they turned 15 years. The gender bias seen in the two schools is consistent with the preference for boys in the families of the interviewees, but the degree to which this bias occurs in two of the schools is substantially greater than the gender imbalance seen among the school-age children of the women interviewed in this study. The only possible explanation for this is that the families of the women interviewed were unrepresentative of those whose children attend these two schools and that girls' educational opportunities are still more limited than those of boys.

With respect to teachers' attitudes toward gender, the idea that males and females are 'mutually complementary' is very strong. Boys are usually described as being 'active' with all other terms used for the attributes of boys reflecting this. Girls, on the other hand, are described in terms which together could be summarized as being more 'passive'. Boys are thought of as being 'strong' while girls are said to be more 'delicate'. Boys do the 'heavy' jobs in the classroom and girls do the jobs that require care rather than strength. Boys are described as being more capable of logical or abstract thinking and solving problems, while girls are more sensitive and expressive. Classroom management and the general interaction between boys and girls in the classroom is discussed in terms of complementarity and the need for developing a balanced character through using their different attributes to help each other. One junior middle school teacher says:

school principals said that school enrolments and attendance rates were excellent and that all who should

As for students in a mixed class, doesn't China teach the five elements[56] and *yin/yang* balance? In teaching this aspect, with respect to sex, you can learn from each other's strong points to off-set one's weaknesses. (No.3)

It is clear that the terms used by teachers reflect the 'active/passive', 'strong/weak', 'heavy/light' 'logical/emotional' dichotomies associated with *yin* and *yang* and the idea that there is the need to develop a balanced character, that is, not too much *yin* and not too much *yang*. It is likely that the development of traditional gender ideas becomes self-fulfilling in classroom practice and in the process, continues to provide support for the gender division of labour.

9.6 Conclusion

The aim of this chapter has been to present an analysis of data gathered in the field with a view to discovering how, in a particular locality, the everyday lives and experiences of rural women affect the development and maintenance of literacy amongst females. The chapter began by looking at the county's efforts to implement nine-year education and carry out adult literacy work which was then followed by the presentation and analysis of interview data. In respect of the former, the first thing to emerge is that Fufeng seems to have been remarkably successful in its implementation of nine-year basic education, having received recognition for meeting the requirements set by the national government and qualified as a county which has eliminated illiteracy. It may therefore seem that a study of female illiteracy in a place which is recognized by the government as having achieved national literacy standards is somewhat misplaced. For example, in my interviews there was not a single woman who was not at least a primary school graduate in the 21-30 year

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be in school were in school.
[56] These are – wood, fire, earth, metal and water.

age group, although there were two who did not go on with their education and one who did not complete junior middle school. Amongst the school-age children of interviewees, there was still a tendency for some children to start their schooling rather late, in some cases, at the age of eight or nine, though there were none whose education was cut short because they had reached the age of fifteen. Thus the data based on the interviews with women appear to confirm county educational reports which suggest that the implementation of nine-year basic education has overcome the production of new illiterates amongst younger people. On the other hand, there appears to be some discrepancy between this data and the information given by principals in two schools which suggest that at least with respect to the catchment areas of these two schools, girls still may not have the same educational opportunities as boys.

The presentation of data in this chapter indicates that literacy practices are gendered as are the kind of literacies being taught in schools. First, the gendering of literacy occurs as literacy practices are institutionalized in the daily routines of the family and the village community. Amongst the interviewees, the gender division of labour, for example, means that most women do the more mundane, time consuming kinds of work such as housework and the repetitious tasks in farming or animal husbandry. When they earn an income of their own, it is usually doing work which can be viewed as an extension of their domestic work, such as: cooking, dressmaking, hairdressing, or carrying on a farming sideline. This work is done in addition to the daily demands of housework and children. The two themes which recur most often when these women speak about their reading and writing habits concern the lack of time to do much of either, and that there is little need to do either, especially writing. Some of the younger women said they read for enjoyment, but few of these women do any writing outside their working hours and some do not do much reading either. The lack of time because of the demands of household

chores and children is usually given as the reason for not reading or writing outside of working hours. Apart from helping children with their homework, most interviewees do not make much use of their literacy skills. If they do have some spare time in the evening, they generally choose to watch television rather than doing some reading for relaxation. As for writing, the comment 'men usually write but women seldom do' shows an awareness of different literacy practices for men and women.[57] The fact that the person who made this observation did not know why this difference existed, however, indicates a lack of consciousness of the role that the gender division of labour plays in supporting these different literacy practices.

The result of this gendering of literacy practices is the gradual loss of literacy skills and an increasing dislike for reading and writing. While it might not be totally unexpected that a primary school graduate might start to forget some characters, there were two junior middle school graduates, aged 23 and 25, who mentioned that they were starting to forget characters. These women, along with a senior middle school graduate aged 40 who said she can no longer recognize or write characters she once knew, are all housewives and farmers. It is clear that completing junior or senior middle school, therefore, is no guarantee that women will remain literate. As literacy skills decline through lack of use, women will be inclined to do even less reading than before as the number of characters which they can no longer recognize increases or they find reading hard work. As for literacy data, it is likely that these women will continue to be included in the statistics for those who are literate because their level of schooling is the measure for determining literacy levels, even though it is likely that some of them will end up semi-literate in their middle years.

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[57] A comparative study of literacy use amongst rural men and women needs to be done. It was not possible to do this within the scope of this thesis.

The second way in which literacy is gendered pertains to the different consequences of literacy for men and women. The data collected in these interviews indicate that being literate does not appear to have made a lot of difference to the opportunities available to the women interviewed. The expectation that education can change

> the situation of women and enable them to leave the house......and be liberated,....so they don't still have to do housework at the same time and then only be able to go out and do things half the time,.....[because then] the housework can be shared with their husbands and isn't something they alone have to do, (No.21)

is not being borne out in the homes of most of the literate women interviewed. This includes the home of the 31 year old senior secondary graduate cited above. When asked about the benefits of education for girls in particular, her response is:

> mm....I think it's....mm....[they] will have lots of opportunities when they go into society to make use....make use of their own abilities, use their creativity....er....be....be able to use their talents.

She says this even though her own experience shows that a senior middle school education has made little difference in her case, because being female has affected the opportunities available to women like her even when they are quite well educated. Nevertheless, most women hope that their children, including their daughters, will not be like themselves and that they will

> have the opportunity to step into society and not live like those of this generation. (No.21)

Another interviewee, a 35 year old junior middle school graduate, sums up the situation for all the women she knows.

[L]et the children go to school, promote reading for the children. Now people my age....it seems that they have given up on reading, reckon that this reading [business] isn't all that beneficial to them any more. ...

[W]hen it comes to writing....what do you write? ....take me these days, I promote learning for the children......let the children study, that's fine. It's like....I feel there isn't anything one needs to write, it's no good practising, what is there to do? (Laughing.)....nothing I'm aware of....(No.18)

There is the sound of disillusionment in these words.

The continuing popularity of patrilocal marriage and marriages involving economic transactions, together with a strong preference for sons and a clear gender division of labour show that cultural factors are still very important in determining the kind of life that women lead in the village. Many women, including younger women, still think that women should do the housework. Even in the homes of interviewees who think boys should do more in the house, boys continue to do a lot less than girls. Thus the expectation of better opportunities for girls in the village in the future seems to lack any reasonable assurance and it is likely that, unless they can do well enough at school to go on to university and leave the countryside altogether, women's opportunities to benefit from their education are likely to continue to be more limited than those of men.[58]

These issues also affect adult literacy work. Of the eleven illiterate women aged between 31-50, seven had never attended a literacy class and none of the four who did attend, graduated. The most common reason that these interviewees gave for not attending or continuing with literacy classes was they were too busy with household chores and children. Although they all generally thought they would be better off if they

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[58] Earlier discussion in Chapter Four, section 4.1.3 suggests that the pathway out of the countryside through higher education is not as easy as these women appear to believe.

could read and write, they see that many literate women in their villages do not read much and seldom write anything, thus there appears to be little to motivate these women to attend literacy classes even if they do have the time. It is also is likely that literacy classes held in the evening and during school breaks are a problem because children are usually home at that time and need supervision.

Finally, we see in the interviews with teachers that the gendering of literacy also occurs in the classroom. Literacy practices cannot be separated from the content of the material being taught or teachers' attitudes in the classroom. The idea that males and females are 'mutually complementary' is constantly reinforced in classroom practice as well as in teachers' different expectations of boys and girls. Hence what children see at home and hear at school makes the gender division of labour and the idea of males being the active agents and females being more passive, seem natural and therefore, more likely to be self-fulfilling. The notion of mutual complementarity is also seen to extend to the different kinds of abilities of boys and girls, promoting different kinds of literacy practices for boys and girls. Teachers generally attribute boys with having superior intellects and being more capable of logical thinking and solving problems, while they see girls as being better at languages because they have better memories, greater sensitivity and are more diligent. Thus the gender division of labour is a logical consequence of the perception that males and females have different kinds of abilities and attributes. The idea that women are better suited to caring for the home and family while men attend to other matters seems 'natural'. Literacy practice in the classroom does not appear to promote a critical literacy in which girls and boys are encouraged to question patrilocal marriage, the gender division of labour and male/female stereotyping. Despite the popularity of the rhetoric that males and females are equal, females still have to try and be like males if they want equality yet,

girls and boys continually receive messages in the classroom that they are different through the promotion of the ideology of mutual complementarity.

The literacy data collected in this field study show that literacy practices reflect social relations and, as social practices, literacy practices are imbued with gender ideologies. Graff's finding that inherited characteristics, such as gender, militate against any personal advantages that literacy may bring and that literacy makes little difference to the occupational advantages of people with the wrong characteristics seems to be confirmed in this interview data.[59] While women's circumstances have improved materially, when it comes to occupational advantages and liberation from the drudgery of housework and the more mundane farming jobs, it has made little difference. Education still tends to benefit people with the right characteristics most, in this instance, those with the right gender.

