WHILE THE STATE CLAIMS THE INTIMATE: POPULATION CONTROL POLICY AND THE MAKINGS OF CHINESE MODERNITY

BY

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DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

In this dissertation, I offer an ethnographic account of the human experience of China's post-socialism and associated globalizing efforts as they are reconfigured in the seemingly intimate space of reproduction. At the heart of the broad socioeconomic transformations that underpin China's unexpected rise in the global economy lies a project of reforming biomedical practices revolving around reproduction. This intensely personal aspect of the larger modernization project was based upon deployments of specific kinds of scientific numbers, and it has profoundly influenced basic aspects of existence for hundreds of millions of Chinese citizens. Accounting for the notorious one-child policy and its subsequent metamorphoses calls for a localized, ethnographic genealogy of China's effort at modernization via bioscience in rural areas since the 1970s.

Based on 16 months of fieldwork in and around an inter-ethnic (Manchu-Han) village in northeast China, my dissertation explores how a shifting series of discursive constructions of peasants as "backward" subjects has legitimized the state's sustained biomedical intrusion into reproduction in rural China, and how rural residents' responses to the state's intimate intrusion has told a rich story of the makings of the nation's post-socialist strivings for modernity. In my dissertation, I analyze peasants' reproductive practices as they intersect with the politics and policies of biomedicine and technology, as well as with those of gender, class, kinship, and ethnic identities. In this work, I treat the state's population control efforts as emblematic of the nation's ambition to achieve modernity, and I combine this perspective with anthropological and feminist critiques of modernity and state transformation to write a mini-historiography of post-socialism in rural China.

Since the 1970s, China's population control policy has been shaped by changing images of modernity fashioned by the government. During the early 1970s, China's population was seen as an unbearable burden impeding modernization. To rapidly achieve its development goals, the Chinese state became increasingly obsessed with controlling population growth and, in 1979, formulated a one-child policy. In promoting this stringent policy, intimate reproductive practices intersected discursively with governmental constructions of "backwardness" (*luohou*). Villagers—especially women—were depicted by the state as suffused by "backward" ideas, as embodied in their childbearing practices. The one-child policy was entrusted with a mission of changing peasants' "backward" reproductive ideas and customs.

Many villagers resisted this policy, as entrenched patrilineal ideologies virtually required all families to produce a male heir. To make its population policy acceptable to peasants, in the mid-1980s the state began granting a "second chance" to rural women to bear a son—but only if their first births had produced girls. Along with this shift, in the 1990s the state's model of modernity came increasingly to center on neo-liberal economic development rather than on stringent birth control methods alone, and reproductive policy discourses changed accordingly. "Bear fewer children, become rich quickly" (*shaosheng kuaifu*) became a pervasive governmental slogan, and improving citizens' economic standing through smaller family size became the focus of the state. Yet the state continued to depict peasants as "backward," claiming now that the ideal

model of rurality was epitomized by an *economic* desire for material prosperity—a desire that most "backward" peasants were said insufficiently to possess.

Concomitant with this critique, around the new millennium, the Chinese state became preoccupied with constructing an internationally acceptable image of modernity. Central to its eager embrace of global capitalism, the government recently announced that its birth control program would provide rural women with more "high-quality services" for their reproductive health—services now construed as "humane and caring." Yet along with this seemingly liberal reform, rural people were once again diagnosed as deficient. This time, the "lack" was discursively located in the need for a more "scientific and civilized notion of marriage and childbearing" (*kexue wenming de hunyu guannian*).

Focusing on the structural continuity behind these ostensibly major shifts in population policy, in my dissertation I examine how prolonged discursive constructions of peasants as backward subjects have legitimized population policy in ways I term a "civilizing machine." At the core of its three-decade-long pursuit of modernity has been a continuing effort by the state to claim the intimate space of reproduction. Reading villagers' subjective experiences of reproduction against the government's hegemonic claims in shaping rurality, my dissertation charts how rural citizens think about, talk about, and manage their fertility strategies and habits in the face of the state's continuing claims on their most intimate practices.

To my parents, Lu Huazhen and Chen Jiankang;
my wife, Zhen Chen, and our son, Isaac;
and in memory of my grandmother, Zhang Juanji

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Male Ethnographer, Female Assistants: Gender Politics and the Fieldwork Experience in Northeastern Rural China

In August 2004, I went to meet a governmental official in the provincial capital to gain official approval to conduct a year of doctoral fieldwork in the village of River Crossing, located in a mountainous area in the northern part of the province. Near the end of our conversation, the government agent said:

"Junjie, you're more than welcome to do research in our province. I believe your research will be fruitful, because you already know so much about China. In the meantime, I hope you always keep in mind that you're a Chinese citizen, although you're currently a student at a US university. In your research report, please always *xiaoma bang da mang*—'criticize only trivial things, but write more substantively about positive aspects'—so as to help us convey positive images of our nation to the foreigners."

The provincial officials' words signaled the post-socialist Chinese state's hyper-vigilant awareness of its international image in the new millennium. Beginning in the early 1970s, population control efforts in rural China have been an integral part of the state's modernization project, and they have been widely criticized as notoriously draconian (Anagnost 1988, 1997, Wasserstrom 1984). In the early 1990s, as the nation began to embrace a market economy, its population policy came increasingly to center on neo-liberal economic development, rather than on draconian birth control methods alone

(Gu 2002). In the wake of the 1994 U.N. International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo, and the subsequent World Conference on Women in Beijing (1995), the government has tried to further transform its population policy from its previous stringent measures toward a promise to provide more "humane services" for women's reproductive health, so as to lessen international criticism of its birth control efforts (Greenhalgh and Winckler 2005).

Indeed, from the turn of the new millennium, the Chinese state has become preoccupied with constructing an internationally acceptable image of its population policy, as central to its eager embrace of global capitalism. For example, during the 1994 U.N. International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo, 10 developing countries (including Bangladesh, Colombia, Egypt, Indonesia, Kenya, Mexico, Morocco, Thailand, Tunisia, and Zimbabwe) formed an intergovernmental initiative—Partners in Population and Development (PPD)—to promote South-South collaborations in reproductive health, population, and development. Taking this initiative as a platform to transform the notorious international image of its family planning program, China joined the PPD in November 1997 and, in June 2002, became chairman of the PPD's Executive Committee (2002-05). During September 7-9, 2004, the Chinese government hosted the 2004 International Population and Development Forum, held in Wuhan, Hubei Province; 20 member countries of the Partners in Population and Development participated in the Forum.[1] Targeting broad international audiences at the Forum, the state endeavored to highlight its recent accomplishments in providing various government-sponsored services

[1] By 2010, Partners in Population and Development has a total of 25 countries. For details please see: http://www.partners-popdev.org/mcon/member_countries.asp
(Accessed at 3:27 pm, March 21, 2011.)

for women's reproductive health. During June and July 2004, while conducting archival research in Beijing, I contacted a number of governmental officials and population scholars. As I learned through conversations and interviews with state officials and university professors who were participating in organizing the event and preparing various government reports for the Forum, the Forum to be held in Wuhan was recognized by the government as the nation's most important event on international affairs of the year.[2]

The state's obsession with its international image shaped the broader political context of my doctoral fieldwork. Being a native Chinese now studying abroad, my identity was somewhat problematic in the view of government officials. As a Chinese citizen who had previously conducted research on rural population and family life (Chen 1995, 1998), I was viewed as having "native advantages" in understanding the "cultural intimacy" (Herzfeld 1997:X) of various local events. Yet without an official affiliation in China, I was simultaneously deemed a "risky" outsider. Thus, the provincial official's conversation with me in the opening story I quoted above also contained an implicit admonishment—that I was expected to criticize only trivial things I might observe, but I should write more expansively about positive aspects of local events so as to help the government establish the nation's progressive image to international audiences.

My selection of a fieldwork site, and my efforts to approach population control primarily from ordinary villagers' perspectives, further made me politically vulnerable, as I recognized later. Two years before, in summer 2002, with the help of several scholar

[2] For information on the 2004 International Population and Development Forum, held in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China, please see its official website:
http://www.hb.xinhuanet.com/zhuanti/ifpd/index.htm
(Accessed at 3:55 pm, March 21, 2011.)

friends in the province, I had located the village of River Crossing as a tentative primary fieldwork site. In order to conduct my pilot research in the village, however, I had to first gain official approval from a provincial government office. Learning that I was planning to conduct fieldwork in an area where the local family planning work was deemed just "average," a provincial official tried to dissuade me. He said that in this province, family planning had been highly successful, and I was welcome to conduct research in any place across the province. Nevertheless, there were many "model areas" (*xianjing diqu*) that deserved my special attention. Indeed, the provincial official encouraged me to just write about a "model" village's population control achievements. Fearing that my fieldwork might be under close official surveillance in such "model" villages, I managed to decline the official's "generous" offer, and eventually gained an approval—though very reluctantly—from him.[3]

I spent a total of 16 month in and around my major field site, the village of River Crossing in northeast China, which I identified during my pilot study in summer 2002. As a place name, River Crossing could refer to three different, though inter-connected, place units. At the lowest level, River Crossing refers to the village proper; in 2004, the village contained 446 households, with about 1,450 residents. Above the village, "River Crossing" is the name of the "administrative village" (*xingzheng cun*), a governing unit immediately below that of the township (contained 651 households with 2,201 residents in 2004); this unit is comprised of the village proper of River Crossing (with 446

[3] To further dissuade my plan to conduct fieldwork in the village of River Crossing, the provincial official said that I would have a much "cozy" (*shufu*) life in a "model" village. I responded that I had already located a family that would be willing to host me, and I found that I could survive the poor local "living condition" (*shenghuo tiaojian*).

households) and five other small villages dispersed in the nearby mountains (with a total of 205 households in 2004), divided evenly between ethnic minority Manchu (48%) and majority Han residents (52%). As the largest village in the township, the village also lends its name to the overarching township; in 2004, the township had 4,213 households, with 13,899 residents. In my dissertation, I usually use "River Crossing" to refer only to the village itself and to the township (but not to the "administrative village"), so as to reduce readers' confusion.

During my fieldwork, I endeavored to understand ordinary villagers' perspectives on the government's population control efforts. To this end, I cautiously avoided close contact with village cadres in the beginning of my fieldwork. One may well argue that the local cadres are central in shaping rural social life. Yet as anthropologist Liu Xin has contended, most ethnographic research in contemporary China has either focused largely on the role of the local cadres or relied heavily on their assistance for research. Thus it is also highly valuable to investigate other possible ways of seeing and being (Liu 2000:181). Considering the hegemonic nature of the Chinese state's population control measures, I felt that, by listening primarily to ordinary villagers' stories and commentaries, I would be able to productively access the human face of China's post-socialism and associated globalizing efforts as they are reconfigured in the seemingly intimate space of reproduction.

During a pilot study I had conducted in summer 2002, I had lived in a house owned by my hostess, a widow in her late sixties. This was an ordinary village family, although slightly well-off financially. Choosing such a household as my host family had gendered

implications. In the village, patrilineal gender stereotypes were still influential. Living in a house with an elderly woman helped me to avoid potential sexual scandals lodged against me.

As a male ethnographer, I had already anticipated that my gender made some aspects of this research difficult. Reshaped by prevailing patrilineal gender stereotypes, China's three-decade-long population control efforts have been a highly "feminized" practice: targeting women, they were also implemented mainly by female agents. To document how ordinary villagers perceived and experienced the government's population control movements, I knew I must engage primarily with women.

Inspired by other male researchers who have successfully conducted research with female consultants (Gregory 1984), I grappled with the challenges of gender barriers by achieving cultural and linguistic (local vernacular) competence, as well as by maintaining my position as a married, sympathetic outsider trained in cultural sensitivity. To help navigate the gender gaps posed my male identity, I hired my hostess and another woman in her early fifties as my research assistants. Positioning myself as married yet childless at the time—hence judged "qualified" yet "inexperienced"—I worked with female informants (especially elders) as a "mentee" *vis-a-vis* their reproductive knowledge and experiences. In working with village women, my questions largely focused on their experiences with pregnancy, childbirth, contraception, and abortion; their ritual, herbal, and biomedical healing methods for reproductive illnesses and conditions; and their commentaries on, and strategies either to accommodate *or* subvert, the state's prolonged claims on their reproductive practices. To bring a gender-balanced perspective to my study, I interviewed many of these women's husbands for their analogous stories and

commentaries. At another level, to complement the secular views of reproduction I mostly privileged, with the help of village women I also collected narratives from five local ritual specialists and folk healers concerning their efforts to cure or ameliorate reproductive troubles.

While these initial strategies greatly facilitated my access to the local women's world of their reproductive practices, the distance I had cautiously kept from village cadres soon developed into mutual estrangement. From my daily conversations with ordinary villagers, combined with my personal observations, I gradually found out that, as a result of the nation's post-socialist transformation, in the village of River Crossing, intensified class differentiation has developed a high degree of what the Chinese sociologist Sun Liping terms *yingzhe tongchi*: "winner takes all" (2004:109). In this rural community, local reality looks like something of a live miniature of Chinese society at its post-socialist globalizing moment, with a "structural rupture" between the elite oligarchy and the rank-and-file (Sun 2004). In River Crossing, with the exception of the elite families and a few allied with them, most villagers could hardly dream of sharing any resources owned by the village, nor most opportunities provided by it.

Along with the emerging class divide came a variety of forms of reproductive privileges—and corruptions. For example, many young villagers married before reaching the bottom-line ages for a legal marriage, which are 22 for men and 20 for women, as long as they paid what amounted to a "protection fee" to local cadres. Likewise, in official records, since 1980 local married women had two children at most; yet from my interviews, I found that at least four women each had three births paid off officials as "hush money."

The more I learned about the local reproductive politics, the more serious I realized the long-standing villager/state contestations were surrounding reproduction. To avoid bringing potential risks to female consultants on this contested subject, from the fourth month of my doctoral fieldwork, I gave up working with my assistants publicly, and I became more careful in contacting informants. For instance, I rigorously coded informants' names and keep the master list in a secure place to assure that my informants are not identifiable. I became more selective concerning fieldwork techniques and avoided those that require collective work such as focus groups, which might make informants readily identifiable. I also avoided conducting interviews in public settings, except with government officials, and I periodically moved part of my field notes to the home of one of my relatives in a neighboring city about twenty-eight miles from the village.

To many male ethnographers, drinking and smoking with informants famously facilitates fieldwork (Rabinow 1977). Yet my experience demonstrates that the reverse might also be true. In River Crossing, masculinity was linked with alcohol and cigarettes. Because I did not drink or smoke, my own masculinity somehow become questionable in not a few village men's perspective, especially in the beginning of my fieldwork. Nevertheless, I soon realized that being associated with "temporarily insufficient" masculinity has actually made my contact with female informants more locally acceptable. At the meantime, I tried my best to be kind and supportive, which also helped me to access local women's world. In particular, I volunteered to tutor seven students (ages 13 – 19). In organizing their children's sessions with me, these students' mothers (and some of their relatives and friends) also began to share with me their

reproductive stories and commentaries. Thus, seeing me as a devoted teacher, many local men gradually accorded me full masculinity. The result of these efforts was rewarding, by the end of my field stay in River Crossing, I have collected detailed reproductive stories from 62 married women and 53 of these women's husbands—grouped by age, ethnic, class, and kinship backgrounds.

In addition to these interviews, throughout my fieldwork I interacted with hundreds of other people (most of them, River Crossing villagers), providing me a rich and broader context to understand villagers' conceptualizations and practices surrounding reproduction. After completing my fieldwork in 2005, I continue to maintain contact with my informants over the phone.[4] These extended communications have kept me informed of many important events that happened after my field stay.

To improve my political security in the village, in fall 2005 I began cautiously contacting officials at township, county, and prefecture governments. Based on these apparently workable relationships with government agents, I further interspersed my village study with cautiously undertaken contacts and interviews with village, township, county, prefecture, and provincial officials, so as to realistically acknowledge the complexities of the *state*. My goal in conducting research in state agencies was to foreground how the intimate event of reproduction has been manipulated, negotiated, and construed by a variety of state agents of the public sphere in multiple and complex ways. From these narratives I endeavored to see the human side behind the face of bureaucracy,

[4] In recent years, telecommunications have developed rapidly in rural China. In River Crossing, in 2004 it only cost some 200 *yuan* (about US$24) to set up a line, with service packages of 10-15 *yuan*/month for local phone calls. As a result, most local families have now installed telephones in their homes.

and to explore the subjectivities of those charged with implementing emotionally difficult government policies. My cautious contacts with government officials eventually provided me with an unexpected opportunity to witness on-site the showcase event that is the focus of the next chapter.

I had hoped that my cautious contacts with governmental officials would have created an acceptable balance between my focus on ordinary villagers' reproductive stories and keeping a bottom-line state of political security for my fieldwork. However, near the end of my fieldwork, I heard from some local women that I had suddenly become the target of a rumor that I was "an American spy on family planning." The creator of the gossip was the head of the village Women's Affairs, whose extended family was part of the village oligarchy.[5] As I figured out later, my extensive examination of villagers' reproductive practices posed a potential threat to village leaders. For instance, over the past several years, several village families were fined for having extra-quota births; the money, however, was pocketed by village and township cadres, who concealed these illegal births to the county authority. If I had exposed the corruption stories to upper-level authorities, the result would have been explosive. This episode demonstrates how, at the local level, reproduction has entangled with intricate local class politics at the nation's current postsocialist moment, and how village cadres skillfully mobilized the state's hyper-vigilant awareness of its international image to suppress the potential threat that my fieldwork posed to their private interests. As a result, during my last two months of fieldwork I always felt stressful and vulnerable; and I became further

[5] I heard the rumor from a middle-aged village woman, who was one of my close informants in River Crossing. The woman told me that the head of village Women's Affairs told her that I was "an American spy on family planning," when she mentioned me during a brief encounter with the female official on street. Several days later, a number of villagers also cautiously reminded me of this rumor.

vigilant of my political situation, constantly placing my first priority on protecting informants.

In conclusion, in this section I have introduced and examined my role as an "ethnographic shifter" in a complicated fieldwork situation. I suggest that, as a male ethnographer exploring the sensitive, feminized subject of reproduction in rural China, my relations with female assistants and informants became entangled not only with local gender discourses but also with national political agendas. This chapter has offered a case study of the ways in which local class politics surrounding gender and reproduction intertwined with the state's globalizing discourses to shape the lived relations between a male ethnographer and female consultants.

OVERVIEW OF THE DISSERTATION

CHAPTER 2

PERFORMING THE FAMILY PLANNING PROJECT OF THE NEW MILLENNIUM: AN INTERPRETIVE APPROACH TO CLASS

Over the past three decades, China has become notorious for its stringent population control policy. However, around the turn of the new millennium, the postsocialist Chinese state became preoccupied with constructing an internationally acceptable image of its population policy. While eagerly participating in the capitalist world economy, the state also revised its birth policy, claiming to provide rural women with more "humane services" for their reproductive health.

In this chapter I examine a township government's showcase presentation on its "humane" family planning project in summer 2005, by unpacking layers of interrelated discursive, symbolic, and sociopolitical forces that converged to shape the event. Analyzing the presentation as a ritual performance, I suggest that the showcase event articulated a form of ideology that served to legitimize the local government's continuous claims on village women's private experiences of reproduction. Treating the event as instantiating the local government's active accommodation of deepening class gaps, I further propose that the presentation simultaneously created a political platform for state agents and local elites to pursue their distinctive yet interconnected organizational and personal interests. Drawing from this case study, I argue that the current globalized discourse surrounding the "humane" family planning program in rural China has to a large degree become "showbiz." This chapter thus suggests an engaged reading of China's emerging post-socialist conditions by foregrounding the reality of intensifying class-based social rifts and their serious real-life repercussions for ordinary peasants on their daily lives, including reproduction.

CHAPTER 3

IMAGINED MODERNITY AND THE METAMORPHOSES OF NATIONAL AND LOCAL POPULATION CONTROL POLICY

In this chapter, I argue that population control in rural China has been a constituent part of the Chinese state's shifting discourses of modernity since the 1970s. Following the discursive transformation of population policy in rural areas over the past three decades, I examine how changing images of peasants as "backward" subjects have

been variably constructed by the Chinese state, and how such constructions of rural identity have served to legitimize the state's sustained intrusion into the seemingly private event of reproduction. Situating China within a comparative framework of post-socialism(s), I further understand recent shifts in the state's population policy as integral to the state's current yearning to join the capitalist world economy. In so doing, I suggest that China's post-socialist transformation has intersected with broader processes of globalization and transnationalism.

CHAPTER 4

REPRODUCTION AGAINST THE STATE: STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE AND WOMEN'S CHILDBEARING EXPERIENCES IN POSTSOCIALIST RURAL CHINA

In this chapter I examine structural violence surrounding reproduction. Since the mid-1990s, concomitant with a strong nationalist discourse of modernization, the Chinese government has strived to create an internationally acceptable image of its notorious population control policy by purportedly transforming its previously "coercive" policy to one that is claimed to provide more "humanistic services" for rural women. Nevertheless, the state continues to construct its rural subjects as "backward" Other in need of the state's incessant guidance, discipline, and efforts at "civilization." Moreover, beneath the nation's ongoing post-socialist transformations lie intensifying socioeconomic differentiations/contestations. The state's birth control policy—articulated through a nationalist discourse, a patrilineal gender ideology, and intensifying class inequality—thus calls for both scholarly and public attention. For their part, ordinary villagers, living in a social setting with nearly impassable class gaps, try to balance their desire for social

mobility with their pursuit of a male heir on the one hand, and their sense of insecurity and powerlessness on the other. Attending to these opposed perspectives, this chapter thus interrogates how the state's current family planning project shapes village women's bodily experiences through structural violence carried out in the name of a "civilizing mission."

CHAPTER 5

REPRODUCTION AT THE INTERSECTION OF GENDER, CLASS, AND RURAL/URBAN SPACES

Beginning in 1980, China's stringent population policy resulted in many rural families having daughters as their only children. As legitimate, sole heirs of their families, these "only daughters" seem to challenge villagers' entrenched patrilineal notion of family line succession. Nevertheless, since the 1990s, more and more such families have produced second children for male heirs. This fertility "fashion" has not only restored but, ironically, further reinforced the traditional patrilineal gender ideology concerning what "counts" as a "family line."

In this chapter, I explore how an emerging consciousness of class distinction has become entangled with villagers' quest for male heirs in the broader context of China's post-socialist transformations. Accordingly, the chapter offers two main contributions. First, seeing kinship as a nexus that links gender and social inequality, and bringing a class-based perspective into a gendered analysis of reproduction, this chapter suggests that villagers' awareness of deepening class divides is now reshaping the contours of how the patrilineal gender ideology influences their reproductive practices and the attendant re-configuration of what counts as a "family line." Second, by providing a feminist

reading of how the broader category of "class" is articulated through women's bodily experiences of reproduction in their pursuit of a family heir, this chapter further enriches developing perspectives on class distinctions in China. Thus, at a more general theoretical level, the chapter suggests that feminist studies of the seemingly "feminine" issue of reproduction and the "outmoded" topic of "kinship" lie at the very center of social science investigations of the complex processes of political economy, as villagers' reproductive experiences encapsulate China's emerging post-socialist conditions. As such, the chapter is inspired by work in feminist anthropology of reproduction and kinship that aims to braid discussions of gender and class as linked factors that provide a lens through which cultural norms, individual struggles, and social transformations might be productively viewed and examined.

CHAPTER 6

STATE PROPAGANDA SLOGANS AND THE ETHICS OF CHINESE MODERNITY

In this chapter I examine the discursive transformation of the Chinese government's propaganda slogans for population control policy over the past three decades. Starting from textual analysis, I expand and link a set of linguistic ideas such as "intertextuality," "dialogism," and "figured world"—as developed by Jonathan Culler, Mikhail M. Bakhtin, William Hanks, and Dorothy Holland et al.—to broader social spheres. I suggest that, since the late 1970s, the Chinese state has been adroitly shaping and reshaping its modernity imagery through changing propaganda slogans for population control policy. Manipulating the image of "modernity," the state has in the meantime created a malleable subjectivity for its rural citizens. Such state-constructed

rural subjectivity, however, contains a scheme of "internal orientalization," within which rural people remained backward, silenced, and subdued subjects. In interrogating the three-decade history of propaganda slogans for the population control in rural China, in this chapter I propose that the Chinese state's modernity project has proved, at best, inconsistent in its purported concern and respect for rural people's subjectivity. From a humanistic perspective, I argue that the modernity project undergirding the Chinese state's population control efforts in rural area remains highly elitist—an arrogant, hegemonic blueprint that further alienates the subjugated population living in the countryside.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSIONS

In this concluding chapter, I briefly review the main points of previous chapters and then further highlight and develop the overarching themes of the dissertation that have been dispersed in these separate chapters. Building upon the previous chapters, this concluding chapter will emphasize that the dissertation explores how a shifting series of discursive constructions of peasants as "backward" subjects has legitimized the state's sustained intrusion into the purportedly private event of reproduction in rural China at the same time that the dissertation unpacks how rural residents' responses to the state's intrusion via their reproductive practices have told a rich story of the makings of the nation's post-socialist modernity. Thus, this ethnographic account of population control in rural China simultaneously offers a historiography of China's three decades of post-socialism.

CHAPTER 2

PERFORMING THE FAMILY PLANNING PROJECT OF THE NEW MILLENNIUM

Introduction

One morning during summer 2005, I traveled to a township seat near the eastern edge of the village of River Crossing in northeast China. At the courtyard in front of the new, five-storey main building, a shiny, black Infiniti had just arrived from the county authority. Escorted by several local officials, two county government officials began to review the township government's preparation for a showcase "On-the-Spot Presentation on Family Planning" (*jihua shengyu xianchang hui*), to be held that afternoon.

Two months before, the county authority had decided to hold the event to promote its recent achievements in family planning. Over the past fifteen years, the county had been categorized as "just average" (*yi ban ban*)—not "falling behind" (*kaohou*), but never "outstanding" (*tuchu*)—in birth control achievements, in comparison to other counties in the province. Through the day's publicity event, officials planned to impress visiting provincial leaders—an act that they hoped might eventually help gain the county an award as an "Advanced Unit in Family Planning" (*jihua shengyu xianjin danwei*). To this end, the county authority had asked seven of the township-level family planning offices (among fifteen in the county) to prepare this showcase presentation as flawlessly as possible.

On the day of the big event, an inspection party—comprised of officials from the provincial authority, prefecture and county leaders, and officials of the prefecture's seven member counties—would move from one township office to another and examine on-the-spot the county's progress in implementing the state's birth control policy. Each township's presentation would influence provincial leaders' perception of whether family planning in that county had attained the level of being "outstanding" or had remained "just average." That day, journalists and news reporters would also follow the inspection party's entire review tour. The event would thus be publicized across the province via newspaper and television. Through satellite TV and the internet—now available in the city and, increasingly, in many rural areas—the event might reach national and even international audiences.

In a broader context, the image-managing event encapsulates China's recent, post-socialist transformation since the 1990s.[6] Efforts to control the nation's population have been integral to the Chinese state's ambition to "modernize" since the 1970s.[7] Over the past three decades, China has become notorious for its stringent birth control policy (Anagnost 1997a, Wasserstrom 1984). However, in the early 1990s, as the nation began to embrace a market economy, its population policy came increasingly to center on neo-liberal economic development, rather than on draconian birth control methods alone (Gu 2002); "Bear fewer children, prosper quickly" (*shaosheng kuanfu*) became a pervasive

[6] For important recent scholarship analyzing China's post-socialist transformations, see, for example, Anagnost 1997b, 2004, 2008; Brownell 2008; Hanser 2008; Harrell 2001; Kipnis 2007; Lee 1998, 2007; Lin 2006; Liu 2002; Nee 1989; Nee and Matthews 1996; Ong 2007; Pun 2005; Rofel 1999, 2007; Ruf 1998; Wasserstrom 2007; Watson 2006; Hui Wang 2003; N. Wang 2005; Wu 2005; H. Yan 2003, 2008; Y. Yan 2003; Yang 2010; and Zhang and Ong 2008.

[7] For important scholarship on modernity of the state and population control in general and China in particular, see, for example, Donzelot 1979; Fong 2004; Greenhalgh 2003, 2008; Jordanova 1980; McClaren 1984; and White 1994, 2009.

governmental slogan (Peng et al. 1996:252-54). In the wake of the 1994 U.N. Population Conference in Cairo, and the subsequent World Conference on Women in Beijing (1995), the government has tried to further transform its population policy from its previous stringent measures toward a promise to provide more "humane services" for women's reproductive health.

This policy shift has been crafted mainly for international rather than domestic audiences: through it, the government aims to lessen international criticism of its birth control efforts (Greenhalgh and Winckler 2005).[8] Indeed, at the turn of the new millennium, the Chinese state became preoccupied with constructing an internationally acceptable image of its population policy, as central to its eager embrace of global capitalism.[9] Thus in 1998, the township authority of River Crossing, like many other local governments across China, banned formerly permissible acts of violence against women in cases wherein villagers breached its population policy. Instead, villagers were

[8] In explaining this policy shift, state leaders always tended to stress that offering a "humane" birth policy would help maintain "social stability" (*shehui wending*) in rural areas by reducing peasants' resistance to the state's family planning program. Reasons like such—reiterated frequently by government officials at all levels—sound plausible, but have misapprehended most peasants' fertility needs since the mid-1990s. As I will discuss in detail in "Chapter 5- REPRODUCTION AT THE INTERSECTION OF GENDER, CLASS, AND RURAL/URBAN SPACES," China's post-socialist socioeconomic transformations, characterized by enlarging class gaps, have profoundly reshaped peasants' reproductive choices and decisions. As a result, since the late 1990s, for many peasants their overall fertility needs became quite close to the state's fertility plans. In the township of River Crossing, for example, since the late 1990s, each year the actual fertility has become slightly lower than the annual birth plan pre-approved by the county authority. Contrary to the state's claim that its recent "humane" birth policy has effectively reduced peasants' resistance to the birth policy, I would suggest that it was the socioeconomic transformation—happened in post-socialist rural China—that has profoundly reshaped their reproductive practices, which have in turn indirectly alleviated their opposition to the state's birth control efforts. Equally important, even if the policy articulations have now become "humane," the government's fertility regulation has remained the same since 1987 (that is, rural women would have a second chance to have a son in cases their first births had produced girls). To villagers, at least as I have witnessed in River Crossing, the claimed "humane" birth policy largely remained lip service in its implementation, as I will discuss in this chapter.

[9] As governmental administrators, Zhong et al., have made plain in official publications, the "service" would help to establish an amiable and acceptable image of the post-socialist Chinese state to international audiences (Zhong, Lai, and Shi 1998).

able to have an additional child beyond the permitted first or second child—but only as long as they could afford a fee for an "out-of-quota" birth.[10] This fee is quite substantial, however: usually 3-5 times of local peasants' *per capita* annual income of the previous year. Accordingly, class distinctions turned out to be increasingly explicit in the birth policy discourse: richer families now clearly enjoy far more reproduction freedom than do poor and "ordinary" families. Accommodating—instead of countering—the reality of deepening class differences, the local government simply reiterated the state's current claim that its birth control effort would henceforth focus on providing high-quality "services" (*fuwu*) for rural women, and would cover a variety of issues such as childbearing and childrearing, and informed options about contraception and abortion, as well as women's reproductive health.

In this chapter, I examine a local government's showcase presentation on family planning. I begin by describing the ways in which local officials showcased their "humane" family planning project in a public event in summer 2005. In my description, I strategically interrupt the flow of the narrative so as to unpack layers of interrelated discursive, symbolic, and sociopolitical forces that converged to shape the event. Considering "the subjectivity of the state being" (Aretxaga 2003:395; cf. Taussig 1992, 1997), I examine how villagers encounter the post-socialist Chinese state in intimate ways through their "close-to-the-skin" perceptions and experiences of the state's birth control efforts (Das and Pool 2004). Questioning why the state's population control policy has metamorphosed into what I suggest is a "showbiz" performance (*zuoxiu*)

[10] In 1980, the Chinese government implemented the one-child policy in both rural and urban areas. Due to peasants' fierce resistance, since 1987 the government began to allow rural women, whose first child had produced girls, a second chance to bear a son, usually after an interval of four to six years. Beyond such pre-approved second births, the government restricts any additional births.

(Boon 1999) with virtually no real substance behind the nation's globalized image-managing efforts, I foreground the ways in which the recent shift in China's population policy has both intersected with, and articulated, the nation's ongoing post-socialist transformations.

Some scholars have suggested that China's current engagements with capitalism are, disturbingly, now accelerating and intensifying class differentiations.[11] However, that perspective remains controversial (Arrighi 2007), and in any case has not yet been applied to an understanding of China's population control policy. This chapter thus offers two main contributions: first, it contributes to developing perspectives on increasing class distinctions in China most broadly; second, it aims to add a rich interpretive approach to that analysis by reading the state's population policy as a form of ritual performance that symbolically reifies class difference—now increasingly evolving toward elite oligarchy. I engage these points by simultaneously taking a "top-down" approach to bureaucrats' encounters with peasants, and a "bottom-up" approach to peasants' encounters with bureaucrats. Reading the performance of the state's local agency at its "showcase moment," this chapter thus offers a local glimpse at emerging post-socialist conditions in rural China.

Preparing the Showcase Event in the Township Government

In River Crossing Township, the showcase event was planned to be held in two parts. First, an inspection party would seem to "drop by" (*shun fang*) a village on the way toward the township seat, to observe on-the-spot how local officials had guided

[11] For recent scholarship on the subject, see, for example, Anagnost 2004, 2008; Pun 2005; Wu 2005; and H. Yan 2003, 2008.

village women to comply with the government's population policy via economic incentives. Then, a major meeting would be held at the township seat.

In the township seat, belying the supposedly impromptu nature of the event, leaders had already arranged a large space for a meeting place. Indeed, over the past several weeks, local officials had spared no effort to prepare relevant materials and had carefully decorated the room to make it into a "respectable" showcase presentation (see Photo 1).



Photo 1: Meeting place in the township government.

On a wall near the front corner of the designated meeting place, names of 12 "Family Planning Exemplary Models" (*jihua shengyu xianjing geren*)—all women—were written in black ink calligraphy on red ribbons attached to red silk flowers (see Photo 2). These women had been chosen as "models" because their stories were taken by

local officials to demonstrate the effectiveness of the state's recent policy slogan, "Bear fewer children, prosper quickly," in promoting its birth control program.[12]

To visualize these "model" women's achievements, on the tables against the room's left and right walls were displayed silk flowers and related crafts (see Photo 3). Why silk flowers? In fact, silk flower assembly was a major industry in the township (second after agriculture). Since the late 1980s, through the coordination of local middlemen, outside entrepreneurs began to sub-contract with local women to assemble inexpensive handicrafts, most of which would be exported overseas. Over the past decade-and-a-half, this business had grown, providing local families with an additional, if moderate, source of income.[13]

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[12] However, these women's status as "family planning exemplary models" might have existed only on the flower ribbons. It is true that their families were indeed all quite well off, and they were all said to have only one child. Yet the actual circumstances of at least several of the women did not fully exemplify the principles they were meant to demonstrate.

Fenghua, for example, was one of the twelve "models" listed on the wall. She and her husband had run a popular restaurant in River Crossing for over a decade. One morning I encountered her in the village street and congratulated her for having been awarded the family planning honor. She replied that the honor was not merited at all, and no one in her neighborhood had ever heard of it. Seeing my surprise, Fenghua told me her story. To cope with the on-the-spot meeting, the director of the township Family Planning Office needed a list of role models to showcase to the inspection party, demonstrating how village women had become rich by bearing few children. Fenghua and the names of three other women from the village were thus temporarily put on the "model" list because their families were among the richest in River Crossing, and each of them had only one child (all sons)—thus they seemed to fit well with the propaganda image of the government slogan, "Bear fewer children, prosper quickly." Pretending that these women's achievements had already been widely publicized by the township government, local leaders tried to impress the inspection party with their success in establishing "role models" who supposedly guided village women to have fewer children via economic incentives—although such publicity events had never been held (at least in the village of River Crossing). After recounting this story, Fenghua joked: "I was a 'model'—but only in the director's mouth."

[13] Profits from assembling silk flowers were quite meager, however. During my fieldwork in summer 2002 and 2004-05, a typical hard-working woman was able to earn about 8-10 *yuan* (about $1-$1.20 U.S. at that time) for 10-12 hours' intensive labor. And because working conditions were harsh, the repetitive stress of flower assembly resulted in swelling and bruising of wrists and finger joints—a common complaint among women who worked assembling the flowers.

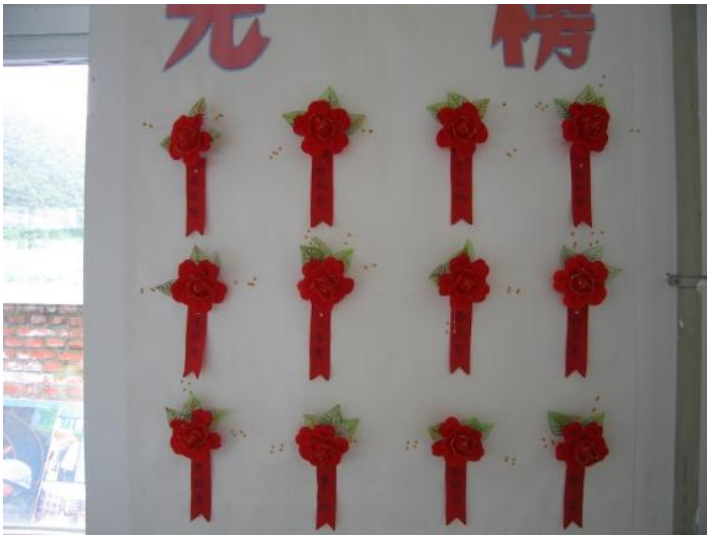

Photo 2: Names of "Family Planning Exemplary Models" were written on ribbons attached to red silk flowers.



Photo 3: Silk flowers and related crafts were displayed on tables.

Seeing this cottage industry as a potential mark of the government's achievements in boosting the economy, township leaders soon came to claim themselves as the "patrons" of this inchoate industry. In the late 1990s, in governmental reports the township authority began to announce River Crossing as the "Home of Silk Flowers" and took full credit for the industry's continuous development. In reality, however, such governmental "support" had only existed in official documents: the business had been

growing for nearly a decade before the local authority came to "promote" it, and this "support" largely remained lip-service.[14]

While the silk flower industry was burgeoning, in the mid-1990s the state's birth policy also began to emphasize economic incentives for having fewer children (White 2009). Seizing a "historical conjuncture" (Sahlins 1981:68) between the growth of the silk flower industry and the state's policy shift in birth control methods, township leaders adroitly manipulated the two events into a discursive causality. That is, in accordance with the national birth policy shift toward greater use of incentives, officials claimed that the township government had been promoting the silk flower business as a means of advertising the slogan, "Bear fewer children, prosper quickly." By pushing village women to be more interested in making money, the officials reasoned, these women would surely be less interested in having babies. In turn, by having fewer children, local women would have more time and energy to become even better off. In so doing, local officials have virtually mobilized a temporal-spatially distorted discursive hegemony—a form of "ideological domination" undergirded by political power (Gramsci 1971:57-58). Through such a hegemonic discourse, officials announced that the village women's silk flower work was an exemplary way of putting into practice the state's call to "bear fewer children, prosper quickly."[15]

[14] Many local officials seemed to be more interested in the potential profit they might gain personally from the silk flower assembly industry than to promote the business through government efforts. Some officials even became involved in the silk flower business themselves, as *de facto* middlemen. Because of their social and political capital, these officials usually earned more than most ordinary middlemen.

