



THE IMPACT OF REFORM ON WOMEN'S WORK
AND GENDER DIVISIONS OF LABOUR
IN RURAL CHINA,
1978-1993

A Thesis

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Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the impact of reforms introduced by the Chinese state since 1978 on women's work and gender divisions of labour in rural areas. The aims are first, to understand the mechanisms through which certain gender divisions of labour have changed, whilst others have been maintained, and second, to explore the relationship between gender divisions of labour and other aspects of gender relations.

In pursuing these aims, I have integrated an analysis of material causes and effects of gender divisions of labour with an examination of the values and meanings surrounding those divisions. I argue that gender divisions of labour in rural China are constructed and operate through a number of conceptual dichotomies. The dichotomies which I focus on as being of particular importance are between 'outside' and 'inside' domains of work, and between 'heavy' and 'light' work. In some instances a dichotomy between 'skilled' and 'unskilled' work also operates. In each of these dichotomies the second element is seen as associated with women and is, in important ways, devalued and made secondary to the first element, which is associated with men.

My contention is not that the actual work of women and men in rural China falls strictly into separate categories according to these dichotomies. Rather, the dichotomies can be thought of as sets of values and assumptions shaping the work opportunities and choices of women and men, the ways in which

work is recognised, and the ways in which gender identities are maintained.

Since 1978 reforms initiated by the state have involved radical alterations to the organisation of work and the kinds of work undertaken by women and men in rural China. In the process, the particular types of work defined as 'outside' or 'inside', 'heavy' or 'light', 'skilled' or 'unskilled' have changed. At the same time, however, the dichotomies themselves and the values attached to each element of the dichotomies have been maintained, and indeed, reinforced.

This combination of reinforcement and change in values and assumptions concerning work and gender identities has been central to the maintenance of some existing gender divisions of labour and the construction and legitimation of new divisions. This process has, in turn, meant that overall, the reforms have not led to an improvement in rural women's status. Rather, certain aspects of women's subordination have intensified and others have been altered or broken down, only to form new patterns of subordination.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ACWF	All-China Women's Federation
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
FNGZ	<i>Funu Gongzuo [Woman-Work]</i> (An internal periodical, produced monthly for members of the All-China Women's Federation)
GMRB	<i>Guangming Ribao [Bright Daily]</i>
NMRB	<i>Nongmin Ribao [Peasants' Daily]</i>
PRC	People's Republic of China
RMRB	<i>Renmin Ribao [People's Daily]</i>
SWB	<i>Summary of World Broadcasts</i> (BBC)
ZGFN	<i>Zhongguo Funu [Chinese Women]</i> (A periodical published monthly by the All-China Women's Federation for mass consumption)
ZGFNB	<i>Zhongguo Funu Bao [Chinese Women's Daily]</i>
ZGNMB	<i>Zhongguo Nongmin Bao [Chinese Peasants' Daily]</i>

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

**Theoretical Concerns**

Since 1978 a re-evaluation by the CCP of Chinese Marxism and an implementation of a set of policies constituting an approach to social and economic development very different from that espoused under Mao Zedong have resulted in major social, political and economic changes. These changes, not the least of which has been a greater degree of openness, have been accompanied by a plethora of analyses of them. New opportunities have developed for social scientists in China and elsewhere to observe change in Chinese society, and to theorise about how such change occurs. Scholars have, for example, analysed the interactions between different interest groups and how these shape politics and economic change; the relationship between political or ideological reforms and changes in the economy; and the effect of economic reforms on different sectors of society and how these in turn feed back into reforms.¹

One theoretical issue that has been relatively neglected, however, has been that of the mechanics of change in gender relations in the post-reform period. This thesis will, I hope, go some way toward rectifying that omission. In it I examine the changes that have occurred since 1978 in gender relations in rural areas as they affect rural women,

¹ For examples, see the articles in Watson 1992b.

concentrating, in particular, on women's work and gender divisions of labour and the complex interrelations between these and other aspects of gender relations.

By 'gender relations' I mean both the social organisation of people into the categories 'man' and 'woman', and the interactions between members of these two different categories. In discussing divisions of labour between 'men' and 'women' I use the term '*gender divisions of labour*' rather than the more common '*sexual division of labour*' as a way of emphasising that there is not one division but many, and that these divisions are not a natural or inevitable consequence or reflection of sexual differences. As Joan Scott puts it,

gender is the social organization of sexual difference. But this does not mean that gender reflects or implements fixed and natural physical differences between women and men; rather gender is the knowledge that establishes meanings for bodily differences. These meanings vary across cultures, social groups, and time since nothing about the body, including women's reproductive organs, determines univocally how social divisions will be shaped. We cannot see sexual difference except as a function of our knowledge about the body and that knowledge is not 'pure', cannot be isolated from its implication in a broad range of discursive contexts (Scott 1988b, p.2).

Much of my thesis will necessarily be concerned simply with charting the ways in which particular gender divisions of labour have changed since 1978, while others, apparently, have not. However, my main aim will be to try to understand how the perpetuation of some divisions and the changes in

others have taken place, and what implications these patterns have for gender relations.

I am interested, in particular, in the ways in which the effects of recent structural reforms on gender divisions of labour have been shaped firstly, by existing social structures, and secondly, by already current values and assumptions concerning on the one hand, different types of work, and on the other, what it means to be 'male' or 'female' in rural China. In addition, I am concerned with changes to social values that have been promoted by the state alongside structural reforms, because I believe that these too have contributed to newly emerging divisions of labour and to the acceptance, by and large, of these divisions as legitimate and natural. Finally, I wish to address the question of the extent to which women have benefited from the reforms by examining the impact of new gender divisions of labour on the nature of work undertaken by women, women's participation in family decision making, political affairs and education, and on values and assumptions about women's identity and their position in society.

Women's work and gender divisions of labour have, in different ways, been issues of major concern in both Chinese Marxist and western feminist, especially socialist feminist, approaches to gender inequalities. Thus, it is hoped that this study, apart from contributing to a western understanding of Chinese society, will both contribute to the discussions of gender relations and the development of

strategies to overcome gender inequalities within China and, by extending the evidence marshalled in western feminist debates to include information from and about China, may perhaps generate new reflections on, and insights into, gender relations in other societies.

What I believe will be of particular value in the theoretical approach taken in this thesis is the integration of an analysis of material causes and effects of gender divisions of labour with an examination of the values and meanings surrounding those divisions. In the course of the thesis I will develop a model of gender divisions of labour in rural China which sees them as being constructed and operating through a number of conceptual dichotomies, which are connected with what is perceived as a dichotomy between 'male' and 'female'. The two dichotomies which I focus on as being of particular importance are between 'outside' ('wai') and 'inside' ('nei') domains of work and between 'heavy' ('zhong') and 'light' ('qing') work. I will show that in some instances a dichotomy between 'skilled' or 'technical' ('jishu') and 'unskilled' or 'manual' ('shougong') work also operates. In each of these dichotomies the first element is seen as associated with men, and the second with women.

My contention is not that the actual work of women and men in rural China falls strictly into separate categories according to these dichotomies. Rather, the dichotomies can be thought of as sets of values and assumptions, or as stereotypes, shaping the work opportunities and choices of women and men,

the ways in which work is recognised, and the ways in which notions of gender identity are maintained. These stereotypes are reproduced at all levels of society, from children's education through to the recruitment policies of rural industry employers and the work patterns of individual women and men.

However, values and stereotypes are not static. Thus, outside/inside, heavy/light and skilled/unskilled dichotomies have a range of meanings and associations in rural China, and in addition, the relations between them and the actual work women and men do have been changing over time.

Heavy/light is a relatively straightforward dichotomy between 'heavy' work or work demanding a high degree of physical strength and 'light' work that is often also tedious, time consuming and 'fiddly', and a concomitant categorisation of men and women according to a perception of men as physiologically more able to undertake heavy work than women and of women as being more capable of lighter work and work which involves dexterity and patience. It is important to note, however, that despite the common recourse to differences between male and female physiology as an explanation of this dichotomy, there are major inconsistencies and variations in local definitions of what types of work are 'heavy' and what types of work are 'light'. As will be discussed in Chapter 7, in relation to agriculture, negotiations and contestation over these definitions have played an important part in the

determination of remuneration rates for male and female labour.