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[59] See Chapter Two of this thesis for discussion of Harvey Graff's work.

10 CONCLUSION: WOMEN, LITERACY AND LIBERATION IN RURAL CHINA

Beginning with the May Fourth Movement, 'women', 'literacy' and 'liberation' assumed symbolic value in the discourse of urban intellectuals who sought to transform China into a modern nation state. It could be said that *rural women* epitomized all that was wrong with Chinese society. Not only as 'peasants' were they regarded as 'backward', 'feudal', 'ignorant', and 'superstitious', but very few were literate. Furthermore, their subordination within the traditional family represented the worst aspects of the Chinese family system. This thesis has sought to examine the relationship between literacy and gender bearing in mind the commitment of the CCP to the goals of women's emancipation, universal literacy, and the liberation and transformation of the *whole* of Chinese society. Transforming Chinese society was not to be achieved by merely reforming the old culture; the old culture was to be annihilated. While there were anthropologists and sociologists, such as Fei Xiaotong, who were of the view that some aspects of traditional Chinese culture and society were worth keeping and building on, there were others, including Mao, who thought that traditional Chinese society and culture needed to be completely destroyed and replaced with an entirely new one.[1] Myron Cohen suggests, however, that

> ... it is precisely the enormity of Communist cultural ambitions, as backed by the politically enforced monopolization of cultural production and by the claim to be the sole legitimate source of cultural meaning, that in fact has led Communist states to be revealed as so culturally impotent.[2]

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[1] Hamilton, Gary G. and Wang Zheng, "Introduction," Fei Xiaotong, *From the Soil*, op. cit., p.18.

[2] Cohen, Myron L., "Cultural and political inventions in modern China," op. cit., p.152.

The large number of female illiterates in rural areas in China today is indicative of such a cultural impotence.

The emancipation of women was part of CCP policy from the beginning. This was partly a legacy of the May Fourth Movement, and partly the result of events taking place in the Soviet Union, where women's participation in the revolution was regarded as being essential to its success. Like the Soviet Union and in line with Marxist theory, the CCP linked women's emancipation to a change in economic and social structure. In 1922 and 1923, the CCP incorporated into its policy: equal rights for men and women, including the right to vote; the protection of female labour; and a commitment to abolishing legislation discriminating against women. It also established a Women's Section within the party.[3]

The situation with respect to early policy on education and the elimination of illiteracy is less clear. The most important statements on education were made by Mao himself and even then, they were scattered throughout his other writings. Mao began as an advocate of modern schooling, but after personally observing the resistance of rural people to such schools during a six month stay in Hunan in 1925, he changed his view. He agreed with them that the teaching materials, which were more appropriate to life in the city, were irrelevant to the needs of the people in the countryside.[4] Mao's view that education should be practical and relevant to the immediate political, ideological and economic needs of the countryside never wavered from that time on. His thoughts on education began to take shape in the Jiangxi Soviet period, but it was in Yan'an that he developed his most important ideas which were used later to guide educational thinking in the PRC. These include his ideas on the importance of the relationship between

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[3] Croll, Elisabeth, *Feminism and Socialism in China*, op. cit., p.119.

[4] Mao Tse-tung, "Report on an investigation of the peasant movement in Hunan [March 1927]," in *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, (Foreign Languages Press, Peking, 1965), Vol. 1, p.54.

knowledge and practice; and the need for a system of school administration which was based on local control and finance with central planning.[5]

Thus we see that women's emancipation and universal literacy have been designated as crucial to the ultimate goal of transforming Chinese society for most of the twentieth century. Both have been on the CCP's agenda since its inception and both have been part of its policy and programs in government. A study of female illiteracy in rural areas, therefore, affords us with an opportunity at the close of the century to gauge in a concrete way, not only what has been achieved in respect of the emancipation of women and the spread of education and literacy, but also the extent to which the transformation of the *whole* of Chinese society has taken place. Support for such an approach is to be found in Marx's statement "... the degree of the emancipation of women is the natural measure of general emancipation."[6]

This concluding chapter begins with a review of the findings from earlier chapters to discuss what has been achieved. I then consider the core findings in light of the different themes developed throughout the thesis. The chapter closes with a discussion of the nature of cultural transformation, including some consideration of the problems of trying to impose such a transformation from above.

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[5] Hawkins, John N., op. cit., pp.57-61, 86-90.

[6] Marx, Karl, *The Holy Family*, (Moscow, 1945), p.256. (Trans. 1956) Cited in Croll, Elisabeth, *Feminism and Socialism in China*, op. cit., p.118.

10.1 Female illiteracy in rural China

10.1.1 What has been achieved?

Few females were literate at the beginning of the twentieth century, and so the reduction of female illiteracy to 31.9 per cent, as indicated by the national census carried out at the beginning of the last decade of the century, represents a significant achievement.[7] Furthermore, the 1995 one percent sample survey suggests this has been further reduced to 24.05 per cent.[8] Nevertheless, Chapter Three's survey of national data indicates that at the end of the century, being female continues to be the characteristic linked most often to illiteracy. Although ethnicity, geographical location, urban/rural categories, age, remoteness, and economic circumstances have a serious impact on literacy levels, gender is the most consistent discriminatory factor affecting literacy levels. Almost three out of every four illiterates (72.49 per cent) are female. More importantly, the proportion of illiterates who are female has continued to increase during the last two decades.

John Buck's survey of rural areas in the 1930s revealed that 98.7 per cent of rural females were illiterate.[9] In the last decade we find that being rural is still the most distinguishing feature of illiteracy, after gender. If data from Chapter Three is summarized in *Table 10.1*, three things stand out. First, urban females fare less well than rural males, which confirms that gender is the more discriminatory factor. All males, whether urban or rural, fare better than all females. Second, urban people fare better than rural people in their respective gender categories, indicating that educational opportunities have been

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[7] *Zhongguo renkou tongji nianjian 1994*, op. cit., p.159.

[8] *1995 Quanguo 1% renkou diaocha ziliao*, op. cit., p.81.

[9] Buck, John L., *Land Utilisation in China*, (Chicago, 1937), pp.373ff. Cited in Croll, Elisabeth, *Feminism and Socialism in China*, op. cit., p.173.

considerably better in urban areas for some time. A substantial difference between males and females, however, is still apparent in urban areas. The third feature is that urban males are located at the top of the combined gender and urban/rural hierarchy, with rural females occupying the bottom, which indicates no change in the relative position of either urban males or rural females. Data from Chapter Three also indicates that the proportion of females illiterates in rural areas has been increasing when compared to female illiterates in cities and towns.

Table 10.1: **Male & female illiterates by urban/rural categories**

Year	Urban			Rural		
	total	male	female	total	male	female
1990	11.97	6.08	18.36	26.23	15.74	37.11
1995	9.23	4.12	14.31	19.66	11.09	28.37

Sources: Zhongguo renkou tongji nianjian 1994, ibid., pp.166-177; *1995 Quanguo 1% renkou diaocha ziliao,* ibid., pp.86-95. (Calculated as % of total population in each category)

10.1.2 What is the nature of the problem?

Rural women comprise three quarters of the female population. If one in three or four rural women is still illiterate,[10] there is a considerable way to go before one can say that the whole of Chinese society has been liberated, using Marx's standard as the benchmark. Confirming this situation is the existence of roughly one in seven urban female illiterates, compared to one in 24 urban male illiterates. The correspondence by gender across urban *and* rural categories suggests that cultural factors rather than political, economic or administrative factors are responsible for the disparities in both categories. That is not to say that these other factors are unimportant, but it does suggest that they become channels through which the problem is expressed rather than its cause.

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[10] The actual figure is one in 3.5.

With educational opportunities steadily improving across the country, it is not surprising to find that illiteracy correlates strongly with age. Even if nothing more was to be done, literacy rates would continue to improve as younger, better educated people aged. Nevertheless, the same discriminatory factors – that is, gender and whether one is urban or rural – are clearly evident amongst younger people. In data from Chapter Four, we saw that amongst those aged 15 to 20 years in 1995, one in twenty rural females, one in 44 rural males, one in 111 urban females and one in 200 urban males are illiterate. What is interesting is the reversal of positions between urban females and rural males amongst this younger group. This not only shows that educational opportunities are significantly better in urban areas, but it probably also reflects greater success with the implementation of family planning policy in urban areas. Nonetheless, whilst better literacy levels amongst females in urban areas is encouraging, it does not necessarily follow that they are liberated. Discrimination against women in employment, including female university graduates, during the last two decades indicates that gender is still the deciding factor regardless of educational levels.

A number of problems have emerged in the implementation of basic education in rural areas. These include: the lack of priority given to education by some local authorities; a shortage of public funds, affecting the payment of teachers' salaries and the need to increase school fees; low teacher morale, resulting in good teachers finding other work; and a curriculum which promotes rote learning. Furthermore, there are not enough junior and senior middle schools for all the children in the countryside who qualify for the next level of education. Educational authorities usually blame these difficulties, along with poverty, for the large number of rural children dropping out of school or not attending at all. These problems, however, do not account for the fact that girls are affected more than boys. 'Traditional' attitudes and practices are usually held responsible for this.

'Males are superior to females' *(zhong nan qing nü);* 'girls are only temporary members of the family'; 'a girl's education can be sacrificed if necessary'; 'young, educated women will be less compliant with fathers' and husbands' wishes'; 'girls are not as smart as boys'; 'an education for girls is totally useless as they end up as wives and mothers working at home'; along with housework, minding siblings or contributing to the family income before marriage, these things are responsible for the large number of girls dropping out of school or not being able to go to school at all. Although these attitudes and practices may have their roots in tradition, the question is whether they should be regarded as 'traditional'. The more appropriate word is 'cultural', because attitudes and practices which are thought of as being 'traditional' are regarded as 'relics' of the past. The word 'cultural' allows for them to be considered in terms of the present. The fact that girls in rural areas are being denied the same opportunities for education as boys, and that literate women find they have little use for reading and writing after they marry; is a reflection of *current* social arrangements and is the result of choices being made today. Whether these choices are made in the light of past practices also involves choice. Rural people have clearly shown the capacity and desire to adapt to new situations when it is in their interests to do so and to use their initiative to create new opportunities for themselves. They also use 'tradition' to negotiate situations in the present – whether it be to create strategies which empower them in circumstances where their access to power through formal channels is limited; or to affirm themselves as 'subjects' rather than 'objects' within and against modernizing discourses and classifying practices of urban based intellectuals and political leaders. Thus both 'traditional' and 'modern' means are employed to generate power (symbolic and practical) according to the opportunities available and the interests of those involved.