[15] In viewing the silk flower crafts, I found that this discursive rhetoric had gone even further. On most of these handicrafts were short phrases written on a paper tag, or directly on the work itself, such as "Family planning benefits our nation as well as our people" (*jihua shengyu, li guo li ming*), "Let nature take its course to either have a boy or have a girl" (*sheng nan sheng nu, shun qi zhi ran*), and "It's nice to have only one child in one's entire life" (*yibeizi zhi sheng yige hao*). After my first visit to the designated meeting room several days before the showcase presentation in the township seat, I asked the director of the

Local officials had managed to use silk flowers to signify the government's dual, interlinked accomplishments in boosting the economy and controlling population. I suggest that this freshly fabricated silk flower discourse is reminiscent of "cargo cults" that were popular among many indigenous Melanesians during both colonial and post-colonial periods.[16] To be sure, the modern Chinese state—central and local alike—has been contemptuous of any folk "cults," which it has relentlessly characterized as "backward" beliefs. Yet ironically, the way the state articulated the silk flower discourse was quasi-cult-like: by treating the silk flower as something of a fetish bearing mysterious potency, local officials were discursively seeking to secure the government's desired but easily-lost "cargo"—control of village women's reproductive ideas and practices, upon which the nation's rapid economic growth was claimed to be built.

Following this quasi-religious reasoning that local officials took in their policy articulation, the silk flower discourse also seemed something like a contemporary version

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township Family Planning Office why such phrases appeared on the handicrafts. The director replied that the silk flower crafts in the room had been donated by village women who had written them. When the director noticed that my facial expression conveyed a look of surprise (which I could not conceal at the moment), she added:

> "In recent years, more and more village women involved in the silk flower assembly business have become well-off soon thereafter. Through our policy propaganda and education, they realized that if they had as many kids as the old generations, they would have been a housewife slaving away around a hot stove all their lives. From then on, these village women gained a deeper understanding that family planning would ultimately benefit their families' well-being. Via the phrases they put on their handicrafts, they expressed their gratitude to our family planning policy."

The director's words sounded like a live version of the government's propaganda text on birth control, and I remained unconvinced by her official-ese elucidation. In fact, I had learned from another staff officer during my first visit to the meeting room that some of the crafts on display had been taken by government officials from local middlemen without paying the workers a penny for them, while the rest were purchased from the county seat; as for the phrases on the handicrafts, they had been written by the director and other staff members.

[16] For anthropological studies of cargo cults in Melanesian, see, for example, Burridge 1970; Lattas 1998, 2005, 2006, 2007; Lawrence 1964; Lindstrom 1993; and Wagner 1981. Similarly taking "cargo cults" as an interpretive trope, Louisa Schein (1999) examined a Chinese minority group's consumerism in the context of both the globalization and "internal colonialism".

of an age-old magic, "invented"—as Roy Wagner might say (1981)—by local authorities to keep in step with the state's persistent—some might say manic—pursuit of a globalized form of modernity. To take an Azande perspective (Evans-Pritchard 1937), the "silk flowers," located and discursively obsessed on by local officials, resemble a mysterious Azande spell that might bewitch village women so that their reproductive practices could be controlled by the local government. Likewise, following Frazer (1890), the silk flower discourse also sounds like a live example of "contagious magic" deployed by local officials espousing an arbitrary causality that they claimed linked the silk flower assembly with women's childbearing ideas and practices. The local government's fabrication of the silk flower discourse could further be viewed as a form of magical action (Mauss 1902). Beyond these symbolic processes, the authority's actions reflect entrenched social realities at the nation's postsocialist moment in rural China.

Situating the silk flower discourse in the broader context of the nation's eager embrace of global capitalism, I would further suggest that beneath local officials' quasi-cult-like birth policy articulation lay the Chinese state's obsession with a contemporary version of commodity fetishism. In *Capital*, "fetishism of commodities" is a critical concept that Marx developed to illustrate how people misapprehend the true nature of commodities by treating them as persons with seeming power and agency, while regarding people as "things"—mere repositories of labor power for sale in the market (2000:473-476). In Marx's day, "fetish" as a term was widely used in the study of non-Western, "primitive" religions." "Fetishism of commodities" encapsulates Marx's profound critique of the irrational nature of capitalism—further claiming that such "primitive" beliefs have also, ironically, existed at the heart of Western modernity.

Strikingly, the Chinese state's current policy focus on the slogan, "Bear fewer children, prosper quickly," reiterated such "primitive" fetishism: by framing the slogan into a discursive causality, human reproduction was reduced to merely a means toward achieving material wealth; conversely, material wealth was instead imbued with certain agency to reduce human fertility. In this way, local officials' silk flower discourse is emblematic of the state's ingrained fetishization of global capitalism.

Beyond these symbolic processes, through choosing wealthy women as exemplars in presenting a fetishized silk flower discourse, class differences emerged to instantiate the local government's articulation of its birth control policy. Thus the authority's actions reflect entrenched social realities at the nation's postsocialist moment in rural China, as I explore in the following pages.

Staging the Presentation in the House of a Local "Model" Family

The first part of the showcase presentation was scheduled to be held in Tong Xiumei's compound, in a village about six miles west of River Crossing. Tong Xiumei's father-in-law had been the village head for 18 years, and she and her husband were successful middlemen in the silk flower business. Because the couple always had many contracts, they usually asked subcontracted women to do their work in the couple's house, to monitor product quality and speed up the assembly. The room that was now decorated for the showcase presentation was actually a workroom for silk flower assembly.

In recent years, the township government had asked each member village to identify one woman as an exemplary model in practicing the state's call to "bear fewer children, prosper quickly." Tong Xiumei had been chosen as a model figure because of

her success in business. Today, to cope with the township leaders' request for an on-the-spot presentation, the workroom had been temporarily rearranged as a village women's Family Planning Activities Center. The setting looked quite convincing to an outsider. Before chatting with the villagers, even I would not have been able to realize that the presentation site had nothing to do with family planning (see Photo 4).



Photo 4: The assembly workroom in Tong Xiumei's house was temporarily staged as the site for the village showcase presentation

While I was speaking with village women, an old woman, Li Laotai, came to join us and began to converse with me. As Tong Xiumei's mother-in-law, Li Laotai looked pleased that the township authority had chosen her son's house for an important event, bringing many officials to visit—although she seemed uncertain what the event would be. Feeling honored, she began to talk about her past hardships and current life.

Our conversation went congenially. As we were chatting, I saw a little boy run out of a room, through the yard, and toward the village street.

"*Lao San* ["Third Child"], don't run! Watch the traffic!" Li Laotai raised her pitch with a loud voice, almost yelling.

"Lao San? Your son has three kids?" I asked, surprised.

Realizing she had made a slip of the tongue, Li Laotai flushed, looking embarrassed. Silence suddenly fell among us for a short while.

Noticing my eyes were still curious, she replied, still ill at ease and in a low voice: "The kid's mom [i.e. Tong Xiumei] reminded me not to talk about that today. And now I've told you—but absolutely don't tell those [officials] who'll come to inspect—she [Tong Xiumei] would blame me if she knew…"

Our conversation continued . . . and revealed another unexpected and indeed ironic side of the showcase event.

Li Laotai herself had three grown sons, and Tong Xiumei was the wife of her eldest son. Equally scandalous from the government perspective, Tong Xiumei and her husband were married before each of them had reached the minimum age for a legal marriage. In 1994, Tong Xiumei had her second child, with both children being girls. Coincidentally, that same year, the wife of Li Laotai's second son also had a second child, with both children also being girls. As it happened, several years later, the first child of Li Laotai's youngest son was once again a girl. The extended family was tortured by the fact that none of the three sons' wives had produced sons; villagers started calling them a family of "Five Golden Flowers." The term was a play on the title of a renowned Chinese film by the same name that featured the stories of five young girls. After the film's release in 1959, its title became the source of a widely spoken slang phrase with multiple implications depending on the context. Regarding Li Laotai's family, the term

sarcastically insinuated that the family had only produced girls. In the local context—where patrilineal ideology remained entrenched—referring to the children of an extended family as "Five Golden Flowers" was humiliating.[17]

Indignant, Tong Xiumei and her husband decided to try again to produce a son. To increase the likelihood that Tong Xiumei would give birth to a boy, the couple made a vow to their ancestors as well as to gods in a local Buddhist temple, promising a reward if they managed to have a son. After Tong Xiumei became pregnant, to "ensure" that the fetus would be a boy, the couple bribed a hospital doctor to reveal to them the ultrasound scanning result of the fetus's sex—an action deemed illegal across the nation. Had the fetus been a girl, the couple had decided that they would have an abortion, counting on their odds in subsequent tries. As it happened, they were told the fetus was a boy. And so, in 1999, the couple eventually had a third child—a son indeed—and paid with joy the huge, 10,000 *yuan* fine (about $1,200) to the township government for having breached the birth policy. To put this sum in perspective: in River Crossing Township, the annual income *per capita* hovered around 2,100 *yuan* that year, making the fine equivalent to nearly five years' salary.[18] To an ordinary family the amount of such an exorbitant fine

[17] For discussions of China's longstanding patriliny and its patriarchal impact, see, for example, Ahern 1973; Cohen 1976; Freedman 1958, 1966, 1979; Fried 1956; Pasternak 1972; Skinner 1964-65; J. Waston 1982, 2004; R. Watson 1985, 1986; Wolf and Huang 1980; Y. Yan 1996; and Yang 1994.

For older generations such as Tong Xiumei's parents-in-law, many villagers—while they were young—were unaware that the male's sperm determines a baby's gender. For those of Tong Xiumei's age or younger, the biological process determining a baby's gender is no longer a secret, thanks to the spread of basic reproductive knowledge along with the state's birth control and propaganda campaigns, including a course on "Physiology and Hygiene" (*shengli weisheng*), containing a chapter on human sexuality and reproduction, that had been taught nationwide during the third year in middle school since the late 1970s.

[18] Yet Tong Xiumei's family was able to afford even more expenditures following the birth of the first male heir. To express their gratitude to their ancestors for their blessings, Tong Xiumei and her husband had asked a high school teacher who was skilled at writing "brush characters" (*shu fa*—traditional Chinese calligraphy) to draw a new chart of the family genealogy, followed by a ritual held in their house and directed by a Taoist priest, with sacrifices dedicated to their ancestors. And to thank the Buddhist gods for their protection, the couple purchased over a thousand *yuan* worth of joss sticks and candles (about $120 in 1999) and donated them to the local temple.

would have been a disaster. That Tong Xiumei and her husband could, without worry, decide to have a third child knowing they would have to pay an extraordinary penalty for this luxury speaks strikingly to the class hierarchy that continues to divide poor peasants from increasingly wealthy elite.

Reading the local government's "presentation" against its performance site—Tong Xiumei's house—I was stunned by the layers of irony that lay beneath the township authority's staging of its current "humane" birth policy. Standing on the site, I was incredulous that the presentation—meant to exemplify how the local government had succeeded in boosting the economy and controlling the population—ended up being held in the home of a local elite family in which both the husband and wife had not only married illegally (before reaching the minimum legal ages for marriage), but had also produced three children (the third, the result of an illegally produced sonogram, to support the officially discouraged continuation of the patriarchal tradition)—with all of these facts being the exact opposite of the image that township officials had been promoting. I had already observed that day that the township government had practiced fraud in preparing for the presentation, but I had not anticipated that they would go that far in doing so.[19]

An explanation of the local government's performance may lie in further commentary offered by Da Kui, an ordinary villager. The day before the showcase

[19] Several weeks later, during a private conversation, I asked a female township government staff member if local leaders had known that Tong Xiumei had given birth to three children before deciding to hold the showcase event in her home. She answered, "Of course." The staff member added that in recent years, only a few families had produced three children, partly because of the prohibitive amount of the fine; in any case, most local families were able to have a son in either their first or second births (if their first birth had produced girls), assisted by the ultrasound technology now available locally (though illegally) since the late 1990s. As a result, those few families who could afford the prohibitive government fine to have a third birth—hoping for a son—have become rather well known to most people in the township, let alone to officials in charge of birth control affairs.

presentation, I had asked Da Kui if he had heard about the upcoming event. Da Kui had replied in a scornful voice: "Why do you bother asking this? That's the business of those officials. For years, events like this have had nothing to do with us!" His words further signaled the enlarging class rifts, and the associated local politics, occurring in the village.

Indeed, shortly after the implementation of its stringent population policy, China launched a reform that transformed the contours of rural society tectonically by redistributing collective farmlands to individual households.[20] With these post-Mao reforms, the state has pushed the entire nation toward a capitalist market economy and hence has become increasingly *post*-socialist.[21] Along with privatization and market-oriented reform has come growing social differentiation.[22]

In the township of River Crossing, intensified class differentiation has developed a high degree of what the Chinese sociologist Sun Liping terms *yingzhe tongchi*: "winner takes all" (2008). In this rural township, local reality looks like something of a live miniature of Chinese society at its post-socialist globalizing moment, with a "structural rupture" between the elite oligarchy and the rank-and-file (Sun 2004:109). In River Crossing, with the exception of the elite families and a few allied with them, most villagers could hardly dream of sharing any resources owned by the township/village, nor any opportunities provided by it.

[20] For recent scholarship on land reform policies in rural China, see, for example, Jacoby et al. 2002 and Li 1999.

[21] For comparative discussion of postsocialist transitions in China and the former Soviet Bloc, see, for example, Boym 1994, 1998; Gal and Kligman 2000; Hann 2002; Harrell 2001; Nee 1989; Rivkin-Fish 2003; and Verdery 1996.

[22] For recent scholarship on social differentiation in postsocialist China, see Anagnost 2008; Rofel 1999; Solinger 1999; H. Yan 2003, 2008; and Zhang 2001.

To instantiate, I offer just a few interconnected cases. In spring 2003, leaders of the River Crossing village sold the government building to an outside entrepreneur at a price of some 280,000 *yuan*, and they moved their office to a compound owned by the township authority and given to them rent-free. As collective property, the money gained from the sale should have been legally owned by all the village residents. But to the surprise of the villagers, the cash proceeds soon evaporated without a trace. To squelch villagers' complaints, leaders claimed that the money had been used to repay debts the village authority had owed to a bank. Most people, however, were suspicious of the claim. Insofar as leaders could not provide any convincing proofs such as verifiable documentation from the bank or a rigorous account audit of their spending, villagers believed that most of the money had been pocketed by officials in murky ways. During private conversations, many villagers were scornful of the village government's ever-increasing "debt."

"'Debt'? Don't fool me!" San Kui, a villager in his early thirties, sarcastically remarked. "Had they [leaders] neither squandered the money through 'going dining, wining, whoring, and gambling' (*chi he piao du*) nor pocketed it themselves, would our village [authority] be in debt?"

San Kui's critique was not unfounded. For instance, although farmland had been redistributed to individual households since 1982, about 3.4% of the village's farmland (190 *mu*—about 31.3 acres) was reserved for specific farming contracts or nonagricultural commercial contracts, with rental fees paid to the village authority. Yet even with this reliable source of income among others, for more than a decade, the village leaders had never launched a single tiny project for the public welfare. For

example, the village streets remained unpaved, full of bumps and hollows; the village drain has been silted up for years, often causing flooding after heavy rains during the summer in several neighborhoods (not surprisingly, no local officials' families lived in these areas); and the village elementary school remained dilapidated for over a decade, until a special government fund was appropriated directly from the provincial authority to renovate many rural schools across the province in 2004. Thus the local agents' continued claim that the government had been "in debt" was utterly unconvincing to most villagers.

Moral scandals involving village leaders further exacerbated the social rifts between village elites and ordinary peasants—rifts that had already been accelerated by the state's market reforms, and intensified by local officials' rampant corruption and disregard of public welfare. Thus in 1993, the village Communist Party secretary was caught *in flagrante delicto* by police while having adulterous sex with a married woman (a local school teacher) in a hotel in the provincial capital. The Party secretary managed to bail himself and his mistress out after paying a huge fine—20,000 *yuan*—to the police authority.[23] To pacify his mistress's family, the Party secretary managed to hire her husband on the staff of the village government. Moreover, ten years later, through the Party secretary, the son of his mistress became a staff member of the township government.

From a combination of such interlinked acts of politico-economic corruption and moral scandals developed a ruling local elite that evolved into a veritable oligarchy

[23] The amount was about $3,450 in 1993. To put the sum in perspective, in 1993 the annual income *per capita* was only about 1,100 *yuan* in this area, making the fine equivalent to 18 years' salary for an ordinary villager.

complete with entrenched, class-based privileges.[24] Thus in 2005, all profitable village positions—the privatized local school restaurant, the farmers' market, the local post office—were controlled by two families: those of the village Communist Party secretary and the village head. The village head's brother was the administrator of the local farmer's market; his daughter became the director of the local post office in summer 2005, shortly after marrying the Party secretary's only son, a government official in a neighboring township; and the Party secretary's wife was the owner of the local school restaurant.

During my fieldwork, I heard numerous private criticisms by villagers of local elites. Yet throughout my entire field stay, no one dared express their condemnation publicly, mainly for fear of open confrontation with local officials and the ensuing potential risks such contestation might incur to their families. The villagers' fears were indicative of the severity of local power inequities, and of class-based social rifts, as well as of the degree of ordinary villagers' sense of insecurity and powerlessness at this postsocialist moment.

As a result of such frustrations, in recent years ordinary villagers have become indifferent to government performances, which they viewed as having nothing to do with their lives. Conversely, local officials have had to seek village elites' cooperation to make events—such as the showcase presentation I have chronicled here—work. The predictable outcome has been, arguably, an enhanced alliance between the state's local

[24] While corruption was intrinsic to China's socialism, the recent market reforms have transformed it in particular ways. Nevertheless, the results to a large degree remain in keeping with earlier socialist/communist patterns, no matter how post-socialist China's economy might be. In future writing, I plan to pursue comparative analysis of the political economy of corruption, comparing socialist and postsocialist regimes of corruption and, more broadly, communist and capitalist regimes of corruption.

agency and village elites. Having chosen Tong Xiumei's house as the site for the upcoming showcase presentation vividly suggests how birth control practices have now dovetailed with such intensifying class differentiations and class-based privileges. Let us now explore the climax and finale of that performance.

Climax/Finale

At 4:02 pm, the inspection party, headed by a high-ranking provincial official and followed by over a hundred local officials, along with several journalists and news reporters, finally arrived at Tong Xiumei's compound. Having visited six townships since the morning, members of the inspection party were rather worn out, as well as being behind schedule. No one seemed interested in the village showcase presentation. As a result, the presentation only lasted about five minutes. For the same reason, a meeting scheduled for the River Crossing township seat was cancelled. After staying in the township seat for drinks and fruits for a total of about ten minutes, the inspection party left and headed toward a hotel for a banquet provided by the county government.

Seeing that the ritual was not fully performed, one might argue that the showcase presentation had failed. Yet I would like to suggest the opposite. As Maurice Bloch has argued, ritual can be viewed as a form of ideology (1989); as such, the archetypal form of ritual is to demonstrate the power of the transcendental over the everyday (1992). Following from this perspective, I take the showcase event as indicative of the Chinese state's mystifying ideology: in fabricating a hegemonic "silk flower discourse," the local government has discursively claimed women's private realm of reproduction as an indispensable springboard toward the global discursive marketplace. Yet as I have

suggested, as a result of growing and intensifying class rifts, the only willing cooperators available for this performance were elite village families. As a result, the showcase presentation on family planning eventuated into a friendly duet of sorts between local officials and village elites—regardless of whether the latter had actually followed the state's birth control policy, as exemplified by Tong Xiumei's heterodox reproductive story. With such emerging alliances between the state's local agents and village elites, the local authority could always justify itself through a variety of "performative duets," disregarding how ordinary villagers might view these performances.[25]

During the very short moment when the inspection party came to examine the local showcase event, I witnessed that no single official tried to engage any real conversation with even a few ordinary villagers on site, except for taking a quick look at the staged presentation organized by local elites. Consequently, although the post-socialist Chinese state tried to appear as a "transcendent and unifying agent of the nation" (Coronil 1997:4), in practice the state was actively accommodating the reality of enlarging class differences in a place that, though seemingly quite remote in this mountainous rural site, is nevertheless being reshaped by the nation's determined transition toward global capitalism. The showcase event provided a telling case instantiating how changing population policy has mutually shaped the ongoing dynamic between the state and its increasingly differentiated subjects.[26]

In fact, once I switched my ethnographic gaze from township officials to the inspection party, I soon realized that not only was the township authority's staging of the

[25] For a compatible perspective on ritual as highlighting the acceptance of convention more than belief per se, cf. Rappaport (1999).

[26] For theoretical discussions on the complex dynamic between the state and its subjects, see Appadurai 1996, Hefner 1998, Orta 2002, and Piot 1999.

showcase event "just a show" as I have just described it, but the arrival of the inspection party headed by a high-ranking provincial official to examine the presentation was also highly performative. During her 10-minute stay in the township seat, the leading provincial official paid a quick visit to the township Family Planning Office, escorted by local leaders.

In the township Family Planning Office, the provincial leader was very interested in a colored poster board hung on the wall, which featured a chart itemizing the entire township's monthly statistics on birth control from October 2004 – May 2005. She began to read through the statistics line by line. Everything seemed to be going fine—until she noted a problem with a monthly statistic concerning removal of women's IUDs.[27]

Pointing out a statistical inconsistency, the provincial official reminded township officials to be more serious about noting their statistics. Seeing that township officials were very embarrassed, she immediately added that occasional mistakes were inevitable; once they paid enough attention to these oversights, their work would soon improve in the future. Having said her comments, the provincial official soon left the office, walking toward her black Mercedes-Benz parked in the courtyard.

After leaving my fieldwork site in August 2005, I wondered if the county leaders had realized their aspirations for receiving a provincial award. I had thought the statistical mistake the provincial official had pointed out in the township Family Planning Office (as well as any other mistakes she might have found out in six other townships)

[27] Because township leaders had thought their achievements in birth control were not "advanced" (*xianjin*) enough, they had intentionally tampered with a number of statistics. But because they had not paid close attention to the mutual relevance between different sets of data, their falsification was easily discernible to someone familiar with basic statistical categories used in birth control studies.

might have ruined her impression of the county's family planning work. In January 2006, while back in the U.S., I called the director of the county Population and Family Planning Commission. To my surprise, the director told me that the county had just received an award from the provincial authority as one of the ten "Advanced Units in Family Planning," among 100 counties in the province. The director further told me that the showcase event was first covered by provincial and local newspapers. Four months later, it appeared on a provincial television program as part of a special report on "New Looks of the Countryside" (*nongcun xinmao*). In December 2005, an introduction of the showcase presentation became available on the government website.[28]

In summer 2007, while I was in the U.S., I had a phone conversation with a local journalist whose main work was to report local events on women and family planning issues.[29] The journalist revealed to me that before the showcase presentation had been scheduled, county leaders had already networked with provincial officials. Local leaders' networking efforts were "lubricated and facilitated" by not insignificant gifts (including cash) to those provincial officials—a practice that is now very common in both business and official circles in China.[30] As a result, the showcase event, held in seven townships the same day, was to large extent "**showbiz"** (*zuoxiu*)—a performance that had been

[28] Because of the sensitive nature of the showcase presentation, I have concealed newspaper sources and websites of the event, so as to protect informants I mentioned in this chapter.

[29] To maintain an additional layer of protection for my journalist informant on this sensitive topic, I will not reveal the journalist's gender nor the place the journalist worked.

[30] For *guanxi* and networking in Chinese society, see, for example, Fei 1947, King 1991, Kipnis 1997, Liu 2002, Y. Yan 1996, and Yang 1994.

carefully set up by county leaders and implicitly approved by provincial officials ahead of time, destined to be a "success," as long as the presentations were acceptable.[31]

Combining my on-site observation with the backstage story revealed by the journalist, I suddenly realized that the episode of the provincial official pointing out a statistical mistake in the township office was also, in essence, **purely performative**—in fact, a nearly perfect performance played by the provincial official. The moment the incident had occurred, I had been standing behind a group of local leaders. Following the statistical problem she had just recognized, I had expected the provincial official to call attention to many other statistics on the same poster board that were full of inconsistencies—as I had already found out in the morning.[32] To my surprise, she did not do so and soon left the site instead.

In ethnographic hindsight, I now recognize multiple layers of performative gestures beneath that episode. By pointing out one statistical problem, the provincial official in effect announced to local officials that, as the leader of the inspection party, she was very serious about the showcase event: that she was not easily fooled and that she had the ultimate power to wipe them out; by subsequently showing leniency and grace to the township officials, who were very embarrassed at the moment, she established an almost perfect image for herself—a serious leader, but tempered by understanding and even magnanimity. Linked together, the staged showcase event—through the provincial official's adroit performance showing her to be both serious **and**

[31] Events that occurred in the wake of the county's showcase presentation seemed to corroborate the journalist's message. A year later, in fall 2006, the director of the county Population and Family Planning Commission was promoted to head another, more resourceful government branch.

[32] These falsifications were easily detectable by one familiar with basic statistics in birth control (see Note 22).

magnanimous—gained some purchase (however momentary) on what Geertz might call the "really real" (1983:84).

How might we understand this performance of the "really real"?

Over half a century ago, sociologist Lewis Coser (1956) and anthropologist Max Gluckman (1959) separately argued that social conflicts may have positive functions in particular contexts. In River Crossing, the unexpected incident of the statistical mistake being publicly unveiled in the township government office offers an apt case in point—although the positive "function" it served was limited only to state officials and local elites. But moving beyond this perspective, I would draw on classic and current anthropological studies of rituals to further suggest that the showcase event was, in effect, an **ideological ritual** (à la Maurice Bloch) that helped legitimize the local government's discursive claim of village women's private sphere of reproduction. Moreover, rooted in a "heteroglossia" (Bakhtin 1981) of multiple "languages" beneath the apparent unity of any national language, and existing in a state of tension and competition over such multiple registers, the event served simultaneously as a **political ritual** that linked interests that were shared (if not identical, nor without tension) among the post-socialist state's agents at different levels of the sociopolitical hierarchy: provincial, prefectural, county, township, and village officials and elites.[33] In other words, the event created a political platform for state officials and local elites to pursue their interlinked yet

[33] For exemplary comparative work on political ritual, see, for example, Copeman 2004, Fox 1996, Gellner 1999, Gluckman 1965, Hartley-Moore 2007, Kelley and Kaplan 1990, Kertzer 1988, LeCount 2001, Lukes 1975, Turner 1967, and Weiss 2004.

distinctive organizational and personal gains, regardless of how ordinary villagers would think of them.[34]

Indeed, to amend Abraham Lincoln's "Gettysburg Address," we might say that by accommodating class rifts that are now expanding without any serious strategies to counter the tendency, the postsocialist Chinese state in rural areas—as exemplified by the township government's showcase event—has to some degree become a state **of** the elite, **by** the elite, and **for** the elite. Thus, not surprisingly, a gain-seeking mechanism seems to have formed and routinized by the local elite oligarchy, as long as they could take advantage of, or invent for themselves, any chances. To further instantiate, I cite a case I have briefly mentioned in the previous section.

In 2004, the township government received a special fund from the provincial authority as a constituent part of the government's recent efforts to improve rural education across the province. In this township, there are three middle schools—the major one in the village of River Crossing and the other smaller ones about 9-12 miles from the village. With this grant, township leaders decided to merge the two small schools with the major one in River Crossing. Yet because villages were dispersed in this mountainous area, many students were unable to commute daily; instead, they had to pay to live in the school dormitory and dine in the school restaurant during school days. The restaurant was now rented out to the wife of the River Crossing village Party secretary. As I learned from a number of villagers, including several school teachers (who knew

[34] In its rural everyday practice, as instantiated by the showcase event, the postsocialist Chinese state has become an open field without fixed institutional or geographical boundaries, calling into question the conventional dichotomy between (formal) state and civil society. For classic and recent scholarships on the state in its everyday practice, see, for example, Alonso 1994; Bourdieu 1999; Brown 1995; Brownell 2008; Comaroff & Comaroff 2000; de Certeau 1984; Foucault 1978, 1979, 1991; Gill 2000; Gupta 1995; Herzfeld 1997; Mitchell 1991; Scott 1998,;Trouillot 2001; and H. Yan 2008.

more about the event), school leaders were virtual partners of the restaurant business. Thus with the collaboration of the school administration, students who boarded in the school were obliged to eat all their meals in this restaurant; those who did not board at the school but had to commute daily (from homes outside the village of River Crossing) were required to purchase their lunches at the restaurant. As a result, the restaurant, in its monopoly, became extremely profitable, with over a hundred students dining there daily.[35] Thus, utilizing the provincial government's project to improve rural education, local elites created for themselves an opportunity to seek their own interests, while in the meantime they brought an extra financial burden to families of those students who had to board at school and those who had to commute daily and to purchase lunch in the school.

As to the showcase event I just chronicled, let us consider the following facts. In 2005, the River Crossing Township Family Planning Office had a budget of some 40,000 *yuan*, most of which were required to cover costs for a variety of birth control services that the provincial government had promised rural women to be free of charge, including offering informed options about contraception and abortion as well as medical examinations concerning women's reproductive health issues. Yet to prepare for the showcase event held in that afternoon, the office had already spent over 12,000 *yuan*: nearly 4,000 *yuan* for decorating the major meeting place in the township seat; and over 8,000 *yuan* for purchasing various items to stage the presentation in Tong Xiumei's house, for preparing gifts for the members of the inspection party, and for fruits and soft drinks,

[35] To be sure, to justify her business, the Party secretary's wife claimed that her restaurant provided "highly nutritious meals" (*yingyang taocan*) to students. Yet at least some residents were skeptical, regarding the claim as just lip service. "Who knows," as Xiao Guo, a female teacher (lived in River Crossing) remarked of the restaurant, "at least I can't appreciate if there is any difference between these 'highly nutritious' meals and those from other restaurants on the street."

among others. With state agencies at different levels of the power hierarchy using resources allotted for villagers to instead ritually impress visiting officials—and this, in a context of emerging "structural rupture" (Sun 2004) between elite oligarchy and ordinary villagers—it seems unlikely that the postsocialist state's "humane" family planning project will bear significant fruit in rural women's reproductive experiences.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have interrogated a local government's showcase presentation on family planning by unpacking layers of interrelated discursive, symbolic, and sociopolitical forces that came to converge at and shape the event. To do so, I first questioned the local authority's hegemonic "silk flower" discourse underlying the showcase event by revealing its quasi-cult-like nature beneath its seemingly "modern" and graceful verbal and visual articulations, undergirded by the post-socialist state's obsession with its contemporary version of commodity fetishism. Starting from this perspective, I came to see the showcase presentation as a ritual performance. I treated this ritual as a Maurice Blochean form of ideology that highlighted implicit discourses and values underpinning the state's everyday practices, which served to legitimize the local government's continuous claims on what might otherwise be village women's private experiences of reproduction.

Building upon these observations, I further foregrounded entrenched social contradictions in rural everyday life surrounding family planning during the nation's current postsocialist moment. I linked the showcase event with the local authority's active accommodation of nearly impassable class gaps between elite oligarchy and the

rank-and-file, without any foreseeable intention to counter the tendency. I thus revealed how the showcase event has simultaneously created a political and ritual space as a platform on which state agents and local elites could pursue their distinctive yet interlinked interests. I suggested that the showcase event I described above was highly emblematic of China's emerging post-socialist conditions. In so doing, I have tried to present a living depiction of the state's birth control efforts in rural China, held in a context of the nation's active efforts to "globalize." I proposed that, since the turn of the new millennium, the globalized discourse surrounding the "humane" family planning program in rural China has to a large degree become a ritual performance manipulated by the state and its local elites to seek their distinctive organizational and personal gains, regardless of how ordinary villagers might feel towards, and view, that program.

Given my analysis of intensifying class gaps, it seems doubtful that the postsocialist Chinese state's determined embrace of the capitalist marketplace will prove to be the "gospel of salvation" (Comaroff and Comaroff 2000: 292) for its ordinary subjects that its agents now claim. Taking the family planning program as an example, this chapter thus suggests an engaged reading of China's emerging post-socialist conditions by foregrounding the reality of intensifying class-based social rifts and their serious real-life repercussions for ordinary peasants on their daily lives, including reproduction. In other words, I hope this chapter offers insight into the intensely human experience of China's post-socialism and associated globalizing efforts as they are reconfigured in the seemingly intimate space of reproduction.

CHAPTER 3

IMAGINED MODERNITY AND THE METAMORPHOSES OF NATIONAL AND LOCAL POPULATION CONTROL POLICY

Introduction

> In 2002, I conducted fieldwork on population control in the village of River Crossing in Liaoning, China. During an informal conversation, a county official told me that nowadays the local population control policy was coming increasingly to center on providing "high-quality services" (*youzhi fuwu*) for rural citizens, which would cover a variety of issues such as childbearing and childrearing, and informed options about contraception and abortion, as well as women's reproductive health. Since the nation has entered an age of "market economy" (*shichang jingji*), the state's local agent explained, peasants [*nongmin*] were coming to expect more caring "services"—*fuwu*—from the government. This, the official further added, is an inevitable historical process that has already been accomplished in Western societies, and China is now speeding up its step to get closer to this end.

As is now widely recognized, population control efforts in rural China have been an integral part of the state's modernization project from its very beginning in the early 1970s, and they have equally widely been criticized as notoriously draconian (Anagnost 1988, 1997, Wasserstrom 1984). Yet the opening narrative supplied above suggests a rather different scene, at least as claimed by the Chinese government: that around the new millennium, the post-socialist state's imagery of modernity undergirding

its population policy in rural areas has experienced a discursive transformation—from its previous harsh appearance, which was now implicitly acknowledged as coercive, toward constructing an internationally acceptable image through its recent promise to offer various "services" that are now officially advertised as more "humane and caring" (Gu 2002, Gu, Simmons, and Szatkowski 2002).

In this chapter, based on my ethnographic research in the village of River Crossing in northeastern China in 2002 and 2004-05, supplemented by my previous fieldwork in the village of Yue in the nation's southeast coast in 1992-94 and 1995, I will examine major shifts in China's population policy in rural areas over the past three decades. During these field trips, I also conducted archival research to collect relevant population statistics, policy documents, and governmental publications on fertility and reproductive issues in the national capital of Beijing as well as a variety of local government offices in northeastern and southeastern areas. To further explore the changing terrain of state-local entanglements and the fraught state-villager dynamics over the three-decade history of population control in rural China, I will tap a series of government policy files and scrutinize them against my more conventional ethnographic data. This chapter thus draws on both my fieldwork observations and my ethnographic readings of the Chinese state's shifting population control policy in rural areas since it was initially formulated in the 1970s.

In the pages that follow, I will argue that population control in rural China has been an integral part of the state's changing images of modernity since the 1970s. To facilitate its population control efforts across the vast expanse of its many rural areas, the Chinese state has constructed a malleable rural identity, an image of the Other that, while

somewhat variable, is nevertheless always seen as lacking in something "good," and hence in need of the state's incessant guidance, discipline, and efforts at "civilization" (Kipnis 1995, Said 1978, Schein 1997). Positioning rural subjects as an Other marked by lacks vis-à-vis the state's discourses of modernity, the Chinese state has produced an image for itself as always being progressive, responsible, and promising, and has thereby sought to legitimize its hegemonic population policy and discursively transform peasants—especially women—into docile instruments of its modernity project (Ferguson 1990, Horn 1994, Scott 1985). Seeing population control in rural China from the comparative perspective of a variety of post-socialisms across Eurasia, I will further suggest that the Chinese state's creation of the notorious one-child policy in the late 1970s, as well as its subsequent shifts, speak actively to China's remarkable social transformation, from Maoist socialism to globalizing post-socialism (Gal and Kligman 2000, Hann 2002, Mueggler 2001, Rivkin-Fish 2003, Rofel 1999, Verdery 1991, 1996, Yan 2003).

As a theoretical strategy, in my analysis I also aim to intentionally reify the "state" insofar as I emphasize ideological discourses that have shaped the Chinese state's population control policy in rural areas. Yet I simultaneously undercut this seeming reification by historicizing these discourses, seeing them change dramatically over the past three decades along with the nation's remarkable social transformations, from Maoist socialism to post-socialism.

Maoist Modernity and the Formulation of China's Population Control Policy in the 1970s

Reproduction is always entangled in complicated ways with various forms of politics (Ginsburg and Rapp 1991). Over the past three decades, China's population control policy has engaged in a dialogue with a set of shifting images of modernity fashioned by the state (Greenhalgh 2003, White 1990, 1994). During the early and mid 1950s, shortly after the People's Republic was established in mainland China, some liberal activists tried to promote a birth control policy that would give women access to contraceptive methods and would loosen official restrictions on abortion and sterilization (e.g. Shao 1954). This modernizing policy had strong connotations of liberating women from the heavy burden of patrilineal gender stereotypes and a pronatalist ideology. However, when state leaders—especially Mao—decided to pursue a Soviet model of a planned economy, the proposed birth *control* policy was soon rearticulated as a birth *planning* policy—as a constituent part of the state's unified socioeconomic planning. To the Maoist state, human reproduction must be planned, in accordance with the development of the planned material production, and hence should also be subject to the comprehensive planning of the socialist regime. Soon thereafter, White (1994) observed, the policy lost its initial liberal implications because women's bodies had now become an instrument of the machinery of the Maoist regime.

Yet for a variety of reasons, population control did not become a widespread practice in the late 1950s or throughout the 1960s. During the Great Leap Forward (*dayuejing*) period of the late 1950s, state leaders—especially Mao—firmly believed that China's huge population, sustained by a high annual growth rate, was an indispensable, constituent part of national power, and was hence beneficial to China's Maoist socialism (Gu and Mu 1994). Birth control, proposed by leading scholars such as the eminent

sociologist Chen Da and celebrated economist Ma Yinchu, was repudiated by the state as a modern version of "vicious" capitalist Malthusianism intended to undermine the "great socialist cause." As a result, in 1957, the national annual population growth rate reached 23.23‰ with a total fertility of 6.41 children per woman (Yang, Liang, and Zhang 2001:22; cf. MacFarquhar 1997, Yao and Yin 1994:9).

After the three years of nationwide famine (1959-61) that followed the failed Maoist experiment of the Great Leap Forward, the nation resumed population growth at an even higher rate—26.99‰ with a total fertility rate of 6.02 children per woman was recorded in 1962, and 33.33‰ with a total fertility rate of 7.5 children per woman the next year (Yang, Liang, and Zhang 2001:29, 33; Yao and Yin 1994:9). To reduce this population growth rate, which was now seen as a burden rather than a boon, by the end of 1962 the state started its effort at exploratory, non-compulsory birth control in urban areas. However, this inchoate attempt was soon broken off by another Maoist radical movement, the Cultural Revolution (*wenhua dageming*), in the beginning of 1966 (White 1994, Zhang et al. 1998: 32-35). As a result, from 1962-70, China still had a very high average annual population growth rate of 26‰, with an average total fertility rate of 5.91 children per woman. In a mere nine-year period (1962-70), China saw a net increase of 170 million people (Chu, 1995: 75). At the turn of the 1970s, after the initial nationwide turmoil brought about by the Cultural Revolution had to some extent subsided, state leaders including Mao began to recognize that such a rapid population growth rate was incompatible with the nation's planned economy (Yang, Liang, and Zhang 2001:41-42; also see MacFarquhar 1997).

Grave socioeconomic realities further influenced state leaders to code their concern with population issues as a *problem*. After over two decades of national experiments, the Maoist blueprint—highlighted by the "Great Leap Forward" of the late 1950s and the "Cultural Revolution" of the late 1960s—proved a failed project. Until the early 1970s, for most Chinese, the living standard remained no better than that of the 1950s.

Years of nationwide material destitution, coupled with the gradual decline of the once unquestionable belief in Maoist doctrines[36], were pushing the Maoist state to gloss over its failures and reclaim its legitimacy. In the early 1970s, the state came to view China's huge population as an unbearable national "burden." Worrying that the high population growth rate would impede high-speed development of the nation's Maoist planned economy, the Chinese state began to launch a new sociopolitical movement to promote birth control in the early 1970s.