In addition, the introduction of new technology has commonly been accompanied by a submergence of the idea that 'heavy' work should be undertaken by men, and 'light' work undertaken by women, and a greater emphasis placed on a dichotomy between 'skilled' and 'unskilled' work. This latter dichotomy, apparent in both agriculture and industry, has served to legitimate and maintain a gender division of labour in which the use of certain types of labour-saving machinery is dominated by men, whilst women are concentrated in more menial, labour-intensive tasks.

The outside/inside dichotomy has a range of meanings which it is important to distinguish, but which nevertheless overlap and reinforce each other. Taking for the moment, a relatively a-historical approach, the following levels of meaning have been attached to the outside/inside dichotomy at different times, with varying degrees of emphasis and in different combinations in rural China during this century.² Firstly, the dichotomy separates work according to physical location. Thus, in pre-1949 China, according to Confucian ideals, women were responsible for work *inside* the walls of the family house or compound, and their movement beyond those

² The differentiation of these levels of meaning is inspired in part by Sylvia Junko Yanagisako's discussion of a similar outside/inside dichotomy underlying perceptions of gender amongst first and second generation Japanese Americans (Yanagisako 1987).

walls was restricted, while men's domain was *outside* the house. I will show, however, that since 1978 the 'inside' domain is being extended to include work in the fields, while 'outside' work refers to work involving travel out of the village for extended periods.

Secondly, the outside/inside dichotomy refers to a division between family and non-family. Before the revolution, it was assumed that women would interact and work mostly with other family members and that their interactions with outsiders, especially men, would be limited. Women could be involved in family businesses, but activities, such as arranging business deals, involving substantial interaction with non-family people would be undertaken by men. Indeed, any formal representation of the family to the outside world, for example in village politics, was considered the responsibility of the male head of the family. This set of ideas, I argue, is still of major influence in shaping gender divisions of labour today.

A third set of meanings attached to the outside/inside dichotomy is a distinction between 'work' and 'care for the family', or between 'production' and 'reproduction'. These meanings have, I argue, been transposed onto the outside/inside dichotomy as a result of Communist intervention into rural structures and values.

A final set of meanings attached to the outside/inside dichotomy, also as a result of Communist intervention, is a

distinction between work undertaken for the collective, and work undertaken for family consumption and cash profit. As a result of reforms introduced since 1978, however, this particular set of meanings has lost its earlier significance.

It is widely recognised that in the first half of the twentieth century women were culturally defined as inferior to men, and in practice also, were subordinated in a number of ways. Gender divisions of labour, shaped by conceptual dichotomies between 'outside' and 'inside', and 'heavy' and 'light' work played an important part in reproducing this devaluation and subordination. For example, restrictions on women's movement and on their interactions with non-family members made them more vulnerable within the family and in this sense contributed to their lack of power. In addition, the perception that females could not undertake 'heavy' field work contributed to the view that girl babies were less desirable than boys.

Communist intervention into gender relations and the rural economy after 1949 involved challenges to gender divisions of labour and the conceptual dichotomies which framed them. In particular, large numbers of women were drawn into 'outside' production. As will be discussed in Chapter 2, this played an important role in reducing women's vulnerability and powerlessness in the family. At the same time, however, a failure to completely overcome or change gender divisions of labour, combined with a reinforcement, and in some cases an alteration of, the conceptual dichotomies informing those

divisions meant that some other aspects of women's subordination were left untouched, and some new ones were created. For example, a failure to reduce women's domestic workload to any significant extent resulted in a serious 'double burden' for women. Furthermore, the introduction of a Marxist ideology, combined with the reorganisation of the rural economy into a primary collective sector and a secondary private sector had the effect of both reinforcing a distinction between 'inside' and 'outside' spheres, and of adding new negative connotations to the former, resulting in a further devaluation of women's work in that sector. In the 'outside' sphere of collective production the implementation of the work-point system was often accompanied by local struggles over remuneration in which divisions of labour between relatively low paid 'light' or 'unskilled' 'women's work' and more highly paid 'heavy' or 'skilled' 'men's work' were strengthened, or in some cases newly created.

In Chapters 6 to 9 I argue that as a result of reforms initiated by the state in 1978 marked changes have occurred in the conceptual dichotomies between outside/inside, heavy/light and skilled/unskilled. Nevertheless, these dichotomies, and the lower value assigned the 'female' side of the dichotomies, still operate, and indeed in some ways have been strengthened in the process of reform. This has, in turn, contributed to the creation and maintenance of gender divisions of labour through which women's subordination continues to be reproduced.

The intellectual origins of the theoretical approach adopted in this study can be divided primarily between the analyses of Chinese Marxists and western socialist feminists which focus on the positions of women and men in the relations of production as a determinant of gender relations, and the work of other western feminists which are concerned mainly with ideology and culture as the determinants of gender relations. As will become apparent in the following paragraphs, I consider none of the theoretical approaches in these works to be fully satisfactory. Nevertheless, an examination of the advantages and the limitations of each, combined with a reflection on recent post-structuralist insights has, I believe, enabled me to synthesise a more sophisticated and politically useful theoretical framework for analysing change and continuity in gender relations in contemporary rural China.

An important starting point for both Chinese Marxist and socialist feminist analyses of gender relations has been Friedrich Engels' work *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, first published in 1884. In this work, Engels undertook a historical materialist analysis in which he linked the emergence of women's subordination with changes in the social relations of production.³ His work provided both Chinese revolutionaries and feminists in the West with a valuable framework for challenging assumptions that women's subordination to men stems directly from

³ Engels' analysis of the origins of women's subordination is discussed in more detail in Chapter 2.

biological differences between the sexes and hence is natural, and by extension, inevitable and right. As Rosalind Delmar has argued,

if the *Origins of the Family* constituted an achievement it was this - that it asserted women's oppression as a problem of history, rather than of biology, a problem which it should be the concern of historical materialism to analyse and revolutionary politics to solve (Delmar 1976, p.287).

In China, the Marxist approach has undeniably been very useful for tackling key areas of women's oppression. Yet the approach has also had severe limitations, in part because of one-sided interpretations or the incomplete implementation of Engels' suggestions, and in part because of limitations inherent in Engels' original formulation and the unsuitability of the formulation for the Chinese context.

Here I wish to draw attention to just three related aspects of the Marxist approach that I see as particularly limiting theoretically.⁴ These are, first of all, a narrow conception of 'production'; second, a failure to problematise gender divisions of labour; and third, a failure to theorise adequately the relations between economic processes on the one hand, and social organisation and culture on the other.

⁴ For more thorough critiques see Sacks 1974; Delmar 1976; Molyneux 1981; and Barrett 1986.

In the preface to *The Origin...* Engels argued that

The determining factor in history is, in the final instance, the production and reproduction of immediate life. This again is of a two fold character: on the one side, the production of the means of existence, of food, clothing, and shelter and the tools necessary for that production; on the other side, the production of human beings themselves, the propagation of the species. The social organisation under which the people of a particular historical epoch live is determined by both kinds of production (Engels 1977, pp.5-6).

However, as Alison Jaggar points out, in most of the writing of Marx and Engels 'production' is more narrowly conceived than it appears here, referring only to the production of material goods, or, in some cases, to the production of material goods for 'surplus value', that is for profit, rather than for consumption (Jaggar 1983, p.217). The 'economy' is defined as the organisation of the production of material goods, and is regarded as the material 'base' of a society, determining ultimately what happens in the non-economic realm, or 'superstructure' (Jaggar 1983, p.134). Marx and Engels, however, see women primarily as child bearers and child rearers, working in a family sphere that is separate from the 'economy'. From a feminist perspective, this set of ideas is problematic firstly, because it obscures the reality that women (and men), are in fact engaged in both of the areas of production that Engels outlines. Secondly, by relegating them to 'the family' in the way that they do, they effectively cast women and their work as the objects, but not the subjects, of historical change (Jaggar 1983, p.76). A corollary of this is that the organisation of

women's work and the relations between women and men within the family are not regarded as important issues, and nor are the interconnections between the organisation of work within the family and in the 'economy' recognised as playing a part in determining social relations.