10.2 The production of female illiteracy in everyday life

In Chapters Eight and Nine we see the human face of the issues which were raised in earlier chapters. The stories of young women and girls in rural villages in Qinghai, Ningxia and Gansu, and the results of fieldwork carried out in Fufeng County, Shaanxi Province, provide graphic examples of the way cultural factors limit the educational opportunities of girls and young women, and affect the opportunities for literate women to make use of the education they have. In the former, whether they were at school or not allowed to attend, young women and girls were expected to fulfil their 'duties' doing housework, looking after younger brothers and sisters, and helping with farm work. Poor or not, 'who will do the household chores?' was a common response when girls approached their parents about going to school. Even when poverty was a problem, if the money for school fees was found or was offered by a teacher, some fathers still would not consent to their daughters attending school. Although many mothers were sympathetic to their daughters' pleas, other mothers considered a girl's 'place' was in the home and believed that having an education was therefore unnecessary. Keeping a daughter home to help, however, was also the only way that some women could cope with their own heavy workloads.

Marriage was another issue that played an important role in deciding whether a girl went to school. Some parents fear that a young woman with an education might be a poorer prospective bride because she may be less malleable in her new family. This kind of sentiment was expressed in Chapter Eight as: "... you won't be able to find a husband after you go to school". On the other hand, sometimes the reverse turned out to be true, with some families not wanting their sons to marry illiterate women. This was the case with Zhang Demei. Her engagement was called off when her prospective husband's family discovered she was illiterate. Thus patrilocal marriage affects the opportunities of both

literate and illiterate women. In both instances, an education, or the lack of an education, is considered desirable according to how it can be exploited.

In the Fufeng interviews we saw that although being literate may improve women's material circumstances, the *kind* of life that women with a reasonable education have after marriage is often not very different from their illiterate neighbours. This was especially evident in the lack of opportunities or time for the women interviewed to make use of their education. Apart from helping their children with homework, the majority of these women said they did not read much and most said they did very little writing. Two reasons were given: there was no time; and there was little need. Reading fared better than writing which, according to one interviewee, was something men often did, but women seldom did. While some of the younger women said they did some recreational reading, writing was mostly connected to salaried work or an official role in the village. Even so, housework, looking after children and farm work still took up most of their spare time. Regardless of their age, interviewees who did not work outside the home, even if they had a sideline, did not make much use of their literacy skills. The frustration felt by women in this situation was summed up by one woman who said that women of her age (35 years) "… have given up on reading, reckon that this reading (business) isn't all that beneficial to them any more". Writing is even less useful. "… what do you write?" she says. Despite their own lack of opportunities to make use of their literacy skills, women still thought it was important to encourage their children, girls and boys, to read and practise their writing.

When interviewees were asked how education would benefit rural girls in particular, many said that they would be able to "… give full play to their abilities"; "… grow up to be independent"; "…do as they please"; "…be on a par with boys"; "… find a good job"; "… have a career"; and so on. There is always the slim possibility that a

daughter may even do well enough at school to go to university and leave the countryside altogether.

> Going to university is especially good and good for them personally. Here in the countryside this housework (business) is pretty....you know....pretty tough. (No.10)

Nevertheless, it is likely that the gender division of labour, the continuing popularity of patrilocal marriage, an increase in the number of marriages involving economic transactions, a clear preference for sons, and the belief that women should do the housework, cultural factors which have affected their mothers' lives, will also influence the *kind* of lives they live. Cultural expectations also affect girls' opportunities to go on with their education. Whereas boys are expected to study, girls find their study time reduced by having to do household chores. If they graduate from middle school, competition for limited places in senior schools tends to favour boys. Moreover, classroom practice and teachers' expectations often reinforce cultural values in which boys are attributed with superior intellects, especially at senior middle school level.

Female middle school graduates might be materially better off than their less well educated neighbours, but the kind of lives they lead are often not very different. Housework, looking after children and farm work continue to define the everyday lives of most village women, literate or illiterate. To be liberated, according to one senior secondary school graduate, would be to have a husband share the household chores so that a woman could have the same freedom as her husband to go out to work.[11] She could then make use of her education. What is actually happening, however, is that many rural men are devolving the more mundane aspects of farm work to the women of their families so that they are free to find work elsewhere. While there may be financial benefits to the

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[11] Interviewee no.21.

whole family in doing this, it is hardly liberating to women who find themselves carrying even heavier burdens than before. In such situations, who is it being liberated?

The same kinds of themes emerged amongst illiterate women when they were asked why they did not attend literacy classes. The two most common reasons given for not attending classes or dropping out were that they did not have time to attend, or they were too old to learn. They all thought that they would be better off if they were literate, but their motivation to persist with classes appeared to be affected by a lack of confidence, insufficient free time, and the observation that their literate neighbours did not use their literacy skills much. *All* of the interviewees who had attended literacy classes said they had forgotten more or less everything they had learned, including the two graduates.

Finally, a cause for concern is the gradual loss of literacy skills occurring amongst some of the literate interviewees, even those with middle school education. Only some kind of comprehensive testing would indicate the extent to which this is occurring. The survey carried out by the All-China Women's Federation and the National Statistics Bureau in 1990 and cited in Chapter Three indicates that there was a significant percentage of young rural women under the age of thirty who had problems recognizing or writing characters. This is particularly apparent when the results for urban and rural women are compared in *Table 10.2*. While it is likely that those who knew less than 50 characters or none at all were women who had received little or no education, the other results suggest that either the educational achievements of young rural women were much lower than those in urban areas, or that those tested had already forgotten a significant number of characters. It was probably both. This situation may have been clearer if educational levels had been tabulated as well.

Table 10.2: **Character recognition amongst urban & rural women under 30 years**

No. of characters known	Urban (%)		Rural (%)	
	20-24 yrs	25-29 yrs	20-24 yrs	25-29 yrs
0	0.5	1.4	12.5	10.6
1-24	0.6	0.6	11.3	9.1
25-49	0.4	0.7	5.8	5.3
50-74	0.2	1.1	8.2	7.1
75-99	3.8	1.6	9.5	10.3
100-124	27.8	34.1	29.4	37.0
125	66.6	60.4	23.3	20.5

Source: Guan Tao (ed), *Zhongguo funu shehui diwei gaiguan,* pp.46-48. (The figures in the columns represent the percentage of those in that age group. A total of 125 characters were selected from the official list of frequently used characters.)

From the stories of girls and young women in Qinghai, Ningxia and Gansu and my fieldwork in Fufeng, it is clearly evident that there are different literacy practices for men and women institutionalized in the routines and practices of everyday life in the family and village. Because women are expected to do the more mundane kinds of work in the house and on the farm, they have little opportunity to make use of their literacy skills. Not surprisingly, this reinforces the notion that schooling is not as important for girls as it is for boys. The exploitation of women as unpaid labourers in the home and on the farm today cannot be blamed on 'tradition'. It is a situation which is actively being promoted in the present for the specific purpose of maintaining a particular set of gender relations.

10.3 The cultural construction of gender in China

To be able to consider female illiteracy as a gender issue, some understanding of the cultural construction of gender is needed. Chapters Six and Seven examined two ways in which cultural patterns from the past have been incorporated into present practice and looked at the way that literacy practice has played a role in the transmission of gender

ideology as well as being an effect of it. The first thing to emerge is that gender is part of an outlook where 'difference' and making distinctions between people is important. Egalitarianism is not indigenous to Chinese culture and equality is a modern notion that many Chinese have found culturally difficult to accommodate in the twentieth century.

In the past, social relations were premised on a profusion of unequal dyads in which every person knew his or her 'place' and through which one's identity was achieved and recognized. These unequal relationships were expressed in terms of *yin* and *yang* which defined two clearly differentiated positions making up part of a harmonious whole. Seniority and gender usually determined one's position in a dyad, though friendship was one relationship where equality was possible. Such distinctions were a characteristic feature of what was deemed to be 'Chinese' culture, including the 'big family' system. A key element of this social structure was the notion *zhong nan qing nü* (males are superior to females) in which patriarchal, patrilineal, patrilocal marriage became a mechanism for maintaining male dominance. In this scheme literacy played an important role not only in formalizing behaviour and expectations which emphasized differences, but literacy itself became a distinguishing feature between males and females.

My interviews reveal that many of cultural characteristics of the past are still important structuring features of everyday rural life in Fufeng County today. In the first place, patrilocal marriage is the norm amongst the interviewees and their families; and arranged marriages involving economic exchanges are increasing rather than decreasing. There also is a clear gender division of labour, with women and girls being responsible for household chores and caring for children. The idea of 'inside' and 'outside' work for women and men is still prevalent, though 'inside' is now extended to include farming and sideline businesses. Some younger interviewees had salaried work, but those who had

children tended to stay home and do housework, mind the children and fit farm work and/or run sidelines around their household responsibilities. Only one young woman actually mentioned that her husband helped her with looking after their daughter and cooking the evening meal. In addition to the above, there is still a strong desire to have at least one son, with a substantial sex imbalance favouring boys (16 boys to 8 girls) apparent amongst second born children of younger interviewees. This suggests that there is still considerable pressure on women to produce a son and that some sex selection intervention has occurred.