In February 1970, at the Annual Meeting of National [Socioeconomic] Planning convened by the State Council (China's central government), Prime Minister Zhou En'lai emphasized that

> now we have too much population. In the 1970s [we] should pay much attention to planned birth control (*jihua shengyu*)… Having more labor force is a good thing—only if it is compatible with the need of economic development" (Yang, Liang, and Zhang 2001:42).

[36] In effect, around the 1970s, in some rural areas including the village of Yue, villagers began to search for opportunities outside the collective agriculture system, in spite of numerous restrictions set by the Maoist state (Chen, 1998:60-94). In a village (called *xiaogang*) in Fengyang, Anhui Province, people went further. In that village, villagers even risked their lives to divide and redistribute secretly the collective farmland to individual households in the mid-1970s. Their dire material poverty, which caused persistent year-round hunger, made them despair of the Maoist commune system.

By emphasizing that human reproduction was an integral part of the national socioeconomic planning, the Maoist state began to formulate its population control policy. On July 8, 1971, the State Council, China's central government, released a decree, called *guofa* No. 51, 1971 (Peng et al. 1996: 64-65; *guofa* refers to a decree/announcement by the State Council). In the decree, the state declared that henceforth, "mankind [sic] should not let anarchism dominate human reproduction; they also need birth planning." To this end, the state planned that by 1975, the nation's annual population growth rate should be reduced to around 10‰ in urban areas and no more than 15‰ in rural areas.[37] This decree of the State Council—*guofa* No. 51, 1971—signaled the beginning of China's nationwide population control history.

In December 1973, the state further announced the principle of *wan, xi, shao* ("later, "sparse, "fewer") to guide its population policy throughout the remainder of the 1970s (Yang, Liang, and Zhang 2001:51). According to the state, *wan*—"later"—meant later marriages. That is, people would not be allowed to marry until they reached certain ages—specified as 25 for men and 23 for women—five years later than the minimum ages set for both men and women for a legal marriage specified by the Marriage Law of 1950 (which was still applicable in the 1970s). *Xi*—"sparse"—referred to larger spacing between births—at least three years. *Shao*—"fewer"—referred to the expectation that every couple should bear no more than two children. Through the propaganda of state media, the population control policy—articulated primarily through *guofa* No. 51, 1971 and the principle of *Wan, Xi,* and *Shao*—became known to the rank-and-file.

[37] The state didn't achieve the goal of 1971. In 1975, China had an overall population growth rate of 15.69‰ (Yao and Yin 1994:9).

As a result of the state's population control policy, in the village of Yue in southeastern China where I conducted fieldwork in the 1990s, since 1971 all married women under the age of thirty-nine who had borne three or more children, or who had borne two children at least one of whom was a son, were required to undergo tubal ligation surgery. These women would first be concentrated in headquarters of the commune (called a "township" after 1983), a sub-county level administrative unit in rural areas. Then, a "medical working team" (*yiliao gongzuodui*) comprised of doctors and nurses under the leadership of a communist Party official would be sent to each commune to perform the tubal ligation surgery. In 1995, a Yue woman in her early fifties recalled for me:

> Forty—maybe more—of us were asked to stay in a huge room of the Commune, waiting for the surgery by the medical team from the County. Then we were sent to the simply equipped ward, one immediately after another, for the surgery…You know how people "fix" roosters? We first drive them to the chicken coop, and then castrate them one after another—before they reach full maturity. I felt I was a chicken to be "fixed" when I was confined in the headquarters.

By the end of 1979, twenty-one women from the small village of Yue—which had a total population of about two hundred and twenty—had undergone the tubal ligation surgery. In the entire township area that contains the village of Yue, the abrupt plummet of both the annual birth rate and population growth rate fully demonstrated the radical effects of the state's birth control campaign: the annual birth rate dropped from

35.9‰ in 1971 to 13.7‰ in 1979; correspondingly, the annual population growth rate reduced from 18‰ in 1972 to 8.5‰ in 1979.[38]

Characteristic of the regime's late Maoist era, the slow-down of the local population growth rate in the 1970s was claimed by the state as the "great success" of Maoist ideology of the "class struggle movement" (*jieji douzheng yundong*).[39] In the view of commune officials, the birth control movement of the 1970s both embodied and extended the spirit of "repudiating the 'four olds' movement" (*po sijiu*; the "four olds" included "old ideas, old culture, old customs, and old habits") (Ong 1999:39). According to a former (male) commune official Liu whom I interviewed in 1992, these "four olds"—envisaged as "dregs of feudalism" (*fengjian yunie*)—have been influential in shaping peasants' ideas and behaviors, including their fertility practices. Consequently, the birth control campaign was aimed to "demolish old ideas and foster new, prevailing [socialist] customs" (*pochu jiu shixiang, shuli xin fengshang*).

This campaign was even extended to local male Communist Party officials. In order to further promote its radical birth control movement, the state expected, and often required, Party members to be the "behavioral paragon" (*xingwei biaoshuai*) for the rank-and-file. For example, the same Liu, who was serving as a commune official in 1976, told me that several months after his wife had a second child—both daughters—he went to the local hospital to undergo vasoligation surgery. Liu recalled that it was not unusual for a male party member to have "birth control surgery" at that time—in order to

[38] At the national level, the annual birth rate dropped from 30.65‰ in 1971 to 18.25‰ in 1978; correspondingly, the annual population growth rate reduced from 23.33‰ in 1971 to 12.00‰ in 1978 (Yao and Yin 1994:9). With regard to rural women's total fertility rate, it dropped from 6.01 children per woman in 1971 to 2.97 children per woman in 1978 (Yao and Yin 1994:144).

[39] Although Mao died in 1976, Maoist policy and ideology continued to influence the government to a large extent until Deng Xiaoping came to power in late 1978 (MacFarquhar 1997, White 1990).

showcase how "various forms of old ideas and behaviors could be thoroughly smashed if one has sincerely responded to the Party's call." Using the language of the late Maoist era, this movement was declared by local officials to have exemplified the "great victory of proletariat ideas and the Cultural Revolution" (*wucan jieji wenhua dagemin de weida shengli*).

"Four Modernizations," the One-Child Policy, and the Discursive Construction of a "Backward" Rural Identity

In the late 1970s, especially after Deng Xiaoping came back to power as China's de facto supreme leader in 1978, a burgeoning population was further diagnosed by the post-Mao state as a national, "chronic illness" (*guji*), impeding the modernity of "Four Modernizations"—now re-envisaged as "industry, agriculture, the national defense, and science and technology" (White 1990, Wong 1997, Zha 2001). To Deng, birth control was critical for the nation's pursuit of these "four modernizations":

> To bring about the "four modernizations in our country within this century, and to build our nation into a socialist power, is an extraordinarily arduous and formidable task. … To enable China to realize the "four modernizations," we must recognize at least two major characteristics: One is that our background is weak. The protracted devastation of our country by [Western] imperialism, feudalism, and bureaucratic capitalism has made China a poor and backward country. … Because our background is too weak, China is one of the very poor countries in the world. … The second characteristic is that we have a large population but little farmland. … We must put great effort behind strengthening the work of family planning." (Deng

Xiaoping, March 20, 1979: "Insisting on the Four Principles," in Peng et al. 1996:137).

In order to rapidly achieve these sought-after "four modernizations," the post-Mao state became increasingly obsessed with controlling its population growth rate, and a more rigorous birth control program became a "fundamental national policy" (*jiben guoce*) (Peng et al. 1996:272-73). Indeed, as Raymond Williams has argued in *The Country and the City* (1973), a "statistical mode" was invoked by the Chinese state to create an illusion of "control" in response to the extreme complexity the nation has to face squarely in the pursuit of its reconfigured post-Mao modernity blueprint. Indeed, following Williams, one might argue that the lower the population growth rate, the higher it was fetishized.

On September 15, 1979, among a series of propaganda slogans that the Central Committee of the Communist Party released in the *People's Daily*—the mouthpiece of the Communist Party—for the celebration of the Thirtieth Anniversary of the People's Republic, the eighth was "Devoting A Major Effort to Launching the Family Planning Movement; Cutting the [Annual] Population Growth Rate Down to Below 1%." (Peng et al. 1996:14; my translation). In that year, the state also set specific goals for the annual population growth rate for the coming years: 0.95% for 1980 and 0.80% for 1981 (Yang, Liang, and Zhang 2001:73). After reducing the annual population growth rate down to 0.50% by 1985, state leaders hoped that China would achieve zero population growth in 2000.[40] Considering that the actual population growth rate was 1.2% in 1978 and 1.16%

[40] Chen Muhua: "To realize the Four Modernizations, [We] Must Control Population Growth in a Planned Way" (Peng et al. 1996:155-58).

in 1979 (Yao and Yin 1994:9), one can perceive how radical the population plan of 1979 was.[41]

To achieve such ambitious goals, in 1979 the Chinese state began to promote a one-child policy in both urban and rural areas. On January 27, 1979, the state advocated that "for the sake of our grand cause of the economic construction of modernization … every couple would better have only one child, and should have two at most" (Peng et al. 1996:272-73). In 1980, the one-child policy became mandatory nationwide, including for the majority Han, who comprise some 93% of the nation's population, as well as for large ethnic minorities such as the Manchu (Peng et al. 1996:16-17; also see Chu 1995, Greenhalgh 2003, Zhao 1995).[42] On February 9, 1982, in "The Instructions of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council on the Further Betterment of Birth Planning Work," the state demanded once again that "in rural areas—universally—every couple could have only one child" (Peng et al. 1996:19). On December 4, 1982, the one-child-oriented family planning program was further written into the Constitution.[43]

Tyrene White (1990) has observed that, although the one-child policy was formulated in the post-Mao context focusing on economic development, its radical nature was to some degree comparable to previous Maoist sociopolitical movements. After

[41] In fact, the state never achieved its ambition of 1979—even with the ensuing stringent one-child policy in the early 1980s. From 1980-85, the annual population growth rates were, respectively, 1.19%, 1.46%, 1.17%, 1.33%, 1.31%, and 1.43% (Yao and Yin 1994:9). Instead of becoming zero growth in the new millennium, the annual growth rate was 0.88% in 1999 (SFPC & CPIRC 2001:33).

[42] The majority Han comprise about 93.4% in 1982, 92% in 1990, and 91.6% in 2000, of the nation's population (SFPC & CPIRC 2001:62-64).

[43] For example, in Article 25: "The nation [should] pursue family planning, to coordinate the growth of population with the plan for economic and social development." In Article 49: "Both the husband and wife have the duty of practicing family planning" (Peng et al. 1996:43).

repudiating resolutely the political excesses of Maoism, the post-Mao regime embarked on a modernization strategy that swiftly and fundamentally reversed the Maoist "class struggle" (*jieji douzheng*) approach. Yet, the degree and scope of post-Mao adjustments were essentially as abrupt and radical as the Maoist reforms had been. In the case of population control, the state was obsessed with its utopian dream of reducing the annual population growth rate as quickly and to as low a rate as possible. For example, in 1979, the planned population growth rate for 1985 was 0.5% (Peng, 1996:15), while the actual rate that year was 1.43% (Yao and Yin 1994:9). In order to achieve the goal of a one-child policy, quite paradoxically, the post-Mao state had to invoke once again the skillful utilization of a familiar political process characteristic of the Maoist period: that is, mobilizing both the Party and the rank-and-file to break out of old routines in favor of new ones (White 1990:74).

As a result, in promoting this radical policy, rural people's intimate reproductive practices came to further intersect discursively with valences of state notions of "backwardness" (*luohou*) that—ironically—were reminiscent of earlier Maoist language. In both campaigns villagers were depicted by the state as suffused by "backward" ideas, and these "backward ideas" were seen by the state as embodied in their childbearing practices. In 1983, through the state's mouthpiece, a "Commentator's Article" (*pinglunyuan wenzhang*) published in a state-run newspaper,[44] the state asserted that

> [T]he old ideas left over from the feudalist past, such as "the more the sons, the higher the happiness" and "boys are superior to girls," are still dominating to varying degrees [and causing] a number of people to have "blind" (i.e. unchecked) childbirth

[44] In China, as with the news propaganda of the editorial (*shelun*), a "commentator's article" in a state-run newspaper usually represent the "spirit" (*jingshen*) or gist of the state's policy on either a general goal or a particular issue of a specific period.

(commentator of *Family Planning Propaganda Materials*, June 1, 1983, in Peng et al. 1996:403-04).

In the view of the Chinese state, such feudalist backwardness was most fully embodied among rural women. In the same "Commentator's Article," rural women were denounced as having a degree of barbarity revolving around their potential for fertility:

> A woman will generally have about thirty years of fertility—from getting married, and starting to have babies, to menopause. [Meanwhile,] human fertility is not affected by season and weather—it [i.e. conception] is always possible at any time of the year (ibid.).

To the state, the potentially year-round nature of rural women's fertility defines them as having an even lower level of *animalness* than other mammals, whose fertility is largely governed by being "in season" only once or twice a year. During my fieldwork in villages of Yue and River Crossing, I found this attitude was widely shared by the state's local agents. For example, female official Huang, director of Family Planning Office of the township that contains the village of Yue, complained to me during a long interview in 1995 that

> Peasants usually have "a low level of understanding" (*renshi shuiping di*) [of the population control policy]. [Village] women are especially "short-sighted" (*muguan duanqian*)—they only care about their immediate desires and interests. If you do not exert direct control [over their fertility], they would keep on producing babies like hens lay eggs.

Official Huang's statement is reminiscent of what Edward Said has discussed the production of the Other (1973). As Said has argued, the making of the Other is productive, and what are produced are ideas and statements that constitute a hegemonic

description of the object—in this case the “backward” rural Chinese, especially village women (1978:3).

Said further suggested that the production of an Other always implies a simultaneous creation of Self (1978; also see Schein 1997). By fashioning and mobilizing discourses of modernity and projecting a series of "despicable" backwardness to rural subjects—especially village women—the Chinese state constructed a progressive, responsible, and promising image of itself. In so doing, the state not only justified its project of promoting modernity, it also effectively legitimized its sustained intrusion into rural citizens' private sphere of reproduction in implementing a stringent one-child policy. In this regard, the Chinese state's discursive constructions of backward rural (female) identity became mutually constructive of its images of modernity (Barlow 1991; also see Gilmartin et al. 1994, Rofel 1999).

In the village of River Crossing in northeast China, since the one-child policy was implemented in 1980, local (female) officials regularly came to inquire about married women's monthly periods or even to inspect their sanitary napkins (*yuejing fangshi*) to make sure that these women were not pregnant at a time that was deemed "outside" the population plan formulated for that village. To cite a set of pet phrases I collected during an interview with a local leader in 2002, which were widely circulated among governmental officials in this area since 1980: the state's female agents should "go down to the village (*jingdaocun*), enter the [individual] family (*rudaohu*), see the [targeted] woman (*jiandaoren*), and touch her belly [to make sure that she is not pregnant outside the "plan"] (*modaodu*)."

Such state surveillance was common in the village of Yue in southeastern China. In that village, the local authority appointed a middle-aged woman as "liaison person for family planning" (*jihua shengyu lianluoyuan*) who would regularly examine the outdoor lavatory in the village to see if any married woman had become "illegally" pregnant. In this rural area, women usually discarded their sanitary napkins in the outdoor family lavatories. When the "liaison woman" saw a discarded pad for a particular woman whose menstrual cycle she was following, she would know that the given woman was not pregnant. Otherwise, that woman would be suspected by the local authority, and subsequent questioning—direct and/or indirect—would soon follow. Another common form of governmental scrutiny was that a female local official or village "liaison person" might came to ask the date of a village woman's monthly period during a casual conversation. When a woman was found to have missed her period, she would be required to have an immediate examination in a local clinic. By exerting a veritable disciplinary panopticon surrounding rural women's bodies (Foucault 1977:206-07), the one-child policy, as the imagined contemporary embodiment of modernity, was entrusted with a mission of changing peasants' "backward" ideas and customs associated with childbearing.

During the implementation of the one-child policy, however, the state encountered varying degrees of resistance from rural citizens—including from the majority Han as well as from large ethnic minorities such as the Manchu. Because of the continuing cultural significance of these groups' longstanding patrilineal ideology and its attendant patrilineally oriented system of ancestor worship, what matters most to virtually all Han as well as to some ethnic minority peasants is to "have a boy" (*sheng yige erzi*) as

the physical and spiritual successor of the family (Chen 1995, Chu 2001, Watson 1981). Indeed, this is the primary concern behind all their fertility practices. As a result, the forced implementation of the one-child rule brought about numerous nationwide acts of violence against rural people rebelling against the birth control policy, especially women (Anagnost 1988, Wasserstrom 1984:371). These acts of violence might include and lead to: (1) emotional humiliation and/or physical abuses meted out to both rural women and men, and sometimes to their immediate relatives as well; (2) appropriations/demolition of villagers' property, ranging from taking away some of their livestock and furniture to razing part of their houses; (3) in some extreme cases, suicide—mostly committed by rural women—became the final choice for thousands of villagers after experiencing unbearable physical and emotional abuses perpetrated by local officials (Liang, Tan, and Jing 1999:31-33; also see Anagnost, 1988:16).

In 1979, a woman in the village of Yue was found to have violated the one-child policy shortly after the local authority announced the policy in 1979. This woman was pregnant two years after she gave birth to a girl and immediately became the first target of the newly formulated strict population policy. Local officials had hoped that, by persuading the woman to terminate her second pregnancy, they could not only accomplish the yearly population plan, but would also establish a behavioral "model" (*yangban*) for local women to follow. However, believing her mother's prediction that the fetus she was carrying in her womb would be a boy, this woman refused to have an abortion. With her husband's assistance, she soon hid herself in a relative's house in another township area until her second baby—a *son* indeed—was born.[45] When the

[45] This story was quite similar to what Anagnost encountered in her field research in southeastern China (Anagnost 1997:135-36).

woman came back to the village of Yue with a new born son, her family had to pay a fine of 200 *yuan* (about $140 in 1979) in cash—about a third of an ordinary village family's annual income that year—to the commune administration. Then the woman in question was required to undergo tubal ligation surgery to further pacify local authority.

Compared with other rural women and their family members' reproductive experiences in the following years, this Yue village woman was fairly "lucky" in the sense that local officials did not exert direct physical violence to force her to terminate her second pregnancy. In 1979, the one-child policy was just advocated—not required—by the state. Since 1980, however, when the one-child policy came to be mandatory nationwide, more draconian measures of enforcement, including various acts of violence against rural citizens, became more and more common.

In the local township area that contained the village of Yue, without a birth quota assigned by the local authority, since the late 1970s all married village women under the age of forty-five were required to take certain measures of contraception, in most cases to have an IUD implemented. From 1980-91, for 12 consecutive years this area became an "advanced area for population control." During my fieldwork in the 1990s, township officials always told me very proudly that, during those 12 years, the population control effort was so successful that there had been no "out-of-plan" birth for a total of five years. Yet such an impressive record was primarily achieved through a physically and emotionally harsh measure: induced abortion of all "out-of-plan" pregnancies. According to the statistics of the township government, from 1987-91, the annual ratios of births to abortions were 1**:**0.22, 1**:**1.65, 1**:**0.73, 1**:**0.58, 1**:**0.56, respectively. In explaining the statistics, a female township official told me that

sometimes an “out-of-plan” pregnancy was due to contraception failures such as “IUD falling-offs” (*diaohuan*). Yet the others—not just a few, the female official found out—were largely "intentional" (*youyide*). For example, the official added, a village woman might stop taking pills or try to remove an implemented IUD without official permissions, leading to a pregnancy outside the local authority’s annual birth plan (Greenhalgh and Li 1995, Rigdon 1996). Considering contraception has been virtually mandatory for every village woman, from the above birth/abortion ratios one can perceive how the one-child policy has been fiercely contested between the state’s local agency and its rural citizens.

In the local commune area (renamed a township in 1984) that contained the village of River Crossing in northeastern China, in order to rigorously implement the one-child policy, the local administration established "Small Shock Brigades of the Family Planning Program" (*jihua shengyu xiaofendui*) to "catch big wombs" (*zhua daduzi*). These officials’ job was to detect "unexpected" pregnancies that occurred outside the commune government's annual population plan in village after village—largely through unannounced examinations—and then to require illegally pregnant women to have abortions. As a local female township official recalled in summer 2002, during the early 1980s, on average every brigade—an administrative unit immediately below the commune—had about eight to ten out-of-plan pregnancies a year. Sometimes women with "big wombs" escaped to the house of their relatives or friends. In such cases, like Holmesian detectives, members of the "Small Shock Brigade" would "spread dragnets" (*shawang*) for days and nights until the "big wombs" were caught. In a few cases, if a woman managed to have a baby "out-of-plan," her family had to pay a fine—about 100-500 *yuan*—to the commune government. To put this sum into perspective, in the early

1980s, the annual income per capita in this area was only about 120-150 *yuan*, as estimated by some of my informants. Thus after paying a considerable portion of their yearly income as a government fine, an ordinary local family would be in serious financial crisis.

In the village of River Crossing, in order to force pregnant women who violated the one-child policy to go to the hospital to undergo an abortion, it was common for local officials to ask male militia and/or male government staff members to use their physical strength in subduing resistant women and their family members. To punish some unyielding villagers, local officials and militia even went so far as to remove tiles from the roofs of recalcitrant villagers—an action that is locally considered a severe symbolic humiliation to a family. In the local context, pulling down an old house usually begins with tearing down tiles from the roof. Consequently, removing tiles from the roof of one's house and smashing them on the ground signifies destroying the entire house as well as the family's symbolic integrity and fortune that the (physical) house represents. Moreover, from the perspective of the state's local agents, it is also an act that symbolizes the state's continued assessment of rural subjects as "backwards," who followed "old," unenlightened ways of life in an outdated "house." Crashing tiles from the roof of a disobedient villager's house is thus a further assertion of state's modernity and rural subjects' *non*-modernity.

Yet even with such draconian measures, in reality the one-child policy still could not be achieved in most areas because many villagers persisted in trying to bear a son if their first pregnancies had produced girls. As a result, even some government-

affiliated scholars had to acknowledge that "more and more local officials had to make false reports to the state" (Liang, Tan, and Jing, 1999:33).

The Market Economy and "Deficient" Rural Subjects

To make its population policy acceptable to peasants, in the mid-1980s the post-Mao state started to "soften" its stringent policy (Greenhalgh 1994). In 1984, the Chinese state accorded a larger birth quota to some rural women. Among women who produced girls in their first births, about 10% of them would now be allowed a second birth to more flexibly accommodate various special cases (e.g., if the first child died or was disabled after an accident).[46] In December 1986, the state affirmed once again the slightly softened policy of 1984.[47] In 1988, the state further raised the acceptable total fertility rate from 1.2 to 1.6 children per woman, according a second chance to bear a son to rural women whose first births had produced girls—usually granted by the local government only after four to six years in most rural areas (including the villages of River Crossing and Yue).[48]

Concurrent with villagers' fierce resistance, the changing post-Mao political economy in rural China also facilitated the gradual loosening of the state's one-child rule. Shortly after the implementation of the one-child policy, beginning in 1982, China

[46] Leading Party Members' Group of the State Commission of Family Planning (March 22, 1984): "A Report on the Situation of Family Planning Work," approved by the Central Committee of the Communist of China on April 13, 1984 as *zhongfa* (the decree/document of the Central Committee of the Communist Party) No. 7, 1984 (Peng et al. 1996:24-27).

[47] Wang Wei (Minister of the State Commission of Family Planning): "An Introduction to the Situation of Family Planning Work at the National Working Meeting on Family Planning Program," December 1, 1986 (Peng et al. 1996:332-36).

[48] Peng Peiyun (Minister of the State Commission of Family Planning): "A Speech at the National Meeting for Directors of Provincial Family Planning Commissions," May 12, 1988 (Peng et al. 1996:344-46; also see Chu 1995; Zhao 1995; and Liang, Tan, and Jing 1999).

launched a rural reform that has tectonically transformed the contours of rural society: the redistribution of collective farmlands to individual households. As a result, by the mid-1980s, the Maoist commune system had been dissolved. In the village of Yue, the collectively owned land was re-allocated to individual households in 1982. In the village of River Crossing, by 1984, almost all the farmland had been redistributed to individual families. To many local governments, the dissolution of the commune system vitiated to varying degrees the state's ability to exert effective control over rural subjects via the prior Maoist institutional structures. In some areas, local townships (former communes) were reported to have virtually lost their control over villagers' behavior, including reproduction (Chen and Mu 1996, Liu 2000, Wang 1992). One recent ramification of this is that the quality of the 2000 census in many rural areas was found to be quite problematic because more than a few rural governments were to some extent paralyzed or otherwise rendered dysfunctional after the post-Mao reform; as a result, they were unable to register the exact number of family members, especially when a family had "out-of-plan" birth(s) and tried to hide them (Yu 2002).

Along with the post-Mao reform, the Chinese state was pushing the whole nation progressively toward a market-oriented economy, although with seemingly distinct labels: "socialist commercial economy" in the 1980s, "socialist market economy" since 1992, and the increasingly popular usage of "market economy" since the mid-1990s (Liu 2002, Nee 1989; Szelenyi and Kostello 1996). With the increasing influx of "notions of the market" (*shichang guannian*), the regime became increasingly *post*-socialist. Maoist ideas of class struggle, once a powerful ideology, gradually lost their appeal to most Chinese. As has been widely noticed by many researchers (e.g. Anagnost, 1997: 125-27;

Zha 2001), since the early 1990s, the discourse of modernity underpinning the state's population policy has become largely material: that is, the state now aims to control population quantity with the aim of achieving desired market-oriented economic growth. My fieldwork experience confirmed this emerging trend. When I was in the village of Yue between 1992 and 1995, a few newly surfaced discursive forms were becoming popular among many villagers, such as "Now no one will pay attention to the 'thought' (*sixiang*, i.e. the official ideology)" (*xianzai shui hai jiang sixiang*), and "What everyone cares about is only to get wealthy" (*renren xiang de du zhishi facai*).

Surrounding the central discourse of the market economy, the post-socialist Chinese state has refashioned the image of modernity underpinning its population control efforts in rural areas. Indeed, in softening the one-child policy in rural areas, the state came to accommodate the traditional patrilineal gender stereotypes. Gradually, the post-socialist state implicitly weakened its claimed mission of remolding peasants' "backward" patrilineal ideology. Along with this shift, in the early 1990s, as the nation began to embrace a market economy, the image of modernity undergirding the state's population policy came increasingly to center on economic development (Winckler 2002).

Asserting itself as the patron and propeller of the market economy, the post-socialist Chinese state redrafted its depiction of rural subjects' backwardness—so as to justify its population control efforts in rural areas in a changing milieu. In 1996, in a report to state leaders, the State Commission of Family Planning acknowledged that "peasants [sic] have some practical difficulties" in complying with the population control policy, and "many are worried that they could not become economically well-off quickly

after having fewer children."[49] Viewed from the perspective of a market economy, however, the state alleged that the problems that peasants were facing were mainly due to their poor accommodation to the emerging market economy. To this end, the state promised its rural citizens a utopian scenario of "having less children and becoming quickly prosperous" (*shaosheng kuaifu*). That is, as a constituent part of its reconfigured image of modernity, the state now claimed that its population control policy also entailed a mission of helping peasants develop their currently deficient attachment to a sense of economic rationality. With improvement of their material conditions, the state alleged, peasants would be convinced that controlling population was not only a requirement of the nation's modernization project, it was also beneficial to individual families. Gradually, the state further asserted, rural people would be grateful to the government when they began to realize that the harshness of both the population policy and of the ways in which local officials had treated their subjects were ultimately for their own benefit—to cultivate their competence in the market economy so as to become prosperous and to have *xiaokang shenghuo*," a relatively comfortable life."[50] In so doing, the post-socialist Chinese state has redefined the ideal model of rural identity as epitomized by an *economic* desire for material prosperity—a desire that most peasants are now said insufficiently to possess. The state's current population control efforts are therefore being claimed by the government to push rural residents to adapt to market reforms.

[49] The State Commission of Family Planning, March 20, 1996: "A Report on the Situations of Launching the 'Three Connections' for the Family Planning Work," in EDCPP (2000:89-93).

[50] Ibid., in EDCPP (2000:90); also see Zhou 1998.

During my field research in the village of River Crossing, a female local official told me that since the mid-1990s, through coordination by the township government, hundreds of local women have been subcontracted to assemble manually cheap handicrafts such as silk or colored paper flowers for outside entrepreneurs. This, the governmental agent alleged, was an exemplary form of how to connect the family planning program with the goal of fostering women's economic rationality by "helping women make a fortune" (*bangzhu funu zhifu*). Yet after having interviewed six village women involved in this new project, I found that none of them could relate their manual work to family planning. The reality was rather disheartening: on the one hand, local officials were taking advantage of these women, making quite a profit through coordinating the subcontract; by contrast, a typical hardworking woman could hardly make a "fortune" from her meager earnings of about $1.50/day for 10-12 hours' labor. This has led to a further irony: these women's difficulty in achieving "a relatively comfortable life" in turn contributes to reinforcing the state's teleological claim of women's deficiency in possessing market shrewdness.

The implication of this circling reinforcement seems rather grim: rural women themselves should be blamed for their failure in the present era of a market economy due to their lack of economic rationality; hence, rural citizens need the state's sustained guidance and discipline—via its population control efforts—to gradually reduce their various "lacks": their feudalist backward ideas embodied in their childbearing practices (especially during the 1970s and '80s), their "low level of understanding" of the state's modernizing population policy and the varying degrees of "barbarity" revolving around rural women's year-round potential for fertility (especially during the radical one-child

policy period in the early and mid 1980s), as well as their insufficient accommodation to the state's newly fashioned ideal model of rural identity epitomized by an economic desire for material prosperity.

Producing "Globalized" Rural Subjects

Concomitant with this critique of rural identity as defined by a series of presumed deficiencies, at the turn of the new millennium, the post-socialist Chinese state became preoccupied with constructing an internationally acceptable image of modernity, as I introduced in the opening narrative. As a constituent part of the nation's eager venture toward participating in the capitalist world economy, in the late 1990s the state began to transform its population policy from the previous, virtually coercive "administrative measures" (*guanlixing*) to more "humanistic services" (*fuwuxing*) (Peng et al. 1996:252-54, Yang, Liang, and Zhang 2001:368-69; also see Gu 2002). In Deqing, for example, a showcase county in Zhejiang Province where the "service" for family planning has been well developed, the state even invited foreign scholars to go there to conduct joint research (Gu, Simmons, and Szatkowski 2002). By the end of 1999, there were more than six hundred county-level units across the nation that were claimed to have joined the "high-quality service" project (Yang, Liang, and Zhang 2001:465). As governmental officials Zhong et al. have made it plain, the "service" would help to establish an amiable and acceptable image of the post-socialist Chinese state to international audiences (Zhong, Lai, and Shi 1998).

As an integral part of this globalized reform, the post-socialist Chinese state has also tried to disseminate "new," "civilized" notions of family and childbearing among its

hundreds of millions of rural subjects. On March 2, 2000, the state released a "Resolution of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council on Reinforcing the Work of Population and Family Planning and Stabilizing the Low Level of Fertility," as z*hongfa* No. 8, 2000 (EDCPP 2000:43-52; *zhongfa* refers to a decree/document of the Central Committee of the Communist Party). In this Resolution, the state declared that one of the major goals in the first decade of the new millennium was to "form a preliminary new notion of marriage and childbearing as well as a new fertility culture" (EDCPP 2000:45).

Following this lead, the state-run China Population Press soon published *Introduction to China's Fertility Culture* (two volumes, 977 pages in total) the next year. In these two edited volumes—edited by high-rank officials, written mostly by university professors, and bearing a foreword by the Minister of the State Commission of Family Planning—the state focused on advocating how to "build a new fertility culture" in implementing its population policy in the new millennium. In December 2001, the government ultimately legislated a national law on state planning of population and birth. This latest policy revision, the state claimed, would further stabilize its population control efforts and would provide rural people, especially women, with more "high-quality services" (*youzhi fuwu*) for their reproductive health—services that were now constructed as "humane and caring" (*renben guanhuai*) (Gu 2002, Winckler 2002). To the post-socialist Chinese state, the ultimate goal of population control in rural China has become

> [to] promote well-coordinated development and sustainable development among population, economy, society, resources, and environment, and to create a favorable population environment for the [cause of] “Reform and Open” as well as the development of modernization (EDCPP 2000:99).

In just a few lines, one can discern major themes now being widely circulated globally: market economy, sustainable development, environmentalism, and so on. In addition to its sustained obsession with economic growth, the post-socialist Chinese state has also constructed a highly globalized image of modernity to transform its population policy into a "civilized service." In this respect, the post-socialist state's modernity project undergirding its population policy has now been speaking actively with, and dialogically shaped by, global society.

Along with the series of seemingly liberal reforms, the state has endeavored to produce "civilized" rural subjects who are currently diagnosed as once again deficient. This time the "lack" (*qianque*) has been discursively located in the need for a more "scientific, civilized, and progressive notion of marriage and childbearing" (Yang et al. 2000:164-65). To cure this freshly identified deficiency which is now seen as a new rural pathology, the state intends to transform the old "fertility culture" (*shengyu wenhua*) into a new, "civilized" one (Yang, Liang, and Zhang 2001:420-21).

In March 1999, the State Commission of Family Planning and the Propaganda Department of the Communist Party's Central Committee jointly launched a three-year-long movement, called "Letting the New Customs of Marriage and Childbearing Flow into Myriads of Families" (*hunyu xinfeng jin wanjia*) (Yang, Liang, and Zhang 2001:438). According to the state, by popularizing "scientific, civilized, and progressive notions of marriage and childbearing," this nationwide activity would raise public consciousness in such a way that peasants would feel motivated to voluntarily conform to the state's population policy (Shi 2001). In July 1999, after a national symposium convened by the

State Commission of Family Planning, the activity was further promoted nationwide by the state at the rural grassroots level (Yang, Liang, and Zhang 2001:446).

Yet my ethnographic observations belied the state's progressive claims. During my fieldwork in the village of River Crossing in summer 2002, I witnessed how these so-called "high-quality services" have been provided and how the new movement of "Letting the New Customs of Marriage and Childbearing Flow into Myriads of Families" has been practiced in the local context. One Saturday morning, for example, a township official told me that a medical team from the county seat would come to offer free diagnoses, mainly for women, with some free medicines available during the morning farmer's market. By the time a van finally arrived carrying the team to the courtyard of the township government, however, it was near noon. At that time, the temporary morning market had been closed for over an hour, and everyone on the medical team was hungry. After a lunch provided by the township government, the team members got back in the van to return to the county seat without having diagnosed a single patient. The "caring" commitment that the local authority had claimed to showcase to its village subjects eventuated in largely a hollow promise in its grassroots practice.

As for the new plan of "Letting the New Customs of Marriage and Childbearing Flow into Myriads of Families," local officials told me that they had promoted this policy for several years. Yet, like the "services" I witnessed in 2002, this was largely an oral performance. When I asked the only daughter of my host family, who was the mother of a seven-year-old boy, if she knew about the plan, the daughter replied dismissively: "Why do you bother asking this?" She explained to me that as far as she knew, "activities" like this mostly existed in "newspapers and the mouths of the local officials."

Contrasting the state's progressive claims with my fieldwork experience, I conclude that an irony has persisted in the post-socialist Chinese state's pursuit of a globally acceptable model of modernity around the new millennium. According to the classic economic doctrine, the essence of an ideal market economy is to give individuals "free choices" to "swim" in the ocean of the market (Becker 1976)—although such an ideal/utopian situation has not yet been produced across the span of capitalist history (Lemke 2001). In any case, even with its seemingly liberal undertaking, China's population policy has left little space to allow rural people to have real "free" choices in childbearing. After redefining rural subjects once again as deficient Others, the seemingly liberal, caring gestures that are discursively apparent in the state's recent population policy have also remained largely performative.

Conclusion

In rural China over the past three decades, population control has been dialogically premised on the state's discursive constructions of rural identity—constructions that have shifted significantly since the 1970s along with metamorphoses in state images of modernity. Yet I have suggested that there is also remarkable continuity behind this series of shifts in population policy. Thus I maintain that the pursuit of modernity by the Chinese state entails a sequential, somewhat paradoxical, dual process: objectifying rural subjects as backward Others, and locating these subjects as targets of a state-sponsored "civilizing" process—both of these eventuating in regulating reproduction (Horn 1994, Schein 1997). As such, controlling the rural population arguably lies at the very core of the Chinese state's pursuit of modernity.

Finally, situating China's recent shifts in population policy as integral to its yearning to join the capitalist world economy, I would further suggest that China's post-socialist transformation—especially since the early 1990s—has intersected with broader processes of globalization and transnationalism as China has endeavored to tailor its state discourses to the global discursive marketplace.

CHAPTER 4

REPRODUCTION AGAINST THE STATE:

STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE AND WOMEN'S CHILDBEARING EXPERIENCES

Introduction

One morning in September 2004, I met a young woman, Zhou Li (age 19), and her husband, Xiao Tang (age 18), in a sickroom at the Family Planning Service Station (*jihua shengyu fuwu zhan*), located in a county seat of northeastern China.[51] Five days before, Zhou Li underwent an abortion at the beginning of her third trimester. Since the couple had married illegally (before both had reached the legal ages for marriage) and lacked a marriage certificate, local officials said that Zhou Li's pregnancy was illegitimate in a double sense—*weihun shengyu* ("unmarried [and unplanned] birth").[52] Officials told the couple that they would let them have the baby if they wished.[53] But to legitimize their child, the couple would first have to legitimate their marriage: altogether,

[51] According to the National Marriage Law, citizens are not permitted to marry until a man reaches 22 and a woman reaches 20. Married in a mountainous township some 45 miles away from the county seat (and about 20 miles away from River Crossing, my primary fieldwork site) before both had reached the legal ages for marriage, the couple were both teenagers at the time, with Zhou Li being 19 and Xiao Tang 18.

[52] Zhou Li had irregular and unpredictable menstrual periods, with only two to three periods a year. Because of this, she did not realize that she was pregnant shortly after the wedding ceremony in January 2004 until she noticed that her stomach had become increasingly "swollen." By the time an ultrasound scan verified her pregnancy, the fetus was at the end of the second trimester. Soon after her pregnancy was publicized in the village, local officials intervened.

[53] Since 1998, the local government had banned physical violence against women in cases of violating the state's birth control policy.

they were required to pay a joint fine of 5,000 *yuan* for an official marriage certificate as well as a "birth permit" (*zunsheng zhen*).[54]

In the township where Zhou Li and Xiao Tang resided, in 2004 the annual income per capita hovered around 2,000 *yuan*. The fine thus imposed a serious financial challenge to the young couple. Before that, their wedding had already cost their families a large sum of money and had put them in debt.[55] Now, with Zhou Li being pregnant, both the young couple and their parents felt they could not afford the additional cost of the 5,000 *yuan* fine. Thus, eight days before I met the couple, Zhou Li--accompanied by Xiao Tang and her aunt—came to the County Family Planning Service Station for an abortion. Unfortunately, the abortion caused a post-surgical infection, for which Zhou Li had to take antibiotics through an intravenous drip for several days. And because her post-abortion infection also made the couple worry for her future fertility, the afternoon after the abortion, Zhou Li planned to undergo a dilation and curettage (D & C) procedure to "clean her womb."[56] For the abortion and related medicines (not including the upcoming cost for the D & C), the couple had already spent nearly a thousand *yuan*, all borrowed from relatives.

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[54] Without a "birth permit," a child cannot be granted legal "citizenship" (called *hukou*—"household registration identity"), which entitles individuals to a series of key rights, including access to land and public schooling.

[55] For example, Xiao Tang's parents had spent about 37,000 *yuan* to renovate and furnish a three-room house in preparation for the wedding, and to offer a 27-table banquet, among other expenditures. As a result, his family was already in debt, having spent all the savings they had managed to accumulate year after year from their meager incomes.