The second limitation in orthodox Marxist approaches to gender issues is a failure to regard gender divisions of labour as part of, or related to, the problematic of women's subordination. In *The Origin...*, Engels claimed that in 'primitive communal' society the division of labour by sex was a 'natural' one that did not lead to inequality (Engels 1977, p.155). This notion of an original, 'natural' division of labour between the sexes is also suggested in other passages in the works of both Engels and Marx.⁵

As Clare Burton argues,

Engels' remarks refer only to the original, 'natural' division. He describes most carefully how conditions which began as 'natural' became oppressive, through changes in the social relations of production (Burton 1985, p.8).

It was in the context of this description that Engels made his now famous claim that

the emancipation of women becomes possible only when women are enabled to take part in production on a large social scale, and domestic duties require their attention only to a minor degree (Engels 1977, p.158).

⁵ See, for example, Marx, K. 1967, *Capital*, p.351, cited in Jaggar 1983, p.68).

The implication here is that the division of labour by gender, in which women are excluded from 'production' can and should be abolished. Yet the force of this argument is weakened by the earlier references to the natural basis of these divisions. Moreover, elsewhere, Marx and Engels appear to argue explicitly against the complete removal of divisions of labour between women and men, with the suggestion that such divisions have both biological and moral foundations (Jaggar 1983, p.68). In his *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, for example, Marx writes that

the standardization of the working day must include the restriction of female labour insofar as it relates to the duration, intermissions, etc., of the working day; otherwise it could only mean the exclusion of women from branches of industry that are especially unhealthy for the female body or objectionable morally for the female sex (Marx, K. & Engels, F. 1968, *Selected Works*, p.334, cited in Jaggar 1983, p.68).

Thus, while Marx and Engels argue for the possibility and the desirability of an emancipation of women which relies heavily on women's participation in 'production', they at the same time see limitations to that participation as 'natural' and also desirable.

This inconsistency in their argument is further compounded by a lack of recognition that within 'production' there are major gender divisions of labour through which women continue to be subordinated to men in a number of ways, such as lower occupational status, lower wages and poorer working conditions, and a failure to make connections between these

divisions and what is perceived to be 'natural' divisions in the family.

In the appropriation by the CCP, and other Communist parties around the world, of Marx and Engels' approach to gender inequalities, the analysis of gender divisions of labour has not been improved. Rather, Communist Parties have exploited the ambivalence toward such divisions so as to maximise the use of women's labour within particular economic strategies, and in such a way that the force of the historical materialist approach to understanding women's subordination is blunted.

Thus, in China under the CCP, while women have been drawn into 'productive' labour on a large scale and some efforts have been made to persuade men to share domestic work, there has been no serious challenge to the notion that child care and other aspects of domestic work are the 'natural' responsibility of women. Furthermore, although equal pay legislation has been enacted, and although periodic efforts have been made (with limited success) to draw women into areas of production, such as heavy industry, previously regarded as men's work, under the slogan 'what men can do, women can do too', these moves have not been accompanied by any serious analysis of, or attempts to overcome, the inequalities faced by women in production as a result of gender divisions of labour.

As will be discussed in Chapter 3, since 1976 the rhetoric of 'what men can do, women can do too' has been abandoned, and 'natural' or 'biological' differences between the sexes have been given primacy in discussions of women's work and their position in society, in a way that affirms the inevitability and desirability of particular gender divisions of labour within 'production', as well as women's roles as mothers and domestic workers. This would appear to sit awkwardly in what otherwise is professed to be a Marxist historical materialist approach to social relations. However, as the preceding discussion suggests, there is less incongruity in this stance than one might suppose, given the ambivalence that Marx and Engels themselves displayed over the question of gender divisions of labour.

A third problem with Marxist approaches to women's subordination, and indeed to social relations more generally, has been a failure to account fully for culture and individual consciousness, and the links between economic processes and culture, or in Marxist terms, between 'base' and 'superstructure'. This is, of course, a very complex and multifaceted issue and this is not the place to address it in detail. However, there are two specific aspects of this problem that I wish to mention briefly here. The first is that orthodox Marxist approaches cannot fully account for either change in, or reproduction of, women's subordination because they do not consider the ideological processes through which such subordination is made to appear legitimate or 'natural' (Burton 1985, p.32).

Second, orthodox Marxist approaches do not adequately address the complexity of relations between women's position in the economy, their cultural (de)valuation, and social structures and practices, including such things as arranged marriage, footbinding and rape, through which women are subordinated, emphasising, instead, the determining role of economic factors. Consequently, in China, as Kay Ann Johnson has pointed out, Engels' emphasis on changing relations of production and women's exclusion from 'productive' work as the causes of women's oppression, has provided the basis for a very conservative and politically inactive approach toward aspects of political, social and family relations through which women are subordinated (Johnson 1983, p.88).⁶

Much of the driving force behind the initial development of socialist feminism came from a concurrent recognition of the values of an historical materialist approach to the analysis of gender relations and attempts to overcome the three key limitations in orthodox Marxist approaches to women's subordination outlined above. Michelle Barrett, for example, claimed that in the most general terms, the object of socialist feminism (or, as she terms it, Marxist feminism)

⁶ Mao Zedong and his followers became known for their 'voluntarist' brand of Marxism, that is, for the emphasis they placed on the role of the 'superstructure' in historical change. As Johnson notes, however, 'the dominant Chinese theoretical view of women and the family, in sharp contrast to many other issues, has remained firmly rooted in the mechanistic, materialistic, economistic mainstream of the inherited orthodoxy (Johnson 1983, p.221).

must be to identify the operation of gender relations as and where they may be distinct from, or connected with, the processes of production and reproduction understood by historical materialism. Thus it falls to Marxist feminism to explore the relations between the organisation of sexuality, domestic production, the household and so on, and historical changes in the mode of production and systems of appropriation and exploitation (Barrett 1986, p.9).

During the 1970s and early 1980s socialist feminism inspired numerous analyses of women's subordination, in both western and non-western societies, in which explorations of gender divisions of labour across the spectrum of work undertaken by men and women were central. These analyses made important advances in understanding the nature of women's subordination in different societies and the mechanisms through which that subordination is reproduced.

Included amongst them were three germinal works on women in China: Delia Davin's *Woman-Work. Women and the Party in Revolutionary China* (1976), Elisabeth Croll's *Feminism and Socialism* (1978) and *The Unfinished Liberation of Chinese Women 1949-1980*, by Phyllis Andors (1983). Following a number of somewhat simplistic and overly optimistic accounts of women's liberation under Chinese socialism (e.g., Rowbotham 1972; Broyelle 1977), these monographs succeeded in showing, through detailed description and analysis, that, although it improved their situation enormously, the Chinese Communist revolution did not completely liberate Chinese women.

However, as in socialist feminist studies of women's subordination in other societies written in this period, an understanding of the mechanisms through which women's subordination is reproduced was limited in these analyses by a failure to examine the social meanings of gender divisions of labour, and the connections between gender divisions of labour and the 'superstructural' aspects of women's subordination. Davin, Croll and Andors highlight the inconsistencies and the limitations of the CCP's practical approach to gender issues, but they make little attempt either to justify or to critique the theoretical principles guiding that approach. Thus, while they demonstrate that the CCP did not consistently meet its commitment to reduce women's domestic work and to draw them into 'production' on a large scale, they do not explain, to my satisfaction, the importance of women's domestic work in their subordination, the exact reasons why women's entry into 'production' should be liberating, and the relationships between this change in gender divisions of labour and changes in women's participation in politics, their education, their decision making power in the family and values and beliefs concerning the 'proper' place of women in the family and society.⁷

⁷ Two other important works on women in China written in this period are *Women, the Family and Peasant Revolution in China* by Kay Ann Johnson (1983), and *Patriarchy and Socialist Revolution in China* by Judith Stacey (1983). These differ from the others in that they focus on the family as the key site of women's subordination, rather than on gender divisions of labour. Thus, Johnson argues that 'women's secondary roles and relatively low participation rates in major areas of the economy deprived them of important means of influence and narrowed the sphere in which they could act. But it did not in itself cause the basic subordination of women, which derived from fundamental principles of kinship

However, this problem is not confined to analyses of women's position in China, nor indeed, to the largely empirical works on women in other countries, written in the 1970s and early 1980s. In more theoretical socialist feminist texts of this period also, it is apparent that the problem of the relationship between 'base' and 'superstructure' has by no means been solved.⁸ Iris Young, for example, argues for the need for a theoretical approach to social and economic relations in which a consideration of the gender division of labour is central (Young 1980, p.50-52). However, she presents conflicting views on the significance of the gender division of labour and the relations between this division and ideology, culture and individual consciousness. On the one hand she cites the economistic Marxist argument that

the specific place of individuals in the division of labour explains their consciousness and behaviour, as well as the specific relations of cooperation and conflict in which different persons stand (Young 1981, p.51).