The majority of interviewees, regardless of age, experienced some degree of discrimination between themselves and their brothers, although many of them did not appear to understand it as discrimination, but as a 'natural' division. Distinctions were primarily expressed through the gender division of labour and in attitudes to schooling. When those who said that their parents treated them the same as their brothers were questioned further, it eventually emerged that 'the same' usually meant according to conventional gender expectations. Boys were generally expected to study and help their parents when they had time, whereas for girls, the reverse was often true. When girls performed poorly in examinations in comparison to boys, it was generally blamed on a lack of ability, with little or no account being taken of the heavier load of household chores they were expected to carry. With respect to their own children, interviewees considered it was 'normal' and 'natural' for girls to work in the house while boys do the heavier work outside. Some thought that boys should do more in the house, but the boys rarely did and they did not usually make them.

Whereas literacy was usually considered to be unnecessary or undesirable for girls in the past, today it has been accepted as useful, but still in the context of cultural patterns

which continue from the past. This can be summed up best in the words of one interviewee who said:

> Because amongst us country folk, that is in China, from olden times it's always been said that 'males are superior to females' *(zhong nan qing nü)*, ... what this means is that a girl, no matter what, you go out and find a husband's family, marry them off, that's it ... We country [women] mostly go to the mother-in-law. (As for) the relationship with the mother-in-law, by far the most important thing is that [a girl] can be sensible. Someone who is illiterate, such a person it seems, is always a bit ignorant about this. (Laughs.) (No.18)

Thus increasing access to education does not seem to be bringing with it the expected transformation of cultural patterns. In fact, if the schools I visited are any indication, schools are probably playing an important role in reproducing such cultural values.

Amongst the teachers in my interviews, the idea of mutual complementarity was very strong, with one teacher actually using *yin* and *yang* when referring to gender differences. Most teachers thought of these differences in terms of 'producing a harmonious whole' or 'working together to ameliorate the more extreme tendencies in the two sexes'. This did not necessarily represent an equality of opposites, however, because teachers were inclined to admire the so-called 'stronger' attributes of boys more than the 'softer' characteristics of the girls, even though they said the latter made classroom management easier. Furthermore, there was virtually no overlap in the terms teachers used to describe the various strengths and weaknesses of boys and girls, with the terms used often reflecting the 'active/passive', 'strong/weak', 'heavy/light' and 'logical/emotional' dichotomies associated with *yang* and *yin*. Thus classroom practice and teachers' expectations generally reinforce traditional cultural beliefs about the differences between males and females learned in the home. Although these attitudes may reflect the backgrounds of the teachers themselves, one young teacher (21 years), in the course of

justifying his own stance on the differences between boys and girls, mentioned that he was told during his teacher training that "... the sexes are mutually complementary". Once again, this might have been the personal views of his instructors, but it also could have been the product of the official 'scientific' approach to sexual difference.

Chapter Six showed that traditional ideas which have been responsible for 'normalizing' male/female relations in the past have been replaced by new 'scientific' gender norms. Instead of changing traditional Chinese cultural ideals, however, many of these ideals have been embodied in new modern 'scientific' terms. Chief among these is the idea that males and females are mutually complementary. In this new 'scientific' discourse, women's bodies and minds are portrayed as being negatively affected by the imperatives of hormones and reproduction. The traditional gender division of labour which allocates the responsibility for the production of off-spring and domestic harmony to women, must therefore be 'natural'. The talismanic faith in 'science' to reveal 'truth', however, does not take into account the interests of those producing this knowledge, nor the limitations and faults of the methodologies employed. Instead, this new knowledge has become the basis for sex education in schools and has been widely promoted in popular magazines and newspapers during the eighties and nineties. While at school, and afterwards, young people learn that females and males are complementary, and it is 'natural' for females to assume responsibility for domestic affairs. Thus it does not matter much whether teachers communicate traditional gender biases, or they teach according to the prescribed material, because much the same values and expectations are being promoted.

Finally, patrilocal marriage, a male head of the household, and the need for at least one son indicates that *zhong nan qing nü* is still the norm amongst those interviewed in

Fufeng. With only four out of thirteen of interviewees aged 21-30 and five out of eighteen of those aged 31-40 claiming to be 'free choice' marriages, and more than half of *all* marriages in these age groups involving some form of economic exchange, there is still a long way to go to reach the CCP's marriage reform goals. This is probably not surprising, given the CCP's long history of conservatism in the face of male resistance to interference in marital affairs in rural Shaanxi. Rural resistance to marriage reform across the country has generally meant that women's issues have been subordinated to other 'more important' political and economic goals in the belief that economic and political reorganization would bring about a change in women's circumstances. The possibilities of this occurring, however, have been constantly undermined by political and economic initiatives such as the household registration system and the role of the family unit in collectivization that have tended to use traditional family structures to achieve political, economic and administrative goals. Thus cultural patterns from the past were not done away with, but actually institutionalized into the new structures.

10.4 Cultural transformation

This thesis set out to investigate female illiteracy in rural China in the light of the goals of female emancipation, universal literacy and the transformation of the whole of Chinese society. Such an investigation not only permits the study of the situation with respect to female illiteracy, but it also offers an opportunity to gauge in a concrete way what has been achieved in regard to the transformation of the *whole* of Chinese society. The justification for such an approach to this issue in this way is to be found in Marx's statement "… the degree of the emancipation of women is the natural measure of general emancipation," which was stated at the beginning of this chapter. This approach is also in

keeping with the official Chinese view which, in the words of its current president, Jiang Zemin, says that "… The Chinese government has held the view all along that the extent to which male/female equality has been implemented is an important measure of social civilization."[12]

Some of the older women I interviewed were quick to assure me that the situation for women is much better than it was when they were young. According to one sixty year old interviewee:

The whole of society is better now, compared with [when I was a child], bringing up boys and girls is better. Back then it was weaving cloth and spinning thread all day long without stopping. So I say now it's extremely good. … (No.41)

Another aged 54 said:

Nowadays there is no distinction between girls and boys. … take her mother and mine, for instance. Their families were so hard up at the time they didn't go to school at all, thus they weren't able to read anything. These days children are able to pick up anything, they are stronger and they speak well. In fact, I think that today's females are more knowledgeable than males![13] (No.55)

These women and others of their mother's generation are very conscious of the changes that have taken place and there is no doubt that the situation for many women is much improved.

National data suggest that illiteracy levels have been reduced from a situation where most rural females were illiterate in 1949 to one where, in 1995, around 95 per cent

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[12] "Jiang Zemin tongzhi guanyu nannü pingdeng de lunshu," op. cit. (Extracts from the welcoming address for the UN Fourth Women's World Conference 4/9/1995), p.1.

[13] She is referring to her sister-in-law (interviewee no.56) who was also present in the room.

of 15 to 20 year old rural females are literate. Such a dramatic change within fifty years can be attributed largely to the implementation of compulsory education and improving economic circumstances. This would agree with the observations of the two women cited above. If we look to literacy rates as indicators of social change, however, we see that there still has been no change in the *relative positions* of males and females and urban and rural residents, with one exception. Data in 1995 show that urban females fare better than rural males amongst the 15-20 year age group. This suggests that better educational opportunities and economic advances *are* making a difference. However, the experience of urban women also shows that when conditions are more difficult, such as poverty or times of economic rationalization, males are chosen over females when choices have to be made. Women's domestic and family responsibilities are usually cited as the reasons for sacrificing their opportunities ahead of men's. Thus it is fairly safe to say that the reversal of positions between urban females and rural males actually reflects a widening disparity between the educational opportunities of urban and rural people, rather than a change in the relative positions of urban women relative to urban men.

When the results of my own field work and the experiences related by the girls and young women in Ningxia, Qinhai and Gansu, are put along side national data which show that around 70 per cent of illiterates across the country are female, it is clear that females are still disadvantaged no matter what the economic or educational situation is. In fact, neither economic advancement nor the improvement in educational opportunities have brought about male/female or urban/rural equality of opportunity. Still at the bottom of the social and political hierarchy, with the poorest opportunities for receiving an education, and lacking scope to make much use of their literacy skills after marriage, rural females cannot be considered liberated. According to Marx's measure, if rural women are not yet liberated, then neither is the whole of Chinese society liberated.

Thus the attempt to destroy the old culture and replace it with a completely new one has failed to bring about a fundamental change in gender relations. This appears to justify Cohen's statement quoted at the beginning of this chapter suggesting that the imposition of a new cultural framework through the "... politically enforced monopolization of cultural production" results in cultural impotence. In drawing this discussion on women, literacy and liberation to a close, it is worth considering an alternative approach to cultural transformation. Paulo Friere has much to say on the nature of cultural transformation and the role that literacy might play in such a transformation.[14]

According to Friere, culture involves

... specific groups of people producing, mediating, and confirming the mutual ideological elements that emerge from and reaffirm their daily lived experiences. ... [S]uch experiences are rooted in the interests of individual and collective self determination.[15]

In Chapters Seven and Eight we saw that what are usually identified as characteristic features of Chinese culture did indeed involve a long development of 'mutual ideological elements' that gave meaning to the everyday lives and experiences of the people. Such a cultural consensus was not arrived at as a result of the imposition of a particular cultural framework by one group of people on another, but through the interaction of many groups of people at all levels of society. For example, the ruling class adapted popular practices to their own situation when they thought that such practices promoted a stability and cohesiveness amongst families. Similarly, the ordinary people copied practices of the ruling class if they thought they improved their own upward social mobility. The Han

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[14] It is not appropriate to carry out a complete survey of Friere's views and experience here. Only some key ideas will be discussed very briefly.

[15] Friere, Paulo and Macedo, Donaldo, op. cit. p.142.

people also absorbed some characteristics of the people in the regions they colonized, which then became distinctive features to be fostered as part as one's 'native place' or regional identity.[16] Finally, the ruling class formalized many cultural features according to their usefulness in strengthening the larger polity of China. Over time, these features, along with others too numerous to mention, coalesced into the notion of what it meant to be 'Chinese'. In this cultural 'cooking pot' gender ideologies and practical mechanisms which supported them evolved, establishing the symbolic order in which men were regarded as superior to women and literacy was considered to be the prerogative of males.