[56] As recounted by Zhou Li and several other women who also had third-trimester abortions at the County Family Planning Service Center, their abortions were not that different from a "real delivery." The only difference was that, at the beginning of such an abortion, a nurse would use a needle to inject medicine into the fetus's head to insure that the fetus would be dead after being delivered. In addition, the government only covers the cost for an abortion itself; rural women must pay for other additional operations such as a D & C procedure. As a result, in most cases, abortions such as these are not followed by a "D & C" procedure.

In rural China, women typically become pregnant shortly after their wedding ceremony and give birth to their first child thereafter. Against such a received, "common-sensical" image, the abortion story of Zhou Li constituted a sharp contrast. Yet her experience of abortion due to a "big womb"—due to what the Chinese government classifies as an unacceptable pregnancy—was not an exception. According to incomplete clinic records of the County Family Planning Service Station, from January – September 2004, 163 rural women came to its clinic to undergo a first-trimester abortion, and 92 underwent second- or third-trimester abortions (with the maximum period of pregnancy being 38 weeks, and a significant portion of the patients being pregnant for more than 30 weeks).[57] To be sure, these simple statistics remained rather incomplete due to a variety of political, institutional, and bureaucratic barriers—apparent and imperceptible alike—that I was unable to circumvent during my fieldwork. Even so, they reminded me of the nation's draconian birth control campaign in the 1980s, which had led many rural women with "big wombs" to have forced abortions in their second or third trimesters—a practice the state now implicitly acknowledges as harsh and coercive (Gu 2002).

Why have "big-womb abortions"—terminations of late-second-trimester and third-trimester pregnancies—continued to take place, after the Chinese state had promised in the late 1990s to transform its birth control policy into a "humane service" to support women's reproductive health? In particular, why did local officials in Zhou Li's and Xiao Tang's villages not forestall the couple's illegal wedding, yet they intervened

[57] In large degree, such abortions were not much different from infanticides (see Note 6).

upon hearing that Zhou Li was in her second trimester of a pregnancy? In this chapter I examine the ways in which village women's reproductive experiences have been conditioned and shaped by a series of actions that Paul Farmer (2004) would call "structural violence" brought about by the state's birth control efforts.

To Johan Galtung, who coined the term, "violence" causes the gap between the potential and the actual (1980), and he employed "structural violence" to describe social structures—economic, political, legal, religious, and cultural—that impede individuals, groups, and societies from reaching their full potentials (Galtung 1969; cf. Farmer et al. 2006:1686). This concept, along with related insightful ones such as "social suffering" (Bourgois 2003, Kleinman et al. 1997) and "everyday violence" (Scheper-Hughes 1992, 1996), has been productively applied by medical anthropologists to examine the systematic constitution of inequality and suffering. To Paul Famer, the concept of structural violence is "intended to inform the study of the social machinery of oppression" (2004:307). He thus defines the concept as social arrangements that systematically bring subordinated and unprivileged groups into detrimental situations and make them susceptible to a variety of forms of harm and suffering (Farmer 2004:307-08; cf. Benson 2008:590). In more recent writings, anthropologists have come to "re-socialize" suffering by tracing its origins to social structures, political-economic processes, and cultural ideologies (e.g. Benson 2008, Benson et al. 2008). In this chapter, I generally follow Farmer's use of structural violence (2004), while trying to "re-socialize" it in terms of broader categories such as the "cultural," "symbolic," and "socio-political."

In the pages that follow, I propose that, although the public appearance of China's population control policy has experienced dramatic metamorphoses, a series of acts of structural violence has continued to condition women's reproductive concepts and practices. As instantiated by Zhou Li's abortion story, I challenge sanguine anticipations one might hold that the Chinese state's family planning project is now moving toward, and will eventually become, a "humane service," as the state has promised. I suggest, instead, that since the 1970s, a series of policy initiatives rooted in structural violence has been carried out through the state's birth control efforts to shape women's bodily experiences of pregnancy, childbearing, contraception, and abortion into the current new millennium, regardless of whether the state's intervention is direct and stern, or is veiled as "humane."

Moreover, viewing class as an analytical lens (Rapp 2001), I examine how class differentiations that have accompanied China's postsocialist transformation have effectively reconfigured the ways in which structural violence still conditions women's reproductive experiences. Highlighting individual village women's reproductive stories, and locating their experiences in the local context characterized by enlarging class gaps, I further examine continuities and raptures of China's postsocialism.

Population Control Policy and "Feminization" of Birth Control Practices

Over the past four decades, China's population control policy has been an integral constituent of the state's modernization blueprint (Greenhalgh 2003). During the early and mid 1950s, shortly after the establishment of the People's Republic, some liberal activists tried to promote a birth control policy that would give women access to contraceptive methods and loosen official restrictions on abortion and sterilization (Shao

1954). Yet for a variety of reasons, these population control initiatives did not become widespread during the 1950s and '60s. As a result, China's population grew quickly. From 1962-70, for example, China saw a net increase of 170 million people, with an average "total fertility rate" of 5.91 children/woman (Chu 1995:75). By the 1970s, however, after the initial nationwide turmoil brought about by the Cultural Revolution had to some extent subsided (Lin 2006, MacFarquhar 1997), state leaders, including Mao, began to recognize that such a rapid population growth was incompatible with the nation's planned economy (Yang, Liang, and Zhang 2001:41-42). Grave socioeconomic realities further propelled state leaders to code their concern with population issues as a *problem*. For example, by the early 1970s, the living standard for most Chinese was no better than it had been in the 1950s.

On July 8, 1971, the State Council (China's central government) released Decree # 51 (Peng et al. 1996: 64-65; my translation) that henceforth, "mankind [sic] should not let anarchism dominate human reproduction; they also need birth planning." The decree proclaimed that by 1975, the nation's annual population growth rate should be reduced to around 10‰ in cities and no more than 15‰ in rural areas.[58] Subsequent birth policies increased the legal age for marriage, specified minimum birth intervals, and permitted couples to bear no more than two children; the policy as a whole was referred to as *wan, xi, shao*: "later" (marriage), "sparser" (longer spacing between births), "fewer" (births) (Yang, Liang, and Zhang 2001:51).

In advancing its population policy, the state also tried to promote egalitarian gender relationships, requesting that males share responsibility for birth planning

[58] The state did not achieve the goal of 1971: by 1975, China still had an overall population growth rate of 15.69‰ (Yao and Yin 1994:9).

measures such as contraception and sterilization. Yet when state officials began to consider feasible ways to implement the policy, paradoxically, they began to implicitly borrow existing patrilineal gender categories—such as that reproduction was largely a women's issue, and that sexuality was always embarrassing—without serious, practical efforts to challenge and change these notions. Thus at the practical level, birth control has become "appropriately" a women's issue and is seen as best carried through in the domestic sphere revolving around women's private bodies. To cite a feminist critique of gendered social space, in order to carry out its birth control policy in the countryside, the Chinese state seems to have largely followed the classic patrilineal analogy of *male : female :: public : domestic*, as theorized by pioneering feminist anthropologist Michelle Rosaldo (1974, 1980).

The local government's birth control practices in the village of River Crossing provided an apt case in point. In 1980, 284 village couples under age 49 were reported to have taken contraceptive measures, with 175 women being sterilized (through tubal ligation surgeries), 98 women having had an IUD inserted, and four women taking contraceptive pills; only seven men participated in contraception in any way, with six using condoms and one having had a vasectomy.[59] Twelve years later (in December 1992), 502 River Crossing Village couples under age 49 were reported to have taken contraceptive measures, with 240 women being sterilized, 253 women having had IUDs inserted, and one woman taking contraceptive pills; by contrast, only eight men participated in contraception, with seven using condoms and one (the same local official)

[59] The vasectomy story of this man—a local official—was promoted by the local government as a "behavioral paragon" (*xingwei biaoshuai*) to exemplify that husbands could—and should—actively participate in the birth control movement. Unfortunately, over the following two-and-a-half decades, not a single village man followed his "model."

having had a vasectomy. Another 13 years later (in May 2005), 342 village couples were reported to have taken contraceptive measures, with 57 women being sterilized, 276 women having had IUDs inserted, two women taking contraceptive pills, and only seven men using condoms.[60]

With the state having adopted entrenched patriarchal gender stereotypes in promoting its population policy, birth control has become solely and "naturally" a women's issue, penetrating many women's consciousness. Wu Dashen, a neighbor of my host family in River Crossing, was an apt case in point. Born in 1948, Wu Dashen married in 1970. When the local government launched a sterilization campaign in fall 1974, she had already given birth to a daughter in 1971 and a son in 1973—hence she was required to undergo tubal ligation surgery. The surgery, which took more than three hours, was performed in the commune clinic located in River Crossing Village. Afterwards, Wu Dashen suffered some complications. As she recalled: "I couldn't leave the bed for nearly two months [after the sterilization]. After that, I could barely walk on my feet, but still felt lack of strength for quite a while." One day, while listening to her complaints, I responded: "Had you thought about having him [i.e. her husband] sterilized? Didn't the government encourage men to take birth control measures? Men's sterilization has the fewest side effects." Apparently surprised by my question, Wu Dashen paused for a second; then she said: "Yes, he could. Had I not done that [i.e. the sterilization], he'd have to take it." Without awaiting my comments, Wu Dashen went on to say: "Having cuts in the [lower] abdomen will harm one's *yuan qi*. My husband is the backbone [*ding liang zhu*] of my family. He shouldn't take the surgery. So I did."

[60] In 2005, the local official having had a vasectomy was 55, at an age "beyond" the state's targets for active birth control. He was hence excluded from the villager's yearly contraception statistics.

Without persistent and effective actions by the state to counter such patrilineal gender stereotypes (despite the state's initial promises), to many River Crossing women like Wu Dashen, reproduction and birth control continued to be viewed as "naturally" a women's issue.

As a result, prevailing patrilineal gender stereotypes have fundamentally reshaped and ultimately subverted the Chinese state's modernizing project of forging a viable population control policy from its very beginning in the 1970s. In the end, the state's population control policy has become quintessentially "feminized": it targeted rural women; it was implemented mainly by the state's female local agents; and, accordingly, it became essentially a "women's job."

Birth Control and the Coming of Reproductive Structural Violence

The "feminization" of population control has essentially reconfigured the contours of the state's policy as implemented in rural areas, which has in the meantime reinforced the patrilineal gender ideology. In this section, I examine village women's collective and individual suffering brought about by the state's birth control efforts. I interrogate the ways in which a series of governmental acts rooted in structural violence, carried out in the name of the state's modernizing project of population control, has shaped village women's bodily experiences of reproduction. To further foreground how a series of acts I consider to exemplify structural violence converged to condition and shape village women's reproductive experiences, I focus my analysis on women's reproductive stories during the period of the notorious one-child policy and its subsequent metamorphoses—a period that even the state later implicitly acknowledged as overly harsh (Gu 2002).

The One-Child Policy and Five Women's Reproductive Stories

In the late 1970s, a burgeoning population was diagnosed by the Chinese state as an unbearable national burden, impeding its ambition to rapidly achieve modernization goals. As a result, the state became increasingly obsessed with controlling its population growth rate. Indeed, following Raymond Williams (1973), one might argue that the lower the targeted population growth rate, the more it was fetishized. Thus in 1979, the Chinese state began to promote a one-child policy. In 1980, this policy became mandatory in both urban and rural areas. In 1982, the one-child-oriented family planning program was further written into the Constitution (Peng et al. 1996:16-17, 19, 43).

To implement the one-child policy in rural settings—where entrenched patrilineal ideologies virtually required all families to produce a male heir—it was predictable that the state would surely encounter villagers' fierce resistance. In the village of River Crossing, such villager-state contestation had already become quite serious several years before the one-child policy. In the late 1970s, many villagers had realized that the state's birth control policy would be more and more rigorous, and thus decided to become pregnant as soon as possible in hopes of bearing a son. For example, Zheng Yulan (born in 1954, wife of Liu Lijie) was married in 1977 and gave birth to a daughter the subsequent year. Her parents-in-law were disappointed that her first child was a girl, and refused to offer any help during her *yuezi*—the "month of confinement" after the delivery. Following the birth of her daughter, Zheng Yulan was not allowed by the government to have a second child until she reached age 30 (according to the local birth policy of 1978). However, fearing the birth policy might become even more stringent, the couple decided

to have their second child right away, and in November 1979, Zheng Yulan gave birth to her second child, a son indeed. Five months after the birth of her son, Zheng Yulan was required to undergo tubal ligation surgery, otherwise her family would have had to pay a fine of 200 *yuan* for postponing the surgery. Nevertheless, during that period the sterilization surgery frequently caused post-surgical complications (such as those Wu Dashen had suffered, as I have just introduced in the previous section), some of which were rather serious. Fearing such a scenario, Zheng Yulan wanted to escape the surgery. Without any money to pay for the fine, she fled to her parents' house but was immediately caught by River Crossing officials, who travelled nine miles to her natal village. In April 1980, Zheng Yulan was sterilized. However, the surgery disturbed her lactation and she immediately had no breast milk to feed her five-month-old son and had to borrow money to purchase formula instead.

After the state initiated its one-child rule in September 1980, governmental punishments against villagers who had violated the birth policy became increasingly harsh. For instance, Liu Dajie (born in 1955, wife of Qi Kuiyuan), had her first daughter in 1978 and gave birth to her second child, another girl, in August 1980, just a month before the one-child policy was implemented. To deter villagers from violating the new population policy, her family was required to pay a fine of 300 *yuan* in cash. Because Liu Dajie refused to undergo the sterilization surgery soon after she had produced her second child, her family was forced to pay another 450 *yuan* as a "security deposit," which would be confiscated if she did not undergo tubal ligation surgery within a year's time. To put the amount of the fine into perspective, in 1980 the annual income per capita in the local rural area was then 119 *yuan* (*County Annals* 1993:626), making the combined fine of 750 *yuan*

equivalent to six years' salary.[61] In April, Liu Dajie finally succumbed to the local authority's pressure and had the sterilization surgery. As Liu Dajie recalled during an interview, the incision from the operation did not heal well. For more than a year, she could not do any of the normal heavy work of farming that she normally performed, such as carrying two baskets of fertilizer or grain on a shoulder pole—whenever she did, the surgical cut was piercingly painful.

Along with the one-child policy, the local government began to make detailed annual population plans. Each year, every village was allocated a birth quota from the township government; henceforth, all childbirths would be rigorously planned—a woman could not become pregnant without official approval ahead of time—and the total number of newborns must not exceed the annual birth quota allotted to the village.

In order to achieve the draconian birth control goals, women's bodies became the locus of a veritable Foucauldian disciplinary panopticon (Foucault 1977:206-07). In the village of River Crossing, beginning in 1980, local (female) officials regularly arrived at the houses of all married women of fertile age to inquire about the women's monthly periods and even to verify the women's claims by inspecting their used menstrual pads (usually, folded toilet paper strips attached to a hand-made, cloth sanitary belt) which were thrown in the outdoor toilet at the corner of a family's courtyard; the goal was to ensure that the women were not pregnant at a time deemed "outside" the population plan formulated for that village. To cite a set of pet phrases I collected during an interview

[61] In Liu Dajia's case, her family borrowed money to pay the 300 *yuan* of fine in cash. As to the 450 *yuan* for a "security deposit," because the family did not have any cash to pay this additional fee, local officials instead took away from the family a camera, a five-drawer chest, and several other pieces of furniture. (Liu Dajie's husband, Qi Kuiyuan, was a local photographer; as his side occupation, taking pictures for local people provided an additional source of income to their family.) The camera and furniture were returned to the family after Liu Dajie underwent the tubal ligation surgery.

with a local leader in 2002, which was widely circulated among governmental officials in this area since 1980: the state's female agents should "go down to the village (*jingdao cun*), enter the [individual] family (*rudao hu*), see the [targeted] woman (*jiandao ren*), and touch her belly [to make sure that she is not pregnant outside the "plan"] (*modao du*)."

Even with such virtually omnipresent surveillance, not a few villagers continued to fervently pursue an additional child, especially when their first births had produced girls. To keep the local population growth within the limit of its annual birth quota, "catching big wombs" (*zhua daduzi*)—that is, detecting and then aborting "unexpected" pregnancies that occur outside the state's population plan—became one of the major tasks for many rural government officials charged with implementing local population control policies. As a result, to varying extents, the state's population policy has triggered lasting contests revolving around the gender of babies—contests that ultimately center on scrambling for women's wombs (Anagnost 1988, Greenhalgh 1994).

Cai Erjie's story was illustrative of how a "big womb" was handled by the local officials during this period. Born in 1961, she married in 1982 and gave birth to a son in 1983, with an IUD inserted soon thereafter. Nevertheless, the IUD did not prevent Cai Erjie from becoming pregnant once again. In spring 1984, Cai Erjie was found to be pregnant for nearly four months. Contesting local officials' pressure, the couple refused to have an abortion, saying that the pregnancy was not their fault. Several months later, in July, local officials brought some militia to their compound and forced Cai Erjie to abort her eight-month-old fetus at the County Family Planning Service Station. As she told me in an interview, the induced abortion was more painful than a normal, full-term

delivery. To induce the labor, she was injected with some medicine, and the needle was directly inserted into the head of the fetus to make sure that the fetus would be dead after being aborted. When the medicine took effect, Cai Erjie began to go into labor and finally "aborted"—delivered—the dead fetus.[62] During the one-child policy period, stories such as Cai Erjie's were common in the village. As a retired local leader recalled in 2005, during the early and mid 1980s, every year about eight to ten out-of-plan pregnancies occurred in the village, and each of these had its own heartbreaking narrative.

Peasants' fierce resistance to the one-child policy pushed the Chinese state to begin to consider possible policy modifications. Thus in 1984, the sate accorded a larger birth quota to some rural women. Among women who had produced girls in their first births, about 10% of them would now be allowed a second birth to more flexibly accommodate various special cases (e.g., if the first child died or was disabled after an accident).[63] Liu Yujuan (born in 1959 and married in 1980), for example, was granted such an "extra" birth in 1985, after giving birth to a daughter in 1981, for two reasons: she was the only child of her parents, plus her first child was a girl. In December 1986, she gave birth to her second child, a daughter again. Disappointed by the reality of having two daughters, the couple managed to postpone the mandatory sterilization surgery (which had already been scheduled by the state for her), and planned for another pregnancy in hopes of having a son. In July 1987, Liu Yujuan was found by local officials to have

[62] In narratives of both village women and medical practitioners, aborting a third-trimester fetus is medically identical to delivering a full-term baby; in China, villagers use the same word, *sheng* ("to labor and deliver"), to describe both late abortions and normal deliveries.

[63] Leading Party Members' Group of the State Commission of Family Planning (March 22, 1984): "A Report on the Situation of Family Planning Work," approved by the Central Committee of the Communist of China on April 13, 1984 as *zhongfa* (the decree/document of the Central Committee of the Communist Party) No. 7, 1984 (Peng et al. 1996:24-27).

been pregnant for two months. She refused to have an abortion and hid in a relative's house. About two weeks later, a team of militia—sent out by local leaders—found her and took her to the township government. After being locked up in a government office for several days (with a female official and several male militia staying with her), Liu Yujuan finally yielded. Two months after the abortion, she underwent a tubal ligation surgery to further pacify the local authority.

As indicated by Liu Yujuan's reproductive story, in the mid-1980s the Chinese state started to add some flexibility to its stringent policy so as to make its population policy acceptable to peasants. In 1987, the state further expanded its policy flexibility, according a second chance to bear a son to rural women whose first births had produced girls. However, in most rural areas (including the village of River Crossing), this "second chance" was usually granted by the local government only four to six years after the first birth.[64] Ironically, this policy of granting a second chance to produce a son has reinforced villagers' entrenched patrilineal gender ideologies.

In effect, since 1988, the state has effectively reduced peasants' massive resistance by accommodating their patrilineal ideology in its policy revisions. Yet the policy itself remained stringent, and punishments against those who had breached the policy continued to be essentially as harsh as before. In summer 1988—shortly after the state had "softened" its one-child rule, for example—Ai Dashao (born in 1962) was found to be pregnant for nearly five months. Before that, she had given birth to a son in 1984, with an IUD inserted thereafter. With this unexpected pregnancy, the couple hoped to have an

[64] Peng Peiyun (Minister of the State Commission of Family Planning): "A Speech at the National Meeting for Directors of Provincial Family Planning Commissions," May 12, 1988 (Peng et al. 1996:344-46; also see Chu 1995; Zhao 1995; and Liang, Tan, and Jing 1999).

additional child, claiming that it was not their "fault" because they had complied with the government's birth control rules and the pregnancy was due to an IUD failure. In the coming several months, local officials continued to press the couple to terminate the pregnancy, but the couple fiercely resisted. At last, one day in October 1988, seeing that the husband was temporarily away from home, four militia—under the command of local officials—suddenly broke into their house and took Ai Dashao on a jeep toward a hospital in a neighboring county seat to abort the eight-and-a-half- month-old fetus.[65] With the abortion of this unexpected pregnancy, the entire township had succeeded in keeping its population growth within the planned annual birth quota. However, as a result of the forced late-term abortion, Ai Dashao suffered severe post-surgical complications. Over the following four years, she was semi-paralyzed and could not walk on her own, and was unable to gain a full recovery after that.

Structural Violence and Women's Reproductive Suffering

As we have seen, the Chinese state's ambitious one-child policy has produced a variety of acts of violence centering on rural women. Their experiences may seem unique, but I suggest that state-sponsored structural violence made them inevitable, insofar as these women have been singled out for medical interventions that have caused egregious afflictions surrounding their young, fecund bodies.

[65] During an interview in summer 2005, a retired township leader, who was one of the local officials commanding the event, revealed to me that local officials deliberately planned their action ahead of time so as to prevent her husband from "obstructing their work": in the 1980s, most villagers knew that local officials usually took village women to the County Family Planning Service Station when they were being subjected to a forced abortion. Now, by unexpectedly taking Ai Dashao to the neighboring county seat, officials would ensure that her husband would be unable to find her even if he went to search for her at the County Family Planning Service Station.

Convergent with the feminization of population control and the resurgence of patriarchy, the Chinese state's population control policy is simultaneously both a nationalist and a "civilizing" project (see Chen 2010). As a nationalist project, since the mid-1970s the Chinese state has successfully constructed a nationalist discourse for its population control policy: China's huge population is now termed an "unbearable burden" (*baofu*) for modernization, impeding the nation from catching up with the developed Western powers and restoring its longstanding national glory and prosperity that it unfortunately lost in the past century-and-a-half (due to the "invasion" of the West and the country's "feudalist decay"). With the successful construction of such a nationalist discourse, population control became a "fundamental national policy" (*jiben guoce)* in the late 1970s, permeating the consciousness of the rank-and-file. Since then, sayings and slogans such as "China is over-populated" and "Control the population, benefit our offspring" have become truisms circulating across the vast span of the nation: in newspapers, on radio, on TV, on posters painted on walls at village street corners, even in people's daily conversations. During my fieldwork in the village of River Crossing, for example, I chatted with a number of couples who, for a variety of reasons, expressed their intentions to have an additional child, especially if they had not yet produced a son to continue their family lines—yet even these couples acknowledged that China's population was too large and needed to be "controlled."

Along with the formulation of the nationalist discourse, the Chinese state has also articulated its population control policy as simultaneously a "civilizing" project. To facilitate its population control efforts across the vast expanse of rural areas, the state has constructed a malleable rural identity, an image of the Other that, while somewhat variable,

is nevertheless always seen as lacking in something "good," hence in need of the state's incessant guidance, discipline, and efforts at "civilization" (Kipnis 1995, Said 1978, Schein 1997). Positioning rural subjects as an Other defined by lacks, the Chinese state has produced an image for itself as always being progressive, responsible, and promising, and has thereby sought to legitimize its hegemonic population policy and discursively transform peasants—especially women—into docile instruments of its pursuit of modernization (Ferguson 1990, Horn 1994, Scott 1985).

Inspired by Paul Farmer (2004, 2006), in reading village women's reproductive stories, I find that the above four discourses have interlocked with each other to form "social arrangements" that systematically made women the sole target of the state's intervention and put them at risk for various forms of suffering brought about by the birth control policy: the patrilineal gender ideology naturalized reproduction as a women's issue, and the corresponding feminization of birth control normalized women as the exclusive object of the state's intrusion; the nationalist discourse justified population control as a "fundamental national policy," and the discursive construction of rural identity as the "lacking," backward Other legitimized the state's intrusion into villagers' private decisions surrounding reproduction. These four discourses have, I suggest, converged to undergird a policy rooted in structural violence insofar as it predisposes village women toward significant suffering in a variety of ways caused by the state's birth control campaign.

In the five women's reproductive experiences I introduced, the entrenched patrilineal gender ideology and the corresponding feminization of the birth control policy have naturalized and normalized women as the sole target of the state's forceful

intervention. Moreover, the state-promoted, nationalist discourse has fundamentally legitimized the government's birth control policy, permeating ordinary citizens' everyday consciousness. During my interviews with these five women, all of them tearfully complained about a variety of egregious acts of violence that the local government had inflicted in pushing them to comply with the birth control policy—but none questioned the birth policy *per se*. The state's "civilizing" discourse has also structurally conditioned women's reproductive suffering incurred by the birth control policy.

During my interviews with local officials about their birth control work, I found they always mobilized the "civilizing" discourse of the population policy—which discursively constructs rural identity as an Other defined by lacks—to justify their hegemonic intrusion into women's reproductive events. For example, during a casual conversation with a township leader who had led militia to take Ai Dashao for a forced abortion, I mentioned Ai Dashao's suffering. The leader remained silent for a short while. Then he said: "Cases like this must be under control. Otherwise everyone would dare to have as many kids as they want." My question seemed to have remained in this official's mind, for near the end of our conversation, he added, in a somewhat vexed tone:

> That woman's [i.e. Ai Dashao's] suffering was pathetic. Yet on the other hand, she deserved that. We'd tried to persuade her many times [to have an abortion], but she and her husband didn't have a normal sense as most people did. To 'stubborn donkeys' like her, exerting necessary [physical] force is necessary.

Such a condescending attitude toward villagers was quite common among local officials in charge of the birth control policy. For instance, in November 1988, a woman in a member village of the River Crossing Township had just given birth—as it happened,

to a son—after having a daughter from her first birth, hence the state considered her a subject of sterilization surgery. When a township official led a medical team to her village, the woman resolutely refused the operation and cursed the township official who came to persuade her. At last, the township official was irritated, saying this woman was really "hateful" (*ke wu*) and should be subdued immediately; he commanded the medical team members to take the woman by force and sterilize her right away. Unfortunately, the woman suffered severe post-surgical complications: since the sterilization, she has always had pains in her lower abdomen and has been unable to straighten her back while walking. In this regard, I suggest that the state's "civilizing" discourse—constructing rural citizens as the backward Other—has become another force constituting the structural violence that has come to shape village women's reproductive experiences.

Power, Social Difference, and Women's Experiences of Structural Violence

Conditioned by a series of acts founded in structural violence, rural women in China remain susceptible to a variety of state interventions, as well as re-interventions—in cases for which previous interventions failed. As instantiated by the stories of Cai Erjie and Ai Dashao, both of them had had an IUD inserted after having a son in their first births. In both cases, their IUDs failed and both women became pregnant once again, causing the state to force them to undergo late-third-trimester abortions. Cai Eerjie's and Ai Dashao's experiences were not uncommon in the 1970s and '80s. During this period, not only did IUDs sometimes fail, but sterilization surgeries were also not always successful.

Dang Sanshen, for example, had given birth to a daughter and a son and was thus sterilized in 1982. Soon thereafter, however, Dan Sanshen found that she was pregnant once again. When local officials came to persuade her to terminate the pregnancy, she refused and said that being pregnant was not her fault at all. Maybe local officials were embarrassed by the surgery's failure, but in any case, they did not physically force her to have an abortion, and Dang Sanshen finally had her third child, a daughter. Shortly after the birth of the baby, however, local officials intervened once again. Seeing that the couple did not have any cash to pay the fine for a third child to which they were subject, the officials took away all five pigs that the family was raising. As many villagers recalled, to punish local poor families who had breached the birth control policy, it has been very common for local officials to confiscate family property in lieu of cash fines. Four months later, Dang Sanshen was forced by the government to undergo a second tubal ligation surgery, but she was not permitted to reclaim her pigs.

Beyond IUD and sterilization failures, the state's birth control measures, especially sterilization surgeries, have frequently caused a variety of post-surgical complications, some of which are quite severe (such as those suffered by Ai Dashao, introduced above). In the village of River Crossing, among nearly a hundred women I have spoken with (62 with were formal interviews and the rest with informal conversations), at least 11 had suffered severe complications from medical procedures required by the state. For example, among these 11 women, three were unable to enjoy sex after sterilization—every time they tried to have sex with their husbands, they felt piercing pains.

Having introduced women's "common" stories, I would like to present cases of "exceptions" to further unpack the intricacy of their reproductive experiences.

For example, Wu Ruomei (born 1946) was the wife of the village Communist Party secretary, with a number of close relatives being local officials. When the state announced its one-child policy in 1980, she was just pregnant. With five daughters she had already borne between 1967-1979, Wu Ruomei should have been required to have an abortion and undergo a sterilization surgery thereafter. Believing her current pregnancy would produce a son, however, she fled to a relative's house. With the implicit but effective protection from her husband and relatives, local militia did not search for her and force her to terminate the pregnancy. In July 1981, Wu Ruomei gave birth to her sixth child. To the couple's disappointment, this baby was once again a girl. Subsequently, her husband deliberately spread a rumor that the baby was born "dead" and thus did not constitute an illegal, out-of-quota birth. In reality, her husband gave the baby girl to his cousin who just married several months previously, claiming that his cousin had just given birth to this daughter. In so doing, the village Party secretary not only covered up this illegal birth—at least to the county and upper-level authorities—but also successfully managed to give his newest daughter a legal identity, in addition to avoiding what should have been a severe punishment due to violating the one-child rule.

After skillfully manipulating all these risks, the couple continued in their quest for a son. To avoid perceivable punishment that would follow their audacious demeanor, they first had a divorce and publicized the event in the village. Then, the Party secretary escorted Wu Ruomei to a relative's home in Inner Mongolia about 320 miles away from the village and lived with her—now his "ex-wife" in legal terms—until Wu Romei became pregnant once again. In November 1982, Wu Ruomei gave birth to her seventh child—this time, a boy indeed. Several months later, gossips began to spread in River

Crossing about the little boy who the Party secretary had managed to produce. Soon thereafter, the birth of the baby boy was verified.[66] Indignant, a number of villagers—who were now allowed to have only one child—reported the Party secretary's case to the township authority. As it happened, the township official in charge of birth control affairs was Wu Ruomei's younger sister—who simply replied that because Wu Ruomei had already divorced her husband, her latest birth, if it had been true, had nothing to do with the Party secretary; and since Wu Ruomei was currently living far away in Inner Mongolia, the township government could not investigate the case. Realizing that the township government was trying to cover up the case, several villagers reported it to county leaders. While the dispute was going on in River Crossing, the extraordinary story began to circulate widely. Seeing the increasing, detrimental impact the Party secretary's misdemeanor had made on the implementation of the state's one-child policy, the county authority eventually intervened, removing the Party secretary from his position and revoking his Communist Party membership.[67]

The extraordinary saga of this elite couple's quest for a son illuminates the significance of power and social connections in women's reproductive experiences. In effect, this couple's social status had already privileged them in the previous decade. Since the mid-1970s, village women under age 39 who had three or more children, or had two with one of whom was a son, were required by the local government to undergo a

[66] Incidentally, several other villagers also had in-laws in the place where Wu Ruomei had temporarily lived with her relative, and these in-laws and the Party secretary's relative knew each other quite well. From their in-laws, villagers began to learn about Wu Ruomei's most recent childbirth story happened behind the curtain of "divorce."

[67] A year later, in winter 1983, the former village Party secretary became a staff member of the township government, in charging of a profitable business-related office, although he was not a Communist Party member any more. Over the following two decades, his family remained one of the most influential in River Crossing.

tubal ligation, while those who had two daughters were mandated to have an IUD inserted and were not allowed to have any more children. To many villages' dismay, Wu Ruomei continued with pregnancy after pregnancy, producing a third daughter in 1975, a fourth in 1977, and a fifth in 1979. To pacify villagers' indignation, the village Party secretary was given a "demerit" (*jiguo*) from the township government as well as several "disciplinary warnings" (*jinggao chufen*) from the township Communist Party committee, but retained his powerful post until the county authority stepped in after the birth of his seventh child, a son.[68]

After the state "softened" its one-child rule in 1988, power distinctions continued to produce a variety of privileges differentiating village women's reproductive stories. The narrative of Guo Lanying offers an apt case in point. Married in 1980, Guo Lanying (b. 1959) gave birth to a daughter in 1982. In 1984, she managed to have a second, out-of-quota pregnancy. Because her husband's elder brother was a village leader, Guo

[68] The reproductive privilege this couple enjoyed was not the only such case in the village of River Crossing. In the 1970s, many local elites took advantage of their political power and influence to serve as "exceptions" during the state's birth control movement. For example, Cheng Shuxian (b. 1937) was a staff member of a state-owned, local grocery store, with three sons and a daughter (born 1961, 1963, 1969, and 1972, respectively); her husband was one of handful powerful figures in the township. In November 1974, Cheng Shuxian was on the list for sterilization surgery, as announced publicly in the village. Yet she refused the operation, and not a single official came to press her. When the birth control policy became even rigorous by the end of 1970s, she was over 40 and had avoided sterilization.

Villagers who did not have positions of political power themselves, but had connections to power, could also manage to evade the state's birth control campaign. For example, Cai Xiuyan was married in 1968 and had a son in 1970. After she gave birth to her second child—another son—in September 1975, she was supposed to undergo a tubal ligation surgery soon thereafter, but managed to escape it. Her husband Guilin, although not an official, was an influential man in the village. The lineage Guilin belonged to was one of the largest in River Crossing, and his brother was a village official. More importantly, Guilin was the best friend of a village leader. With that leader's tacit consent, Guilin claimed that her wife had high blood pressure and could not withstand the sterilization right away. To be sure, the real intent of the couple was to have a daughter from a third birth. Being quite well-off by village standards, having a third child would not bring serious financial challenges to the family even if they had to pay a significant fine, in addition to the cost of raising an extra child. About a half-year later, in April 1976, Cai Xiuyan was pregnant. In February 1977, she gave birth to her third child, a girl indeed. Knowing that undergoing surgery for a tubal ligation would likely dry up her breast milk, Guilin further managed to delay his wife's sterilization surgery until fall 1977. When she eventually underwent the surgery in November 1978, her daughter was nearly 20 months.

Lanying escaped a forced abortion (which would likely have happened had she been an ordinary village woman) and bore a second daughter in January 1985. Her family was forced to pay a fine of 500 *yuan* in cash soon thereafter. Nevertheless, taking advantage of her social connection, she avoided being sterilized, saying that her physical condition did not allow a tubal ligation operation. In 1986, Guo Lanying again became pregnant, again escaped a forced abortion, gave birth to her third daughter in July 1987—and again avoided a tubal ligation after paying a reduced fine of 800 *yuan* for her second out-of-quota birth.

Comparing privileged women's reproductive stories with those of ordinary village women such as those I introduced in this and the previous sections, I suggest that social differences produced by power and connections have become an integral element constituting yet another form of structural violence in conditioning and shaping village women's "birth control" experiences. In the late 1990s, when the state's birth control policy came to accommodate the reality of accelerating socioeconomic differentiations, such power-and-connection-related social differences became more evident and metamorphosed into full-blown class-based distinctions, building into a new form of structural violence to condition women's reproductive stories, as I examine in the next section.

Building a "Humane" Family Planning Program: Class Distinctions and the Reconfiguration of Reproductive Structural Violence around the New Millennium

Since the early 1990s, integral to the Chinese state's determined venture toward a market- economy, its population policy has come increasingly to articulate the discourse

of neo-liberal economic development, rather than draconian birth control methods alone. In the late 1990s, along with the Chinese state's eager embrace of global capitalism, the township authority of River Crossing, like many other local governments across China, promised that its birth control efforts would henceforth focus on providing high-quality "services" (*fuwu*) for rural women. As a constituent part of this policy transition, villagers were allowed to bear an additional child beyond the permitted first or second child—as long as they could afford a fee for an "out-of-quota" birth.

Following the state's "humane" policy gesture, however, a series of acts of structural violence has continued to condition women's reproductive experiences—but in a reconfigured way. The contrasting experiences of Li Sanmei and Chang Guizhi encapsulate its continuity and transformation nicely.

In February 2005, local officials went to Li Sanmei's house to collect a fine the fourth day after she gave birth to her third child, a baby boy, after having already borne two girls. This birth was thus "out-of-quota" and it would not become legitimate until her family paid a corresponding fee of 10,000 *yuan*, about four times the local per capita annual income. When Li Sanmei and her husband begged for the amount to be reduced in consideration of his family's poor circumstances, officials asked how much savings the family had. Li Sanmei's husband replied, timidly: "Nine thousand." In the end, local officials legitimated the birth of their son after taking the couple's entire savings of 9,000 *yuan*.

Several days later, I met Lao Ma, the brother of a female township official who attended this fine-collecting event, from whom I learned the officials' side of the story. Lao Ma revealed that, in 2004-05, the township government had made an implicit,

acceptable "price" for having a first "out-of-quota" child: about 5,000 *yuan*. The local authority would be pacified if a family agreed to pay this reduced amount, although its public announcement was still 10,000 *yuan*.

Chang Guizhi's story was quite contrastive to those of Li Sanmei. Chang Guizhi (b. 1964) was married in 1986. She gave birth to her first child in 1987 and the second in 1995, both daughters. Because of their poverty, Chang Guizhi and her husband, Yonggang (b. 1965), realized that they could not afford to have an additional child, although they really wanted to have a son to continue the family line. In 2001, Yonggang's uncle, a businessman who had recently become wealthy in the provincial capital, came for a visit. He encouraged them to try again for a son, saying that "a family without a son will be looked down by neighbors." Seeing the couple's worries about paying the fine for an out-of-quota child, the uncle promised that he would talk to local officials to settle the issue for them. In addition, he would bring their older daughter to the city for a better education, and would come to take their younger daughter a couple of years later. The uncle's efforts were motivated by his desire to return the favor he had received from his late older brother. Without his brother's years of support from his meager income years before, the uncle would not have been able to attend the best senior middle school in the county seat and eventually go to a three-year college. Now, the uncle's support emboldened the couple's ambition for a son. In summer 2002, Chang Guizhi became pregnant. After several color Doppler imagings confirmed that the fetus was a boy, she gave birth to her third child, a son indeed.[69] With his political

[69] When B-ultrasonographic scanning became available in many hospitals nationwide in the early 1990s, the sex of a fetus (five months or older) became detectable (Tu 1993). Since the 1990s, local government posed strict regulations forbidding villagers from using any medical facilities to identify the sex of the fetus that might lead to selective abortions of female fetuses. Yet such regulations were rendered almost

connections, the uncle paid only 3,000 *yuan* to pacify the local authority—2,000 *yuan* less than the "usual" price.