In another section, however, she seems to be arguing that ideology and culture precede and condition the gender division of labour, when she says that

organisation and family formation, both of which in turn organised society'(p.25). Johnson and Stacey, like the other scholars mentioned above, develop important insights into gender relations in China. I would argue that like them, however, in attempting to focus on the most fundamental cause of women's subordination, they have underestimated the importance of the links between different aspects of gender relations, whether they be gender divisions of labour or family relations.

⁸ Compare Barrett 1986, p.84: 'The concept of ideology is an intractable one for Marxist feminism, not least because it remains inadequately theorised in both Marxist and feminist theory'.

any account of the gender division of labour... presupposes that there are genders - that is, socio-cultural division and classification of people according to their biological sex (Young 1981, p.54).

We therefore need, she claims, an account of 'the origins, symbolic and ideological significance and implications of gender differentiation' (Young 1981, p.54).

In attempting to move away from the awkwardness of the 'base'/'superstructure' problematic, or what one might term a Marxist and socialist feminist version of the 'chicken and egg' dilemma, so apparent in Iris Young's conflicting statements, I have found it useful to consider the work of Michelle Rosaldo and Sherry Ortner. These two American feminist anthropologists have been concerned primarily with understanding cultural perceptions of women and men, rather than material aspects of their relations. I would argue, however, that they also suggest a way in which the two concerns might be addressed in a more integrated fashion than has yet been achieved by Marxist or social feminist analysts such as those discussed above. I must stress, however, that there are also serious problems with Rosaldo's and Ortner's theories.

In an influential paper published in 1974 Michelle Rosaldo set out to explain what she regarded as 'a universal asymmetry in cultural evaluations of the sexes' (Rosaldo 1974, p.17) by means of

a structural model that relates recurrent aspects of psychology and cultural and social organization to an opposition between the 'domestic' orientation of women and the extra-domestic or 'public' ties that, in most societies, are primarily available to men (Rosaldo 1974, p.18).

'Domestic', as Rosaldo uses the term,

refers to those minimal institutions and modes of activity that are organized immediately around one or more mothers and their children; 'public' refers to activities, institutions, and forms of association that link, rank, organize, or subsume particular mother-child groups (Rosaldo 1974 p.23).

For Rosaldo, a dichotomy between 'domestic' and 'public' spheres is a broad description of a universal fact of social organisation. This fact has both material and symbolic consequences for all aspects of gender relations. Rosaldo argues, for example, that

insofar as men are defined in terms of their achievement in socially elaborated institutions, they are participants, par excellence, in the man-made systems of human experience. On a moral level, theirs is the world of 'culture'. Women, on the other hand, lead lives that appear to be irrelevant to the formal articulation of social order. Their status is derived from their stage in a life cycle, from their biological functions, and, in particular, from their sexual or biological ties to particular men... Accordingly, in cultural systems we find a recurrent opposition: between man, who in the last analysis stands for 'culture', and woman, who (defined through symbols that stress her biological and sexual functions) stands for 'nature', and often for disorder (Rosaldo 1974, p.31).

This point is further elaborated by Sherry Ortner in her paper 'Is female to male as nature is to culture?' (1974).

Ortner argues that

the universal devaluation of women could be explained by postulating that women are seen as closer to nature than men, men being seen as more unequivocally occupying the high ground of culture (Ortner 1974, pp.83-84).

Ortner, following Levi-Strauss, claims that

the categories of 'nature' and 'culture' are of course conceptual categories - one can find no boundary out in the actual world between the two states or realms of being. And there is no question that some cultures articulate a much stronger opposition between the two categories than others... Yet I would maintain that the universality of ritual betokens an assertion in all human cultures of the specifically human ability to act upon and regulate, rather than passively move with and be moved by, the givens of natural existence (Ortner 1974, p.72).

Rosaldo and Ortner made an important contribution to feminist anthropology in the late 1970s and early 1980s by suggesting a framework for analysing gender relations with which the complexity of the links between gender ideologies and stereotypes, broader cultural systems, social institutions, social behaviour and personal experience could be explored (Moore 1991, pp.15-16). As I will discuss in the following paragraphs, their arguments have also come in for a good deal of criticism. This criticism does not, however, entirely negate the value of their work. Rather, by taking their theoretical approach as a starting point, and by examining the criticisms of that approach, it is possible to develop a yet more sophisticated framework for understanding gender relations.

Rosaldo and Ortner have been criticised primarily for first of all, a narrow conception of nature/culture and domestic/public dichotomies in western culture and secondly, for an ethnocentrism which leads them to attribute a false

universalism both to women's subordination and to the dichotomies they outline.

In a critique of attempts, such as those of Ortner, to impute to other people's thought systems a dichotomy between 'nature' and 'culture' and a view of women as being closer to nature, Marilyn Strathern begins by examining western perceptions of male and female, nature and culture. She points out that

no single meaning can in fact be given to nature or culture in western thought; there is no consistent dichotomy, only a matrix of contrasts (Strathern 1980, p.177),

and argues that

in selecting from our own repertoire of overlapping notions certain concepts envisaged in a dichotomous or oppositional relationship (nature vs culture), we are at best making prior assumptions about the logic of the system under study, and at worst using symbols of our own as though they were signs; as though through them we could read other people's messages, and not just feedback from our own input (Strathern 1980, p.179).

In similar fashion, other writers have suggested that in attributing a domestic/public dichotomy either to the actual organisation or to the culture of the society they are observing, western anthropologists are merely reproducing an ideological construct belonging to their own culture.

Following criticism of her paper on the domestic/public dichotomy, Rosaldo herself acknowledged that most modern western social thinking is based on the work of turn-of-the-century social theorists who absorbed, quite uncritically, the Victorian doctrine of separate male and female spheres

(Rosaldo 1980, p.401).⁹ Amongst these social theorists is Engels, whose depiction of the origins of women's subordination and prescriptions for their liberation, as Rosaldo suggests, are based on assumptions that women's reproductive role has everywhere confined them to a 'domestic' sphere, distinct from a 'public' sphere of production. These assumptions, in turn, reflect Victorian ideals of femininity and masculinity which are bound up with industrialisation and a contrast between a natural, nurturing, moral, domestic sphere and a competitive, progressive, heartless, public sphere (Rosaldo 1980, p.402; Lloyd 1984).

Turning to the second type of criticism of Rosaldo's and Ortner's theses, numerous writers have undermined their claims to the existence of the universal subordination of women based on domestic/public and nature/culture dichotomies with ethnographic evidence from other societies.

Strathern and MacCormack, for example, claim that the Hagen people of the Papua New Guinea Highlands draw a contrast between wild (*romi*) and domestic or planted (*mbo*) things, but deny other writers' suggestions that this can be equated with the nature/culture contrast. Nor, they argue, do Hageners

⁹ As Rosaldo notes, however, the opposition between a public male sphere and a private female sphere did not begin in the Victorian era, but can be traced to ancient Greek philosophy (Rosaldo 1980, p.401). An analysis of the history of the domestic/public dichotomy (and also of the nature/culture dichotomy) in western thought is undertaken by Lloyd 1984.

make the same associations between these contrasting categories as are made between the male/female, nature/culture contrasts found in western thought. Men are associated with that which is prestigious (*nyim*), and women with that which is rubbish (*korpa*), but these categories are not linked with those of the planted and the wild (MacCormack 1980, p.10).

Studies such as this repudiate Rosaldo's and Ortner's claims for the universal existence of gender-linked dichotomies between domestic and public domains, and nature and culture, primarily with empirical evidence. However, equally important, and not dissimilar, criticisms of their work can also be made from a more theoretical standpoint. A particularly serious weakness in both Rosaldo's and Ortner's arguments lies in their conception of the nature of the dichotomies and of their significance.