In his writing and his practical involvement with illiterate people, Friere attributes considerable importance to the reality of human experience and the need to avoid alienating people from their own knowledge and experience of the world. He says that cultural transformation can only occur as people rethink their *own* assumptions, no matter how 'naïve' or 'superstitious' their thinking may seem to be to others. It is not something that others can do for them or without them.[17] Political and educational programs designed according to the view of reality of those implementing them, no matter how good their intentions, often fail because they do not respect the particular world view held by the people. Such an approach, he says, is really a 'cultural invasion' in which the 'invaders' are the actors and the 'invaded' are regarded as objects.[18]

> The invaders mold; those they invade are molded. The invaders choose; those they invade follow that choice – or are expected to follow it. The invaders act; those they invade have only the illusion of acting, through the action of the invaders.[19]

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[16] The pride with which officials treated me to 'traditional' Shaanxi style food which incorporated features of the food of the local Hui people is an example of the latter.

[17] Friere, Paulo, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, op. cit., p.100.

[18] Friere, Paulo, ibid., pp.83-84.

[19] Friere, Paulo, ibid., p.150.

A critical assessment of literacy development in China during the Mao era reveals that the people were treated as *objects of* a cultural transformation rather than *subjects engaged in* the transformation process. The kind of literacy taught was deliberately orientated towards making the people 'ideologically literate' and used language which was less concerned with the everyday experiential existence of the people than with the implementation of new political and social structures. Literacy was not concerned with opening the minds of the people to *possibilities* for transformation, but with the programming of them to think in a certain way suited to goals already established by political leaders. If Friere is correct in saying that cultural production, and therefore cultural transformation, involves "... people producing, mediating, and confirming mutual ideological elements that emerge from and reaffirm their daily lived experiences" it should not be surprising that literacy, which was regarded as 'ideological work', did not contribute much, if anything, to the transformation of 'traditional' attitudes and practices.

An education which is transforming, according to Friere, involves "... acts of cognition, not transferrals of information".[20] These 'acts of cognition' involve people discovering *for themselves* how they can transform their own world. It means *they* identify the ideological elements that actually make up the world around them and what they mean to them. Without going through this process these ideological elements often remain hidden to them. For example, myths, such as the 'naturalness' of the gender division of labour, need to be identified as myths. That males are more important than females is myth, not fact. The reality is, both are equally important to each other and both need to acknowledge this fact. Without decoding and thinking about the way they live, people do not ever ask whether their situation could be different, or how they might be able to

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[20] Friere, Paulo, ibid., p.67.

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change it. Instead, new myths are usually created, such as: having an education will mean women will become more independent, have a career, or do as they please, when the reality for rural women like those I interviewed is very different. The official line that 'women will be liberated when the whole of society is liberated' is also myth because the truth is that the liberation of the whole of society is *dependent on* women (and other disadvantaged groups) being liberated. Furthermore, the notion that women will be liberated when economic conditions are good is also myth because not only does experience already show that this is not necessarily so, it ignores cultural factors which still retain advantages for men.

Friere's approach uses literacy as an important means of enabling the people themselves to identify the various elements that characterize their everyday lives. Learning to 'read the world' is as important as 'reading the word'. According to Friere:

> The act of learning to read and write, in this instance, is a creative act that involves a critical comprehension of reality. The knowledge of earlier knowledge, gained by the learners as a result of analyzing praxis in its social context, opens to them the possibility of a new knowledge. The new knowledge reveals the reason for being that is behind the facts, thus demythologizing the false interpretations of these same facts. Thus, there is no longer any separation between thought-language and objective reality.[21]

Reading the word and the world, however, is not enough. Reading without writing is passive literacy. The texts that are most important in Friere's adult literacy programs are written by the participants themselves. In the earliest stages, this writing might be done using tape recordings which record the people talking about their everyday lives which are

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[21] Friere, Paulo and Macedo, Donaldo, op. cit., p.157.

then transcribed to become the reading texts of participants.[22] Friere sees this approach as a metaphor for the action of human beings on the world which he describes as *writing* or *rewriting* the world.[23] In other words, human beings are involved in

> complex operation of simultaneously transforming the world by their action and grasping and expressing the world's reality in their creative language.[24]

Everyone, no matter how seemingly powerless they are, is involved in this transformation process. The aim of Friere's style of literacy program is to enable participants to recognize and maximize the opportunities that they already have to transform their situation without promising what is not yet possible.

In this thesis I have shown how gender is an integral aspect of *culture* which needs to be addressed from a cultural perspective. That is not to say that political and economic measures are unimportant. Rather, by themselves, political and economic solutions are unlikely to bring about a cultural transformation because they do not directly address cultural issues such as gender. Friere's approach to literacy offers the opportunity to participate in the production of meaning at the level of everyday experience where culture is being produced or reproduced. Such an approach is different from the way literacy has been approached in the past in China where political and economic needs have been the main impetus behind literacy development.

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[22] This approach can also be used in schools where children's own compositions can be made into books for themselves and others to read. My own classroom experience showed that these materials were the most popular books in the classroom library. See Friere, Paulo and Macedo, Donaldo, op. cit., pp.37-46, for example, for his ideas on the production of texts.

[23] Friere, Paulo and Macedo, Donaldo, ibid., p.35.

[24] Friere, Paulo, "Cultural action and conscientization," *Harvard Educational Review*, Vol.40, No.3, (August 1970), p.453.

11 APPENDICES

Table 11.1: **Male/female illiteracy as a percentage of the male/female population in each province in 1982 and 1990**

Region	Total Illits 1982	Males	Females	Total Illits 1990	Males	Females
Beijing	14.97	7.75	22.3	10.91	5.37	16.86
Tianjin	17.2	8.38	26.25	11.6	5.34	18.03
Hebei	29.55	17.54	42.08	21.62	12.84	30.69
Shanxi	24.35	15.97	33.46	15.81	10.1	21.98
Neimongu	31.08	21.68	41.48	21.68	14.39	29.63
Liaoning	16.58	10.02	23.38	11.51	6.58	16.62
Jilin	21.78	14.97	28.93	14.3	9.47	19.33
Heilongjiang	22.17	14.35	30.39	14.93	9.47	20.67
Shanghai	16.7	7.39	25.86	13.52	5.96	21.37
Jiangsu	34.63	19.25	50.39	22.74	12.05	33.65
Zhejiang	31.2	19.12	44.22	22.95	13.28	33.13
Anhui	46.23	29.57	64.12	34.35	21.16	48.3
Fujian	37.15	18.32	57.06	23.15	10.6	36.28
Jiangxi	32.12	16.85	48.35	24.09	12.35	36.59
Shandong	36.76	21.68	52.1	23.01	13.3	32.85
Henan	36.96	23.36	50.96	23.08	14.13	32.28
Hubei	31.16	17.74	45.2	22.31	12.53	32.69
Hunan	23.87	13.18	35.48	16.99	9.17	25.46
Guangdong	22.9	9.15	37.1	15.06	5.81	24.55
Guangxi	24.96	12.25	38.56	16.25	7.52	25.74
Hainan	no	Separate	Figures	21.16	9.92	33.19
Sichuan	31.96	19.77	44.98	21.25	12.96	30.12
Guizhou	47.88	29.33	67.37	36.73	21.44	53.16
Yunnan	49.26	34.47	64.37	37.47	24.47	51.17
Xizang	73.16	61.53	84.33	69.34	55.49	83.08
Shaanxi	33.21	22.31	44.91	25.12	16.39	34.51
Gansu	48.05	32.66	64.65	39.17	26.26	53.06
Qinghai	46.81	31.87	62.77	40.04	26.91	54.4
Ningxia	43.04	29.48	57.59	33.48	22.47	45.12
Xinjiang	30.71	25.43	36.37	19.52	15.80	23.55

Sources: 1982 census, *Zhongguo renkou nianjian 1986*, pp. 316-317; 1990 census, *Zhongguo renkou tongji nianjian 1992*, pp. 140-141. (Figures for Hainan were not available for both censuses.)

NOTE: 1982 literacy rates are based on those aged 12 years or more, while the rates for 1990 are based on those aged 15 years or more.

Table 11.2: **Male/female illiteracy as a percentage of the male/female population in each province in 1995**

Region	Total Illits 1995	Males	Females
Beijing	7.95	3.61	12.23
Tianjin	9.27	4.01	14.44
Hebei	13.35	7.37	19.36
Shanxi	9.42	5.49	13.44
Neimongu	16.65	10.44	23.19
Liaoning	9.29	4.93	13.71
Jilin	9.32	5.63	13.09
Heilongjiang	10.83	6.44	15.35
Shanghai	8.47	3.08	13.79
Jiangsu	14.57	7.23	21.6
Zhejiang	17.02	9.0	25.09
Anhui	19.38	11.6	27.28
Fujian	20.57	9.08	32.1
Jiangxi	18.57	8.62	28.42
Shandong	17.62	9.29	25.81
Henan	15.95	9.25	22.67
Hubei	17.06	8.58	25.71
Hunan	15.26	7.77	23.02
Guangdong	11.37	3.88	18.69
Guangxi	13.5	5.69	21.78
Hainan	14.65	6.6	23.1
Sichuan	16.82	9.76	23.9
Guizhou	29.49	15.38	44.25
Yunnan	29.42	18.55	40.74
Xizang	61.5	46.45	75.96
Shaanxi	18.35	11.19	25.56
Gansu	34.05	21.3	47.43
Qinghai	37.43	24.84	50.67
Ningxia	26.41	16.71	36.18
Xinjiang	13.44	10.18	16.85

Source: 1995 1% sample survey, *Quanguo 1% renkou chouyang diaocha ziliao*, pp. 80-81.

* NOTE 1: Literacy rates for 1995 are based on those aged 15 years or more.