The stories of Li Sanmei and Chang Guizhi are telling in that, on the one hand, they demonstrate the lasting nature of reproductive structural violence which has continued to shape their reproductive experiences. The birth policy has remained a nationalist discourse widely accepted by the rank-and-file as the "fundamental national policy" indispensable for China's modernization. Moreover, the patrilineal ideology pushed both families to have a third birth to "try for a son"—so as to continue the family line. Furthermore, birth control was still a "naturally" feminized event—several after the birth of their sons, both Chang Guizhi and Li Sanmei had an IUD inserted to prevent unplanned pregnancies without asking their husbands to consider using condoms.[70]

On the other hand, the contrasting stories of Li Sanmei and Chang Guizhi illustrate how class-based distinctions and associated advantages/disadvantages have become entangled with villagers' reproductive experiences. For privileged people, being able to afford, afford with a discount, or even escape, governmental penalties to have extra, "out-of-quota" children not only demonstrates, but also consolidates their social "distinction"

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dysfunctional shortly after most local clinics were privatized, and major hospitals experienced market-oriented reforms by the end of the 1990s (Huang 2008). As a result, these local medical institutes were to varying degrees commercialized: they would be willing to offer any services, including revealing the fetus's sex to a pregnant woman, as long as it was profitable. In the local area surrounding River Crossing, since the end of the 1990s, the government prohibition against using B-ultrasound scanning to identify the sex of the fetus has largely become little more than "a scrap of paper," although it may be effective for a short while during specific occasions, such as when the local government launched month-long movements to counter the increasingly skewed sex ratio at birth. With the introduction of color Doppler ultrasound imaging systems at local major hospitals around the turn of the new millennium, identifying a fetus's sex became more accurate (cf. Taylor 2008).

[70] As a constituent part of the state's "humane" birth policy reform, beginning in the late 1990s, women were not mandated to have a tubal ligation surgery after having two or more children. Instead, they are now granted several options for contraception, including IUD, hypodermic insertion, and pills, in addition to sterilization.

(Bourdieu 1984). If Chang Guizhi's childbirth experience has only implicitly indicated such a tendency, Zhang Laoer's quest for a son more explicitly encapsulates the point.

Zhang Laoer and his wife, Qi Sanjie, were married in 1984 and had a daughter the subsequent year. Because both husband and wife were formal staff members of a local state-owned business agency and held "urban household registration identities" (*chengshi hukou*), they were not allowed to have an additional child even after the state had "softened" its birth control regulations in 1988, and even though they lived in the village of River Crossing instead of the city.[71] However, Zhang Laoer was very disappointed to have a daughter and yearned for a son. Several years after their daughter was born, he began to abuse Qi Sanjie, in addition to actively seeking affairs around the village. In May 1998, he started an affair with Xiao Luo, a young woman from southwest China who had migrated to River Crossing as a sex worker. Several months later, Xiao Luo was pregnant. After several ultrasound scans had verified that the fetus was a boy, Zhang Laoer forced his wife Qi Sanjie to sign a humiliating agreement with him and Xiao Luo: if the baby Xiao Luo bore were a boy, Xiao Luo would give him to the couple after the "month of confinement following the delivery" and leave River Crossing forever, for which the couple would compensate her with a large sum of cash; in case Xiao Luo ended up producing a girl, she would take the baby girl and leave the village, and the couple

[71] River Crossing houses the township administration (the lower-end of China's urban-based governing apparatus), as well as a set of state-owned public services and businesses. Officials and formal staff members working for the state's local agency (and in many cases, their family members as well) hold the status of urban *hukou* (urban citizenship—"urban household registration identities") (Cheng and Selden 1994). With urban *hukou*, these state agents and their family members enjoy a variety of governmental benefits, such as access to urban public schools and jobs in state-owned industries, to which peasants do not have access. Yet because of their urban status, they are required to follow the government's *urban* birth policy, which in general has been the one-child policy since 1980, with very few exceptions. Among the 651 households in River Crossing Village, about 120 households had at least one member with an urban *hukou*, amongst whom 80 had all their (nuclear) family members holding "urban *hukou*."

would give her the same amount of money as compensation. In April 1999, Xiao Luo delivered her child—as it happened, a baby boy indeed.

Unexpectedly, Xiao Luo did not keep her promise after the birth of her son. As a migrant sex worker in her late twenties, she decided to take advantage of Zhang Laoer's obsession with the baby son and use it to secure her life with him before her charms disappeared; she thus started a war with Qi Sanjie in scrambling for Zhang Laoer. In spring 2002, Qi Sanjie could no longer bear the prolonged humiliation the situation had inflicted on her. She moved out of their house and divorced her husband in August 2002. Yet Xiao Luo's victory was also transient. Zhang Laoer did not marry her, and since fall 2004, when her son had to wait for about a year to attend elementary school, Zhang Laoer began to abuse her. In July 2005, he finally forced her to leave his house. About two months later, in September 2005, his son started his elementary education in a private boarding school located in the county seat.

From 1998 – 2005, during his six-year-long son-quest adventure, Zhang Laoer had violated not only the state's birth control policy, but also the National Law of Marriage. According to the National Law of Marriage, a man cannot maintain a marital or marital-like relationship with more than one woman, whether or not the relationship is officially registered, and violation of this law constitutes the crime of bigamy. Thus from the time he started to have a stable relationship with Xiao Luo in May 1998 to the moment that his wife finally divorced him in August 2002—a period of more than four years—Zhang Laoer had been committing bigamy. After his divorce, the birth of his son was still illegal with regard to the state's birth control policy. Because Zhang Laoer already had a daughter with Qi Sanjie, his ex-wife, and Xiao Luo herself had borne a son when she was

only 18, they were not permitted to have any more children even if they had married. Yet even with the violation of both the National Law of Marriage and the state birth control rules, from 1998 until I completed my fieldwork in August 2005, not a single local official had ever intervened. Such sharp contrasts among the cases of Zhang Laoer, Li Sanmei, and Chag Guizhi in their son-quest experiences are illustrative of the enlarging class rifts, and the associated local politics, occurring in the village.

Indeed, shortly after the implementation of its stringent population policy, China launched a reform that transformed the contours of rural society tectonically by redistributing collective farmlands to individual households (Chen and Summerfield 2007, Jacoby et al. 2002, Li 1999). With these post-Mao reforms, the state has pushed the entire nation toward a capitalist market economy and hence has become increasingly *post*-socialist.[72] Along with privatization and market-oriented reform has come growing social differentiation (Anagnost 2008; Rofel 1999, 2007; Solinger 1999; H. Yan 2003, 2008; and Zhang 2001).

In the township of River Crossing, as I have documented in Chapter 2, intensified class differentiation has developed a high degree of what the Chinese sociologist Sun Liping terms *yingzhe tongchi*: a "winner takes all" orientation (2008). In this rural township, local reality looks like something of a live miniature of Chinese society at its post-socialist globalizing moment, with a "structural rupture" between the elite oligarchy and the rank-and-file (Sun 2004:109). In River Crossing, with the exception of the elite

[72] For comparative discussion of postsocialist transitions in China and the former Soviet Bloc, see, for example, Boym 1994, 2001; Gal and Kligman 2000; Hann 2002; Harrell 2001; Nee 1989; Ries 2009; Rivkin-Fish 2003; Verdery 1996; and Zeng 2009.

families and a few allied with them, most villagers could hardly dream of sharing any resources owned by the township/village, nor any opportunities provided by it.

To villagers, the reason behind Zhang Laoer's risk-free son-quest adventure was as apparent as "a fly on a bald head": Zhang Laoer belongs to one of a few elite families in the village. He is the second son of Cheng Shuxian, wife of a former powerful figure in the township (see Note 23). As to Zhang Laoer himself, with his family connections, he obtained his current resourceful position right after he graduated from senior middle school in summer 1981 and began to be in charge of local governmental investments. From this position he deliberately developed his network over the following two decades and became an influential figure among the local elites. This local elite circle is something of a network of both mutual dependency and mutual protection. As individuals, they exchange what they have controls for what they want with each other; collectively, they form a virtual local politics of elite oligarchy, monopolizing local power, and major resources.

For ordinary villagers, their inability to afford, or bypass, such governmental fines further exemplifies and reinforces their social inferiority. Without connections to local authority, Li Sammei and her husband lacked insiders' knowledge concerning the range of fees for an "extra" child and thus ended up paying 4,000 *yuan* more than the fee that the government judged acceptable—an excess payment that further impaired their already fragile financial stability. The couple's experience supports anthropologist Yan Yunxiang's observation that the local state is becoming increasingly predatory in rural China (2003:234).

Following Yan Yunxiang's insight, I would further suggest that the postsocialist Chinese state is more likely to be predatory on the basis of widening class gaps. Indeed, as a result of the state's active accommodation of class rifts that are now expanding without any serious strategies to counter the tendency, a gain-seeking mechanism seems to have formed and routinized by the local elite oligarchy, as long as they could take advantage of, or invent for themselves, any opportunities for advancement. To further instantiate, I extend my examination of Li Sanmei's story that I summarized in the beginning of this section.

In summer 2004, news of Li Sanmei's out-of-quota pregnancy spread across the village. According to the state's recent birth control policy, local officials should have tried their best to persuade Li Sanmei to have an abortion, although they were not allowed by the state to use any physical violence to force her. Nevertheless, during the entire period of her pregnancy, no official—village- and township-level alike—had ever intervened. Ironically, they immediately appeared when Li Sanmei's unplanned pregnancy became an unalterable fact—after her third child was born—to collect a fine. When I discussed Li Sanmei's story with Lao Wu, an ordinary villager in his late fifties, he commented sarcastically: "Family *planning*? They're expecting you to have an *un-planned* birth to fine you!"

Lao Wu's remarks pointed to the ways through which local elites make a profit from its "erring" subjects, and I suggest that this is now becoming an important venue of their gain-seeking mechanism. Lao Wu's commentary also answered the question I asked after introducing Zhou Li's story in the beginning of this chapter: Why did local officials in Zhou Li's and Xiao Tang's villages not forestall the couple's illegal wedding,

yet they intervened upon hearing that Zhou Li was in her second trimester of a pregnancy? As Zhou Li and her husband Xiao Tang told me, in their village, quite a few young people married before reaching the bottom-line legal ages (20 for women and 22 for men). Local officials never intervened to prevent those weddings, but they would soon come to collect a fine when a young wife became pregnant—at this time, an illegally married couple would have to legitimize their marriage so as to legitimate the birth of their child. If officials had prevented Zhou Li and Xiao Tang's illegal wedding, they would have lost the resultant, "juicy" 5,000 *yuan* in fines. Unexpectedly, the couple disappointed local officials because their families were too poor to afford the fine and ended up with Zhou Li undergoing a third-trimester abortion after all.

Indeed, searching for villagers' "erring" acts, or waiting for villagers to "err," has become an important source of informal income for local officials. In summer 2005, shortly before I left the field, I had a casual chat with the director of the township Family Planning office, a woman in her late forties. Maybe she saw that I had not made any trouble with local officials during my entire field stay, plus I was about to leave for the U.S. in a few days, but whatever the reason, she talked in a less guarded way than usual.[73]

Near the end of our conversation, the director sighed with regret that because River Crossing had a small population dispersed in the mountains, unlike a neighboring township, her Family Planning Office did not have much additional income from a variety of fines it could collect from villagers. She added that in that nearby township,

[73] Because of the lasting villager/state contestations surrounding reproduction in China—and the serious repercussions that could results from conflicts—I always placed my first priority on protecting my informants. During my entire field stay, I was always very cautious and tried my best to keep a low profile. For a discussion of my fieldwork experience, see Chen 2009.

which had a population nearly three times as large as that of River Crossing, its Family Planning Office could afford a Beijing Jeep, based on fines it collected from villagers.

I was amazed by her frankness—the only occasion I ever encountered such honesty by this government administrator during my fieldwork—but was not surprised by the information she inattentively revealed. Several months earlier, I had interviewed a former village official who had lost his post during an internal conflict that had happened a-decade-and-a-half previously. The former official told me that nowadays, local officials not only seek fines as a source of income for their office and themselves as well, they are also actively selling additional birth quotas to wealthy families for a profit. For example, one day in spring 2005, the director of the township Family Planning Office visited Pan Ernian, a businessman who had recently become quite well-off by village standards. During their conversation, the director congratulated Pan Ernian for having a grandson. Then the director asked if Pan Ernian was interested in having a granddaughter, and if he was, she would be happy to grant his son's wife an additional birth quota at a reduced price—3,000 *yuan* instead of the "usual" 5,000 *yuan*. In December 2007, Pan Ernian had his second grandchild—a girl indeed—and paid a reduced fine of 3,000 *yuan* to legitimate the birth of the baby girl.[74]

When class distinction came to condition women's reproductive experiences, it has also refracted the state's birth control policy as a "civilizing" discourse. To ordinary villagers, the birth control project, no matter how "humane" the state has promised it to

[74] I learned the event through phone conversations with villagers. After completing my fieldwork in 2005, I continue to maintain contact with my informants over the phone. These extended communications have kept me updated about my informants' lives, including those of Pan Ernian and her granddaughter.

be, remained a "civilizing" discourse by positioning the rural rank-and-file as Other steeped in lacks. As Lao Ma recounted to me: back home, his sister, one of the local officials who had come to Li Sanmei's house to collected the fine, told him [Lao Ma] that when Li Sanmei and her husband agreed to pay a fine of 9,000 yuan to legitimate their third, out-of-quota child, his sister was surprised and "giggled silently in her heart." Delighted with such an unexpected big "harvest" of fine, Lao Ma's sister added in a disdainful voice: "These 'stupid assholes' (*sha bi*) [Li Sanmei and her husband] deserved a higher fine! It taught them a lesson to be rational in the future."

By contrast, to local elites, as exemplified by Zhang Laoer's son-quest saga, having an illegitimate, out-of-quota son had nothing to do with the stigma of being "backward." Instead, Zhang Laoer's achievement in having a son without incurring any official punishment symbolized his elite status. To Chang Guizhi and her husband Yonggang, the intervention of their wealthy uncle transformed an event that would otherwise likely have been stigmatized—their third, out-of-quota birth of a son. With their uncle's help, the couple eventually had a son by paying a discounted fine, both of which events significantly improved their status in the village. During my 16-month field stay in River Crossing, the couple's reproductive story was frequently recounted with envy by many ordinary villagers.

In short, along with China's postsocialist transformation toward global capitalism, class distinction has not only become an increasingly influential force behind reproductive violence, it has also in significant ways reconfigured the ways in which structural violence shapes women's reproductive experiences. As I have illustrated by comparing the stories of Li Sanmei, Zhang Laoer, and Chang Guizhi, women's reproductive experiences now

index their class status, leading to what anthropologist Shellee Colen (2006) might term "stratified reproduction" (cf. Rapp 2001).

Conclusions:

Structural Violence and the Raptures/Continuities of (Post)Socialist Transformations in Rural China

In this chapter, I have examined what I consider to be structural violence as a force that has conditioned and shaped village women's reproductive experiences in contemporary rural China. I suggest that, although the public appearance of China's population control policy has experienced dramatic metamorphoses over the past three decades that have appeared to diminish in harshness, a series of acts of structural violence has continued to condition women's reproductive concepts and practices. These acts counter any sanguine anticipations one might hold that the Chinese state's family planning project is now moving toward, and will eventually become, a "humane service" as the state has promised.

Moreover, I propose that along with China's postsocialist transformation have come intensified socioeconomic differentiations that have evolved into full-blown class-based distinctions around the turn of the new millennium. By actively accommodating the reality of enlarging class gaps without enacting feasible strategies to counter the tendency, the postsocialist state has become increasingly reliant on social forces from a variety of rising "elites" who have benefited the most from the nation's three-decade transformations (Wu 2005). In so doing, however, as illustrated by River Crossing women's "stratified" reproductive experiences, while the local state has successfully regained resilience by

effectively resorting to emerging local elites, the vigor of this mini-regime is built upon deepening social gaps. And the more the local state allies with the elite class for power and vitality, the wider the social divides it will produce. In this regard, I suggest that while the post-socialist local state presents vital resilience indicating the mini-regime's continuity, this continuity has been accompanied by social raptures characterized by accelerating class differentiations.

With River Crossing now evolving into a mini-society with widening gaps between the rising elite oligarchy and powerless rank-and-file, class distinctions have effectively reconfigured the ways in which structural violence condition women's reproductive experiences. As I introduced in the opening story, had her family had slightly better circumstances, it is unlikely that Zhou Li would have had to "voluntarily" go to the County Family Planning Station to terminate her third-trimester pregnancy, and suffer post-surgical infections. In her case, poverty, along with other constituent forces of structural violence, had invisibly but perceptibly restricted her reproductive options, forcing her to "volunteer" to have an induced, third-trimester abortion. Zhou Li's story, as with other women's narratives I have documented, exemplifies how the state's recent "humane" birth control policy has become a hollow promise to ordinary villagers trapped by enlarging class-based social divides in postsocialist rural China.

CHAPTER 5

REPRODUCTION AT THE INTERSECTION OF GENDER, CLASS, AND RURAL/URBAN SPACES

Introduction

On a sunny day in April 2005, I attended a celebration ritual, held by Shu Yan (age 38) and her husband, Da Kui (age 37), for the birth of their second child, a boy, in the village of River Crossing in northeast China.[75] To my surprise, I learned at the celebration that the couple's first child, a girl, had been born 16 years previously, and was going to graduate from the local middle school that summer. With a daughter for their first child, the couple would have been allowed by the government to become pregnant with a second child back in 1995, when their first child was six years old. Yet for nearly a decade, they did not try to become pregnant. Thus at the party, in congratulating the mother on the birth of her son, I asked Shu Yan why she had waited so long to have a second child. Shu Yan responded in a proud and joyful voice: "Don't you see, 'a big, big sister with a little, little brother' (*da da jie, xiao xiao di*) is the fashion nowadays?" Without awaiting my response, she immediately enumerated over a dozen families in the village with this childbearing pattern. What explains this unexpected and unusual development in fertility transition?

[75] The ritual was called *xia nai*, held on the 12th day after the baby's birth. The aim of this ritual is to stimulate the nursing mother's breast milk, and is marked by gifts (nowadays, usually cash wrapped in red paper envelopes) from relatives.

Beginning in 1980, China's one-child policy resulted in many rural families having daughters as their only children. Many villagers vehemently resisted this policy because of a continuing commitment to patriarchy, which requires a male to continue the family line. In 1987 the state decided to address villagers' resistance and began granting a second chance to have a son to rural women whose first births had produced girls. Despite this policy modification, quite a number of rural families with an only daughter did not produce a second child. Government propaganda has claimed such families as exemplars of the state's birth control efforts to successfully transform villagers' traditional gender ideology: as legitimate heirs of their families, these "only daughters" seem to challenge villagers' entrenched notion of family line succession as rooted in patriliny. Nevertheless, as the opening story reveals, since the 1990s, along with China's post-socialist transition toward global capitalism, more and more families with teenage "only daughters" began to have a second child, with the intention of producing a male heir. This fertility "fashion"—euphemistically termed by peasants "a big, big sister with a little, little brother"—has not only restored but further reinforced the patrilineal gender ideology concerning what "counts" as a "family line."

In this chapter, I explore the ways in which Chinese villagers' reproductive practices of family line succession have increasingly become entangled with re-surfacing gender discourses, all in the broader context of the nation's postsocialist transformations. I investigate how ordinary villagers have tried to balance their desire for social mobility with their pursuit of a male heir and their sense of insecurity and powerlessness (cf. Anagnost 1997, Colen 2006, Rapp 2001).

The emergence of a reproductive "fashion," and the associated resurfacing of patrilineal gender discourses, are emblematic of China's recent, post-socialist transformations over the past two decades (Rofel 2007). Since the 1970s, population control has been a constituent part of the Chinese state's ambition to "modernize." During the early 1970s, China's population was seen by the government as an unbearable burden impeding modernization. To rapidly achieve its development goals, the state became increasingly obsessed with controlling population growth. In 1979, the state became so audacious as to formulate a national one-child policy in both urban and rural areas (Greenhalgh 2008).

Many villagers resisted this policy, as entrenched patriarchal ideologies had traditionally required virtually all families to produce a male heir (Watson 1982). To make its population policy acceptable to peasants, in 1987 the state began to grant rural women a second chance to bear a son if their first child was a girl, usually after an interval of four to six years—although no state-sanctioned right was granted to bear a second child if the first child was a boy. Along with this shift, in the early 1990s, as the nation began to embrace a market economy, its reproductive policy began to emphasize economic incentives for having fewer children, rather than draconian birth control methods alone (Gu 2002).

At the turn of the new millennium, the government has tried to further transform its reproductive policy from its previous, notoriously stringent measures toward a promise to provide more "humane services" for women's reproductive health. Since 1998, the township authority of River Crossing, like many other local governments across China, has allowed villagers to have an additional child beyond the permitted first or

second child—as long as they could afford to pay a fee for an "out-of-quota" birth. This fee is quite substantial: usually three to five times local peasants' *per capita* annual income of the previous year. Accordingly, class distinctions have become increasingly explicit in reproductive policy discourse and practice alike: rich families now clearly enjoy far more reproductive freedom than do poor and "ordinary" families.

Inspired by recent anthropological and feminist scholarship on the intersecting ties linking reproduction with kinship, gender, and class structures, in this chapter I explore how an emerging consciousness of class distinction has become entangled with villagers' quest for male heirs (e.g. Anagnost 1997, Gal and Kligman 2000; Ginsburg and Rapp 1991, 1995). I draw, as well, on feminist scholars who, stimulated by Schneider's pioneering, symbolic approach to kinship (1968), have further deconstructed the pervasive biologism and Euro-American ethnocentrism of an earlier generation of scholars that treated kinship and gender as based on "natural" facts (e.g. Collier and Yanagisako 1990, MacCormack and Strathern 1980, Ortner 1996, Strathern 1992a). From this critique, kinship studies have come to focus on everyday experiences and representations of gender, power, and difference, with previously excluded or marginalized topics such as lesbian/gay kinship and transnational adoption, and challenges brought about by new reproductive technologies that are profuse in contradiction and ambivalence, now at the center of inquiry (e.g. Franklin and McKinnon 2001; Leinaweaver 2009; Prendergast and Abelmann 2006; Schneider 1997; Stone 2001; Strathern 1992b, 2005).

In this anthropological and feminist literature from which I draw my inspiration, reproductive practices are viewed as intersecting with policies and politics of kinship,

gender, race, class, and other aspects of social hierarchies on multiple levels of both the global and the local, allowing reproduction to be seen as a field of both constraint and resistance/empowerment (e.g. Inhorn 1994, 2007; Martin 1987; Peletz 1995). Moreover, approaching kinship and reproduction (including pregnancy, childbearing, and the constitution of the fetus) from a symbolic perspective, this group of scholars view reproduction as a broad cultural category that necessarily entails but is not limited to discourses of power (e.g. Carsten 1997, 2004, 2007; Davis-Floyd and Sargent 1997, Gottlieb 2004; Shipton 2009; Van Vleet 2008). Viewing resistors as doing more than merely *re*-acting to domination but also as actively interpreting the contours of that domination (e.g., Moore 1994, Ortner 1995), these anthropological and feminist writings motivate me to explore how Chinese villagers engage in both cultural and political discourses of reproduction in facing the state's shifting but sustained interventions.

As Marshall Sahlins has argued in *Culture and Practical Reason:* "Any cultural ordering produced by the material forces presupposes a cultural ordering of these forces" (1976:39). Although Sahlins himself is not a scholar of gender, his insight holds promise for my feminist inquiry: a "thick" understanding of villagers' fertility behavior surrounding their quest for male heirs calls for an explication of the underpinning symbolic and social order that provides them with the values they pursue and that constrains the strategies they follow. Thus, this chapter offers two main contributions. First, by bringing a class-based perspective into a gendered analysis of reproduction, this chapter suggests that villagers' looming awareness of deepening class divides is now reshaping the contours of how the longstanding patrilineal gender ideology of the Chinese countryside continues to influence their reproductive experiences. Accordingly,

seeing kinship as a nexus that links gender and social inequality, my analysis foregrounds how villagers' re-configuration of what counts as a "family line" is a joint product of several forces: the persistent patrilineal gender ideology; the state's forceful intervention; and villagers' emerging awareness of enlarging class differences that have converged to shape their childbearing practices. Second, by providing a feminist reading of how the broader category of "class" is perceived and articulated through women's bodily experiences of reproduction in their quest for a family heir, this chapter further enriches developing perspectives on class distinctions in China. In so doing, at a more general theoretical level, this chapter suggests that feminist studies of the seemingly "feminine" issue of reproduction and the "outmoded" topic of kinship lie at the very center of social science investigations of the complex processes of political economy, as villagers' reproductive experiences encapsulate China's emerging post-socialist conditions. As such, the chapter is inspired by work in feminist anthropological discussions of reproduction and kinship that aim to braid discussions of gender and class as linked factors that provide a lens through which cultural norms, individual struggles, and social transformations might be productively viewed and examined (Rapp 2001; cf. di Leonardo 2004, Herzfeld 2007, Kanaaneh 2002).

"Embracing Singleton Daughters" vs. "A Big, Big Sister with a Little, Little Brother"

In 2005, in River Crossing Village, there were 364 married couples with the wives' ages under 49: these women are the primary target of the government's birth control policy. Among these couples, 263 (72.3%) had one child, 86 (23.6%) had two children, and one couple (0.3%) had three children; in addition, 14 couples (3.8%) were

recently married—with seven women being pregnant, and the remaining seven haven't yet become pregnant.

Among those 263 couples who had only one child, 160 had boys and the rest (103) had girls. Of the 160 couples with only sons, 125 (78.1%) had applied for "only-child certificates" (*dusheng zinu zheng*)—a pledge not to have a second child with a reward of an extra portion of farmland (1 *mu*, about 0.165 acre) from the village government. By contrast, of the 103 couples with only daughters, only 19 (18.4%) had applied for "only-child certificates." In the entire township, a total of 82 such couples with only daughters had applied for "only-child certificates."

During my fieldwork, local officials always cited cases of rural couples who applied for "only-child certificates" for their daughters, to demonstrate how the government's birth control efforts had successfully transformed villagers' entrenched patrilineal gender ideologies concerning family line succession. Taking this as an emerging phenomenon, some scholars now argue that villagers are experiencing a transition in reproductive choices by "embracing singleton daughters" (Shi 2009:15), and this has resulted in an emerging "new fertility culture" (Yan 2003:205).

Nevertheless a parallel phenomenon seems to counter such progressive claims. Since the state softened its stringent birth control regulations in 1987, most village couples who had produced girls in their first births took advantage of the government's policy modification to give birth to a second child (for a son). This fertility trend has continued into the new millennium. In 2003, 13 couples in the village of River Crossing had their first child (with six boys and seven girls) and two couples had their second child after first having a girl (with both couples producing boys); in 2004, nine couples had

their first child (producing seven boys and two girls) and five couples had their second child (producing three boys and two girls); and from January – July 2005, two couples had their first child (both boys) and the other two couples had their second child (also both boys).

More intriguingly, as Shu Yan has remarked in the opening story, having "a big, big sister with a little, little brother" has become something of a reproductive "fashion" for families with teenage daughters. In River Crossing, since 1992, there were a total of 22 couples, who had their first child—all daughters—as singletons for more than ten years, and then produced a second child, with spacing between the two births being between 10 and 16 years (average 12.3 years). Because these couples did not have their second child for over a decade after their first births, they had been deemed by local officials as unlikely to have another child.

For these 22 couples, the predominant drive that motivated their second births was the desire to have a male family heir. Among a variety of ritual, medical, and pseudo-medical venues, the main method that has most effectively assisted their quest for a son was ultrasound technology. When B-ultrasonographic scanning became available in many hospitals nationwide in the early 1990s, the sex of a fetus (five months or older) became detectable (Tu 1993). Since the 1990s, local government posed strict regulations forbidding villagers from using any medical facilities to identify the sex of the fetus that might lead to selective abortions of female fetuses. Yet such regulations were rendered almost dysfunctional shortly after most local clinics were privatized, and major hospitals experienced market-oriented reforms by the end of the 1990s (Huang 2008). As a result, these local medical institutes were to varying degrees commercialized: they would be

willing to offer any services, including revealing the fetus's sex to a pregnant woman, as long as it was profitable. In the local area surrounding River Crossing, since the end of the 1990s, the government prohibition against using B-ultrasound scanning to identify the sex of the fetus has largely become little more than "a scrap of paper," although it may be effective for a short while during specific occasions, such as when the local government launched month-long movements to counter the increasingly skewed sex ratio at birth. With the introduction of color Doppler ultrasound imaging systems at local major hospitals around the turn of the new millennium, identifying a fetus's sex became more accurate.[76]

During my fieldwork, I had the chance to meet in person 18 of these 22 couples (with a child set of "a big, big sister with a little, little brother"), and I learned the remaining 4 couples' stories indirectly. From their reproductive experiences, I found out that having access to color Doppler imaging facilities had an enormous impact on whether the couples' second baby was a boy. Among the 22 couples, 12 had their second child from 1992-99, when ultrasound technology was not readily available locally. Of these, half had a baby son, with a sex ratio of six boys to six girls. Most of the remaining 10 women, however, had found access to the advanced color Doppler imaging during their pregnancies from 2000-05. As a result, most of them achieved their goal of having a son, with a highly skewed sex ratio of 8 boys to 2 girls. Among the eight women who had sons in the second birth, three had a second-trimester abortion and one had two second-trimester abortions—after the color Doppler imaging results had confirmed that the fetuses were girls.

[76] For sensitive anthropological analyses of imagining technologies in the U.S. context, see, for example, work by Rapp (2000) and Taylor (2008).

Having introduced their statistical profiles, one intriguing question remains: Why did these 22 couples wait so long to have their second child/male heir, ending up with a child set of "a big, big sister with a little, little brother"?

The Reproductive Story of Shu Yan and Da Kui

To elaborate how such "little, little brothers" were produced in village women's second births, let us examine in-depth Shu Yan's reproductive experience, which I introduced in the opening story. In 1995, Shu Yan was "qualified" by the state to have a second child, when her daughter was six. Shortly after her IUD was removed, she became pregnant. Yet at that moment, her husband, Da Kui, had been sick for over a month, and was later diagnosed as suffering from pleurisy. Because Da Kui had been taking antibiotics for an extended period of time, they both worried that his sperm might have been affected by the medicine, and might lead to a congenitally deformed baby. Fearing such a scenario, Shu Yan terminated her pregnancy with a "D & C" procedure at the end of her second trimester. The surgery was performed without any anesthesia, and Shu Yan was horrified by her abortion experience.[77]

For his part, Da Kui had been lukewarm to the idea of having another child and was very supportive of his wife's decision to abort. The eldest child of six, since his childhood he had witnessed his parents suffering to raise so many children and see them all married. Now, as an ordinary villager with a modest income, Da Kui felt he was not ready to raise two children, even if the second one were a boy. In his heart—as a Chinese

[77] According to local population policy, if a woman terminates a pregnancy to avoid having a child out of the local government's annual population plan, or to give up a birth quota already granted (such as in Shu Yan's case), she can go to a designated clinic to have an abortion for free. However, anesthesia and other expensive medicines including antibiotics are considered "extra" and are not covered by the state's offer. Shu Yan's abortion experience was very common among River Crossing women.

man, heir to a longstanding patriarchal tradition—he never rejected the idea of having a son. Yet, since he had three younger brothers, he calculated that as long as one of his brothers could produce a son, his extended family would continue (using the traditional patrilineal calculus of kinship reckoning), and no one in the village would dare say that his family would vanish without a male offspring.

Moreover, by this time, Da Kui had other plans in mind. With limited savings, he wanted to build a new house for his nuclear family. In 1997, the couple completed their compound. To accomplish this project, they had borrowed a large sum of money from relatives and friends.

The couple had thought that they would be able to pay off their debts in two to three years if they worked hard. Yet the reality of their circumstances frustrated their optimism, and it took the couple over six years to pay off all their debts. As an ordinary villager, Da Kui came to realize that his hope of getting rich and moving upward in the near future was quite unrealistic, and he would not be able to sufficiently support an additional child with a bright future. With such a gloomy attitude toward the future, during those years Da Kui became less and less interested in having a son.

In the meantime, their daughter was excelling in school, and that, too, diluted the couple's desire to have a son. In elementary school, their daughter had been the best student in her class. In middle school (which she started attending in fall 2002), their daughter continued to be one of the top three students in her class of 58 students. If she could keep her record in high school, she would very possibly go on to attend college, which would certainly bring honor to the family—in this remote and mountainous rural area, very few girls reached that goal. With this prospect in mind, the couple felt they

should concentrate their limited resources on supporting their promising daughter. This priority had further pushed aside any interest in having another child.

However, beginning in the fall of 2003, their inclination not to have a son, at least immediately, began to evaporate. In July 2003, an affine—Xiu Juan, wife of Da Kui's youngest brother—became pregnant. In the previous years, the wives of Da Kui's other two brothers had already borne their first children—both girls. With Xiu Juan pregnant, the entire extended family was crossing their fingers that this time they would have a male offspring. Unfortunately, Xiu Juan had a miscarriage around the end of her first trimester.

Da Kui's parents were especially distressed by the miscarriage. They could not face the fact that, with four sons, thus far they did not have a single grandson to carry on the family line. Wondering if he could have a grandson in the future, Da Kui's father consulted a fortune teller in the county seat. The fortune teller told him that he would have had a grandson already, instead of a granddaughter, had Da Kui married a year later. Yet things might not be that bad, the fortune teller comforted Da Kui's father—Da Kui still had an opportunity to have a son if he began to try in the coming two years. Back home with this positive prospect, the old parents urged the couple to try for a second child.

Shu Yan was the first to become motivated. She also consulted a fortune teller in her natal village. To her excitement, this fortune teller corroborated the prediction that she was "destined to have a son" (*mingli youzi*). Since then, Shu Yan began to ponder the various disadvantages of not having a son. Her yard was surrounded by her neighbors' compounds. Unlike her own family, all her neighbors had a son. She was

disturbed by a vision that many years later, her compound would be inherited by "people of different surnames" (*waixing pangren*), while all her neighbors' compounds would continue to be inhabited by their own offspring with a shared surname. Haunted by this image, Shu Yan couldn't help envisioning her afterlife, which had never come to her mind in the previous years: she and Da Kui would be penniless because, as most villagers firmly believed, the "paper money" (*zi qian*) burnt by a daughter could never reach her parents in the other world.

Shu Yan's words somehow persuaded her husband. Soon thereafter, she had the IUD removed that she had reinserted after her previous abortion. Shu Yan combined her biomedical knowledge of ovulation times (which she learned from fellow village women) with the broad timing recommendations of the fortune teller to try to conceive. Three months later, in summer 2004, she became pregnant.

Seeing that he was going to have another child, however, Da Kui once again became rather upset, worrying that he was still not ready financially. From the middle of the first trimester to the end of her second trimester, Da Kui pressed Shu Yan five times to have an abortion—until he was convinced that the fetus was a boy, after a regular B-ultrasound scan and four color Doppler imagings. In March 2005, Shu Yan delivered her second child, a boy indeed.

Soon thereafter, the couple began a business adventure. In summer 2005, they started to run a small restaurant in their compound's side rooms that face the local highway. In fall 2008, their daughter went to a college in West China. That October, Da Kui rented out the restaurant, purchased a second-hand dump truck, and became a driver

transporting materials for local infrastructure construction projects.[78] During a phone conversation in January 2009, Shu Yan told me that the birth of their son had greatly invigorated her and Da Kui. With double incomes, the couple were endeavoring to support their daughter's college years; after that, they also hoped to save enough money for their young son. In River Crossing Village, the reproductive stories of Shu Yan and Da Kui as well as of several other couples with the same "happy ending," have proven seductive to other villagers despite their continued economic worries, and have thus further reinforced the longstanding patrilineal ideology of the Chinese countryside by encouraging others to "try for a son."

Intensified Social Differentiations, Emerging Awareness of Class Distinctions, and Villagers' Patrilineal Ideal of Family Line Succession

The reproductive experiences of Shu Yan and Da Kui cited above might help shed light on our understanding of a perennial question complicated by the Chinese state's population policies: How, and in what ways, do villagers conceptualize and practice their patrilineal family line succession in rural China at the nation's present post-socialist moment?

To most Chinese, including the majority Han and other "ethnic" Chinese with similar patrilineal traditions (such as the Manchu and ethnic Koreans), the conventional concept of family line succession revolves around the entrenched notion of *chuanzong jiedai*—"to have a male heir and continue the family line." By producing a male successor, a man becomes an indispensible link in his family line. Underlining this

[78] The truck cost the couple 130,000 *yuan*, most of which were borrowed from their friends and relatives.

notion is a two-generational, father-to-son framework that expects every man to have a male offspring (Fei 1981, Watson 1982).

In the story of Da Kui and Shu Yan, the patrilineal notion of *chuanzong jiedai* continued to be influential. However, this idea did not immediately lead to the couple having a second birth to "try for a son." Instead, the couple's decade-long consideration of "trying for a son" has intersected with their emerging consciousness of rising class gaps, as well as with an accompanying desire for social mobility in childrearing practices—both of which are integral to, and emblematic of, China's post-socialist transformations.

As I have discussed in Chapter 2, the postsocialist transformations have produced a ruling local elite that evolved into a veritable oligarchy complete with entrenched, class-based privileges. Facing nearly impassable class gaps, for an ordinary village family who was not contented with their current life, one way—sometimes the only way—for them to improve their circumstances was to nurture a child to become competitive enough that, ideally, she/he could go to college and eventually become a success in the city. To address this intriguing issue of childrearing practices in post-reform China, a number of scholars have proposed a theory of "quality" (*suzhi*) (e.g. Fong 2004, Kipnis 2007). In the late 1980s, a state discourse of "population quality" came to circulate. As Anagnost (2004) has observed, this discourse presented a shift in state policy from regulating births to raising the quality of the population as a whole. In the 1990s, integral to the post-socialist nation's intensified class differentiations, the semantic field of "quality" was extended to encompass minute social distinctions

defining a "person of quality" in practices such as consumption and the incitement of a middle-class desire for social mobility.

In River Crossing, if a couple hoped their second child—ideally a boy—would achieve such goals, they recognize that they must provide necessary resources to support the child. In this village, where the annual income per capita hovered around 2,500 *yuan* (about $330) in 2005, most families could afford the cost for elementary and middle school education, but the costs for sending their child to the high school in the county seat would be beyond most families' financial capabilities. As for college education, few families, except the local elites, could afford the cost.

To take Shu Yan and Da Kui's daughter as an example, during her elementary school years (1996-2002), her family paid 700-800 *yuan*/year in school costs. During her middle school period (2002-05), her family paid about 2,000 *yuan* in the first two years and 4,000 *yuan* in the last year. For her high school (2005-08) in the county seat, her family paid about 22,000 *yuan* (including housing and dining, among other school fees). As of this writing, her first semester in college (fall 2008) has cost her family 11,000 *yuan*. To support this college education, her parents are already in debt.

As a result, as exemplified by the reproductive story of Da Kui and Shu Yan, villagers' quest for a family heir became entangled with a desire for social mobility, and their sense of financial instability had postponed their second childbirth for nearly a decade—both of which were suggestive of their emerging consciousness of the growing and intensifying class differentiations now occurring in post-socialist rural China.

In River Crossing, another group of 11 couples had produced girls for their first child and, after about a decade, became interested in having a second child for a male heir,

but had not produced such a second child thus far. Yet convergent with the experiences of the first group of 22 couple I discussed above (with a child set characterized by "a big, big sister with a little, little brother"), the underlying rationale that deterred wives of this group of 11 couples from becoming pregnant a second time also derived from their worry that they could not raise a "capable" second child (in terms of school and economic success) in the current era of intensified social differentiation.