In Rosaldo's case, the domestic/public dichotomy is, as noted, taken to be a description of a universal aspect of social organisation which has a particular, singular set of cultural consequences. In addition, although Rosaldo points out that 'biological research may illuminate the range in human inclinations and possibilities, but it cannot account for the interpretation of these facts in a cultural order' (Rosaldo 1974, p.22), she nevertheless argues that 'biology dictates that women will be mothers' (Rosaldo 1974, p.23) and claims that everywhere 'women become absorbed primarily in domestic activities because of their role as mothers'

(Rosaldo 1974, p.24). Apparent in Rosaldo's approach are three conceptual leaps that must be questioned. The first is in the assumption that biology or physiology is everywhere perceived or categorised in the same way (for example, that women's reproductive capacities are everywhere taken as the basis for their categorisation in a single social group), the second is in the assumption that biology or physiology leads to particular forms of social organisation, and the third is in the assumption that similar forms of social organisation are everywhere linked with the same sets of values or meanings.

In contrast to Rosaldo, Ortner speaks of the nature/culture dichotomy as a conceptual one. However, as Olivia Harris points out, she too 'slides into unargued assumptions about the universal implications of certain physiological and physiology-related characteristics' (Harris 1980, p.89). Thus, while claiming that biological facts 'only take on significance of superior/inferior within the framework of culturally defined value systems' (Ortner 1974, p.71), she also argues that women everywhere are devalued because of their closer association with nature, which stems directly from women's 'greater bodily involvement with the natural functions surrounding reproduction' (Ortner 1974, p.76).

In Ortner's argument, universal associations between women and nature, men and culture, are made at the level of the unconscious. Such associations may not be explicitly drawn within any given culture, but are implicit in all cultural

thought. It is apparent from her paper that Ortner draws heavily on Levi-Strauss's discussion of the distinction between 'nature' and 'culture' as a fundamental element in all cultures, and more generally, on structuralist linguistic theories according to which all human beings construct meaning through the perception of oppositions and contrasts and in which it is held that underlying all human thought and behaviour is a single basic structure of binary thinking (MacCormack 1980, p.2). While this is not the place for a detailed critique of structuralism, there are two limitations of this approach that I wish to highlight here. Firstly, because it refers to the unconscious, it is difficult to validate; and secondly, by attempting to reduce all cultures to a universal set of binary oppositions this approach does more to obscure than to explain changes in perceptions and values within a given society, and the differences between societies in, for example, their interpretation of physiology and their valuation of 'male' and 'female'.

Drawing on poststructuralist theories of language and power, I would summarise the underlying problems in Rosaldo's and Ortner's conceptions of domestic/public and nature/culture dichotomies in terms of an assumption of a direct correspondence between the world around us (whether 'natural' or 'social') and the construction of a single set of meanings. Rather than assuming such a correspondence, one of the frequent consequences of which is, as we have seen, the perpetuation of ethnocentric understandings, we need to ask,

how, in what specific contexts, among which specific communities of people, and by what textual and social processes has meaning been acquired? More generally, the questions are: How do meanings change? How have some meanings emerged as normative and others have been eclipsed or disappeared? What do these processes reveal about how power is constituted and operates? (Scott 1988a, p.35).

Adopting such an approach does not necessarily mean discarding Rosaldo's and Ortner's theses on domestic/public and nature/culture dichotomies in their entirety. Rather, it implies exploring more deeply the implications of Ortner's claim that these dichotomies must be seen, not as descriptions of a universal reality, but as 'conceptual' categorisations, that is, as elements of thought systems through which people seek to organise and understand their world, that vary from one society to another and change over time. It suggests that in societies other than our own where male/female, domestic/public or nature/culture dichotomies seem to operate, we need to be open to the possibility that they may have very different meanings and values attached to them.

We need also to consider that in the meaning systems of some other societies these particular dichotomies may not operate, while others may be central. This insight is, of course, the basis for my exploration of outside/inside and heavy/light dichotomies in contemporary rural China. Initial research suggested that a conceptual dichotomy between domestic and public domains was an important factor in ordering and legitimating gender divisions of labour and changes to those

divisions. Further study revealed, however, that the complex of meanings surrounding the dichotomy in rural China was somewhat different from that of the domestic/public dichotomy in contemporary western society, and could be better represented by the indigenous terms 'inside' and 'outside', although these must also be viewed only as shorthand for a more complex and changing set of concepts. At the same time, it appeared that in some situations two other very important organising principles for the work of rural Chinese women and men and the relations between them were conceptual dichotomies between 'light' and 'heavy', and 'unskilled' and 'skilled' work.

Pushing these ideas yet further, it is, I would suggest, possible that societies exist, or have existed, in which distinctions between the sexes are not regarded as being of any particular social significance (just as in our society the distinction between brown eyes and blue eyes is not regarded as significant), and are not connected with any other distinctions. Thus, I make no attempt to argue in this thesis that gendered dichotomies of any kind are universal.

Ethnographic studies strongly suggest, however, that in societies in which people are regarded as being divided into two separate and contrasting categories of 'male' and 'female', that division is most commonly entangled with, and reproduced through, other conceptual dichotomies or contrasts

which play central roles in organising social life.¹⁰ And in the course of this thesis, I will draw on a large body of evidence to show that *in rural China* notions of gender identity and cultural understandings of what people do are shaped by, and intertwined with, conceptual dichotomies, in particular, between inside/outside, light/heavy and unskilled/skilled work. These conceptual dichotomies must, I argue, be taken into account if one is to understand the changes that have occurred in gender divisions of labour, and the links between these changes and other aspects of gender relations. It is necessary, first of all, to take account of the ways in which the conceptual dichotomies have contributed to the existing cultural perception of women as subordinate or inferior to men and how they both shape, and are reproduced in, the structures and processes through which women are subordinated in practice. Secondly, we must pay attention to the ways in which modifications of the conceptual dichotomies have shaped and legitimated changes in gender divisions of labour.

In summary, in this thesis I attempt to combine the concerns of Marxists and socialist feminists with the position of women in relations of production and with gender divisions of labour, with insights from feminist anthropology and post-structuralism relating to gender symbolism and the links between language and power. There are, as yet, few models

¹⁰ See, for example, the articles in Collier & Yanagisako 1987.

available for developing such an approach.¹¹ However, one work that has provided inspiration for my study is the book *Gender at Work* by Ann Game and Rosemary Pringle (1983).

In this work, Game and Pringle use case studies from Australian manufacturing, banking, retailing, computing, nursing and domestic work to explore the relations between gender, the labour process and technological change under capitalism. Their aim is to 'make sense of the social processes which generate changes in the sexual division of labour, and the ways in which it is reproduced' (Game & Pringle 1983, p.16). The sexual division of labour, they contend 'operates through a series of dichotomies which, on the one hand, refer to male and female spheres and, on the other, correspond to social divisions that are characteristic of capitalism: public/private, work/non-work, production/consumption' (Game & Pringle 1983, p.15). Within particular areas of work, they identify further dichotomies. In whitegoods mass production plants, for example, they claim that jobs are sex typed according to dichotomies between skilled/unskilled, heavy/light, dangerous/less dangerous, dirty/clean, interesting/boring and mobile/immobile (Game & Pringle 1983, p.28). They argue that

¹¹ Similar comments are made by Game & Pringle 1983, p.14; Beechey 1987, p.13; and Moore 1991, pp.30-31.

despite the fact that jobs are always allocated as male or female with either direct reference to biology or on the basis of supposed biological differences in characteristics and abilities, there is nothing static or fixed about the sexual division of labour. The content of men's work and women's work is subject to change. Changes in definitions of men's work and women's work always take place in relation to each other. There is nothing inherent in jobs that makes them either appropriately female or male. If anything remains fixed, it is the *distinction* between men's work and women's work... The sexual division of labour is remarkably flexible given that it is supposed to be based on biology. Why then, if it is so flexible, does it continue to exist at all? The answer to this lies in the nature of the relations involved. Gender is not just about difference but about power: the domination of men and the subordination of women. This power relation is maintained by the creation of distinctions between male and female spheres - and it is the reproduction of these distinctions which accounts for the persistence of the so-called 'naturalness' of it all (Game & Pringle 1983, p.16).

Scope and Method of Research

The study which follows is limited largely to an analysis of the situation of *rural* women of *Han* nationality. However, I will also discuss the rural/urban division and the changes that have occurred in that division because these have been important factors in shaping divisions of labour and other aspects of social relations in rural China in recent years.