Table 11.3: **Regional illiteracy as a percentage of the regional population**

Region	Total Illits 1982	Males	Females
Beijing	14.97	3.9	11.06
Tianjin	17.2	4.24	12.96
Hebei	29.55	8.95	20.6
Shanxi	24.35	8.32	16.03
Neimongu	31.08	11.39	19.69
Liaoning	16.58	5.1	11.47
Jilin	21.78	7.67	14.11
Heilongjiang	22.17	7.35	14.82
Shanghai	16.7	3.66	13.04
Jiangsu	34.63	9.75	24.88
Zhejiang	31.2	9.91	21.29
Anhui	46.23	15.31	30.92
Fujian	37.15	9.42	27.72
Jiangxi	32.12	8.68	23.44
Shandong	36.76	10.93	25.83
Henan	36.96	11.85	25.11
Hubei	31.16	9.1	22.01
Hunan	23.87	6.86	17.01
Guangdong	22.9	4.65	18.25
Guangxi	24.96	6.33	18.63
Hainan	no	separate	figures
Sichuan	31.96	10.22	21.74
Guizhou	47.88	15.02	32.86
Yunnan	49.26	17.42	31.85
Xizang	73.16	30.16	43.0
Shaanxi	33.21	11.55	21.66
Gansu	48.05	16.95	31.1
Qinghai	46.81	16.45	30.25
Ningxia	43.04	15.26	27.79
Xinjiang	30.71	13.15	17.57

Sources: 1982 census, *Zhongguo renkou nianjian 1986,* pp. 316-317; 1990 census, *Zhongguo renkou tongji nianjian 1992,* pp. 140-141. (Figures for Hainan were not available for both censuses.)

NOTE: 1982 literacy rates are based on those aged 12 years or more.

Table 11.4: **Han/minority illiteracy as a percentage of the Han/minority population in each province in 1990**

Region	Han	non-Han	Region	Han	non-Han
Beijing	11.02	8.3	Henan	23.14	18.0
Tianjin	11.66	8.86	Hubei	22.34	21.65
Hebei	21.83	16.37	Hunan	16.34	24.92
Shanxi	15.83	9.79	Guangdong	15.07	13.84
Neimongu	22.52	17.54	Guangxi	13.26	20.99
Liaoning	11.74	10.15	Hainan	20.02	27.32
Jilin	14.86	9.13	Sichuan	20.02	50.97
Heilongjiang	15.19	10.48	Guizhou	33.51	43.1
Shanghai	13.55	5.67	Yunnan	33.71	45.5
Jiangsu	22.76	11.28	Xizang	3.09	72.82
Zhejiang	22.94	26.49	Shaanxi	25.17	16.06
Anhui	34.40	24.18	Gansu	36.69	68.24
Fujian	23.08	28.04	Qinghai	25.78	62.74
Jiangxi	24.1	19.99	Ningxia	26.36	49.71
Shandong	23.03	20.49	Xinjiang	12.86	24.68

Sources: 1990 census, *Zhongguo minzu renkou ziliao: 1990 Renkou pucha shuju*, pp. 74-75;
Zhongguo renkou tongji nianjian 1992, pp. 140-141.

Table 11.5: **Household structure of interviewees (Fufeng County 1998)**

	Personal details			Household structure									(Head of household = #)								
Place	Int'viewee	Age	Lit/illiterate	Father	Mother	Father-I-L	Mother-I-L	Husband	Son	Daughter	Daught-I-L	Grand-child	Sister	Brother	Sister-I-L	Brother-I-L	Nephew	Gr mother	Total no. people	No. of generations	Related to interviewee
FUFENG	1	50	Illit					X#	3		2	3							10	3	No.2
	2	26	Lit			X#	x	x		1					1	2	2		10	3	No.1
	3	27	Lit	x	X#	x	x	x							1				7	2	
	4	42	Lit				x	X#	1	1									5	3	No.5
	5	84	Illit						1#		1	2							5	3	No.4
	6	85	Illit?						1#		1	2							5	3	
	7	60	Illit					x	3#		3	3							11	3	
ZHAOZHAI CUN	8	28	Lit			x		X#	1	1									5	3	
	9	33	Lit			x		X#	1	1									5	3	
	10	39	Illit			x	x	X#	1	1									6	3	
	11	47	Illit					X#	2	1	1	1							7	3	
	12	41	S'lit			x	x	X#	1	1									6	3	

Place	Int'viewee	Age	Lit/illiterate	Father	Mother	Father-I-L	Mother-I-L	Husband	Son	Daughter	Daught-I-L	Grand-child	Sister	Brother	Sister-I-L	Brother-I-L	Nephew	Gr mother	Total	No. of generations	Related to interviewee
FUFENG	13	16	Lit	X#	x									2					5	2	
	14	41	Lit					X#		1									3	2	Close to husb's family
	15	21	Lit	X#	x									2	2		1		8	3	
	16	64	Illit#																1	1	Sons look after
	17	60	Illit#					x	2	1	2	2							9	3	
	18	35	Lit				x	X#	2										5	3	No.19
	19	65	Illit						1#		1	2							5	3	No.18
XINDIAN CUN	20	35	Lit			X#	x	x	1	2				2	2	4			15	3	
	21	31	Lit			X#	x	x	1	1									6	3	
	22	57	Illit					X#	2		2	5							11	3	
	23	30	Lit			X#	x	x	1	1					1	1	1		9	3	
	24	37	Illit					X#	1	2									5	2	
	25	47	Illit#					x	1	1									4	2	
	26	32	Lit				x	X#	2										5	3	

Place	Int'viewee	Age	Lit/illiterate	Father	Mother	Father-I-L	Mother-I-L	Husband	Son	Daughter	Daught-I-L	Grand-child	Sister	Brother	Sister-I-L	Brother-I-L	Nephew	Gr mother	Total	No. of generations
XIQUAN CUN	27	35	Lit					X#	1	1									4	2
	28	31	Lit					X#	2										4	2
	29	28	Lit			X#	x	x	1										5	3
	30	23	Lit			X#	x	x							1				5	2
	31	22	Lit	#				no details											?	?
	32	22	Lit	#				no details											?	?
	33	38	Illit					X#	1	1									4	2
	34	36	Lit					X#	1	1									4	2
	35	44	Illit					X#	1	1									4	2
	36	44	Lit					X#	1	1									4	2
	37	33	Lit				x	X#	1	1									5	3
	38	70	Illit					x	1#			1	1						5	3
	39	38	Lit					X#	2										4	2

Place	Int'viewee	Age	Lit/illiterate	Father	Mother	Father-I-L	Mother-I-L	Husband	Son	Daughter	Daught-I-L	Grand-child	Sister	Brother	Sister-I-L	Brother-I-L	Nephew	Gr mother	Total	No. of generations	Related to interviewee
CHANGMING SI	40	30	Lit			X#	x	x		1									5	3	No.41
	41	60	Illit					X#	1		1	1							5	3	No.40
	42	42	Illit					X#	1	2									5	2	
	43	36	Lit					X#	1	2									5	2	
	44	38	Lit					X#	2	1									5	2	
	45	27	Lit					X#	1	1									4	2	
	46	30	Lit					X#	1	1									4	2	
TAIBAI CUN	47	40	Lit			x	x	X#	1	2									7	3	
	48	35	Lit				x	X#	1	2									6	3	
	49	50	Lit					X#	2		1	2							7	3	
	50	37	Lit					X#	1	1									4	2	
	51	23	Lit			x	x	X#	1								1	1	7	3	
	52	47	Illit					X#	2		1	1							6	3	
	53	25	Lit			X#	x	x		1									5	3	

Place	Int'viewee	Age	Lit/illiterate	Father	Mother	Father-I-L	Mother-I-L	Husband	Son	Daughter	Daught-I-L	Grand-child	Sister	Brother	Sister-I-L	Brother-I-L	Nephew	Gr mother	Total	No. of generations	Related to interviewee
	54	26	Lit					X#	2										4	2	
FUFENG	55	54	S'lit					X#	1		1	2							6	3	SIL of No56
	56	45	Illit					X#	2	1									5	2	SIL of No55
	57	56	Illit					X#	3		2	3							10	3	
	58	53	Illit						1#		1	1							4	3	
	59	25	Lit			X#	x	x	1	1				1				Husb's x	8	4	

Table 11.6: **Level of education of interviewees**

Personal details				Level of education													Parents' education
Place	Int'viewee	Age	Lit/illiterate	No schooling	Grade 1-2	Grade 3-4	Grade5-6	Graduate	Jun. middle school	Graduate	Sen. middle school	Graduate	Zhongzhuan	Graduate	Literacy class	Graduate	Parents literate/illiterate (M=mother, F=father)
FUFENG	1	50	Illit		x										no		M-illiterate/F-literate
	2	26	Lit										x	x			M-illiterate/F-literate
	3	27	Lit						x								M/F literate
	4	42	Lit						x	x							M/F illiterate
	5	84	Illit	x											no		M/F illiterate
	6	85	Illit?	x											x	Bible lit class	M/F illiterate
	7	60	Illit												x	?	M/F illiterate
ZHAOZHAI CUN	8	28	Lit					x									M-illiterate/F-literate
	9	33	Lit						x								M-illiterate/F-literate
	10	39	Illit			x									no		M-illiterate/F-literate
	11	47	Illit		x										x	?	M-illiterate/F-literate
	12	41	S'lit			x									x	?	M-illiterate/F-literate

Place	Int'viewee	Age	Lit/illiterate	No schooling	Grade 1-2	Grade 3-4	Grade5-6	Graduate	Jun. middle school	Graduate	Sen. middle school	Graduate	Zhongzhuan	Graduate	Literacy class	Graduate	Parents literate/illiterate (M=mother, F=father)
FUFENG	13	16	Lit						x	at school							M-illiterate/F-literate
	14	41	Lit						x	x							M/F-illiterate
	15	21	Lit						x	x							M-illiterate/F-literate
	16	64	Illit#	x											x	?	M-illiterate/F-literate
	17	60	Illit#	x											no		M/F-illiterate
	18	35	Lit						x	x							M/F-literate
	19	65	Illit	x											no		M-illiterate/F-literate
XINDIAN CUN	20	35	Lit						x	x							M-illiterate/F-literate
	21	31	Lit								x	x					M-illiterate/F-literate
	22	57	Illit	x											x	Drop-out	M/F-illiterate
	23	30	Lit						x	x							M/F-semi-literate
	24	37	Illit	x											no		M/F-illiterate
	25	47	Illit#	x											no		
	26	32	Lit						x	x							