To cite just one case, Shu Xian and her husband San Jie (both age 40 in 2005) had a daughter born in 1986. Following the birth of the daughter, the couple planned to have another child so as to "try for a son" and thus did not apply for an "only-child certificate." When the state "qualified" Shu Xian to become pregnant again in 1993, however, the couple—especially the husband (San Jie)—became rather hesitant. As San Jie confessed to me, since he had three brothers, two of whom had a son, he did not feel obliged to have a son right away, since his extended family would "continue" with the birth of his brothers' sons. To San Jie, to raise a son was a more serious challenge than to simply produce a son. To be sure, he had often dreamt of having a son—but that was only a dream. However, even if his (imagined) son proved to be a strong enough student to attend college, he would not be able to afford the expensive cost; in case his son could not go to college and ended up living as an adult with his parents, San Jie would have to build a new house for his son, in addition to hosting a wedding—if he wanted his son to marry a decent woman—which would cost at least 70,000 *yuan* (some $9,000 in 2005). Both peasants without much extra income beyond the meager earnings that their farm produced, San Jie calculated that he and Shu Xian simple could not afford having a son. Realizing that San Jie was only considering the possibility of his wife bearing a *boy*, I

joked: “If the second child were a girl, then you wouldn’t have the burden of building a house for her wedding, if she couldn’t go to college.” Surprised by my question, San Jie replied without hesitation: “Why bother having another daughter? I have one already.” Although they continue to be haunted by the patrilineal ideal of having a son, facing the rapid post-socialist class differentiation happening in their life-world, this couple’s sense of insecurity has overpowered their quest for a male successor.

As for the 19 couples who had applied for an “only-child certificate” for their singleton daughters, it is possible that at least some of these couples have “embraced singleton daughters” in their reproductive choices, as some scholars would now suggest (Shi 2009, Yan 2003). In this case, their fondness for their only child/daughter itself may have provided sufficient motivations for their reproductive choices—as the state has encouraged. Yet other factors might also lead rural couples to have a “certified” single daughter.

River Crossing houses the township administration (the lower-end of China’s urban-based governing apparatus), as well as a set of state-owned public services and businesses. Officials and formal staff members working for the state’s local agency (and in many cases, their family members as well) hold the status of urban *hukou* (urban citizenship—“urban household registration identities”) (Cheng and Selden 1994). With urban *hukou*, these state agents and their family members could enjoy a variety of governmental benefits, such as access to urban public schools and jobs in the state-owned industries, which peasants would not be able to share. Yet because of their urban status, they are required to follow the government’s *urban* birth policy, which in general has been the one-child policy since 1980, with very few exceptions. Among the 651

households in River Crossing Village, about 120 families had at least one member with an urban *hukou*, amongst whom 80 had all their members holding "urban *hukou*." Accordingly, among the 19 couples who applied for "only-child certificates" for their singleton daughters, six had urban *hukou*, and thus were required by law (and their position) to follow the urban birth policy, regardless of whether or not they were satisfied with having an only child/girl.

Among the remaining 13 couples (without urban *hukou*) who had applied for "only-child certificates" for their singleton daughters, some did so for economic/class-related reasons similar to those invoked by San Jie and Shu Xian (although the latter couple never did apply for the certificate). To cite just one case, let us consider Shu Wen's story. Shu Wen (age 32 in 2005) married at 18 and had a daughter the following year. In the coming years, her family experienced some financial difficulties and did not prosper, though not for lack of effort. In 1995, Shu Wen applied for an "only-child certificate" for her daughter. Explaining her decision to me, she said: "I hope my daughter would have a life much better than me. My current circumstances only allow me to raise one child." Her husband was not that happy with having only one daughter. Yet after the wife of his younger brother gave birth to a son from her first pregnancy, Shu Wen's husband relented in his efforts to have a son through a second pregnancy. As Shu Wen said: "He [her husband] continues to like the idea of having a boy, but doesn't have the [financial] ability [to realize it]." She further added, "Now that his brother has a son, we can take a breath [for not being obliged to have a son]."

Taking the above factors into account, I would suggest that along with China's post-socialist transformation came a diversification of villagers' fertility strategies—in

terms of their timing and number of childbirths, as well as their desired gender composition of their completed "child set" (Gu 1996). Yet in assessing the degree and scope of rural couples' "transition" in reproductive choices, the trend to "embrace singleton daughters" is only one of several factors that are relevant to villagers in their decision to have only one child, in the case that child is a girl. To some villagers, the patrilineal ideal of having a male heir continues to haunt them even if they have pledged to "embrace" a singleton daughter by applying for an "only-child certificate."

Class/Ethnic Politics and the Quest for a Family Heir

In this inter-ethnic Manchu-Han borderland, class consciousness has also intersected with ethnic politics, which further complicates villagers' reproductive experiences in their quest for family line succession. The reproductive story of Chen Si and Xiao Yan is illustrative.

In September 2004, Xiao Yan (Han, age 39) had her second child, a son. Their first child, a girl, had been born fifteen years ago. For over a decade, the couple were not allowed by the state to have another child. Xiao Yan is a peasant and has a rural *hukou* ("household registration identity"). Chen Si (her husband, Manchu) has an urban *hukou* with a job in a state-owned industry in a nearby city, and because of this, his daughter also received an urban *hukou*. In such a case, the couple is only permitted by the state to have one child. But their situation changed in 2002. Shortly after becoming part of the township government staff, Xiao Yan managed to "correct" (*jiu zheng*) her ethnicity to claim Manchu identity because she claimed that her maternal grandfather was a native-born Manchu. With this new identity, the couple were now entitled to have two children.

By manipulating their ethnic identities, Chen Si and Xiao Yan succeeded in their effort to have a second child, a male heir, without incurring any punishment by government.

In this couple's quest for a male heir, their victory mainly came from Xiao Yan's adroit manipulation of her ethnic identity, which was indispensably associated with class-based privileges after she became part of the township government staff. During a casual conversation, the couple were proud of their reproductive strategy. "Junjie," Xiao Yan laughed loudly, "I'm virtually a *fake Manchu* (*jia manzu*)—because a *real* Manchu should have been [officially] registered before 1985—but it worked!" According to the local government's birth control regulations, if a couple are both minorities (including Manchu), and if the wife is a peasant (with rural *hukou*), they could have two children regardless of the sex of their first child; yet, to be qualified for this special policy treatment, a couple must meet another requirement: they should have both registered their minority identity before 1985. This additional requirement immediately disqualified Xiao Yan to have a second birth (she registered her Manchu identity in 2002), but it did not intimidate Xiao Yan. She first managed to have an official document to verify her identity as a Manchu descendant from her mother's natal village, about 35 miles from River Crossing.[79] With this official "verification," Xiao Yan had township officials "corrected" her ethnic identity as Manchu and tampered with the date of this "correction" as back in 1983 instead of 2002—taking advantage of being a local government staff. While listening to Xiao Yan's "strategy," I hinted that the birth of her son seemed to have

[79] To get this document, Xiao Yan bribed local officials in her mother's natal village. As I learned from Xiao Yan and Chen Si, Xiao Yan's claim for Manchu ethnicity came from her late maternal grandmother. However, although her maternal grandmother did have some Manchu relatives (none were her agnates), she had never registered her ethnicity as Manchu; instead, she was a registered Han. Thus, the official document verifying her grandmother's "true" Manchu identity was actually forged. Chen Si is a nephew of my host, a Manchu woman married a Han husband—through her connection I came to know Xiao Yan and Chen Si.

caused jealousy from some villagers, and asked how she would deal with a possible situation when someone in the village came to question her "Manchu" identity. Xiao Yan replied that such public confrontation was unlikely to happen (although private gossips would be inevitable). If someone does so as a result of resentment, Xiao Yan was quite confident that the township officials would help cover up her forgery of her Manchu identity because she was now a government staff.[80]

Conclusions:

The Gendered Consequences to Re-conceptualizing What Constitutes a "Family Line" in Post-socialist Rural China

Reading villagers' reproductive stories against their quest for boys, I propose that the Chinese state's past three decades of efforts to control its population have greatly challenged villagers' capacity to fulfill the traditional expectation for family line succession that every man should be succeeded by a son. Meanwhile, population control in rural China has intersected with rural transformations that have been accelerated by post-Mao reforms. Facing growing and intensified social differentiations, an emerging consciousness of class distinctions has come to be entangled with villagers' quest for sons. Living in a local setting with nearly impassable class gaps, ordinary villagers have tried to balance their desire for social mobility with their pursuit of a male heir and their sense of insecurity and powerlessness in a place that, though seemingly quite remote in

[80] On her husband's side, as long as Chen Si could present an official document that verified Xiao Yan's Manchu ethnicity, Chen Si judged that his work unit leaders would not bother asking further questions about his wife's background because, as a River Crossing villager, Xiao Yan was largely the target of the *rural* birth control policy, subjecting her to the surveillance of the *rural* authorities.

its mountainous location, is nevertheless being reshaped by the nation's determined transition toward global capitalism. As a result, choosing whether or not to pursue a son in a second birth, so as to achieve the patrilineal ideal of family line succession, has become entwined with villagers' lived experiences of China's post-socialist transformations.

Yet even among those who temporarily suspended, or eventually gave up, the pursuit of a male heir from a second pregnancy, the patrilineal ideal of family line succession has continued to haunt them. Nevertheless, unlike the patrilineal ideal of a two-generational, father-son framework that expects every man to have a male offspring, to villagers like Shu Yan and Da Kui, the framework that now evaluates family line succession seems to be a three-generational, grandfather-grandson model in the context of the extended family. To Da Kui's father, for example, as long as one of his four sons could produce a boy, his extended family line will continue, and no one in the village would dare gossip that his family would vanish without male progeny.

In River Crossing, this grandfather-grandson framework has to some degree become a supplemental model co-existing with the traditional one in villagers' conceptualizations of family line succession. With this broader and relatively flexible model, the patrilineal notion of family line succession has sustained itself by accommodating changing family structures as a joint product of the state's three-decade-long efforts at population control, as well as the accompanying post-socialist transformations. Yet by locating their reproductive practices within an extended family framework, many villagers such as Da Kui, Shu Yan, Shu Xian, San Jie, and Shu Wen have gained precious extra "space" from which to ponder their reproductive choices

against the persistent patrilineal notion of family line succession and its relevance during the nation's post-socialist moment. For example, as I discussed in the previous section, because San Jie's two brothers each had a son, he and his wife Shu Xian could consider their reproductive decisions mainly from their own perspectives, after having a daughter in 1986. Reciprocally, for Shu Wen, after the wife of her husband's brother gave birth to a son in 2003, the family pressure she and her husband felt due to having an "only daughter" lessened considerably.

Sahlins has argued that a "cultural ordering produced by the material forces presupposes a cultural ordering of these forces" (1976:39). Following his insights, an understanding of villagers' reproductive behavior commands a mapping of the underlying symbolic and social order that gives people the values they pursue and constrains the strategies they adopt. I would add that the current grave reality of deepening class gaps in China has come to shape villagers' sense of the "social order" itself. Their awareness of class inequalities is now reshaping the contours of how their patrilineal gender ideology influences their reproductive practices and the attendant re-conceptualization of what counts as a "family line."

Franklin and McKinnon have argued that ideologies of kinship are embedded in—and in turn signify—power relations that "draw lines of hierarchy and exclusion, bring about relations of dominance and subordination, and generate a range of violence in the heart of kinship" (2001:18). This perspective clearly illuminates the situation in contemporary China. As villagers' emerging consciousness of class distinction has become entangled with their quest for male heirs, their reproductive experiences encapsulate China's post-socialist conditions. And yet, while the emerging, supplemental

framework of family line succession has provided an extra space for villagers' reproductive choices, it continues to accommodate the entrenched patrilineal ideology—that ultimately sons are the sole, legitimate heirs of the family. For those who are able to produce a son in their second birth, the patrilineal gender ideology underlying their male preference become further reinforced. Thus, if David Schneider and feminist anthropologists have targeted biologism and ethnocentrism in their examinations of Euro-American kinship (cf. Schneider 1968, Strathern 1992a), I would suggest that Chinese villagers' reproductive practices constitute an ironic critique of the state's modernization project—which claimed that its birth control efforts would fundamentally transform villagers' ingrained patrilineal ideology concerning what "counts" as a "family line" and the associated longstanding gender stereotypes.

As the pursuit of male heirs via "extra" births now has a "price" stipulated explicitly in the state's reproductive policy, rich families now clearly enjoy far more reproductive freedom than do poor and "ordinary" families. As the largely commercialized medical establishments began catering to villagers' preference for sons by providing sex-selective diagnosis and abortions, female fetuses—in addition to women's bodies—have become the casualty of villagers' quest for family line succession.[81] And as the post-socialist state's birth control policy now accommodates

[81] One obvious demographic consequence of this is the alarming, increasingly skewed sex ratio at birth nationwide over the past two decades, along with millions of unwanted infant girls being abandoned, let alone more female fetuses being aborted. According to Tyrene White's comprehensive review, the national sex ratio at birth (girl/boy) has been rising steadily: 111 in 1985, 114 in 1989, and 117 in 2000 (2009:203). As to the area containing River Crossing, as revealed by local officials over informal conversations, since 1999 the sex ratio at birth has been above 120 at both the provincial and county levels (although the officially announced ratios were around 113). For recent studies of China's abandoned girls and sex-selective abortions, see Cai and Lavely 2003, Chu 2001, Johnson 1996; for the associated practice of foreigners, especially Americans, adopting abandoned female Chinese babies left in orphanages, see Anagnost 2000, Dorow 2006.

both the reality of deepening class gaps and the traditional patrilineal gender ideology, childbearing has become refracted to index social distinction. Thus the reproductive "fashion"—epitomized as "a big, big sister with a little, little brother" as I have discussed in this chapter—tells a story of how human bodies have become commodified, with "little" boys being desired and valued over "big" girls, and imbued with the emerging sense of class differences. In families' pursuit of a male heir, women's bodies continue to be the locus and battlefield of villagers' reproductive struggles, as well as of the state's sustained intervention—no matter how "globalized" and "humane" the government now purports its birth control policy to be.

In making these claims, this chapter is inspired by work in feminist anthropology of reproduction and kinship that aims to braid discussions of gender and class as linked factors that provide a lens through which cultural norms, individual struggles, and social transformations can be productively viewed and examined (Rapp 2001, Rapp and Ginsburg 2001). Drawing on this case study, this chapter offers localized insight into the intensely human experience of China's post-socialism and associated globalizing efforts as they are reconfigured in the seemingly intimate space of reproduction.

CHAPTER 6

STATE PROPAGANDA SLOGANS AND THE ETHICS OF MODERNITY

Introduction

> In an afternoon in June 2002, when I went to interview the director of a county-level Family Planning Commission in Northeast China, the governmental official was talking to two rural women the next door to his office. These women, who are in mid or later fifties, came to ask for governmental compensations for the injury they suffered after they were required by the local government to undergo the tubal ligation surgery two decades ago. They told the director that they had heard that the government now had "legal regulations" (*fagui*) to deal with their cases, including damages for their physical injuries as well as the resultant economic losses.

The director later told me that now the government does have regulations for women in the case of injury and/or complications they might suffer after the surgery of—in most cases—tubal ligation and induced abortion.[82] In this county, for example, a woman might receive a damage of 1,500 *Yuan*/year for the second-class injury, 1,000 *Yuan*/year for the third-class, 700 *Yuan*/year for the fourth-class-A, and 500 *Yuan*/year for

[82] In Article 14, Chapter 3, *XXXX Provincial Regulations for Family Planning Program*, which came into force on Nov. 9, 1997.

the fourth-class-B.[83] To the county government, the damage regulation is viewed as having embodied the "spirit"—essence—of the discursive transformation of China's population control policy. That is to say, in the 1970s and 80s, the state now acknowledged, the family planning program was highly "administrative" (*guanlixing*) containing certain stringent and harsh measures (Zhou 1998). Since the late 1990s, the state has begun to improve the quality of population control in terms of offering "high-quality service" (*youzhi fuwu*) (Gu 2002). The financial compensation for some injured women, though meager in amount, is considered a constituent part of the reform in the family planning program.

Two decades ago, such official acknowledgement of, and the consequent compensation for, injury to rural women's bodies—brought about by the population control movement—would have been unimaginable. In the small village of Yue[84] in southeast China (with a population of about two hundred), among twenty-one women who underwent the tubal ligation from 1971-79, for example, two of them experienced serious post-surgery complications for 3-4 years with no hope of ever having a full recovery. Although the two women did get some forms of meager compensation for their sufferings, the local government had never publicly acknowledged the medical accidents.[85] Instead, the birth control movement in the 1970s was claimed by local

[83] In 2002, $1 equals to about 8.2 *Yuan*. When I asked the director how much is the first-class damage, he immediately became highly alert, and he did not answer my question directly. Instead, he told me that "the first-class is death." The county governmental agent stressed, however, that in this county with a population about four hundred thousand, "no woman has ever died after having the surgeries in a period of over two decades." He did not tell me how much the first-class damage is.

[84] Yue is a pseudonym, in which I conducted ethnographic research in 1992, 1994, and 1995.

[85] The compensations these two Yue women received were largely contingent on their family members' repeated plead to local officials, although the local government implicitly recognized their post-surgery complications as "unexpected accidents." Nonetheless, the compensations were very limited. For example,

officials to have exemplified the "great victory of proletariat ideas and the Cultural Revolution" (Chen 2002).

As widely recognized, China's population control policy in rural China is a modernity project from its very beginning in the early 1970s, and is criticized as notoriously draconian (Anagnost 1988, 1997; Wasserstrom 1984). Yet in the opening vignette, it seems that, in the beginning of the new millennium, the image of Chinese

state's modernity cause, in light of its population policy, has become quite different from its previous stern appearance. In this chapter, by examining its population control policy in rural area over the past two and a half decades, I will argue that, on the one hand, the Chinese state's modernity project has a trajectory of metamorphosis; in the meantime, following the changing images of modernity, the state has also been ably constructing and reconstructing the Saidian orientalized (Said 1978) subjectivity of its rural rank-and-file.

From such a contemporary concern, I plan to conduct a mini historical-anthropological study of the key "slogans" (*kouhao*) for population control in rural China. In daily life across the nation, the widespread circulation of various political slogans is one of the distinguishing features of the Maoist and post-Mao regime. In the forest of slogans, key slogans are viewed by both the state and its subjects as having embodied the "essence" of guiding policies on specific issues of a particular period. As a result, the

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for one woman with serious post-surgery complications, the compensation included: (1) her family could still get the annual quota of grains (mainly rice) from the village at the stabilized price offered by the state; (2) she could be reimbursed about thirty percent of the medical expenditure, as long as it had official receipts. As this Yue woman has told me, the struggle for compensation was a hardly bearable ordeal, both physically and emotionally. In order to win over the sympathy from the local cadres (officials) for the meager reimbursement, her husband (two years later, sometimes also including herself) had to go to implore them for dozens of times every year. If one could not successfully gain local cadres' sympathy, the compensation would be much less and unstable.

metamorphosis of key slogans for population control signifies the shifting loci of the population policy in contemporary rural China.

Before I engage in examining key slogans, it is necessary to clarify that there are roughly two distinctive types of slogans in the Maoist and post-Mao China. One is *general* or *ordinary* slogans, which—somewhat like a symbolic "shifter," so to speak—always acquire their concrete implications under the context of particular policies in specific historical settings largely signified by another type—*key* slogan. For example, since it was proposed by the state in 1982, "controlling population quantity, improving population quality"[86] has been widely circulated across China as the general principle for China's population policy (Zhao 1995; cf. *An Essential Pamphlet for Leaders of the Family Planning Program*, p. 99). Yet its particular meaning and practical consequences differ over the past two decades. In terms of "controlling population quantity," in 1982, it meant that every couple—regardless rural or urban—could have only one child, in accordance with the then nationwide stringent one-child policy. After the late 1980s, however, it meant a "one and a half children" population policy in rural area.[87] With regard to "improving population quality," in the early 1980s, China's population was also "diagnosed" by the state to be of "low quality" (*suzhi taidi*) due to people's deficient grasp of modern science and technology and, more importantly, due to their lack of exposure to sustained "education of the socialist spiritual civilization in the new era" (cf. Anagnost 1997:118-28, Chen 1993). Consequently, along with the one-child policy, "improving

[86] See "Instructions from the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council on How to Further Improve the Family Planning Work," which is released on February 9, 1982 as *Zhongfa* (the decree/document of the Central Committee of the Party) No. 11, 1982 (Peng 1996:18-20).

[87] That is to say, for those rural women who produced girls in their first births, they are allowed to have the second chance to have a son. As a result, statistically, each rural women on average can have "one and a half" children (Chu 1995; Chen 2002; Chen and Chen 1997; Liang, Tan, and Jing 1999).

population quality" was specifically entrusted with the task of disseminating "advanced socialist spiritual civilization" (Chen 1993). Yet since the early1990s, in the Chinese state's modernity discourse in light of population control policy, the "socialist spiritual civilization" has largely faded—especially since the beginning of the new millennium. This will become clearer in the pages that follow.

Analytical Concepts

In this chapter, I'll apply the theoretical concepts offered by William F. Hanks (1989), Mikhail M. Bakhtin (1981), and Dorothy Holland et al. (1998) as main analytical tools. In particular, I find Hanks' idea of *textuality*, *intertextuality*, and *centering*, Bakhtin's notion of incessant *dialogism* between the *centripetal* forces—embodied in the *unitary* language—and the *centrifugal* forces of *heteroglossia* of any discourse, as well as the heuristic metaphor, *figured world*, of Holland et al. to be potentially productive for my analysis of key slogans for population control in rural China.

In "Text and Textuality," Hanks argued that the interpretability of text locates itself "not so much in the immanent structure of a discourse as in the social matrix within which the discourse is produced and understood" (1989:96). Following such social orientation toward text, he stressed that the role of context is central in defining the text-work (1989:98). Consequently, in Hanks' view, textuality is understood largely as "the fit between the sign form and some large context that determines its ultimate coherence" (1989:96). He implied, further, that such a context-oriented approach might extend our vision of text into social history with broader concepts such as intertextuality (1989:99). Although Hanks did not proceed to define the concept, based on my reading of his whole

article, I feel, to Hanks, it has much do with the sense of intertextuality developed by Jonathan Culler. That is, from the perspective of intertextuality, text exists between and among other texts through its relations to them (Culler 1997:33). Following the lead of Hanks' context-oriented perspective, I find the concept of intertextuality can be highly illuminating in my analysis of key slogans in a renovated way.

In my understanding, the idea of intertextuality also dovetails nicely into the notion of "symptomatic text," which means a text "that spoke to larger cultural anxieties and issues surrounding women, male violence, and representation" (Walter 1995:10, cf. Culler 1997:68). In fact, as Walters has pointed out, media as culturally significant text can be approached more productively from a perspective of "contextualism" (Walters 1995:4). For example, key slogans can be read as speaking to larger socio-cultural contexts including Chinese state's anxieties surrounding the "population problem" (*renkou wenti*).

When a symptomatic text is regarded as an instance of the cultural practice (cf. Culler 1997:68), it becomes quite illuminating in explicating that practice as well as the underlying "deeper" implications such as cultural logic and assumptions. In this regard, text can also be viewed as a specific form of cultural performance (Culler 1997:106-07): its symptomatic meaning is achieved/interpreted by linking the text itself to the larger socio-historical context. That is to say, one can achieve a symptomatic understanding of a text by shifting a perspective from a constative reading (Culler 1997:99-100) to that of the performative. In the pages that follow, I will argue that performance is also a constituent of the key slogans for the post-Mao state in constructing its modernity image.

Except the ideas of textuality and intertextuality, Hanks offered another incisive concept, "centering," for textual analysis. In his view, although text can never be "complete," it can still be adequately understood due to its "centering" aspect. That is to say, to Hanks, text is "centered insofar as it is grounded in a locally defined social context, which functions as the source of information an author and reader draw on to flesh out the interpretation of the textual artifact" (1989:107). He pointed out, due to the centering aspect of text, the possibility of multiple interpretations is never open-ended in the real social world. Rather, "it is partly inscribed in textual form, and partly contested by actors" (1989:107). In examining key slogans, I will argue that "centering" is a very useful idea. Yet its analytical potential might be more productive if we extend its sphere beyond text.

Bakhtin's notion of dialogism points to unending struggles among competing social-linguistic possibilities such as stylistic genres, rhetorical choices, professional slants, as well as languages of different social strata and generations. According to his socio-historical dynamic framework, dialogism is—heuristically—also like the war between centripetal and centrifugal forces. To Bakhtin, language can be viewed as ideologically saturated, as a worldview, or even as "a concrete opinion, insuring a *maximum* of mutual understanding in all spheres of ideological life" (1981:271, italics original). In terms of the centripetal, it offers a "unitary language" (1981:270) toward "concrete verbal and ideological expression and centralization, which develop in vital connection with the process of sociopolitical and cultural centralization" (1981:271). With regard to the centrifugal, at any given moment, the centripetal forces operates in the midst of heteroglossia, which represents the combining features—that is, "the co-

existence of socio-ideological contradictions between the present and the past, between differing epochs of the past, between different socio-ideological groups in the present, between tendencies, schools, circles and so forth, all given a bodily form" (1981:291). In Bakhtin's view, such dialogism is "a property of *any* discourse" (1981:279, italics original). In the pages that follow, I will apply the Bakhtinian dialogism—either sociologically or metaphorically—to understand the unremitting dynamic that has been pushing key slogans to metamorphose over the time.

Finally, but not the least, the idea of "figured world" is highly illuminating of the broader context, within which key slogans for population control are produced and transformed. Like the Bakhtinian "chronotope" (Bakhtin 1981:84, Holland et al. 1998:171), figured world is "a socially and culturally constructed realm of interpretation in which particular characters and actors are recognized, significance is assigned to certain acts, and particular outcomes are valued over others" (Holland et al. 1998:52). As collective "as-if" spheres, figured worlds are socio-historic, contrived interpretations or imaginations that mediate people's/actor's behavior. As the co-authors have rightly pointed out, when people have certain actions, they are not only sending messages, but are also positioning themselves in social fields in varying degrees of relation to identifiable others (Holland et al. 1998:271).

In this chapter, I plan to employ these concepts to analyze the metamorphosis of key slogans for population control in rural China over the past two decades. Yet in most cases, I do not apply them in an "orthodox" sense. Rather, based on my linguistic-anthropological reading of the key slogans, I will try to incorporate them into my own

analytical framework. By so doing, I also hope to have some theoretical dialogues with these theoretical concepts.

A Brief History of Birth Control Movement in Rural China in the 1970s

The key slogans for population control in rural China have their genealogical "ancestry" in the birth control movement in the 1970s. As Ginsburg and Rapp (1991) have point out, reproduction is always unavoidably entangled with politics. In the case of China, population control was an integral part of its "grand modernity blueprint" (*xiandaihua hongwei lantu*) from its very beginning. In the 1950s and early 60s, birth control, proposed by leading scholars such as the eminent sociologist Chen Da and celebrated economist Ma Yinchu, was repudiated by Chinese state as a modern version of vicious capitalist Malthusianism intended to undermine the "great socialist cause." The state leaders firmly believed that the huge amount of population was an indispensable, constituent part of the national power, and was hence beneficial to China's Maoist socialism (Gu and Mu 1994). As a result, for example, from 1962-70, the average annual population growth rate reached as high as 2.6%, with an average total fertility rate of 5.91 children per woman. In merely a nine-year period (1962-70), China had a net increase of 170 million people (Chu, 1995: 75).

After over two decades of national "experiment," however, the Maoist blueprint—highlighted by the "Great Leap Forward" of the late 1950s and the "Cultural Revolution" of the late 1960s—proved to be a failed project. Until the early 1970s, for most Chinese, the living standard remained no better than that in the 1950s (cf. Chen 1998:62-63). When I conducted my field research in the village of Yue in 1992 the first time, for example, I

was told that, with only one exception, no villager married in the 1950s and 60s could afford to buy, or could make, new furniture such as a bed and wardrobe. The only exception was a woman who had married into this village in 1965 with a large wardrobe as part of her dowry. However, although looked new in villagers' memory, this "new" wardrobe was in fact part of the dowry of that woman's mother—herself the daughter of a wealthy family—in the early 1930s. Another instance of the material hardship was the extreme shortage of vegetable oil for cooking during the early and mid 1970s. Almost two decades later, in the early 1990s, many Yue villagers still remembered the unbelievably prohibitive price of the canola oil, the major vegetable oil in that area. In 1975, the average annual income per capita in this village was about 200-300 *Yuan*, but the price of 1 *jin* (0.5 kg) canola oil was about 1.8 *Yuan* (about $1.50). As a result, cooking became an extremely difficult daily chore for the village women—both technically and emotionally. A young man of my age told me that, in those years, he had thought, "even fried wood would be more edible than those foods cooked without oil."

Years of nationwide material destitution, and the gradual decline of the once unquestionable belief in Maoist doctrines, were pushing the late-Maoist state to seek scapegoats to gloss over the failure and to reclaim its legitimacy. Since the early 1970s, for the national government, China's huge population began to be viewed by the state as an unbearable national "burden." Worrying that the high population growth rate would impede the planned, "high-speed development" of the nation's Maoist planned economy, the Chinese state began to launch a new sociopolitical movement of birth control in the early 1970s.[88]

[88] In February 1970, at the Annual Meeting of National [Socioeconomic] Plan convened by the State Council (China's central government), Prime Minister Zhou En'lai emphasized that "now we have too many

Keeping in step with the state's birth control policy, in 1971, all married women in the village of Yue under the age of thirty-nine who had borne three or more children, or who had borne two children, at least one of whom was a son, were required to undergo tubal ligation surgery. In the view of local officials, the birth control movement in this commune—a sub-county level administrative unit in Maoist era to which Yue belongs—had been highly "fruitful": the annual birth rate plummeted from 3.59% in 1971 to 1.37% in 1979; and in the same year, the annual population growth rate dropped from 1.80% in 1972 to 0.85%.

1971-78 was the late Maoist period,[89] during which the Maoist ideology of "class-struggle-movement" (*jieji douzheng yundong*) was still dominating people's everyday lives. Under such circumstances, the slowing-down of population growth rate was viewed by the state as a "great success" justifying the Maoist ideology. In 1992, a township (called Commune in the Maoist era) official recalled that the birth control movement in the 1970s was also claimed by the state to have embodied and extended the spirit of "'repudiating' (*po*) the 'four olds' (*sijiu*: old ideas, old culture, old custom, and old habits) movement"(cf. Ong, 1999:39), by "changing prevailing old habits and customs" (*yifeng yishu*) reflected in rural people's childbearing practices.[90] Put otherwise, according to the "spirit" of the movement—to use the language of the late Maoist era—birth control should "demolish

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population. In the 1970s [we] should pay much attention to planned birth control (*jihua shengyu*)… Having more labor force is a good thing—only if it is compatible to the need of economic development" (Yang, Liang, and Zhang 2001:42).

[89] Although Mao died in 1976, the Maoist policy and ideology, continued to influence the government to a large extent until Deng came to power in 1978 (White 1990).

[90] In 1976, several months after his wife had a second child—both daughters—this local official went to the local hospital to have a vasoligation surgery. He told me that it was not unusual for a male party member to have "birth control surgery" at that time. Party members were then expected, and often required, to be the "behavioral paragon" (*xingwei biaoshuai*) for the rank and file.

old ideas and foster new, prevailing [socialist] customs" (*pochu jiu shixiang, shuli xin fengshang*).

Since the late 1970s, population was further diagnosed by the post-Mao state as a national "illness," impeding the redefined modernity of "high-speed Four Modernizations"—of "industry, agriculture, the national defense, and science and technology." In order to pursue a high speed of the Four Modernizations, the post-Mao state in 1979 became so ambitious as to promote a one-child policy regardless of urban or rural areas. In 1980, the one-child policy became mandatory nationwide, mainly among the majority Han who comprises 93.4% of the nation's population in 1982 (SFPC & CPIRC 2001:62). In tandem with the one-child rule, the state in the early 1980s began to promote the "Three Mains" as the key slogan on how to effectively implement the one-child policy in the vast rural Han areas.

The "Three Mains"

[Text I]

"Letting the Experience of 'Three Mains' be Spread Nationwide"

By Commentator of *Family Planning Propaganda Materials*, June 1, 1983

"During the practice of the family planning work, Rongcheng County has summed up a method of 'Three Mains': That is, propaganda and education should be combined with the administrative and economic measures, with the stress *mainly* on propaganda and education;

contraceptive birth control should be combined with induced abortion, with the stress *mainly* on contraceptive birth control; regular, day-to-day work should be combined with the sudden, concentrated effort/activity, with the stress *mainly* on the regular, day-to-day work. During "the On-The-Spot Meeting of the National Family Planning Work" (*Quanguo jihua shengyu xianchang huiyi*) in Rongcheng,[91] the "Three Mains" has been affirmed as an important guiding principle for the family planning work. This event has great significance.

"The family planning work is concerned with myriad of families. Only through the effort of thoroughgoing and painstaking propaganda and education, could it gain the support from the absolute majority of the masses to voluntarily implement the contraceptive measures; and [in this way,] could [the family planning work] be solidified and developed further. The old ideas left over from the feudalist past, such as 'the more the sons, the higher the happiness' and 'boys are superior to girls,' are still dominating to varying degrees a number of people to have 'blind' (i.e. unchecked) childbirth. In addition, the widespread advocacy of the 'only one child for every couple' has also brought about radical transformation in family structure. To either cadres (i.e. officials) or the ordinary masses, this will inevitably have a process of cognition [before being fully accepted]. Such a situation has determined that propaganda and education must be constantly put to the first priority in the family planning work:

[91] The meeting was convened by the State Family Planning Commission in Rongcheng, Shandong Province from May 7-11, 1983 (Yang, Liang, and Zhang 2001:111-12).

[We] should use the method of persuasion and education to change people's old ideas, and establish new notions of marriage and childbearing.

"Relying mainly on contraceptive birth control is a fundamental measure for the realization of the family planning program. As demonstrated by the experience, if [we] invest the energy of our work on induced abortion, it will not only land our work in a passive position, but will also affect/dampen [material] productivity, aggravate the burden on the national and the [rural] collective economy, and impair to some extent women's health. To this end, insisting relying mainly on contraceptive birth control is not only an issue of technology, but also of ideology and working method. It embodies whether we have the viewpoint for the masses as well as the economic standpoint. We must extremely care and love the masses, and help them seriously implement the measure of 'relying mainly on the contraceptive birth control.'

"Relying mainly on the regular, day-to-day work—this is also determined by the law of family planning work itself. A woman will generally have about thirty years of fertility period—from getting married, starting to have baby, to menopause. [Meanwhile,] human fertility is not affected by season and weather—it is always possible at any time of the year. This has determined the protracted and arduous nature of the family planning work. [We] must make unremitting, sustained effort and preserve its day-to-day consistency.

"The working principle of 'Three Mains' is the product of long-period practice of family planning work. It is the summing-up of the

law/regularity of the [family planning] work itself. The experience of the 'Three Mains' should be promoted and spread nationwide."

—(Peng 1996:403-04)

Text I is a highly centered text, explaining very concisely what the "Three Mains" means. Viewed in isolation, it is largely a monologue offered very condescendingly by the state, which looks an exception of Bakhtin's point that non-poetic texts are always dialogical between centripetal forces and centrifugal forces of heteroglossia (1981:270-71, 279). For example, within the text per se, Text I was comprised of a series of highly centered judgements from the state: "[We] should use the method of persuasion and education to change people's old ideas, and establish new notions of marriage and childbearing. … We must extremely care and love the masses, and help them seriously implement the measure of 'relying mainly on the contraceptive birth control'. … [We] must make unremitting, sustained effort and preserve its day-to-day consistency." Instead of building its persuasiveness on the conceptual and emotional cogency, the centering power of Text I—like the decree from the monarch—came mainly from the underlying, yet explicitly signified, hegemony and ideology of the state through the rhetorical form of "commentator's article" (*pinglunyuan wenzhang*). Similar to the "editorial" (*shelun*), in China, the "commentator's article" represents the "spirit"—gist—of the state's policy on the general goal, or a particular issue, of a specific period. It's law-like, final and unquestionable. In this regard, Text I—of the key slogan of the Three Mains—can be read as a monologue offered by the post-Mao state.

Yet by looking at its contextuality, one finds Text I was deeply rooted in the "social matrix" (Hanks 1989:96) of the Dengist post-Mao modernity project at the turn of

the 1980s, a "figured world" (Holland et al. 1998:52) surrounding the Four Modernizations. Within such a figured world, Text I exhibited some forms of dialogism, although not always in its initial Bakhtinian way.

As widely recognized, compared with the unending "class struggle movement" of the Maoist regime, the pursuit of the Four Modernizations became the distinguishing feature of the post-Mao state after Deng came back to power in 1978 (White 1990, MacFarquhar 1997). As the kernel of its figured world, the "Four Modernizations" began to shape the state's various policies nationwide, including that of population. On January 27, 1979, *People's Daily*—the mouthpiece of the Communist Party—carried an Editorial, titled "[We] Must Attach Great Importance to the Family Planning Work." It advocated that "for the sake of our grand cause of the economic construction of the [Four] Modernizations," "every couple would better have only one child, and should have two at most" (Peng 1996:272-73). To Deng, China's iron hand since 1978, birth control was a strategic task of realizing the Four Modernizations:

> "To bring about the Four Modernizations in our country within this century, and to build our nation into a socialist power, is an extraordinarily arduous and formidable task. … To enable China to realize the Four Modernizations, we must discern at least two major characteristics: One is that our background is weak. The protracted devastation of our country by [Western] imperialism, feudalism, and bureaucratic capitalism has made China a poor and backward country. … Because our background is too weak, China is lacking in scientific and technological strength. … The second characteristic is that we have a large population but little farmland.

… We must put a great effort behind strengthening the work of family planning."

—Deng, on March 20, 1979: "Insisting on the Four Principles"

(Peng 1996:137).

In the figured world of the Four Modernizations, population growth rate touched increasingly on the state's nerve. To the post-Mao regime, the nation's huge population was not just blamed as the scapegoat for the failure of the Maoist project. Moreover, controlling population was regarded as the essential component of an imagined panacea for the state's modernity blueprint: the lower the population growth rate, the more promising the Four Modernizations. To this end, the state became more and more obsessed with population "statistics" (*shuzi*). As a result, a Raymond Williamsian "statistical mode" was invoked by the state to create an illusion of "control" in response to the extreme complexity the nation has to face squarely with in the pursuit of the Four Modernizations (Williams 1973).

In fact, in order to achieve the modernization goal, state leaders have had somewhat a "population-phobia" of its high growth rate. On September 15, 1979, among series of slogans that the Central Committee of the Communist Party released on *People's Daily*—the mouthpiece of the Communist Party—for the celebration of the Thirtieth Anniversary of the People's Republic, the eighth of which was "Devoting Major Effort to Launching the Family Planning Movement; Cutting the [Annual] Population Growth Rate Down to Below 1%." To the state, only the low index of population growth is worshiped—the lower the rate, the more it is fetishized. On September 28, 1979, in "The Resolution of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on Issues of

Speeding Up Agricultural Development," the Party had even imagined that, by 1985, the annual population growth rate could be further reduced to 0.5% (Peng 1996:15). A month ago, on August 11, 1979, Vice Prime Minister Chen Muhua argued—in an article on *People's Daily*—that "controlling population growth is an important prerequisite to the realization of the Four Modernizations." The Vice Prime Minister pointed out that, after reducing the annual population growth rate down to 0.50% by 1985, China should achieve a zero population growth in 2000.[92]

From December 15-20, 1979, in a national conference convened by the Office of Family Planning Leading Group of the State Council (the predecessor of the State Family Planning Commission), the state set the specific goals of the annual population growth rate for the coming years: 0.95% for 1980 and 0.80% for 1981 (Yang, Liang, and Zhang 2001:73). Considering the actual population growth rate was 1.16% in 1979 (Yao and Yin 1994:9), one can imagine how radical the population plan of 1979 was.[93] To this end, the crux of family planning work was claimed to promote "every couple to have only one child" (Yang, Liang, and Zhang 2001:73). In just eleven months, the proposal of "two children at most" was no more favored by the state.[94]

In 1980, the one-child policy became mandatory nationwide to the majority Han. On September 25, 1980, through the state media, the Central Committee of the Party

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[92] Chen Muhua: "To realize the Four Modernizations, [We] Must Control Population Growth in a Planned Way" (Peng 1996:155-58).