By 'rural' women I mean here those women with rural household registration (*hukou*). This category is primarily comprised of women who live and work in villages and small townships. However, it also includes women whose permanent residence is rural, but who live and work on a temporary basis in a town

or city. The household registration system and the impact it has on divisions of labour is discussed in Chapter 7.

Empirical data for this thesis was collected mainly from Chinese newspapers, journals and academic reports, and from interviews with rural women, officials and social scientists. Each of these sources has its limitations. Taken together, however, they provide a wealth of information. In most instances in this thesis I have been able to base my discussion on information gained not just from one source, but from many. Thus, when discussing phenomena reported in the media I have generally been able to draw on a number of articles, or have confirmed the validity of media reports by reference to my own fieldwork. Similarly, in discussing my fieldwork findings, I have made comparisons with the findings of other scholars or with reports published in the Chinese media.

The journals *ZGFN* and *Hunyin yu Jiating* [*Marriage and the Family*], the newspapers *NMRB* and *ZGFNB*, and the compilation of media clippings published every two months by the People's University entitled *Funu Zuzhi yu Huodong* [*Women's Organisations and Activities*] have proved to be the most useful documentary sources of short reports and human interest stories relating to women in rural China. Many of the articles report 'success' stories, for example, of female entrepreneurs. These cannot be taken as representative of the situation of rural women, but they do give an indication of the parameters shaping the fortunes of women and the

degree to which they are able to benefit from reform. Not all reports present a rosy picture. Common also, are articles discussing particular problems faced by women. In recent years, reports on crimes against women and the scarcity of women involved in formal politics have been particularly numerous. Such reports are often useful in their discussion of the factors contributing to these problems, and how the state or local authorities are addressing them. These reports most commonly provide only very localised statistics, however, and give little indication of how widespread the problems are.

The internal journal of the Women's Federation, *FNGZ*, has been a valuable source of discussions on the Women's Federation's approach to gender relations in rural areas, and of reports on surveys of the situation of rural women, conducted by the Federation. These surveys are mostly small in scale, however, and issues such as sample size and survey methodology are poorly documented in the reports.

Academic monographs and articles published in journals such as *Nongye Jingji Wenti* [*Issues in Agricultural Economics*], *Renkou yu Jingji* [*Population and the Economy*], and *Shehui Kexue* (a condensed version of which is also published in English as *Social Sciences in China*), contain more detailed reports and analyses of surveys of various aspects of rural society and, in particular, of the rural economy. Over the last fifteen years numerous very thorough surveys of the rural economy have been conducted, but very few, outside

those undertaken by the Women's Federation, focus on women's position in the economy or on gender divisions of labour. Furthermore, even more generalised survey reports usually do not break down statistics according to gender.

Fieldwork for this thesis was carried out between August and December 1989. During the first two months I was hosted by the Rural Development Institute of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing, as part of an exchange programme with the University of Adelaide. Between October and December I was based in Chengdu, and was assisted in my work by members of the Research Office of the Sichuan Provincial Women's Federation.

I conducted a total of 60 interviews with rural women in Huairou County in Beijing Municipality, Ling County in Shandong Province, and Xindu, Jinniu, Wenjiang, Guan and Mianyang Counties, all of which are in the vicinity of Chengdu, in Sichuan Province. In each county, I visited a few different villages. My interviewees were selected beforehand by local officials. My request that I be allowed to talk to women of varying ages and occupations was granted in each county. However, my sample included only married or widowed women, and the number of women running specialised households or private enterprises was disproportionately large.

Each interview lasted approximately one hour and was conducted in the woman's home. This was valuable in enabling

me to observe the women's working environments. In my interviews in rural Beijing and Shandong I was accompanied by a fellow researcher from the Rural Development Institute, and in Sichuan three members of the Research Office of the Provincial Women's Federation took turns to accompany me. In addition, we were generally accompanied by a member of the County Women's Federation and one or two local township or village officials. In some cases the woman's husband or other family members were also present, and contributed to the discussion. The presence of these various people provided some useful insights into official-peasant and intrafamily relations, but probably also inhibited the women from speaking freely in some instances, as no doubt my identity as a foreigner did also.

Interviews were conducted largely in Mandarin, with interviewees also sometimes using their local dialect. The questions I asked in these interviews related mainly to family membership, to the family's economic activities, income and expenditure, to divisions of labour in the family and family decision making processes, and to women's perception of their work and of gender relations. I had a check list of questions, but the interviews were conducted fairly loosely. I generally asked roughly the same set of questions, in roughly the same order, but sometimes my interviewee talked at length about issues not on my check list, and sometimes I omitted questions or reworded them. During the interviews both I and the researcher accompanying

me took written notes which we then compared at the end of each day.¹²

In addition to interviewing individual rural women, in most counties I visited two township enterprises where I interviewed managers, and in some cases women's representatives and small numbers of female workers. These visits gave me an insight into the experiences of women working in township enterprises, as well as providing information on the recruitment of workers, occupational segmentation, wages and labour protection policies.

In each county I collected background information on the situation of rural women, and on state policies affecting women, from representatives of the County Agricultural Bureau, the Education Bureau, the Township Enterprise Bureau and the Women's Federation. In Huairou, Ling and Mianyang Counties, I also interviewed representatives of the County Family Planning Committee. In addition, I conducted interviews with one township and one village women's representative in Ling County, two village women's representatives in Xindu County and one township women's representative in Jinniu County.

Whilst in Beijing I conducted formal interviews with representatives of the All-China Women's Federation, the

¹² A summary of the information I collected in my interviews with rural women is provided in Appendix 1. I have discussed my experiences of undertaking fieldwork in rural China in more detail in Jacka 1990a.

State Education Commission and the State Family Planning Commission. I also interviewed a representative of the Beijing March 8th Domestic Service Company and five young, unmarried rural women working in Beijing as nannies, and discussed various aspects of my research with members of the Sociology Institute and the Rural Development Institute of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

In Chengdu I conducted interviews with various members of the Sichuan Provincial Women's Federation and the Chengdu Municipal Women's Federation, with the Deputy Head of the Provincial Family Planning Committee, and with researchers in the Sociology Institute of the Sichuan Academy of Social Sciences.

Thesis Organisation

Having outlined the theoretical concerns pursued in this thesis and the sources of information on which the work is based, in Chapter 2 I will provide a historical perspective by examining gender relations and state policies on gender relations before 1978. Chapter 3 then sketches out the key features of the reform process initiated by the state in 1978 and signals questions and themes relating to the impact of reform on gender relations to be taken up in subsequent chapters. Chapters 4 and 5 discuss women's position in the family and their participation in education and politics. The aim of these two chapters is to examine the ways in which

gender divisions of labour and the conceptual dichotomies informing them are shaped by, and reproduced through, other aspects of gender relations, and how, in turn, these are affected by gender divisions of labour and changes in those divisions. Chapters 6 to 9 focus on the issue of change and continuity in women's work, gender divisions of labour and conceptual dichotomies relating to work and gender in the post-Mao period. Through an examination of the impact of reform in each of the areas of domestic work, agriculture, the courtyard economy and industry, these chapters seek to understand the relationship between general social and economic change and change in gender divisions of labour, and the implications of such change for rural women and for gender relations in rural China. In Chapter 10 I conclude by demonstrating how the findings of my study support and elucidate the position which I take on the theoretical issues outlined in this introductory chapter.

CHAPTER 2: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Introduction

Gender relations in rural China in the post-Mao era are the result of a complex blend of continuities and discontinuities with the more recent past, that is the Maoist era, and with pre-revolutionary society. Therefore, before examining the reforms introduced by the state in the late 1970s and the impact these reforms have had on gender relations, it is necessary to step back for a longer perspective which puts the contemporary period in the context of the history of gender relations in twentieth century China.

This chapter aims for such a perspective. Rather than attempting a comprehensive history, however, it focuses on certain issues of lasting significance for the discussion developed in this thesis.¹ The first section of the chapter provides a brief outline of gender divisions of labour in rural China in the early twentieth century, and of the key values and structures that shaped those divisions. The second section outlines the origins of the CCP's theoretical approach to gender issues, and the ways in which that approach was moulded by practical experience and expediency in the early years of CCP power. The final section of the

¹ For more detailed analyses of gender relations and state policies on gender relations between the 1900s and the 1970s, see Davin 1976, Croll 1978 and Esther Yao 1983. Croll's work includes an examination of Guomindang policies on gender relations, an issue not discussed here.

chapter sketches the fluctuations in state policy toward women between 1949 and 1978 and indicates in broad terms the changes in gender relations, especially in gender divisions of labour, that occurred in rural areas during this period.