Place	Int'viewee	Age	Lit/illiterate	No schooling	Grade 1-2	Grade 3-4	Grade5-6	Graduate	Jun. middle school	Graduate	Sen. middle school	Graduate	Zhongzhuan	Graduate	Literacy class	Graduate	Parents literate/illiterate (M=mother, F=father)
XIQUAN CUN	27	35	Lit						x	x							M/F-illiterate
	28	31	Lit						x	x							M/F-illiterate
	29	28	Lit						x	x							M/F-illiterate
	30	23	Lit						x	x							
	31	22	Lit						x	x							M/F-literate
	32	22	Lit						x	x							M/F-illiterate
	33	38	Illit			x									no		
	34	36	Lit						x	x							M/F-illiterate
	35	44	Illit	x											x	no	
	36	44	Lit			x											
	37	33	Lit						x	x							
	38	70	Illit			x									x	x	
	39	38	Lit					x									M/F-literate

Place	Int'viewee	Age	Lit/illiterate	No schooling	Grade 1-2	Grade 3-4	Grade5-6	Graduate	Jun. middle school	Graduate	Sen. middle school	Graduate	Zhongzhuan	Graduate	Literacy class	Graduate	Parents literate/illiterate (M=mother, F=father)
CHANGMING SI	40	30	Lit						x	x							M/F-literate
	41	60	Illit	x											x	no	M/F-illiterate
	42	42	Illit			x									x	Drop-out	M/F-illiterate
	43	36	Lit						x	x							M-literate/F-illiterate
	44	38	Lit								x	x					M/F-illiterate
	45	27	Lit						x	x							M/F-illiterate
	46	30	Lit					x									M/F-literate
TAIBAI CUN	47	40	Lit								x	x					M/F-illiterate
	48	35	Lit						x	x							M/F-literate
	49	50	Lit						x	x							M/F-illiterate
	50	37	Lit						x	x							M-illiterate/F-literate
	51	23	Lit						x	x							M-illiterate/F-literate
	52	47	Illit	x												no	M/F-illiterate
	53	25	Lit						x	x							M/F-illiterate

Place	Int'viewee	Age	Lit/illiterate	No schooling	Grade 1-2	Grade 3-4	Grade5-6	Graduate	Jun. middle school	Graduate	Sen. middle school	Graduate	Zhongzhuan	Graduate	Literacy class	Graduate	Parents literate/illiterate (M=mother, F=father)
FUFENG	54	26	Lit						x	x							M-illiterate/F-literate
	55	54	S'lit					x							x	Drop-out	M/F-illiterate
	56	45	Illit	x											no		M/F-illiterate
	57	56	Illit	x											x	Yes	M/F-illiterate
	58	53	Illit	x											x	Drop-out	
	59	25	Lit						x	x							M/F-illiterate

Table 11.7: **General data on marriage, children & occupations of interviewees**

Place	Interviewee	Age	Lit/illiterate	Type of marriage						Children (3b & 2g)=no order		Occupations			Family engaged in agriculture
				Unmarried	Arranged Marriage	Parents, & agree	Go between	Free choice	Bride price	Distance birthplace	Children (order) (b=boys g=girls)	Main occupation	Sidelines	Husband's work	
FUFENG	1	50	Illit		x				no	15km	3 boys	Housewife & farmer	None	Farmer	√
	2	26	Lit					x		Another county	1 girl	Medicine shop	None	Doctor	√
	3	27	Lit		x				no	here	None	Hairdresser	None	Factory worker	√
	4	42	Lit		x				no	5km	1b, 1g	Farmer	Making noodles Apples (new)	Farmer	√
	5	84	Illit		x				no	2-3km	(3b & 2g)	Retired		Deceased (Depends on son)	√
	6	85	Illit?		x				?	10+km	1g, 2b	Retired (WF worker)		Deceased (Depends on son)	
	7	60	Illit		x				no	5km	2g, 3b, 1g	Housewife	Rents out rooms/houses	Retired cook	
ZHAOZHAI CUN	8	28	Lit		x			yes		Very close	1g, 1b	Farmer	House painting	Orchardist (apples) & farmer	√
	9	33	Lit		x			yes		5km	1g, 1b	Farmer	Selling apples, hairdressing, flowers for funerals	Farmer	√
	10	39	Illit		x			yes		2-3km	1g, 1b	Farmer	Paper cutting	Orchardist (apples)	√
	11	47	Illit		x			yes		3-4km	2b, 1g	Farmer	Pigs	Orchardist (apples)	√
	12	41	S'lit		x			yes		4km	1g, 1b	Farmer		Orchardist (apples)	√

Place	Interviewee	Age	Lit/Illiterate	Unmarried	Arranged Marriage	Parents, & agree	Go between	Free choice	Bride price	Distance birthplace	Children (b=boys g=girls)	Main occupation	Sidelines	Husband's work	Family engaged in agriculture
FUFENG	13	16	Lit	x						here	None	Still at school		Not married	√
	14	41	Lit					x		25km	1 girl	Hairdresser		Factory worker (Fufeng)	
	15	21	Lit	x						here	None	Dressmaker		Not married	√
	16	64	Illit#		x				no	25km	4 boys	Housewife		Deceased (depends on sons & husband's pension (majestrate)	
	17	60	Illit#		x				no	here	2b, 1g	Housewife & farmer		Sick (on pension, also support from sons)	√
	18	35	Lit			x			no	10km	2 boys	Housewife & farmer	(Helps husband sell cloth)	Sells cloth & farming	√
	19	65	Illit		x				no	here	1g, 1b	Housewife		Deceased (Depends on son)	√
XINDIAN CUN	20	35	Lit				x	(still decided)	no	5km	2g, 1b	Housewife & farmer	Pigs (Helps in family grain shop)	Farmer	√
	21	31	Lit				x	(still decided)	no	5km	1b, 1g	Housewife & farmer	Pigs	Farmer	√
	22	57	Illit		x				no	5km	2b, 2g	Housewife & farmer	Pigs & sheep	Farmer	√
	23	30	Lit				x		no	6-7km	1g, 1b	Housewife & farmer	Peppers, pigs, chickens & sheep	Construction worker	√
	24	37	Illit					x		Another province	2g, 1b	Farmer & housewife	Cooks for unit	Farmer?	√
	25	47	Illit#					x		5km	1b, 1g	Housewife & farmer	Pigs & chickens	Farmer?	√
	26	32	Lit					x		1km	2 boys	Housewife & farmer	Pigs	Farmer?	√

Place	Interviewee	Age	Lit/Illiterate	Unmarried	Arranged Marriage	Parents, & agree	Go between	Free choice	Bride price	Distance birthplace	Children (b=boys g=girls)	Main occupation	Sidelines	Husband's work	Family engaged in agriculture
XIQUAN CUN	27	35	Lit		x				yes	4km	1g, 1b	Housewife & farmer	Apples & peppers	Grain processing factory	√
	28	31	Lit		x				yes	0.5km	2 boys	Grain processing factory & farming		Village accountant	√
	29	28	Lit					x		Here	1 boy	Grain processing factory & farming	Apples	Factory worker (Fufeng)	√
	30	23	Lit					x		Here	None	Grain processing factory	Apples	Factory worker (Nanyang)	√
	31	22	Lit	x						Here	None	Grain processing factory	Apples (family)	Unmarried	√
	32	22	Lit	x						Here	None	Grain processing factory	Apples (family)	Unmarried	√
	33	38	Illit		x				yes	0.5km	1g, 1b	Cook for teachers	Apples	Cement factory (Nanyang)	√
	34	36	Lit		x				yes	1km	1g, 1b	Housewife & farmer	Apples, cherries & peaches	Farmer	√
	35	44	Illit		x				yes	5km	1g, 1b	Housewife & farmer	Apples, peppers	Fruit company (Nanyang)	√
	36	44	Lit		x				yes	1.5km	1b, 1g	Housewife & farmer	Apples & peppers	Doctor at village clinic	√
	37	33	Lit		x				yes	2.5km	1g, 1b	Housewife & farmer	Apples & peppers	Cement factory	√
	38	70	Illit		x				yes	1.5km	No details	No answer	(Had to leave)		
	39	38	Lit		x				yes	1km	2 boys	Housewife & farmer	Apples & peppers	Cement factory	√

Place	Interviewee	Age	Lit/illiterate	Unmarried	Arranged Marriage	Parents, & agree	Go between	Free choice	Bride price	Distance birthplace	Children (b=boys g=girls)	Main occupation	Sidelines	Husband's work	Family engaged in agriculture
CHANGMING SI	40	30	Lit		x				yes	1km	1 girl	Farmer	Chickens & pigs	Farmer (owns tractor)	√
	41	60	Illit		x				yes	.5km	(2b & 2g)	Retired		Retired (Supported by son)	
	42	42	Illit					x		Here	1b, 2g	Farmer & housewife		Interior decorator & farmer	√
	43	36	Lit					x		3km	1b, 2g	Housewife & farmer	Pigs, goats & chickens	Small business & farmer	√
	44	38	Lit					x		1.5km	1g, 2b	Housewife & farmer	Pigs, goats & chickens	Cook (lives in another town)	√
	45	27	Lit					x		15km	1g, 1b	Hairdresser		Farmer	√
	46	30	Lit				x		yes	4km	1b, 1g	Housewife	Pigs & chickens	Transportation (owns tractor)	?
	47	40	Lit		x				yes	2.5km	2g, 1b	Housewife & farmer	Pigs & apples	Builder in locality	√
	48	35	Lit					x		3km	2g, 1b	Housewife & farmer	Pigs & apples	Teacher (lives in another town)	√
TAIBAI CUN	49	50	Lit		x				yes	2km	2 boys	Housewife & farmer	Pigs & apples	Farmer	√
	50	37	Lit		x				yes	1km	1b, 1g	Housewife & farmer	Pigs	Transportation	√
	51	23	Lit			x			yes	Here	1 boy	Housewife & farmer	Apples (new)	Builder (works away)	√
	52	47	Illit		x				yes	Another county	1b, 1g, 1b	Housewife & farmer	1 pig, apples	Builder (in Xi'an)	√
	53	25	Lit		x				yes	1.5km	1 girl	Housewife & farmer	Apples & pigs	Local factory worker	√