[93] In fact, the state had never achieved its ambition of the 1979—even with the ensuing stringent one-child policy in the early 1980s. From 1980-1985, the annual population growth rates were, respectively, 1.19%, 1.46%, 1.17%, 1.33%, 1.31%, and 1.43% (Yao and Yin 1994:9). Instead of becoming zero growth in the new millennium, the annual growth rate was 0.88% in 1999 (SFPC & CPIRC 2001:33).

[94] On December 18, 1979, during that national conference convened by the Office of Family Planning Leading Group of the State Council, Vice Prime Minister Chen Muhua made it plain that now "two children at most" was no more favored by the state (Peng 1996:160).

released "A Public Letter to the Whole Members of the Communist Party and the Communist Youth League on the Issue of Controlling Our Nation's Population Growth." In that "letter," literally, only the members of the Party or the Youth League were required by the Party to have only one child (Peng 1996:16-17; cf. Chu 1995, Zhao 1995). Yet in effect, every non-"member" was also subjected to the Party's essentially mandatory "call" (*haozhao*). On February 9, 1982, in "The Instructions of the Central Committee of the Party and the State Council on the Further Betterment of Birth Planning Work," the state demanded that "in rural area—universally—every couple could have only one child" (Peng 1996:19). On December 4, 1982, the one-child oriented family planning program was further written into the Constitution.[95]

In order to promote its one-child program, the state was eager to summing up effective practical experiences from the grass-roots—to popularize them nationwide in terms of catching key slogans. In 1980, in Rongcheng County of Shandong Province, some Commune (later called township after the Commune system dissolved in the mid-1980s) governments began to experiment what was summarized two years later—in the form of slogan—by the county administration as the "Three Mains"—that family planning work should rely *mainly* on propaganda and education, *mainly* on contraception, and *mainly* on the regular, day-to-day work. On October 20, 1982, the "advanced experience" (*xianjing jingyan*) of the "Three Mains" was favorably affirmed by the national state (Yang and Chen 1997:97). In May 1983, the State Family Planning Commission began to promote the "Three Mains" of Rongcheng County as the key

[95] In Article 25: "The nation pursues family planning, to coordinate the growth of population with the plan for economic and social development." In Article 49: "Both the husband and wife have the duty of practicing family planning" (Peng 1996:43).

slogan, embodying the guiding principle for rural officials on how to implement the one-child policy across the nation's vast rural areas (Yang, Liang, and Zhang 2001:111-12). On June 1, 1983, the State Family Planning Commission released its official version of the "Three Mains" in the form of "Commentator's Article" on *Family Planning Propaganda Material* (*jihua shengyu xuanchuan ziliao*),[96] which has been transcribed into English from Chinese Mandarin in the beginning of this section as Text I. Since 1983, the "Three Mains" became the nationwide key slogan for the one-child policy in rural China.

Looking at the course of its "birth," Text I—of the "Three Mains"—presents certain dialogism. Yet unlike Bakhtin's initial idea of dialogism among different voices within the text (1981:270-72), the dialogue is largely outside Text I itself. As illustrated by the forming of one-child policy, Text I was the product of the increasingly intensive dialogue between the state and its figured world of post-Mao modernity.

This characteristic brought about another unique feature to Text I. Generally speaking, following Hanks (1989), the Three Mains achieved its textuality largely from the context of the figured world revolving around the Four Modernizations at the turn of the 1980s. Yet, to be precise, the textuality came out of the *intertextuality* of population control policy and the state's figured world of modernity, following Culler's definition of intertextuality (1997:33) that text exists between and among other texts through its relations to them. That is to say, the "Three Mains," as the guiding principle of how to implement the one-child policy in rural China, exists intertextually in the incessant,

[96] *Family Planning Propaganda Material* is the predecessor of *China Family Planning Daily* founded on June 29, 1987 (the name of which was changed to *China Population Daily* since July 1, 1988), the mouthpiece of the State Family Planning Commission (Peng 1996:447-48).

heated dialogues between the state and its fetishized goal of the high-speed Four Modernizations. When China's huge population was diagnosed as the national "illness," the state leaders had what I have called the "population-phobia" of its high growth rate.

In the beginning of 1979, for example, the state was proposing "every couple would better have only one child, and should have two at most" (Peng 1996:273). Yet, just a year later, in order to relieve its paranoia of "population growth" as quickly as possible, the one-child policy became mandatory nationwide. Again, two and a half years later, the "Three Mains" was born, as the guiding principle for implementing the one-child rule.

Now, ensnared in such a broad intertextual background, the "Three Mains" began to present implicit dialogues—within Text I per se—at two distinct yet closely related levels. The first is between modernity and tradition. In order to achieve a fast, grand modernity in light of the "Four Modernizations," the post-Mao state endeavored desperately to repudiate any kind of backwardness, which, in the view of state leaders, was notoriously reflected in its feudalist traditions. In terms of the one-child policy, as Text I asserted, for example, "[T]he old ideas left over from the feudalist past, such as 'the more the sons, the higher the happiness' and 'boys are superior to girls,' are still dominating to varying degrees a number of people to have 'blind' (i.e. unchecked) childbirth." Accordingly, in dialoguing with the figured world of the Four Modernizations, the state entrusted a highly backward subjectivity to the vast rural rank-and-file due to their alleged close links with the feudalist traditions surrounding the patriarchal ideas. To the state, this was in sharp contrast to its modernity project and should be repudiated resolutely as "feudalist dregs" (*fengjian canyu*).

Defining the "despicable," "backward" subjectivity of its rural subjects helped the state to legitimize its stringent one-child policy, as exemplified by the second level dialogue—between the three "Mains" and the three non-"Mains," so to speak. In the first paragraph of Text I, to highlight the three "Mains," the "commentator" mentioned three contrastive non-"Mains": "the administrative and economic measures" (in contrast to "propaganda and education"), "induced abortion" (in contrast to "contraceptive birth control"), and "the sudden, concentrated effort/activity" (in contrast to "regular, day-to-day work"). When the state began to emphatically promote the "Three Mains," it was also dialogically implying to go beyond the three non-"Mains"—in order to more effectively implement the one-child policy. Yet this also implied, to think dialogically, that before the "Three Mains" became the guiding principle in 1983, the three non-"Mains" had been the major measures for implementing the one-child policy across rural China.

In fact, a quick examination will expose the harsh nature of the three non-"Mains." First, as exemplified by Ann Anagnost's study (1988), within the context of the radical one-child policy, the "administrative and economic measures" always implied the draconian physical coercion—the "administrative"—and the prohibiting financial fine—the "economic"—against rural people who violated the policy. Further, "induced abortion" plus "the sudden, concentrated effort/activity" is like a miniature of the Maoist sociopolitical movement such as the Cultural Revolution (cf. White 1990). In River Crossing, as a local female official recalled, in her Commune (now renamed Township), in order to implement the one-child policy, the Commune established "Small Shock Brigades of Family Planning Program" (*jihua shengyu xiaofendui*) to "catch big wombs"

(*zhua daduzi*)—that is, detecting and then aborting "unexpected" pregnancies that occur outside the state's population plan—village after village, largely through uninformed, sudden examination. According to the governmental agent's personal memory, in the early 1980s, in most cases in her area, on average, every brigade—an administrative unit immediately below Commune—had about eight to ten out-of-plan pregnancies a year. Sometimes women with "big wombs" escaped to the house of their relatives or friends. In such cases, like Holmesian detectives, members of the "Small Shock Brigade" would "spread dragnets" (*shawang*) for days and nights until the "big wombs" were caught. In a few cases, if a woman finally had a baby "out-of-plan," her family had to pay a fine—about 100-500 *Yuan*—to the Commune government.[97] Two decades later, the fine looked meager. Yet in the early 1980s, the annual income per capita was only about 100-150 *Yuan* in that area, as estimated by some of my informants. After paying a considerable portion of the yearly income, an ordinary local family could hardly escape a serious financial crisis.

Viewed more broadly—in the combined contexts of both the Maoist and post-Mao era—the slogan of the "Three Mains" reflected the radicalness of the one-child movement in rural China. As Tyrene White (1990) has argued, after repudiating resolutely the political excesses of Maoism, the Dengist regime embarked on a modernization strategy that swiftly and fundamentally reversed the Maoist approach. That reversal demanded a de-radicalized political environment. Yet, the degree and scope of Dengist adjustment were essentially very radical. In the case of population control, the state was obsessed with its utopian dream of reducing the annual population

[97] From my field notes on June 20, 2002.

growth rate as quickly and to as low a rate as possible. For example, in 1979, the planned population growth rate for 1985 was 0.5% (Peng, 1996:15), while the actual rate that year was 1.43% (Yao and Yin 1994:9). In order to achieve the goal of one-child policy, quite paradoxically, the post-Mao state had to invoke once again the skillful utilization of a familiar political process characteristic of the Maoist period: that is, mobilizing both the Party and the rank-and-file to break out of old routines in favor of new ones (White 1990:74).

In practice, in order to effectively implement its one-child policy, the post-Mao state not only incorporated the Maoist model of sociopolitical movement, but also aimed to perfect it from the three non-"Mains" to the three "Mains." Of course, emphasizing the three Mains did not exclude the use of the three non-Mains. As made plain by Minister of the State Family Planning Commission in the "On-The-Spot Meeting of the National Family Planning Work" in Rongcheng in May 1983, in some areas with "weak foundations" (*jichu boruo*) for the Three Mains, the family planning work might have to mainly depend on the three non-Mains.[98] In Text I, even the three "Mains" were also to some extent reminiscent of the Maoist period. For example, the first "Main," the stress on "propaganda and education," continued the typical Maoist way of ideological indoctrination.

In the meantime, in the other two "Mains"—"relying mainly on contraceptive birth control" and "relying mainly on the regular, day-to-day work"—the post-Mao state aimed to transcend the Maoist strategy into somewhat a Foucauldian "panopticon"

[98] Qian Xinzhong, May 11, 1983, "Learning Advanced Experience, Paying More Attention to, and Further Improving, the Family Planing Work: Concluding Speech at 'The On-The-Spot Meeting of the National Family Planning Work' in Rongcheng" (Peng 1996:313-15).

(Foucault 1977: 195-228), the omnipresent surveillance of its rural subjects, primarily women's body. In the discourse of the "Three Mains," women's subjectivity was also denounced as having a degree of barbarity, "primitivity" or even "animalness," revolving around their fertility potentials:

> A woman will generally have about thirty years of fertility period—from getting married, starting to have baby, to menopause. [Meanwhile,] human fertility is not affected by season and weather—it is always possible at any time of the year (Text I).

To the state, such primitivity exacerbated their backward subjectivity and, hence, deserved the "day-to-day" omnipresent surveillance, centering on their wombs, which are susceptible to feudalist ideas to have "unchecked" childbirth.

Following the lead of the Three Mains, in the village of River Crossing, for example, local officials—usually females—began to regularly inquire women's monthly period or even to inspect their sanitary napkins—called *yuejing fangshi*—to make sure that they were not pregnant outside the population plan. To cite a set of pet phrases widely circulated in this area since 1980, local cadres (officials) should "down to the village (*jingdaocun*), enter the [individual] family (*rudaohu*), see the [targeted] woman (*jiandaoren*), and touch her belly [to make sure that she is not pregnant outside the "plan"] (*modaodu*)."[99]

As a result, the key slogan of the Three Mains embodied the post-Mao state's ambition to accomplish quickly a grand modernity in light of the Four Modernizations. To this end, the contrastive backward tradition, which was alleged at the center of rural

[99] From my field notes.

people's subjectivity, was repudiated as feudalist remains. In this respect, one-child policy, as the contemporary embodiment of modernity, was entrusted the task of changing people's old ideas and customs. As the state made it clear in Text I: "[We] should use the method of persuasion and education to change people's old ideas, and establish new notions of marriage and childbearing."

The "Three Connections"

[Text II]

"A Report on the Situations of Launching the 'Three Connections' for the Family Planning Work"

By the State Family Planning Commission, March 20, 1996

"The Central Committee of the Party and the State Council:

"Since the beginning of the 1990s, Provinces such as Jilin, Liaoning, Sichuan, and Jiangsu have been conforming to the new circumstances of the Reform-and-Open policy (*gaige kaifang*) and constructing a system of socialist market economy; summing up the practices of the masses; and drawing on other countries' useful experiences [for the family planning program]. On the bases of such, [they] have *connected* rural family planning work *with* developing economy, *with* helping peasants work hard toward 'a relatively comfortable life' (*xiaokang*), and *with* building a civilized and happy family—called the 'Three Connections' for short, which are well received

by the broad masses. In just a few years, the 'Three Connections' of family planning work has been gradually spread across the nation with very beneficial effects. It blazed a new way of how to propel forward the family planning work under the new circumstance, to comprehensively deal with population problem, and to advance the coordinated development among population, economy, and society. Now [we] report related issues as follows:

"The focus and difficulty of our nation's family planning program lie in rural areas. On the one hand, peasants are more deeply influenced by traditional ideas. On the other hand, due to the low developmental level of productive forces, to peasants, they have some practical difficulties—which have not yet been well resolved—in complying with the family planning policy. Many are worried that they could not get economically well off quickly after having fewer children. Meanwhile, rural people also have some issues (complains) with [local officials'] "working methods" in implementing our family planning program, which has undermined the relationship between Party and peasants as well as that of cadres (local officials) and local people. In order to promote and perfect the family planning project in rural area, as early as the 1970s and 80s, some regions began to explore how to integrate family planning with eliminating poverty, as well as with promoting production. Since the beginning of the 1990s, some regions—under the unified leadership of Party committee and government—have integrated developing rural

economy and advancing the family planning program. They try to organize rural households that are subject to the family planning policy; help these rural families to make plans of "Having Fewer births and Becoming Quickly Prosperous" (*Shaosheng Kuaifu*); support one or two secure projects that can help these families to be prosperous; in addition to offering multifaceted services for production, everyday life, and childbirth, among others. This way, [regional governments] have helped these families to have an annual income higher than the overall average in their local areas, and gradually formed a working method of the 'Three Connections." The crux of this approach is that: revolving around the focus of economic development, [these governments] try to cater to rural people's strong drive of developing production, eliminating poverty, getting prosperous, as well as the lust for building a civilized and happy family. By helping [rural people] develop economy and increase income, they have convinced peasants that population control is not only the requirement of the nation, it will also benefit individuals as well as their families. In so doing, they have stimulated peasants' inner motivation for having fewer children. … As proved by the practices, in [rural] areas where the 'Three Connections' is well developed, the project of "Having Fewer births and Becoming Quickly Prosperous" has achieved remarkable success.

…

"The above-mentioned report, if not inappropriate, [we] suggest it be approved and transmitted to every region and government departments across the nation."

—*An Essential Pamphlet for Leaders of the Family Planning Program*, pp. 89-93

Since it became mandatory nationwide in 1980, the one-child policy, an essentially very radical modernity project, encountered rural people's—mostly Han villagers'— resistance due to reasons revolving around their patrilineal gender ideology (Chen 1995; Watson 1981). As a result, the forced implementation of the one-child policy, implied by the Three Mains, which also incorporated the highly coercive three non-"Mains," has led to numerous nationwide acts of violence against rural people, especially women (e.g. Anagnost 1988; Wasserstrom 1987: 371). In some extreme cases, suicide—mostly committed by rural women—became the final choice for thousands of village people after experiencing unbearable physical and emotional abuses perpetrated by local officials. In fact, even with the either highly coercive measures of the three non-"Mains" or the Foucauldian panoptic surveillance of the Three Mains, the goal of the one-child policy could not be exactly achieved in most rural areas. Gradually, as Liang et al. have noted, "more and more local government officials had to make false reports to the state…" (Liang, Tan, and Jing, 1999: 33)—that they have achieved the goal of one-child rule.

Facing the peasants' fierce resistance, the state since 1984 began to "perfect and soften" its draconian population policy. On April 13, 1984, the Central Committee of the

Party approved a report by the State Family Planning Commission. Among rural women who produced girls in their first births, about 20% of them now could be allowed a second birth—to have a son.[100] In December 1986, the state affirmed once more the slightly softened policy of 1984.[101] In 1988, the state further raised the total fertility rate to 1.6 children per woman to provide rural women who had girls in the first birth with the second chance, usually after 4-6 years in most rural areas.[102] The softened policy largely continued to the new millennium until I conducted field research in summer 2002.[103]

Shortly after the implementation of the one-child policy, since 1982, China also launched a rural reform that has tectonically transformed the contour of rural society: to redistribute the collective farmland to individual households. As a result, the Maoist Commune system dissolved by the mid-1980s. In the village of Yue, the collectively owned land was re-allocated to individual households in 1982. In the county I conducted research in summer 2002, by 1984, almost all the farmland went back to the individual families.[104] To most local governments, the dissolution of the commune system vitiated to varying degrees their ability to exert effective control over rural subjects via the prior

[100] Leading Party Member's Group of the State Family Planing Commission (March 22, 1984): "A Report On the Situation of Family Planing Work," approved by the Central Committee of the Communist of China on April 13, 1984 as *Zhongfa* (the decree/document of the Central Committee of the Party) No. 7, 1984 (Peng 1996:24-27).

[101] Wang Wei (Minister of the State Family Planing Commission): "An Introduction to the Situation of Family Planing Work at the National Working Meeting on Family Planing Program," December 1,1986 (Peng 1996:332-36).

[102] Peng Peiyun (Minister of the State Family Planing Commission): "A Speech at the National Meeting for Directors of Provincial Family Planing Commissions," May 12, 1988 (Peng 1996:344-46; cf. Chu 1995; Zhao 1995; and Liang, Tan, and Jing 1999).

[103] Although the Congress has passed the Law of Population and Family Planing on December 29, 2001, local regulation had not yet been stipulated in summer 2002, at least in the rural area I visited in northeast China.

[104] *County Annals of XXXX* [in Chinese], pp. 250-51. Shenyang, Liaoning: Liaoshen Press.

Maoist institutional fabrics. In some areas, local townships (former Communes) were reported to have virtually lost their control over villagers' behavior, including reproduction (Chen and Mu 1996, Liu 2000, Wang 1992). One ramification of this is that the quality of the 2000 Census in many rural areas was found to be quite problematic—not a few of rural governments now could not even register the exact number of family members, especially when a family had "out-of-plan" birth(s) (cf. Yu 2002).

Meanwhile, following the post-Mao reform, with the whole nation progressively oriented toward a market economy,[105] Maoist socialism as once very powerful ideology gradually lost its appeal to most Chinese. When I was in Yue in 1992 and 1995, a few newly emergent slang terms were joining popular discourse among many villagers, such as "now no one will pay attention to the 'thought' (*sixiang*, i.e. the official ideology)" (*xianzai shui hai jiang sixiang*), and "what everyone cares about is only to get wealthy" (*renren xiang de du zhishi facai*). These slang phrases were in sharp contrast to the "socialist spiritual civilization" in light of "propaganda and education."

Along with the market-oriented economic growth becoming the kernel of its figured world, the post-Mao state located its population policy within the fabric of market economy. On August 14, 1993, Peng Peiyun, then State Councilor and Minister of the State Family Planning Commission, alleged that "just because the 'Three Connections' dovetail nicely into broad rural people's strong desire for being prosperous toward 'a relatively comfortable life' (*xiaokang*), and for building a civilized and happy family, it

[105] "socialist commercial economy" in the 1980s, "socialist market economy" since 1992, and the increasingly popular usage of "market economy" since the mid-1990s (cf. Nee 1989; Szelenyi and Kostello 1996).

received their enthusiastic upholding."[106] On September 20, 1993, *China Population Daily* released an editorial, "Implementing in an All-round Way the 'Three Mains,' Gradually Promoting the "Three Connections" (Peng 1996:434-35). From June 17-20, 1994, the State Family Planning Commission convened a National Symposium for Directors of Provincial Family Planning Commissions in Yancheng, Jiangsu Province, based on the local experience of how to develop a "civilized project of 'the Fewer the Children, the Quicker to be Prosperous" in Yancheng area (Yang, Liang, and Zhang 2001:293-94), which was immediately followed by another on the same theme in Guanghan, Sichuan Province from October 5-9 that year (Yang, Liang, and Zhang 2001:300). Since then, eleven years after the initial promotion of the Three Mains, the Three Connections became another key slogan for population control widely circulated in rural China.

A year later, from October 22-26, 1995, the State Council assembled a national conference, aimed to facilitate the exchanging of experiences on how to promote the Three Connections project in different areas. The state hoped that the Three Connections would provide a new approach for population control at the era of market economy (Yang, Liang, and Zhang 2001:325-26). On March 10, 1996, during the meeting convened by the Central Committee of the Party, the strategic significance of the Three Connections was further affirmed by China's top leader, President Jiang Zemin (Peng 1996:221-22).

Text II came right after the historical moment when the Three Connections achieved a full recognition by the state, and was approved and transmitted nationwide as

[106] Peng Peiyun, August 14, 1993: "The 'Three Connections' is a Promising Way for Rural Family Planning Program" (Peng 1996:203-05).

the decree of the General Offices of both the Central Committee of the Party and the State Council (No. 14, 1996) (Yang, Liang, and Zhang 2001:342). Moreover, Text II was also put in *An Essential Pamphlet for Leaders of the Family Planning Program* as the standard official explanation of the key slogan of the Three Connections specifically for governmental officials. For this reason, I choose it as the representative text among its many versions.

Viewed from the perspective of intertextuality, Text II existed in the increasingly engaged dialogue between the state and its aspiration for building a prosperous market economy. Yet to the post-Mao state, market is a two-edged sword. When the state launched a series of reforms to push the whole nation toward a market-oriented economy in the 1980s, paradoxically, what the market first presented was more of its centrifugal forces to the modernity blueprint underlying the Three Mains, especially the socialist "thoughts." As exemplified by the case of the rural reform in the first half of the 1980s, along with the collapse of the Maoist Commune system, "socialist spiritual civilization" began—quite quickly—to lose most of its rural audiences.

Facing the irreversible loss of its prior ideological appeal and hegemony underlying the "Three Mains," the state in Text II endeavored to invoke the market and re-invent it as a centripetal force to unify its modernity project in light of the softened population policy. Quite in contrast to Text I, in which tradition—in terms of rural people's "old ideas"—was viewed as the major obstacle for the one-child policy, in Text II, it was the "underdeveloped rural economy" that took the place of "old ideas." Aiming at economic development, the state, in the project of the Three Connections, tried to convince rural people that population control would not only benefit the nation, it was

also beneficial to themselves. In this way, instead of invoking the Maoist ideology, the state now resorted to material incentives to "stimulate peasants' inner motivation for having fewer children."

Surrounding economic growth, "backward tradition" began to obtain a somewhat positive value, as long as it could "foster" the nation's economy. To this end, for example, the Chinese state began to reinvent the value of its age-old tradition to help bridge its connection with overseas Chinese—to attract their investments (Ong 1999:42-54, cf. Handler 1988:57-60), regardless of whether or not the reinvented tradition is "socialist" in nature. In fact, as early as in the mid-1980s, when the state began to "soften" its population policy to allow rural women who produced girls in their first births a second chance to have a son, the patrilineal gender stereotype of Han villagers—which had been condemned as "feudalist dregs" throughout the whole Maoist and early post-Mao era—started to gain official, though somewhat reluctant, concessions.

Essentially, the Three Connections was de facto a manifesto of "the fewer the children, the quicker to be prosperous" (*shaosheng kuaifu*). Among the three "Connections," two of them—connecting rural family planning program *with* "developing economy," and *with* "helping peasants work hard toward 'a relatively comfortable life' (*xiaokang*)"—are explicitly economical. Even the third—connecting family planning with "building a civilized and happy family" (Text II)—was not so much "spiritual" as "material." Surrounded by the "material forest" of the mundane economy, "civilized", the only index that might have implied the "spiritual," when juxtaposed with "happy," had much to do with the material advancement—to appear somewhat "spiritually" decent in terms of *xiaokang*, "a relatively comfortable life."

Not only rural people's "desire" for childbirth, but their unending issues with local officials—the state claimed in Text II—could also be dispelled through the mechanism of "economy." By promising rural people to be quickly prosperous, the state imagined a utopian scenario that its rural subjects would gratefully understand—that the harshness of both the population policy and the way local officials had treated them was ultimately for their own benefit: to get prosperous and to be *xiaokang*, "a relatively comfortable life." Compared with the Three Mains, the ideological load in the Three Connections has become to some degree quite performative.

By fetishizing the omnipotent, beneficial power of market economy centered in the text of the Three Connections, the state has "materialized" its modernity project in light of population control policy, along with the irretrievable fading of socialist ideology once so pervasively underlying the Three Mains. In this way, the material aspect of its modernity project was also dialogically ideologized through the state's emphatic fetishization, which would imbue the "material" with some forms of "spirituality," the fetishism of commodity, to follow Marx.

In the meantime, the fetishization of the market also commoditized the subjectivity of rural people. Throughout Text II, the state was endeavoring to assert that, by convincing rural rank-and-file the "truth" of "" the fewer the children, the quicker to be prosperous," it could stimulate "peasants' inner motivation for having fewer children" (Text II). By so doing, the state has redefined rural people's subjectivity as essentially "Economic Person," in accordance with the ascending fashion of market economy. While the alleged backward aspect of their personhood—deemed having embodied the feudalist dregs in terms of "a number of people" were still having "'blind' (i.e. unchecked)

childbirth" in the Three Mains period (Text I)—was no longer under the intense gaze of the state's softened population control policy.

"Two Transitions," "One Goal," and "Letting the New Custom of Marriage and Childbearing Flow into Myriads of Families"

[Text III]

"Two Transitions"

"The so-called 'Two Transitions' means, in the working principle and method of family planning, (1) a transition from stressing the family planning for the sake of birth control itself, toward integrating family planning closely with economic and social development—to adopt comprehensive measures to resolve the problem of population; (2) a transition from social restriction toward gradually establishing a mechanism that combines the guidance of [material] benefit and social restriction, and integrating propaganda and education, comprehensive service, as well as scientific administration. Under the context of building a socialist market-economy proposed by the Fourteenth Congregation (in fall 1992) of the Party, in order to meet the need of developing family planning program, to improve the level/quality of family planning work, to establish an amiable image of the family planning program, and to fully embody our Party's purpose to serve the people wholeheartedly as well as

its fine working style of maintaining close ties with the masses, family planning must realize the 'Two Transitions.'"

—*A Concise Dictionary of Population Knowledge*, pp. 160-61.

When the "Three Connections" gained the fullest recognition by the state in 1995, another key slogan, "Two Transitions," was first proposed by the State Family Planning Commission the same year (Gu 2002:3).[107] From April 11-14, 1996, at the Annual Meeting of the Family Planning Association of China, its potential significance was highly stressed by the powerful President of the Association, a former member of the Standing Committee of the Politburo (Peng 1996:252-54). From March 8-12, 1997, the Two Transitions became the major theme of the National Conference of the Family Planning Work (Yang, Liang, and Zhang 2001:368-69), and became a key slogan nationwide as a result. Shortly thereafter, except state media, articles related to the Two Transitions began to appear even in academic journals (e.g. Zhong, Lai, and Shi 1998). Like *An Essential Pamphlet for Leaders of the Family Planning Program, A Concise Dictionary of Population Knowledge* is also a mini pocket dictionary/pamphlet—edited by high-rank officials of the State Family Planning Commission—for officials in charge of implementing population control policy.[108] For this reason, in this section, I excerpted texts from these two pamphlets for the analysis of the key slogans.

[107] Unfortunately, I haven't yet had a chance to get access to the original document by the State Family Planning Commission that year.

[108] *An Essential Pamphlet for Leaders of the Family Planning Program* was edited and published by China Population Press, a sub-division of the State Family Planning Commission in charge of publishing materials for officials of the family planning program. The editor in chief (Yang Kuifu) and one of the deputy editor in chief (Liang Jimin) of *A Concise Dictionary of Population Knowledge* were former Deputy Ministers of the State Family Planning Commission.

Following the Two Transitions, in the beginning of the new millennium, another key slogan, "One Goal," appeared in "the Resolution of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council on Reinforcing the Work of Population and Family Planning and Stabilizing the Low Level of Fertility."[109]

[Text IV]

"One Goal"

> "[It] means achieving controlling population quantity, advancing population quality, and improving population structure—to promote well-coordinated development and sustainable development among population, economy, society, resources, and environment, and to create a favorable population environment for the [cause of] 'Reform and Open' as well as the development of modernization. By 2010, trying to control population below 1.4 billion."
>
> —*An Essential Pamphlet for Leaders of the Family Planning Program*, p. 99.

In between the Two Transition and One Goal, in October 1998, a third key slogan—"Letting the New Custom of Marriage and Childbearing Flow into Myriads of Families"—was proposed by the State Family Planning Commission to transform the old "fertility culture" (*shengyu wenhua*) into a new, "civilized" one (Yang, Liang, and Zhang 2001:420-21). In March 1999, it was promoted by the Propaganda Department of the Central Committee of the Party and the State Family Planning Committee—as a

[109] The "Resolution" was released on March 2, 2000 as *Zhongfa* (the decree/document of the Central Committee of the Party) No. 8, 2000.

nationwide activity in the ensuing three years—to raise the public consciousness to voluntarily conform to the population policy by popularizing the scientific, civilized, and progressive notion of marriage and childbearing (Yang, Liang, and Zhang 2001:438). Three month later, from June 29 to July 2, 1999, a national symposium was convened by the State Family Planning Commission to exchange and sum up various experiences in developing the activity of "Letting the New Custom of Marriage and Childbearing Flow into Myriads of Families" (Yang, Liang, and Zhang 2001:446).

[Text V]

"Letting the New Custom of Marriage and Childbearing Flow into Myriads of Families"

> "In order to deepen the propaganda and education of family planning, since 1998, the State Family Planning Commission introduced the activity of 'Letting the New Custom of Marriage and Childbearing Flow into Myriads of Families.' It advocates scientific, civilized, and progressive notion of marriage and childbearing, such as 'to have a late marriage and late childbirth,' 'fewer births with better children (i.e. higher quality),' 'it is both desirable with having either a boy or a girl,' 'a girl can also be an heir and continue the family line,' 'men and women are equal,' as well as 'the husband should share the responsibility of family planning."
>
> —*An Essential Pamphlet for Leaders of the Family Planning Program*, p. 99-100.

Combined together, Text III, IV, and V provided an image that is to some extent quite distinct from the "Three Connections." Except for the common stress on developing the economy, they distinguished themselves from the "Three Connections" on two aspects: one is the centering on the new images of family, especially Text V; another is the seemingly humanist stress on "service," especially Text III.

In Text V, "new customs of marriage and childbearing" implied what the state claimed the "progressive" notions such as "late marriage and late childbirth," "fewer births with better quality," and "it's both desirable with having either a boy or a girl." This way, the activity of "Letting the New Custom of Marriage and Childbearing Flow into Myriads of Families" intended to repudiate "old ideas and customs." In this regard, it seemed that the state was endeavoring painstakingly to reclaim its lost ideological appeal over myriads of rural subjects without the harshness of the Three Mains, for the simple reason that now the image was "scientific, civilized, and progressive."

In state media, it also sounded that the slogan of "Letting the New Custom of Marriage and Childbearing Flow into Myriads of Families" was getting a noticeable momentum. In March 2000, in the "the Resolution of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council on Reinforcing the Work of Population and Family Planning and Stabilizing the Low Level of Fertility," the state claimed that one of the major goals in the first decade of the new millennium was to "form a preliminary new notion of marriage and childbearing and fertility culture." Following the lead of "building a new fertility culture," in October 2001, China Population Press published *Introduction to China's Fertility Culture*, edited by high-rank officials, written mostly by university professors, and forwarded by the Minister of the State Family

Planning Commission. In its *two* volumes, with about a thousand pages, it covered a wide range of topics from the antiquity to contemporary practices including the activity of "Letting the New Custom of Marriage and Childbearing Flow into Myriads of Families."

Following the principle of the Two Transitions (see Text III), the State Family Planning Commission decided to explore the feasibility of presenting family planning program in the form of "high-quality service" (*youzhi fuwu*) to its rural recipients (Gu 2002). By the end of 1999, there were more than six hundred county-level units claimed to have joined the "high-quality service" project (Yang, Liang, and Zhang 2001:465). To the state, to offer "service" instead of coercive "administrative" measures was viewed one way of transforming the prior harsh image of family planning program—"from social restriction toward gradually establishing a mechanism that combines the guidance of [material] benefit and social restriction, and integrating propaganda and education, comprehensive service, as well as scientific administration," to use the language of Text III. At the global present, the Two Transitions appeared very humanistic, because "service" always puts the value of humans at the first priority. In Deqing, a showcase county in Zhejiang Province where the "service" for family planning has well developed, for example, the state even invited foreign scholars to go there to conduct joint research (Gu, Simmons, and Szatkowski 2002). As Zhong et al. have made it plain, the "service" would help to establish an amiable and decent image of the state to international audiences (Zhong, Lai, and Shi 1998).

Yet my observation in the field in River Crossing during summer 2002 belied such telling intention of the state. During an earlier meeting with the provincial officials

that summer—because I must have their permission to go to the field—I was told that this province had launched the project of "high-quality service" since 1998. While I was in the field, a village with about two thousand people where also located the township government, fortunately, I did witness such a "service." One Saturday morning, a township official told me that a medical team from the county would come to offer free diagnosis, mainly for women, with some free medicines on the morning free market. When a van finally carried the team to the courtyard of the township government, however, it was near the noon. At that time, the temporary morning market was over an hour ago and everyone on the team was hungry. After the lunch entertained by the township government, the team members got on the van to go back to the county town without diagnosing a single patient.

As to the activity of "Letting the New Custom of Marriage and Childbearing Flow into Myriads of Families," local officials told me that they began to promote it since1997. Yet like the "service," it was also largely a "form" (*xingshi*)—a performance. When I asked the only daughter of my host family, who was thirty and had a seven-year-old son, if she knew the activity. The daughter replied: "why you bother asking this?" She explained to me that as long as she knew, activities like this mostly existed only on "newspaper and the mouths of the cadres (i.e. local officials)".

Contrasting the Texts with my field experience, the key slogans around the turn of the new millennium were in fact highly performative. Along with two decades of quick economic growth, Chinese state is now becoming more and more involved in the global economy. Consequently, the global became an increasingly important constituent of its figured world. Looking at Text IV, of the One Goal, it was really "global"—it aimed to

"promote well-coordinated development and sustainable development among population, economy, society, resources, and environment, and to create a favorable population environment for the [cause of] 'Reform and Open' as well as the development of modernization." In the three lines, one can fish out the major themes widely circulated globally: neo-liberal market economy, sustainable development, environmentalism, etc. In this respect, the global has been shaping the key slogans of population control policy. This means, on the one hand, the modernity project of Chinese state was dialoguing intertextually with, and dialogically shaped by, the global society; on the other hand, the state was also trying to instill the "scientific, civilized, and progressive notion of marriage and childbearing" (Text V) into the subjectivity of rural people, in addition to the signification of Economic Person in accordance with the market economy—although both were essentially in a highly performative way at the global present. Yet the irony has been persisting in its modernity blueprint: according to the neo-liberal doctrine, the essence of market economy is to give individuals "free choices" to "swim" in the ocean of the market (Becker 1976). However, even in this highly "progressive" period around the new millennium, the population policy has left little space to let rural people to have "free" choices in childbearing.

Snobbish Modernity, Malleable Subjectivity

In this chapter, applying the ideas of Bakhtin, Hanks, and Holland et al., I have delineated the trajectory of Chinese state's population control policy in light of the metamorphosis of the key slogans in rural areas: the Three Mains in the 1980s, Three Connections in the 1990s, as well as Two Transitions, One Goal, and "Letting the New

Custom of Marriage and Childbearing Flow into Myriads of Families" around the new millennium.

In my analysis of slogan texts, I found that linguistic ideas might become more productive—at least to me—when I linked them, heuristically, to broader social spheres. For example, the centering power of key slogan texts such as Text I came mainly from the implied hegemonic state, instead of the text itself. Another instance is the concept of intertextuality. When I located the key slogan of the "Three Mains" *intertextually* in the population control policy and the state's figured world of modernity, it became salient that the slogan was largely the product of the incessant, heated dialogues between the anxious state and its fetishized goal of the high-speed Four Modernizations—outside the highly centered Text I. And then, the subdued dialogues gradually became discernible within the seemingly monologue of Text I, between "Mains" and non-"Mains." For this reason, in order to make their analytical potentials more productive, I think concepts such as intertextuality should go beyond Culler's narrow textual understanding, which is seemingly accepted by Hanks.

In a short history of two and a half decades, Chinese state has been shaping and reshaping its modernity image within the changing figured worlds. From its very beginning in the 1970s, China's population control policy has been an integral part of its modernity project. In the early 1980s, the stringent one-child policy was viewed as an indispensable strategy to realize a grand modernity of the Four Modernizations, with omnipresent surveillance of women's body and the paired omnipotent coercive measures. To this end, tradition, because of its close link with patriarchal ideas, was repudiated as feudalist dregs. Consequently, as exemplified by the Three Mains, one-child policy was

also meant to change people's old ideas and customs reflected in their childbearing practices. Since the early 1990s, as suggested by the Three Connections, the modernity image centered increasingly on economic development, along with the whole nation moving toward a market economy. In tandem with the softening of the one-child rule, "feudalist" tradition"—as long as it could foster economic growth—began to obtain somewhat positive values. Around the turn of the new millennium, in addition to its centered obsession with economic growth, the state set out to construct a largely performative global image by claiming to transform its population policy from the coercive "administration" to "civilized" "service."

During its able manipulation of the modernity image, the state has been creating a malleable subjectivity of its rural subjects. In the Three Mains period, rural people were depicted by the state as full of backward feudalist ideas embodied in their childbearing practices. In the Three Connections era, rural people's subjectivity was said to be mainly comprised of economic desires for material prosperity. Around the new millennium, rural subjectivity was now suggested to be lack to varying degrees in a new item—"scientific, civilized, and progressive notion of marriage and childbearing" (Text V)—in addition to their "obsessed" economic desires at the global present. Throughout the history of population control in rural China, the state has been inventing and reinventing an image of Otherness—of rural subjectivity—that was, and still is, always lack in something "good" and, hence, in need of the state's guidance, discipline and, overall, "civilization."

To some extent, the Chinese state's such able constructions of malleable rural subjectivity as the "lacking" Other appears another version of Saidian orientalization.[110] As Said has argued, orientalism is productive, and what are produced are ideas and statements that constitute a hegemonic description of the object (Said 1978:3). Positioning its rural people as the malleable Other, the state has been essentially orientalizing its subjects. Through such a mechanism, the state could manipulate another level of dialogism—not in the initial Bakhtinian sense—to mobilize the "lacking" rural Other to justify its shifting modernity blueprint, with rural people's voice being silenced and their resistance disappeared in the state's official image of "brilliant accomplishments" (*huihuang chengjiu*). Such logic of orientalization is also somewhat analogous to what Frykman and Löfgren (1979) have depicted in the process of "culture-building" of Sweden bourgeoisie in around the turn of the twentieth century, during which the peasant was defined by the ascending bourgeoisie as dirt, ugly, and "lack in culture," although each happened within very different socio-historical contexts with distinct social-political implications.

Within the state's internal orientalizing frame, rural people remained passive, silenced, and subdued subjects. When I asked the director of the County Family Planning Commission if he would give some compensations to the two suffered women in the opening vignette, the government agent replied "maybe." Yet his answer was immediately followed by a litany against the rural women:

[110] This point is inspired by Louisa Schein (1997). Following Said (1978), She pointed out that, in justifying its authority over the non-Han minorities, the Han Chinese state mobilized a discourse of Saidian orientalism, positioning the minorities on its periphery as internal Others. Schein coined a term, "internal orientalism," to signify such an important aspect of ethnic relationships in China (Schein 1997:73).

> "Nowadays there are too many 'unruly imposters' (*diaomin*). They will shamelessly take advantage of our government's well intention for even meager interests, regardless of whatever the potential infamy they may impose on us. … You cannot simply trust them—even with the proof from the village and township governments. Who knows all they said is true? If they have patience to come over again, maybe we'll consider it. But it's complicated. Who knows things over twenty years ago!"