Gender Divisions of Labour in Early Twentieth Century Rural China

The bulk of the time and labour of most families in rural China in the early twentieth century was spent in subsistence agriculture and domestic work. In addition, activities such as the production of handicrafts, small-scale animal husbandry and farm labour for other families were undertaken to supplement the family's diet and/or cash income. John Buck, undertaking a survey of Chinese farms in the 1930s, found that, not including domestic work which he neglected to investigate, agriculture involved the full-time labour of just over two-thirds of the farm population, subsidiary work one-eighth, and agriculture and subsidiary work combined one-fifth (Buck 1956, p.289).

Gender divisions of labour in the rural economy were, and indeed continue to be, partly shaped by certain Confucian ideals and family structures. In particular, the notion that women are to serve and be subordinate to men and to the demands of the patrilineal family was both expressed and partially enforced through the belief that ideally women should be confined to an 'inside' sphere of family and home.

Thus, one of the words for wife - 'neiren' - literally meant 'inside person', and it was commonly claimed that 'nan zhu wai, nu zhu nei' ('men rule outside, women rule inside'). According to Confucian ideals, 'good' women limited their interactions with people outside the family, especially men. Representation of the family to the 'outside' world, for example in community politics or in business transactions, was considered the responsibility of the male head of the family. In more literal terms, also, women's movement was ideally restricted within the bounds of the home. The most visible expression of this ideal was the practice of footbinding, in which a young girl's feet were wrapped tightly to prevent them from growing beyond three-inch stumps. This meant that for the rest of the girl's life walking would be slow and painful.

Whilst families maintained control over women in part by confining them to an 'inside' sphere, another key element in women's subordination and in the maintenance of particular gender divisions of labour was, ironically, their status as 'outsiders' to the patrilineal family. Marriages in rural China were most commonly arranged by the older generation or by a matchmaker, and were usually patrilocal, that is the woman joined the man's family upon marriage.² In most places same surname and same village marriages were also prohibited. These practices meant that women were treated as temporary members of their family before marriage and as outsiders to

² There were exceptions, however. See Johnson 1983, pp.12-13.

the family after marriage. Since a family lost its daughter's labour power when the girl married (generally in her early teens), daughters were treated as less valuable than sons and, even in well-to-do families, were very rarely educated. In times of hardship they were sometimes drowned at birth or later sold as slaves, prostitutes or wives. Patrilocal marriage and surname and village exogamy also meant that as a new wife a woman was somewhat isolated and vulnerable.³

The Confucian ideal of women being confined to the 'inside' sphere of family and home contributed to a division of labour such that domestic work was largely done by the women of the family, or in gentry households, by female servants. However, in peasant families, although some domestic work was performed within the home, it also included activities outside the home, involving travel and contact with outsiders. Thus, peasant women not only cleaned the house, washed clothes, repaired and made clothes, prepared food and looked after young children and the sick and elderly. They also had to fetch water, often a few times a day from considerable distances, collect firewood or crop residues for fuel, tend domestic animals, grow vegetables, and buy goods from pedlars or in the market. As Marion Levy has written, peasant women, by necessity, led far less secluded lives than their gentry sisters:

³ For a more detailed discussion of the significance of patrilocal marriage see Chapter 4.

Light inside their houses was poor, and peasant women frequently sat on their doorsteps or along the street to do sewing and similar jobs. They did their washing along the banks of the local streams or canals, and several groups of women were generally busy with their work at the same time. Since they had no servants to shop and market for them, the peasant women and their daughters who accompanied them came into more contact with local shopkeepers and peddlers than did their gentry counterparts (Levy 1963, p.80).

In agriculture, women, on average, worked far less than men. Buck estimated that 24 per cent of rural women worked in the fields and they performed only 13 per cent of all field labour, most of which was done in the busy seasons of harvesting and planting (Buck 1956, pp.290 & 293). Women's low participation rate in agriculture was once again related to Confucian ideology, in the sense that it was considered improper for women to work in the fields. This ideal, combined with the patrilocal marriage system meant, in addition, that parents were unwilling to train their daughters in farming techniques. Women, therefore, did not know how to do some agricultural tasks.

These restrictions on women's participation in agriculture were further bolstered by popular religion, in which women were associated with pollution and destruction. It was widely believed, for example, that if a woman went near a well that was being dug, no water, or only bad water, would be found, and if a menstruating woman walked through a paddy field she would cause the rice shoots to shrivel (Wolf 1985, p.81; Ahern 1975).

It must be recognised, however, that while women's participation rate in agriculture was, everywhere, lower than men's, it varied considerably according to economic necessity and between different classes and different parts of China. In general, total absence of women from agriculture could only be afforded by the gentry and the wealthiest peasant families, and the poorer the family the more often its women would work in the fields, especially during the busy seasons.

John Buck analysed Chinese rural land and labour utilisation in terms of two major regions - the wheat region of north China and the rice region of south China (Buck 1956, pp.23-24). He found that in the rice region as a whole women performed 16 per cent of field labour as compared to only 9 per cent in the wheat region (Buck 1956, p.293).⁴ He suggested that the amount of work done by women was partly associated with the extent to which women's feet were bound, so that in the rice region, where the practice of footbinding was less strictly adhered to, women performed more field work than in the wheat region of the north. It may be, however, that, as Delia Davin has suggested, the variations in footbinding practices were more an effect than a cause of the differentials in women's field work (Davin 1976, p.118). But in any case, the correlation between footbinding practices and the extent of women's field work does not hold in all

⁴ Buck further divided the wheat and rice regions into eight areas. The boundaries of these areas and regions were determined largely by physical factors, such as climate and soil type, which affected land use (Buck 1956, pp.23-24). For details of variations in women's participation rates in agriculture between areas see Buck 1956, p.293.

cases. As Buck himself pointed out, 'in the Spring Wheat Area where foot binding is very prevalent and where it is so tight as to compel women to do the field work on their knees, 14 per cent of the labour is done by women' (Buck 1956, p.292). Nor can this relationship explain the existence of variations in women's field work between areas with similar footbinding practices (Davin 1976, p.118).

Another factor in determining variations in women's field work was that of variations in labour requirements. For example, since the cultivation of rice was particularly labour intensive, women's participation rates in field work were highest in the double-cropping rice area. In addition, despite a general discouragement of women's involvement in agriculture, there were certain agricultural tasks, such as tea cultivation and sericulture, that were considered women's work, and where such work was common, women's agricultural participation rates were higher. Variations between local customs also had an impact. Hakka women, for example, worked a great deal in the fields (Davin 1976, p.121).

Within agriculture there was a good deal of variation in gender divisions of labour. In general, it was considered that men should do more of the heavier work, while women performed the lighter tasks. However, there were considerable differences in the meanings attached to the terms 'heavy' and 'light' work, and in the strictness with which work was differentiated. This is illustrated by the following three examples, all from Yunnan in the 1940s.

Francis Hsu claimed that in 'West Town', 'men do the comparatively heavier jobs, such as carrying the crops from the fields or spreading fertiliser. Women do the planting, gathering, weeding and threshing. But either men or women may do any work that is most convenient at the moment' (Hsu 1949, p.67). In contrast, Fei Hsiao-Tung and Chang Chih-I claimed that in 'Luts'un'

there is a very clear division between the sexes. In general, the men do the heavier work, that which requires more strength and energy. During the transplantation of rice the men pull the shoots from the nursery beds and transport them to the main fields, where the women plant them. In the rice harvest the women cut the grain, tie it, and transport it to the threshing box. The men do the threshing and carry the threshed grain to the storehouse. The work in connection with the broad bean crop is performed mainly by the women. At planting time the men dig the trenches for the placing of the seeds by the women; but the latter do all the work connected with the harvest, including the cutting, the threshing, and the beating of the vines, while the men devote themselves to the preparation of the fields for the new rice crop. This division is reflected in the tools used by the two sexes: the most important for the men is the hoe; for the women the sickle and the beater are most characteristic. The distinction between the sexes is carried over into the matter of remuneration for hired labour: women are paid at only one-half the rate received by the men (Fei Hsiao-Tung & Chang Chih-I 1945, p.31).