Place	Interviewee	Age	Lit/Illiterate	Unmarried	Arranged Marriage	Parents, & agree	Go between	Free choice	Bride price	Distance birthplace	Children (b=boys g=girls)	Main occupation	Sidelines	Husband's work	Family engaged in agriculture
FUFENG	54	26	Lit		x				yes	5km	2 boys	Housewife	Growing vegetables	Painter & selling vegetables	√
	55	54	S'lit		x				no	3km	1g, 1b, 1g	Housewife		Retired (on pension) & grows vegetables	√
	56	45	Illit		x				?	5km	2b, 1g	Cleaner, also grows wheat & vegetables for family use		Builder	
	57	56	Illit		x				yes	5km	2b, 1g, 1b	Retired	Vegetables (family)	Farmer	√
	58	53	Illit		x				?	A long way	(3b & 1g)	Housewife		Deceased (Depends on son)	√
	59	25	Lit		x				yes	here	1b, 1g	Housewife & farmer	(Helps husband)	Small business preserving eggs	√

Table 11.8: **Number of times everyday activities were mentioned by interviewees** (16 year old not included in this analysis)

The numbers represent each time a particular type of task was mentioned by the respondent. While respondents were occasionally prompted when they did not know what to say, had been distracted or had forgotten where they were up to, the instances where this happened were not generally counted. The numbers *suggest* the relative importance of the tasks in the minds of the respondents.

Group 1: 21-30 years

Tasks Respond-ent	Cleaning /tidying	Children	Washing	Cooking/ serving/ eating	Caring-sick/ elderly	Farming /animal husband -ry	Paid work/ (sideline)	RECREATION				
								Knitting/	reading/	watch TV/...rest/		go for walk
No.15	4	0	0	4	0	0	4	1	1	1	0	1
No.31	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	1	0	1	1	0
No.32	0	0	0	2	0	2	10	1	0	1	0	0
No.51	2	5	3	2	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0
No.53	1	2	1	4	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
No.59	0	2	2	2	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	1
No2	0	4	1	6	0	0	6	0	0	1	0	0
No54	0	3	1	2	0	0	0	3	0	2	0	0
No3	0	0	0	2	0	0	5	0	0	0	0	0
No45	1	5	0	5	0	0	8	0	0	2	0	0
No8	1	2	1	3	0	2	0	0	0	1	0	0

Tasks / Respondent	Cleaning /tidying	Children	Washing	Cooking/ serving/ eating	Caring- sick/ elderly	Farming /animal husband -ry	Paid work/ (sideline)	RECREATION				
								Knitting/	reading/	watch TV/	...rest/	go for walk
No29	1	0	0	3	0	0	2	0	0	1	0	0
No23	2	5	1	2	0	0	(1)	1	0	0	0	0
No40	1	5	0	4	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0
No46	2	1	0	2	0	4	0	1	0	1	0	0
Total times	15	34	10	43	0	8	42 (1)	10	1	14	1	3
Total women	9	10	7	14	0	3	9	8	1	11	1	3

(Total times = total number of times mentioned; Total women = total number of women who mentioned them.)

Group 2: 31-40 years

Tasks / Respond-ent	Cleaning /tidying	Children	Washing	Cooking/ serving/ eating	Caring- sick/ elderly	Farming /animal husband -ry	Paid work/ (sideline)	RECREATION				
								Knitting/	reading/	watch TV/...rest/		walk/ex'cise
No21	3	1	1	4	0	0	0	2	0	2	0	0
No28	2	1	1	3	0	0	3	0	0	1	0	0
No18	3	5	0	6	0	0	2	1	0	3	0	0
No20	0	3	0	7	0	0	3	1	0	0	0	0
No27	1	4	1	2	0	3	0	0	0	2	0	0
No48	0	3	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0
No34	4	4	0	4	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	0
No43	2	3	0	3	0	8	0	2	0	1	0	0
No24	1	1	0	8	1	0	(2)	0	0	1	0	0
No50	1	1	0	1	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	1
No39	3	5	0	8	0	4	0	0	0	1	0	0
No44	1	3	0	3	0	4	0	2	0	2	0	0

Tasks / Respond-ent	Cleaning /tidying	Children	Washing	Cooking/ serving/ eating	Caring- sick/ elderly	Farming /animal husband -ry	Paid work/ (sideline)	RECREATION				
								Knitting/	reading/	watch TV/...rest/		walk/ex'cise
No10	2	6	1	6	0	2	0	0	0	1	0	0
No47	3	2	0	2	0	4	1	0	0	0	0	0
Total times	26	41	5	59	1	31	9 (2)	8	0	15	0	1
Total women	12	14	5	14	1	8	4(1)	5	0	10	1	1

Group 3: 41-50 years

Tasks Respond-ent	Cleaning /tidying	Children	Washing	Cooking/ serving/ eating	Caring-sick/ elderly	Farming /animal husband ry	Paid work/ (sideline)	RECREATION				
								Knitting/	reading/	watch TV/...rest/		walk/ex'cise
No12	2	1	0	5	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0
No14	2	0	0	1	0	0	2	0	0	1	0	0
No4	5	4	1	6	2	7	5	0	0	0	2	0
No42	1	3	0	5	0	7	0	0	0	1	0	0
No56	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
No11	0	1	0	0	0	2	1	0	0	0	0	0
No52	3	4	0	6	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
No1	1	4	3	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
No49	1	1	0	0	0	0	6	0	2/2write	0	0	0
Total times	15	19	4	28	2	19	15	0	2/2	3	3	0
Total women	7	8	2	6	1	4	5	0	1	3	2	0

Group 4: 51-60 years

Tasks Respond -ent	Cleaning /tidying	Children	Washing	Cooking/ serving/ eating	Caring- sick/ elderly	Farming /animal husband ry	Paid work/ (sideline)	RECREATION				
								Knitting/	reading/	watch TV/...rest/		walk/ex'cise
No55	4	7	0	7	2	3	0	0	0	0	0	0
No57	3	6	0	7	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
No22	2	5	0	9	0	0	0	1 (embr)	0	3	0	0
No7	3	2	0	10	12	0	2	0	0	0	0	11
No17	2	1	1	3	0	1	0	0	0	2	0	0
No41	0	0	0	5	0	2	0	0	0	1	1	3
Total times	14	21	1	41	14	7	2	1	0	6	1	14
Total women	5	5	1	6	2	4	2	2	0	3	1	2

Group 5: 61+ years

Tasks Respond-ent	Cleaning /tidying	Children	Washing	Cooking/ serving/ eating	Caring- sick/ elderly	Farming /animal husbandry	Paid work/ (sideline)	RECREATION Knitting/	reading/	watch TV/	...rest/	walk/ex'cise
No16	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	2	3	1
No19	1	11	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
No5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
No6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	4
Total times	1	11	0	7	0	0	0	0	0	2	7	5
Total women	1	1	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	2	3	3

Table 11.9: **General profile of primary teachers interviewed**

School	Int'viewee	Age	Sex (M/F)	Training	Teach Exp	Exp this sch	Pers Income	Married	Tot. income	Grade	Specialty	Position
Taibai zhongxin xiaoxue xiguan yifu xiaoxue	1	25	M	ZZ	5	3	306	Y	306	3		
	2	45	M	ZZ	22	2	360	Y	360	6	L	
	3	22	F	ZZ	2	1	287	N	NA	5	L	
	4	23	F	ZZ	3	2	287	Y	500	4	L	
	5	40	F	ZZ	20	2	358	Y	1000	3		
	6	27	F	ZZ	9	2	289	Y	1000	5		
	7	37	F	ZZ	16	2	270	Y	600	5	M	
	8	27	F	ZZ	9	2	289	Y	600	5	L	
	9	21	M	ZZ	1	1	281	N	NA	3/4/5	Art	
	10	30	M	DZ	10	2	312	Y	600	6	L	
	11	30	M	DZ	10	2	312	Y	590	5	M	DP

KEY: ZZ=Zhongzhuan, DZ=Dazhuan, L=language, M=maths, DP=Deputy principal. [Zhongzhuan *(xiao zhongzhuan)* is a vocational training school (including teacher training) which takes junior middle school graduates, or senior middle school graduates; Dazhuan *(da zhongzhuan).* takes senior middle school graduates.]

Table 11.10: **General profile of junior middle school teachers interviewed**

Int'viewee	Age	Sex (M/F)	Training	Teach Exp	Exp this sch	Pers Income	Married	Tot. income	Grade	Specialty	Position
1	40	F	ZZ	20	3	362	Y	800	3	Eng	
2	40	F	DZ	22	3	375	Y	7/800		Chi	
3	28	M	DZ	7	7	328	Y	600+		Pol	
4	39	M	DZ	18	3	338	Y	700	3	Chi	
5	36	F	DZ	16	16	340	Y	700		Eng	
6	25	F	Corr	5	5	336	N	NA	2/3?	Chi	
9	41	M	DZ	21	4	354	Y	1000+		Pol	DP
10	38	M	DZ	18	5	340	Y	700		Alg	

KEY: ZZ=Zhongzhuan, DZ=Dazhuan, Corr=Correspondence College, Eng=English, Chi=Chinese, Pol=Politics, Alg=Algebra, DP=Deputy principal [Zhongzhuan *(xiao zhongzhuan)* is a vocational training school (including teacher training) which takes junior middle school graduates, or senior middle school graduates; Dazhuan *(da zhongzhuan)*. takes senior middle school graduates.]

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