In effect, throughout the metamorphosis of the key slogans for population control over the past two and a half decades, the state's grand modernity project was largely lack in consistent concern with, and sincere respect for, rural people's subjectivity. In this regard, from a humanistic perspective, I have to argue that the modernity project of Chinese state in light of its population control policy in rural area is highly snobbish, an arrogant, hegemonic blueprint aggravating the alienation of the subdued humanity, in a country claimed to be Marxist, whether during the Maoist socialist or post-socialist context.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSIONS

In spring 2011, while remaining in the U.S., I interviewed a provincial official over the phone. During our conversation, I asked the official how the government might apply the population control policy to "deported migrants" with one or more children born overseas (these Chinese migrants had initially managed to go to migrate overseas without legal status). I asked this question for a particular reason. Over the last decade and a half, as part of China's post-socialist engagement with global capitalism, the state has become increasingly eager to pursue technology, investment, and expertise in research, industry, and transnational business on the part of its citizens who now live overseas. As a result, beginning largely in the mid-1990s, the Chinese state came to accord birth policy exceptions to its most "civilized" citizens, without accusing them of "backwardness" as it has stigmatized peasants for additional births. Accordingly, diasporic citizens are now allowed to circumvent the government's one-child policy for the urban areas and may legally return to China with more than one child, as long as their "extra" children were born outside the Chinese territory. From this practice, the potential to bypass the state's population policy has come to signify an upper-middle-class identity for these diasporic mainland Chinese. By asking the provincial official this question, I hope to learn if the policy "exception" would be equally applied to those who have overseas childbearing experiences but lack decent educational and socioeconomic standings.

To my surprise, the official did not answer my question directly. Instead, he questioned me first, asking if my question was motivated by prior news reports that not a few illegal Chinese immigrants in the U.S. had used their stories of having multiple children to apply for refugee status (for permanent residency in the States), due to the Chinese government's stringent birth control policy. The official was indignant to this entrenched, popular image of China's population policy in the American media. He said that China's population policy is now very "humane" indeed and the previous popular stereotype of forced abortion and sterilization have been out of the picture for more than a decade. Without clearly answering my initial question, the official concluded our conversation by urging me to rebuke any further stigmatization of the nation's birth policy while I am in the States as a Chinese citizen.

The episode resonates major themes I have explored in my dissertation. On the one hand, since the 1990s the Chinese government has become highly vigilant to its global image of its population control policy, along with the state's yearning for international recognition as a constituent part of the nation's embrace of global capitalism. As I have presented in Chapters 3 and 6, since the 1990s the population policy discourse has increasingly served as what I would term the "political cosmetics" for the state to embellish its outlook to international audiences, while in the meantime continued to help legitimize its sustained intrusion into reproduction in changing socio-political contexts. In examining the metamorphoses of the state's political cosmetics underlying its population policy discourses, I ground my analysis against the broad context of China's post-socialist, globalizing transformations. In so doing, I aim to further unpack the intricacies and ironies of Chinese post-socialism in rural China, a massive yet (in the

state's view) socio-politically "backward" hinterland looming large at the nation's ambitious, globalizing present.

On the other hand, the provincial official's subtle but palpable contempt toward illegal overseas Chinese diasporas once again signals how the population control policy has entangled in delicate ways with class inequalities. Although I did not hear a direct response to my initial question from the provincial official, I was quite clear that these overseas Chinese with lower socioeconomic standing did not have a place in policy makers' mindset. As a result, to women with illegal overseas experiences, whether the state would also apply its birth policy "exceptions" to them remains an open question with numerous uncertainties. The opening episode in this chapter indicates how the broader category of "class" has subtly but profoundly shaped the Chinese state's population control policy articulations. In my dissertation, while I focus my analysis on rural China, I engage the broad question of "class" through my ethnographic scrutiny. In Chapter 2, I examine how the state's seeming "humane" family planning project has to a large degree become a "showbiz" performance with virtually no real substance in relation to birth control behind the nation's globalized image-managing efforts. In Chapter 4, I explore how class distinctions have effectively reconfigured the ways in which structural violence condition women's reproductive experiences. In Chapter 5, foregrounding the ways in which an emerging consciousness of class distinction has become entangled with villagers' reproductive decisions, I interrogate how peasants' awareness of class inequalities is now reshaping the contours of patrilineal gender ideology, in turn influencing their reproductive practices surrounding a reconfiguration of what counts as a "family line." In so doing, my dissertation speaks to feminist work that braids

reproduction and class—two aspects of human experience that, together, provide a lens through which not only cultural norms and social transformations, but also individual struggles, can be productively examined.

In my dissertation I actively engage with these two themes by examining how Chinese village women's reproductive experiences has been shaped by, entangled with, and acting against the state's recently postsocialist history, characterized by its continued but shifting political cosmetics as well as the deepening class differentiations over the past several decades. My dissertation explores how a shifting series of discursive constructions of peasants as "backward" subjects has legitimized the state's sustained intrusion into reproduction in rural China, and how rural residents' responses to the state's intimate intrusion has told a rich story of the nation's post-socialist strivings for modernity. In my dissertation, I analyze peasants' reproductive practices as they intersect with the politics, policies, and discourses of gender, class, kinship, and ethnic identities. More broadly, in this work I treat the state's population control efforts as emblematic of the nation's ambition to achieve modernity, and I combine this perspective with anthropological and feminist critiques of modernity, development, and state transformation to write a mini-historiography of post-socialism in rural China.

In making these empirical and theoretical efforts, in my ethnographic scrutiny I aim for my dissertation to become a symbolically and feminist-oriented historiography of "reform" in rural China. As a historiography, the underlying concerns that drive my dissertation predominantly engage intellectually and politically with the present, yet I broadly contextualize and firmly pursue my inquiry through an interrogation of China's recent history of "reform." With regard to "symbolic," I take reproduction in general—

and state-promoted family planning efforts in particular—as emblematic of the Chinese state's ambition to achieve modernity as played out in especially idiosyncratic ways in its rural hinterland. Combining these two perspectives, in my dissertation I first depicted the conditions of the state's birth control policy in rural residents' everyday lives at the nation's new millennium present, a moment when China is yearning to become a "respectable" member of "global society." I then traced the trajectory of this present moment back to its origins in the 1970s—including the metamorphosis of governmental birth policy and women's reproductive experiences, shifting policy slogans, and the increasingly important role of class and the privatization of state interests. In so doing, I endeavored to show how "modernity"—after delicate sociopolitical and discursive embellishments by the state, and modeled after its metropolitan settings—has been experienced by rural citizens in their everyday lives. In this sense, I hope my work is at once a feminist and a humanistic project.

While I was a child growing up in China, my mother suffered several years of debilitating post-surgical complications due to the state's mandatory sterilization campaign; thus from a young age, I experienced the intimate consequences of the state's stringent birth control project.[111] Now as a scholar, I feel compelled to forge a theoretically informed understanding of the biopolitics behind China's contemporary transformations. Examining village women's reproductive experiences while the state claims the intimate, my dissertation explicitly argues that feminist anthropological studies of ethically and politically fraught issues such as reproduction lie at the very center of social science investigations of the complex processes of political economy, as villagers'

[111] See my memoir of my early childhood experiences, following my mother's forced sterilization surgery (Appendix: "Learning to Keep House.")

reproductive experiences encapsulate China's emerging post-socialist conditions. Building on these themes, the larger project that encompasses both current my doctoral and the upcoming postdoctoral research captures the current historical moment of China's post-socialism, and interrogates the intricate—and often intimate—ethical, political, and ideological meanings of this moment for a broad range of Chinese citizens.

APPENDIX

LEARNING TO KEEP HOUSE

"Mom, I'm back…"

It is an afternoon at the end of September 1975, the first month of elementary school for me. As usual, I call my mother when I get close to the gate of our front yard. Using a voice to signal one's presence is the age-old custom of my family. Twenty-seven years ago, my home village, Yue, was a quiet place with about only forty households. All families, except one, descend from a common ancestor fourteen generations ago. Years of close daily interaction have made us all familiar with each other. I am almost six. At this age I know the voices of most of my close relatives. I will hear two stressed dry coughs with a brief stop in between—"erh!…erh!"—when my dad comes back. Mom coughs only once with a soft voice, followed by a call to my younger sister and me: "Shenshen, Ah'Yhen—— " Shenshen is my pet name, and Ah'Yhen is my sister's. She is three and a half.

Usually Mom will immediately respond to my call. But today she doesn't. Believing she must be at home, I repeat my call with a raised voice when I almost reach the gate of the front yard: "Mom——"

Mom is at home. When I walk into the gate, I see she is on the porch, sitting in a bamboo chair. She turns her head and smiles at me. To my surprise, there are also three men on a long wooden bench opposite her. This is odd. There are almost no strangers who come to our house, only neighbors and relatives.

Feeling insecure, I walk quietly toward Mom, standing at the back of her chair, staring at the strangers.

"Come on, Shenshen. This is uncle Zhuang. This is uncle Wang…"

Following Mom's introduction, I come forward and call them "uncles." They are my dad's age. In this area, kids are always told to show respect to strangers by calling them kinship terms.

By calling them "uncles," I feel less nervous. Zhuang, the man on the left, smiles and asks me if I can remember who he is.

Oh, yeah. I remember him. I've met him once in the barbershop in another village with my paternal grandpa. He is the (Communist) Party Secretary of our Brigade. Yue is a quite typical village in the coastal plain of East China. Above Yue is the "Production Brigade" comprised of eight villages nearby. Sixteen similar "Brigades" form the local "Commune." At the county level, there are seventy-one Communes in total. The Party Secretary is always the most powerful person at every level. I learned this when I was four years old. Everyone knows that everything is under the leadership of the Party.

I like Zhuang. He is so amicable. A "big name," the Party Secretary, remembers me after having just seen me once. I feel a little thrilled. I want to stay with Mom listening to their conversation.

"Shenshen, would you like go inside to do your homework?" Mom says in a very soft voice.

I have to obey. This is a command, in my understanding. I've just come back to this home for a month-and-a-half. In most of the past years, I lived with my maternal

grandma until I was almost six for school. Emotionally, I feel my grandma's house is my real home. When Mom proposed in the summer of 1975 to bring me back home for elementary school, I resisted fiercely. Yet my grandma finally managed to convince me. She told me that every good boy should go to school, and the only opportunity for me was to go back home. Without a correspondent household registration identity, I could not go to the school in my grandma's village. With Grandma's promise that she would go to see me frequently and I could stay with her for the whole summer and winter break, I left with endless tears.

Mom and Dad are so pleased that I finally came back for school. They treat me well. But I always feel that there is something between us. To my disappointment, unlike Grandma, they do not really understand me. They treat me the same way as they treat my sister. But Ah'Yhen has been with my parents since she was born. That's different. Mom and Dad think they treat us equally. But this equality makes me sick. Often, in my feeling, their best wishes always seem like endless commands: "Shenshen, you'd better do this, eat this, take that…." Endless "shoulds!"

Things are getting worse. Before I came back, my sister was the princess of the family. Now she seems a bit jealous. She regards me as an outsider. The only one I feel comfortable with is my paternal grandpa. He has four sons, but I'm the only grandson. He loves me wholeheartedly. I know. While I was living with Grandma, every month or two, he would come to see me, bringing fruits, cookies, and candies. Yet he lives with my uncle, his second son; I can't stay with him. In fact, I don't want to stay with him for long periods. He is addicted to smoking. Every short while, accompanying his incessant smoking, Grandpa will have a spell of deep, strong coughs. I don't like the smell of

burning cigarettes and the noise of the coughs. I'm a very quiet kid. I love a quiet environment with fresh air. In my parents' eyes, I'm an obedient child and will get accustomed to their style. Yet they don't know, in reality, I'm a lonely soul in this loving family. If my grandma were here this afternoon, she would not drive me away to my room. I miss the seamless intimacy I once enjoyed with her.

The second morning, after breakfast, I go to school with Grandpa. It's raining heavily. The school is less than a half-mile away from Yue, but I have to go over two bridges. Grandpa thinks it's dangerous to let me go alone.

"Shenshen, do you know several local officials visited your family yesterday?"

"Um-hum."

"Do you know why they came?"

"No," I shake my head, "Mom didn't let me listen."

"Oh—…I'll tell you. They were persuading your mother to have an operation."

"Surgery?!" I get worried. "Is she sick?"

"No, not at all."

"So why?" I'm eager to know the reason.

"Shenshen, do you know, now, women can't have many children? Haven't you heard anything in school?"

"Ha, about children"—I feel relieved—"of course, I know. I heard it last Friday in our school's weekly meeting. Our schoolmaster read a newspaper article to us. Grandpa, you know Fang, the student in the fifth grade? He told me later that women should be fixed if they already had three kids. I know how people fix roosters. That's horrible.

Grandpa, you must be wrong, for my mom only has Ah'Yhen and me. Grandma told me that my mom is very satisfied with having two kids. She won't have any more."

"That's true. But the thing is not like you had thought. You are too young to understand the article…Yes, women who have three children must have the surgery. But that's not all. It also include those who have two kids with at least one of them a boy. Your mother is among the targets."

"So Mom has agreed?"

"She has no alternative. Shenshen, you know your mom's family origin. People like her should follow closely the instruction of the Party. You should understand."

Of course I understand. My mom was born in 1942 in a local intellectual elite family five miles from my village. For more than four hundred years, every generation of her family had some provincially or even nationally famous scholars. Nonetheless, beginning in 1949, the glorious family history became an unbearable burden to my mom and her siblings after the Party "liberated" the Mainland. The Party claimed that the new regime is for the interest of the proletariat, while my mom's family belonged to the opposite, "exploiting class"(*boxue jieji*), which should be suppressed by the Communist state. Grandma told me that Mom was one of the most brilliant students in high school. Yet her family background prevented her from entering leading national universities such as Peking and Fudan. After waiting anxiously at home for a couple of months, Mom was accepted by a teacher's college. She was lucky. In the last semester of her senior year, however, adversity fell again. The Party said, because Mom was born into a family of the exploiting class, she should be sent down—exiled—to a rural area to remold her "worldview" through years of physical ordeals (as a farmer) without the college degree

she should have earned. I've learned this is a very serious issue. In my grandma's village, no kid from proletariat families was encouraged to play with me—I was a kid radiating contamination of the exploiting class. As a result, most of my childhood life in Grandma's house was spent reading and memorizing Chinese classics.

"Grandpa, will Mom be OK after the surgery, and no one will laugh at her?" Knowing Mom's surgery is certain, the only thing left for me is the horrible image of fixing roosters.

"Of course she'll be OK. It's not just your mom. Many others will also have the surgery. It's serious and honorable to respond to the call of the Party. Who dares to laugh at her?"

"Um-hum." Grandpa's words convinced me. He is right. If my mom has to have the surgery, many of my classmates' mothers will also. Most of them have three or more siblings.

Ten days later, Saturday afternoon, I go to the small town with two of my distant cousins, who are also my classmates, to buy some stationery. The town is only about a mile from Yue. We chat and sing songs learned from school. Within half an hour, after going through one big village and over three bridges, we arrive at the town. It is really a tiny place with only about a dozen small shops, most of which are mainly groceries, as well as a one-room restaurant, a fabric store and, of course, a stationery shop which also sells books.

Actually, purchasing stationery is not the major goal for my short trip. After buying five pencils and a white eraser, I tell my cousins that I want to see my mom at the

headquarters of the Commune—a sub-county level administrative unit in the Maoist era—not far from the stationery shop. If they don't want to wait, I tell them, they can go home themselves. My friends say they'd like to wait for me because they want to browse through the picture-story books in the stationery shop. One of my cousins' mothers is also slated to have the surgery, but she is on the waiting list for the operation the next week.

Five days ago, my mom and many other women were taken to the Commune headquarters to wait for the surgery. Early this morning, Dad told me that Mom had the operation yesterday evening, and would be back home soon. But he didn't tell me if Mom is safe or not before he left hurriedly for work. Maybe he forgot. These days Dad is too busy. I decided to make sure myself.

Besides, I have a gift for Mom. Yesterday morning, my dad steamed three chicken eggs—in their shells—to console me in my loneliness on my sixth birthday. This was quite unusual. Normally, I'll only have one or two eggs for my birthday. Of the three eggs for my birthday, I only ate one. I know eggs are nutritious for patients—otherwise why do women in the village eat a lot of eggs during the "Month of Confinement" after giving birth to a baby? I put the two other cooked eggs in my drawer, covered with old newspapers. I want to give Mom a surprise.

With Mom gone nearly a week, the home is empty and lifeless. The day before my Mom was put in the Commune, Dad sent my sister to my grandma's. Grandpa is already in his seventies. He can't take care of both my sister and me. Grandpa can't cook, either. My dad has to cook the meals for the whole day in the morning before he rides his bicycle to work in the city six miles away from the village.

Compared with Dad, Mom is much more tender, though I also don't feel very comfortable with her style of treating me. To me, Dad is a half stranger. He is an electrical engineer. Until I was three years old, he worked in a city for seven years in north China about two thousand miles from Yue, after graduating from a military engineering college. We have spent very little time together even after he came back to our county. He is polite and nice to me, but I don't think he has ever entered my life. To him, my sister is a princess. I miss my Mom.

The Commune headquarters is about a hundred yards west of the stationery shop. To my six-year-old's eyes, it's huge. The main building is a three-floor house. I ask the entrance guard—an old man, maybe in his late fifties, with a blue Maoist jacket, which is the standard color and style of clothes for government staff—if my mom was here for the surgery yesterday. I tell him I haven't seen her for five days. The man is very sympathetic. He tells me that the surgery is done on the opposite side of town, in another place owned by the Commune. I have to walk eastbound for about two hundred and fifty yards, after going over two bridges.

"If someone asks you why you've come there, you can mention me," he tells me. His family name is Huang.

About ten minutes later, I find the place. It's a large, old house surrounded by high walls, like my grandma's. I guess maybe it belonged to a local elite family before the "liberation." Fortunately, the young entry guard does not ask me any questions. He tells me the surgery was over yesterday for this group of women. "If I'm not mistaken, your mother is in the large east room."

He’s right. I immediately recognize my mom when I look through the window of that room. She is covered with a cotton quilt, with one side of red silk embroidered with a cluster of peonies, a Chinese folk symbol of happiness and safety. This is part of Mom's dowry. My dad brought it to her the day she was sent here.

Like the other women, Mom is lying almost directly on the ground near the northeast corner, with another cotton quilt covering a door plank as her mattress. Her eyes are closed. The room is very large, about four to five times the living room of our house. A huge photo of Chairman Mao is on the wall. There are about thirty women in the room, maybe more.

"Mom, Mom. Are you asleep?"

"Aha, Shenshen. It's you!" Mom opens her eyes. She looks pale, and her hair is uncombed.

"I'm not sleeping, just closed eyes for rest." Mom smiles. "How did you get here? It's dangerous to go over bridges. You know two bridges on the road are without railings."

To assure her that I'll be safe going back home, I tell her I came with two friends, and they are waiting for me in the stationery shop.

"Mom, do you feel OK?"

"Yes, of course."

"So when can you come home?"

"Soon. Shenshen, be patient. Just a few more days."

"That's so good." I'm relieved.

"Shenshen, now you should go home. Grandpa will be worried if you're away for too long."

"Um-hum…"

"Shenshen, go, go… Be a good boy. It's too messy here."

Knowing I have to go, I take two eggs out of my pocket: "Mom, it's for you."

"Shenshen, good boy!" Mom is surprised—I'm pleased. "Mom, take them. It's good for you."

"Shenshen, you take it. It's your birthday gift."

"How come you know, Mom?" I'm surprised.

"Your dad told me last night after the surgery. He told me you're a good boy. Mom knows eggs are good. But Mom has other nutritious food…" She opens her mouth, along with the left palm moving toward it, mimicking eating eggs.

"Shenshen, Mom has eaten the eggs. It's delicious. Thank you. Now you take yours. Don't keep them too long. They may spoil tomorrow." She puts the eggs back in my pocket.

I have to leave. The sun is setting on the mountains in the west. Grandpa will be worried if I linger here for too long. I reluctantly leave the room with the hope that Mom will soon come home as energetic as before. Mom is not tall, only about five feet two, but she is always full of vim and vigor, even in the adverse years after being exiled to the rural areas from college.

Yet Mom does not come home as soon as the other women who had the surgery the same day. With five other women (two from Yue, including Mom), Mom stayed in the

Commune for another week-and-a-half. Everyone in the village knows that there something went wrong during Mom and another woman's surgery. Later, Grandma tells me that Mom's surgery failed. The doctor cut more than he should have cut for a tubal ligation. As result, Mom has serious post-surgery complications, in addition to an infection right at the incision.

The news spreads to my school. My teachers exhibit concern for Mom and my family. Yet their consolation also becomes a burden on me. All of a sudden, too much attention has been drawn to me from the school and the village. A couple of my classmates, who are naïve about the severity of my mom's sickness—most of them are seven or eight—sometimes make jokes or even pull pranks on me:

"My mom is sick, my mom is sick…," in a mimicking voice.

"One of our roosters was fixed wrong…" This cruel joke makes me furious.

I try to fight, but I'm not their match. I am one or two years younger than my classmates—I started school a month before six, which was a year earlier than the bottom line age of seven. I report the bullying to the teacher, but it's not always effective. Luckily, in about two weeks, the pranksters finally lose interest in tormenting me. Yet their jokes have left an uneasy memory that will disturb me for years.

The more mundane yet concrete challenge comes from my own family. In late October my mom is back—lying on a door plank carried by Dad and some neighbors. She is just in her early thirties, yet her face looks fatigued and pale. Her eyes are not as shiny as they were before the surgery. Without a bath for weeks, her hair is colorless and unkempt. She has no energy to open her mouth—to mimic eating eggs once more. The

air in my home feels so muggy and stuffy, although it's already the chilly late fall. Yet the issue still goes far beyond my pessimistic imagination. My mom will spend most of her days—in addition to all her nights, of course—in bed in the coming two years and seven months.

In the beginning there are always some relatives—such as my grandma and her younger daughters, my two maternal aunts—who come to help with the housework. My grandma comes quite frequently. Sometimes she stays for a month. Her house is about five miles away. But Dad spends more than half of his salary buying medications for my mother, and the financial support my family can provide for Grandma becomes less and less and almost stops a year later. Grandma has to depend more and more on herself. My two aunts are not always available. One of my mom's younger sisters just had a daughter in late August, and she is busy taking care of the baby, in addition to working on the village farm to make a living. My Mom's youngest sister is an accountant at a factory twenty miles away. Although she is still single, the distance has prevented her from frequently helping my family. As a result, the housekeeping tasks fall onto the shoulders of Dad and Grandpa . . . and, gradually, onto my small and weak shoulders.

Daily housekeeping is always trivial, yet a myriad of trivia will add up to a huge burden. In the fall of 1975, my family has four ducks and nine hens for laying eggs, as well as thirteen roosters to provide meat in the winter, and for the spring festival. The latter is China's traditional New Year. In less than a month, people usually have to spend quite a large amount of money to entertain relatives. In order to save some money for the winter holidays, local people, including my family, usually raise their own fowl such as chickens, ducks, or geese. Feeding the fowl is loaded with trivial details. For example,

to feed chickens, one has to prepare feed every three to four hours—from early morning, around 4:30 a.m. in summer and 6 a.m. in winter, until dusk. Otherwise the hen won't lay eggs regularly, and the rooster won't be as big as your neighbor's. Rural life is not so idyllic as many have imagined. Life is full of mutual comparison and competition, and by the end of the year, if your rooster is a pound or two lighter than your neighbor's, you'll feel disgraced, sensing others judge you incompetent, or even lazy.

Another daily chore is cooking. Before he leaves for work, Dad usually prepares the meal and rice for the whole day for Mom, me, himself and, sometimes, Grandpa—Grandpa is never a very competent cook. While my mom is sick, most of the time my younger sister stays with Grandma. Every noon, Grandpa has to reheat the food for Mom. Yet at the age of seventy, Grandpa is too old to learn to cook, even very basic skills. Before his second wife, my dad's stepmother, died six years ago, Grandpa had seldom touched chores related to the kitchen. Just reheating lunch for Mom and me is almost beyond his ability. Sometime he makes very naïve mistakes. More than once, when he lights the kitchen range to reheat the lunch by steaming it, he forgets to put water into the pot—until he smells something burning. At that moment most of the food is almost totally charred. Mom and Dad feel very sorry for having ensnared him in daily chores.

By the end of 1975, I volunteer to help Grandpa with the lunch after I come back from school around 11 a.m. Gradually, we develop a division of labor. Grandpa sets the fire for the kitchen range; I am in charge of the pot as well as adding plant fuels such as rice or cotton stalks into the chamber of the kitchen range. At this time, Grandpa's vision is already poor. Mom says that it's dangerous to let him be in charge of the fire. Dad and she encourage me to fuel the fire. If I have any questions, I can walk into Mom's room to

ask her. At the age of six, I am a very cautious, responsible, yet still very inexperienced cook. Almost every day, my little forearms will be more or less burned by sparks from the fire. But I don't want to let Grandpa, Dad and, especially Mom, know. Otherwise they will feel guilty. To conceal my burns, I wear long-sleeve shirts for the next two-and-a-half years.

After the spring of 1976, it seems unlikely Grandpa can help me with the lunch every day. First, my dad, his beloved youngest son, feels very sorry for keeping him laboring at such an old age. Second, in terms of family relationships, Grandpa is experiencing extreme pressure. He has four sons, with three of them living adjacent to each other. Since the death of his second wife, Grandpa started to "rotate" his daily meal from one of his son's family to the other every three days. Since fall 1975, he has been helping my family while having meals in my uncles' houses for more than half a year. Now my uncles' wives are complaining that Grandpa is showing bias toward his sons. To exhibit their dissatisfaction, a couple of times when Grandpa helped reheat food for Mom and me and then went back to my uncle's house for lunch, his meal and rice was cold or the bowl even almost empty. To Grandpa, this is not an overlookable humiliation. When Dad learns this, he asks Grandpa not to help us when he won't be eating his meal at our house. Even when the meal is at our house, he does not have to heat the lunch himself, as long as I can handle it. The only thing he asks of Grandpa is that when I'm in the kitchen, he'd better sit nearby—in case I make mistakes, especially with the fire. I am still only six-and-a-half. I remember one night in late spring, about the end of April 1976, Dad walking into my room and asking me if I understand his intentions.

"Shenshen, Mom and I are very sorry because you're still too young for the housework. But Mom is sick. We must heal your mom. A family without a mom is not a family. You understand?"

I understand, of course. In the past months, I have not only become an indispensable part of my family, I have also begun to understand the ways of the world—the vicissitudes of life. In November of last year, in the days when Mom was still in an intermittent coma, Grandma began to teach me how to do some basic needlework like stitching quilts and sewing on buttons. She told me if my mom is gone, I'll have to do it myself because she herself is getting old with weaker vision, Dad has to work, and my sister is too young—only four. Grandma told me, "A good boy is not only good at school, but also helps parents with the housework—Shenshen, you understand?" Of course I understand. I have to understand because I have no alternative.

Dad further tells me that he knows that I wish Grandpa would stay with me every day, especially during such a hard time. But currently he can't support Grandpa himself because "we have to save Mom's life." Dad says now the only thing he can guarantee for Grandpa is one pack of cigarettes a day, plus the "rotated" meals at our house. "Shenshen, this is what I can do for Grandpa. You understand?"

Of course, I understand—for saving Mom, for Grandpa not being explicitly humiliated at such an old age if he helps me cook lunch. Somehow, I am understanding what I have to understand, because I have no alternative.

Now, in the late spring of 1976, I have taken over quite a lot of the housework, especially feeding the fowl and re-heating our daily lunch.

I'm already quite acquainted with lunch. Feeding the chickens is largely a fixed routine. Dad feeds the earliest round. I then do the second by mixing the feed—rice bran and vegetable leaves—around 6:30 a.m. The third meal for the chickens is around 11 am. After a large second feed, the chickens usually won't be very hungry. In most cases, they will also search for some food themselves such as beetles and worms. Before I return to school around 2 p.m., I provide the fourth meal. Near evening, I prepare the last feed, a large quantity—for the chickens to gain weight—before they go back to the coop for the night. That's all. Chickens recognize their coop when dusk falls. My last job is to close the gate of the coop in case weasels come.

Taking care of the ducks is more difficult. I don't have to feed them much, just once at noon and again before they go back to the coop in the evening. In the early morning, Dad releases them from the coop. "Ga, ga, ga…" They rush happily toward the pond at the east edge of the village, or to the narrow canal fifty yards north of Yue—for a nutritious fresh live breakfast such as minnows, small shellfish, and fresh water snails. Yet once or twice a week, one or two ducks forget to return home or get lost on the road in the evening. (In this village, a duck is taken as a symbol of low intelligence. People sometimes say: "He is as stupid as a duck.") When this happens, my job is to start looking for the lost ducks after locking the chickens and the returned ducks in the coop,. Based on daily contact with them, I'm quite familiar with their habits and their habitual travel route. In most situations, I will find the lost duck(s) within half an hour. But sometime the search proves difficult. One evening, I remember, I kept looking for a lost duck for almost two hours, without any luck. When I came home despondently, to my

surprise, my dad told me that a neighbor had found the lost duck in their coop and had sent it back a while ago.

During the summer break of 1976—I am almost seven—one more task enters into my daily routine: to decoct (*jian*) medicinal herbs—that is, to boil the herbs in water to make a cup of herbal medical medicine—as prescribed by Chinese traditional doctors. After almost nine months of biomedication offered by local doctors, my mom still doesn't have hope of a substantial recovery. Following a friend's suggestion, Dad begins to try herbal medicines. After years of everyday contact with it, I now have a preliminary knowledge of Chinese herb medicine. The prescription of herbs, based on the individual practitioner's experience, is a delicate combination—in terms of both the type and the quantity of different medicines—of various herbs and, sometimes, pieces of dried flesh or skeleton of small animals (such as seahorses), or animal organs or bones (such as deer antler and small, freshwater turtle shell). Because Mom's hope for a full recovery is still very meager, Dad counts highly on the traditional medicine.

The procedure of decocting medicine is somewhat mysterious. For example, the water for decocting, I am told, must be water from the river because—according to one of the many sayings—it contains the essence of the earth. Luckily, at that time, very few rivers around the local area are obviously polluted by industry.

Now, my added job that summer is to go to the canal north of the village around 6 a.m. I find a place with no ducks or geese nearby—otherwise the water is deemed contaminated. Using a locally made pottery container, I go down to fetch some river water. Then I go back home with the water, letting the container set for about two hours,

which is considered to be sufficient to let the sediments settle. Around 8 a.m., I fetch four cups of water—about three pounds—from the top of the container. I add it to a porcelain pot with a dose of the prescribed herbs, then start to heat the pot on the stove. The basic skill for decocting the medical herbs is that, in the beginning, I must turn the flame to the maximum level to make the mixture boil as soon as possible. When the pot begins to boil, however, I have to turn the flame down to the minimum level. This way, it is believed that the power of the dose will be fully released. About an hour later, the herbal medicine is done. But I still have to filter the dense, sometimes sticky, herbal concoction into a cup, ideally producing 5-6 ounces of liquid. Because the decoction is so hot, most times Grandpa will help me to filter it, and I carry it to Mom when the medicine is still very warm—which is considered the best temperature for healing. After the first round of decoction is filtered, Grandpa or I will add another three pounds of river water to the pot. Around 2:30 p.m., I repeat the same process. By then the power/essence of the dose is believed to have been depleted—it becomes the "dregs of a dose" (*yaozha*). When the pot is cooled down, I go to the east or west end of the main village road and throw the "dregs" onto the road. The dregs will be stepped on by passers-by, villagers and outsiders alike, who are believed to carry away my mom's illness. To my pleasure, the dregs, which are said to have carried Mom's sickness, won't transfer the disease onto those who have stepped on it. The happiest time of day is always the moment when I carry the dregs to throw them on the road.

Usually, in taking the herbal medicine, the unit for a course of treatment is ten days, sometimes a month. If both Mom and the doctor think the prescription is effective, the course will be extended. By the time Mom can totally leave her bed in the early summer

of 1978, I am eight years old and have had nearly two years' experience of decocting the medicinal herbs.

Maybe due to the herbal medicine, my mother begins to exhibit the signs of substantial recovery, although the process is still extremely slow. Thrilled by the positive inklings, Dad devotes more time and money in seeking miraculous herbal prescriptions. At the same time, he still invests in biomedicine as well, because he is not sure which one is responsible for the amelioration of Mom's illness. As long as she is recovering, he decides to lay his bets on both sides.

My mom's post-surgery complication is implicitly recognized by the local brigade as a "medical accident." However, the remedy and compensation are very limited. It includes two parts: first, the brigade and Commune will reimburse Dad for about thirty percent of his medical expenses, as long as my father presents official receipts; second, my family can get our annual quota of rice from the village of Yue at the stabilized price offered by the government (otherwise, according to official regulations, we would not qualify for the rice quota since we don't work on the collective farm). In the 1970s, grain is in short supply, and strictly controlled by the Maoist state. Without that government quota, it would be very difficult for my family to buy rice elsewhere, even at a much higher price. As for the partial medical reimbursement, my dad starts to query about the herbal medicine. He finds out that he cannot get a refund because most of the herbal prescriptions are from folk doctors outside of the state's medical agency, and so it is impossible for them to give Dad "official receipts." As a result, although the herbal medicines are largely much cheaper than the biomedicines, after a year, Dad finds that he

has spent quite a large amount of money on the herbal medication in addition to his purchases of biomedicine.

This expense was added to another. A year before my Mom's surgery, in fall 1974, Dad and Mom had just built a new house. The project cost almost every penny of my parents' savings. Before my mom had the post-surgery complication, my family was quite well off by village standards. Now, due to the combined consequence of these two events, in the spring of 1978, my family begins to encounter the most difficult time. Because I'm in charge of lunch, I realize the quality and quantity of the meal are decreasing. A year ago, I could have meat or fish two or three times a week. Now, the lunch is largely composed of rice and vegetables, occasionally with tofu and eggs. Another problem is cooking oil. In the 1970s, cooking oil is always in short supply. Yet before that spring, we could manage somehow to have the minimum amount of oil for daily meals. Now, at least one or two days a week, we don't have any oil for the meal. In my village, tasty meals are usually stir-fried. Without oil, the meal becomes flavorless.

One day, while I am walking along the western end of the village road for school, I meet a teenager from my village. He and my dad are related distantly; I call him Little Uncle. To my surprise, he has a full bamboo basket of fish, mostly carp and crucian carp—*jiyu*, a type of small, tasty fish very common around the local area.

"Where did you get so many fish, Little Uncle?"

"At the Tang Dam."

"How?"

"Shenshen, let me tell you. The dam over there has two ship lock gates. Before the gates are lifted up, the water of the upper reaches will rise up, and leaks somehow to the

lower reaches. When the water flows down the gate, it draws quite a large amount of fish, especially in the early morning around 5 am when there are few waiting ships to disturb their migration against the water flow."

"Really?"

"Of course. Everyone knows fish like traveling against the flow. You dad will surely believe it. Tell him to have a try. He'll get a lot of fish—maybe much more than me today."

Two days later it's Friday. During dinner, I tell Dad what Little Uncle has told me about the fish at the Tang Dam.

"Dad, is what he said true?"

"Yes. Fish like migrating against the water, especially in the spring."

"Dad, why don't we go to have a try? Maybe we can catch more. I learned to go fishing with a rod in the summer before I started school. And you like fishing, too. But—Dad—our fishing rods having been laying idle, collecting dust for years."

"I know, I know. But I don't have any time to do it. Early tomorrow morning I'm going far away to consult a good herbal doctor. You see, Mom is getting better and better. When she is fully recovered, I'll take you fishing. OK?"

I feel so disappointed. Of course, OK! But why should I always be expected to UNDERSTAND everything? Don't you notice there is very little fish or meat that appears on our dining table?

The next morning, shortly after Dad releases the fowl and leaves for consulting the herbal doctor, I immediately get up. Quietly getting a small bamboo fishing rod and a bamboo basket, I walk hurriedly toward the Tang Dam, about two miles away. In less

than an hour, I'm standing by the north side of the bank near the lock gate, where I see water flowing down the river.

"Shenshen, are you here, alone?"

It's Little Uncle. He is on the other side of the bank. He has come here earlier than I. I nod my head, feeling a little embarrassed. If I can't catch even one small fish, it will be a joke in the village.

"Shenshen, I also just arrived. Come here. Your place is not good."

I walk over to his side. Compared with him, I'm just too little—I'm only eight-and-a-half—with no knowledge of how to fish in a dam.

"Shenshen, this place is much better than that one. You see, here the water flow is larger than there—but also, in the corner between the gate and the bank, the water is relatively static. Fish like places like this. Shenshen, you have earthworms for bait?"

"Yeah. Of course." I show him a dozen large earthworms I just dug out at the side of the road on my way to the dam. They're too large, but I don't have time to prepare smaller ones.

"That's not the type for fishing with a rod. Use mine, I have plenty."

Little Uncle's are small earthworms the size of a match, the best bait for rod fishing. I learned it three years ago in Grandma's village.

"Oh…this must be your dad's rod, right? It's too heavy for you. Let's exchange. Mine is much lighter. It's better for you."

I take his bamboo rod. It's a little shorter, more slender, and much lighter. It's much easier for me to manage.

Fishing near the dam is very different from angling in the small pond near Grandma's house. The pond is quiet, yet I always have to wait for a quarter or even half an hour for one or two bites. Here, I can't see clearly what's going on in the water, because it's still barely dawn. But the brisk sound of the gushing water gives me a sense of lively, sanguine hope. It makes me feel a little relaxed, waiting for the fish's first bite…

"Shenshen, raise the rod. Your bait is bitten!"

I widen my eyes. Yes. The float made of goose feather is being pulled down into the water. Moving backward with the rod quickly at first—the basic skill for a novice fisherman—I feel something weighty on the end of my fishing line.

"The fish is baited!" I exclaim. Then I try to move the rod further backward, but slowly. It's a red carp, and it seems to be over a pound.

"Shenshen, great! Today it's you that made a good beginning."

But the final luck belongs to Little Uncle. Two hours later, he has caught six carp, with one more than three pounds, as well as a dozen crucian carp and other smaller fish. I got three carp, all of similar size, as well as about ten crucian carp and some minnows.

When Dad comes back in the afternoon, the fish really gives him a surprise. He cooks it, but doesn't eat much. I tell Dad that now I can go fishing myself. Dad says I'll be a good fisherman, but next time I go, I must have a companion, preferably Little Uncle.

That spring and early summer, Little Uncle and I go out fishing more than ten times. He is a lively and warmhearted person. He quit school just one semester before graduating from junior high. Little Uncle likes activities such as fishing and snaring birds such as sparrows, and is very good at them. A couple of times, when we have a big

harvest in rod fishing, we even manage to sell some of them—his and mine—at the morning farmer's market. During this period of financial hardship, even a small increase in cash will mean a banquet for my family.

In summer 2002, after studying in the United States for two years, I went back to China to visit my parents for a week. They have been living in the city for a decade-and-a-half. Shortly after I went abroad, Dad retired. I found out, while home, that Dad had difficulty filling all his retirement time. After getting up early in the morning to take exercise for two hours, he had to count on reading stereotyped state-sponsored newspapers, and watching how neighbors play Chinese chess. A day before I left to return to the US, I suggested to Dad that maybe he could try occupying some time by going out fishing with a rod. To my surprise, he didn't respond with a word. Finding some coins, he said he had to go out to buy the newspaper. After he had gone downstairs, Mom told me that Dad could not bear to go fishing ever since that extremely hard spring and summer of 1978. He still feels so sorry for having me learn to keep house at such a young age.

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