In another village in Yunnan, however, Fei Hsiao-Tung and Chang Chih-I reported that 'the sex differentiation in work is not very strict here. We ourselves have seen women digging the soil' (Fei Hsiao-Tung & Chang Chih-I 1945, p.145).

Despite intensive farming, peasant families frequently found that their small plot of land was not enough to support them

and so the labour power not being used in the fields was turned to developing subsidiary activities such as spinning and weaving, basket making, animal husbandry, and vegetable growing, the products of which were sold in nearby markets.⁵ These activities were small-scale and undertaken at home or in village workshops. As the saying 'nan geng nu zhi' ('men plough, women weave') suggests, subsidiary activities, especially spinning and weaving, were an important area of employment for women. Sidney Gamble found, for example, that in Ding County, Hebei, 95 per cent of spinners were women and 82 per cent of weavers were women. 88 per cent of home industry workers were engaged in spinning or weaving or both (Gamble 1954, pp.288-301). Fei Hsiao-Tung and Chang Chih-I reported that in 'Yuts'un' in Yunnan, weaving was done only by women. Of 201 adult women in the village, 151 undertook weaving. Almost all young girls learnt how to weave from their mothers or other older women, and were given a loom as part of their dowry. Most of the women engaged in weaving were middle-aged and from middle-income families (the rich generally did not bother with it and the poor often could not afford the necessary materials). Weaving in this village was of low profit: working full-time a woman could not earn her subsistence. Generally women only undertook it as a subsidiary occupation in addition to farming and domestic work. This nevertheless brought in an important income for the family, serving as a buffer against starvation when, for

⁵ For a detailed discussion of the development of commercialisation and family production in handicrafts and other subsidiary activities see Philip Huang 1985 and 1990.

example, the main crops failed, or the male worker became ill (Fei Hsiao-Tung & Chang Chih-I 1945, pp.239-244).

According to John Buck, women performed 16 per cent of all subsidiary activities in the early 1930s. However, under 'subsidiary occupations' Buck included those of merchant, hired farm-hand, unskilled labour, skilled labour, professional occupations, scholar, official and soldier, as well as those in home industry (Buck, 1956, p.298). His figures obscure the fact that in a number of these occupations, particularly those of soldier, and those such as official and scholar, requiring a high level of education, the numbers of women were negligible, whereas in home industry their participation rate was high.

The notion that women belong in the 'inside' sphere did not prevent rural women in the early twentieth century from being involved in commerce or trading. Generally, however, women involved in such activities travelled shorter distances than men and their transactions were on a smaller scale. Francis Hsu reported that in 'West Town' there were more women than men in the markets, selling all sorts of products. However, women traded within a radius of no more than 15 miles, while a large number of men made trips to places as far away as Burma, Indo-China, Hong Kong and Shanghai. Hsu claimed also that women worked in small family shops that occupied a part of their home, but were rarely found in the larger shops located on separated premises and employing people outside the family (Hsu 1949, pp.67-74).

In this brief examination of women's and men's work in early twentieth century rural China I have shown that gender divisions of labour were constructed and maintained in part through conceptual dichotomies, in particular between 'inside' and 'outside' spheres, and also between 'light' and 'heavy' work. These dichotomies and the ways in which they shaped gender divisions of labour varied, however, from one region to another. They also intersected with, or were modified by, popular beliefs, for example relating to the 'polluting' effects of women, class divisions, and the requirements of the family economy.

The picture I have so far drawn of gender relations and gender divisions of labour is a somewhat static one. Even within the period covered by the above account, however, gender relations underwent a good deal of disruption and change. Scholars generally agree that from the eighteenth to the mid-twentieth century, living conditions for Chinese peasants were gradually worsening (Bianco 1971, p.104). In part this was due simply to increasing population pressure on the land. In the two hundred years from 1651 to 1851 China's population tripled from 120-140 million to 350-430 million, and by the early 1950s it had reached approximately 580 million people (Bianco 1971, p.91). Despite increases in cultivated acreage due to improved farming methods and the planting of new crops, and the migration of millions of Southerners overseas and of Northerners to Manchuria, this population explosion put severe strains on the land and the rural economy and consequently on social relations. In the

first half of the twentieth century, shortage of land, increasing exploitation of tenant farmers by landowners and natural disasters resulted in starvation, mass migration, banditry and rebellions, and these were further compounded by foreign imperialism (Wakeman 1975; Bianco 1971).

These socio-economic disruptions made it extremely difficult for poor peasants to attain the Confucian ideals of the family and of gender relations: children died, sons left home to look for work elsewhere and daughters and wives were sold to pay for the survival of the rest of the family. Many poor young men could not afford to marry, and women whose husbands had died or, for one reason or another, could not support them, were forced out to work to earn food for themselves and their children, often through begging or prostitution.

Opium, sold by the British from the eighteenth century onwards, sent numerous families into destitution. Men became addicts, were unable to support their families and sold all their possessions and even wives and children in order to obtain the drug (Pruitt 1945). Some other imported goods competed with local products and dealt a severe blow to certain rural home industries. Cotton spinning, the largest handicraft industry in the nineteenth century, and one involving numerous peasant women working at home, suffered most. Other handicraft industries, such as weaving, were relatively unaffected, however (Riskin 1987, p.15).

As the most vulnerable and insecure members of society, women suffered most from poverty and dislocation, yet they also

gained some independence through it. In addition to the women who were forced to earn a living for themselves, some young women were sent to work in the textile and light industry factories newly established in the big cities. For most, this was a miserable experience, characterised by exploitation and appalling living and working conditions (Honig 1986; Hershatter 1986). However, these young women did gain some independence from their families and were exposed to new ideas about individual freedom and the evils of the Confucian family. In the 1920s some rural women industrial workers participated in strikes, and in the Guangzhou silk factories young women banded together and refused the marriages that their families arranged for them (Topley 1975). On the whole, however, new ideas and behaviour in the cities scarcely affected the vast rural population.

This, then, was the setting in which the CCP first formulated policies relating to gender relations in rural China. In theoretical terms, the early approaches taken by the CCP developed out of two main intellectual currents: the May 4th Movement and Marxism-Leninism. In subsequent years much of CCP policy making on gender issues would be characterised by conflict or tension between these two outlooks.

The Origins of CCP Policies on Gender Relations, 1919-1949

The May 4th Movement, so named after student demonstrations on May 4th 1919, was a revolutionary movement of the nineteen teens and twenties in which urban intellectuals played the most important role. It involved, above all, a rejection of Confucian ideology, which was perceived as being the cause of China's economic and social degeneration in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and its weakness in the face of foreign encroachment. Central to the movement were challenges to family ideals and structures, and calls for an end to the oppression of women within the family and for the establishment of equal rights for women and men in all spheres.

In their condemnation of Confucian ideology, May 4th intellectuals drew on western liberal notions of democracy, equality and individual rights, and were inspired by European liberal or bourgeois feminists and earlier western influenced Chinese feminists, such as Jiu Jin and Sophia Chang (Croll 1978, pp.59-79). Like their Western counterparts, they devoted much energy to campaigning for reforms in the laws of property and inheritance, and for women's right to be educated, to be employed, to vote and hold office and to choose their own husbands.

Following the Russian revolution of 1917, a number of intellectuals, many of whom had been involved in the May 4th movement, were drawn more and more towards Marxism-Leninism.

Many women activists began to regard their earlier feminist concerns as having too narrow a focus and joined the nationalist and socialist revolutionary movements in the belief that women's liberation could only be won after a revolution of the whole social system had been achieved.

The CCP was founded in Shanghai in 1921. In drawing up policies on women, as in other areas, it initially followed closely the approach taken by the Soviet Union. Thus, it held firstly, that, as Engels had argued, women's liberation is dependent on their involvement in non-domestic production and the reduction of their domestic workload. Secondly, the CCP regarded the particular oppression of women as far less important than the oppression of the worker and poor peasant classes, and, like the Russian Bolshevik Party, was wary of any separate organisation that represented women's interests as *women*, fearing that this would disrupt the unity between women and men in the revolutionary movement (Johnson 1983, p.40).

In the years to come the CCP did not always adhere to the first point mentioned above. In the first place, with the exception of the Great Leap Forward period (1958-1960), the CCP's adoption of Engel's maxim has always been lop-sided, with the reduction of women's domestic work receiving far less attention than their participation in non-domestic production. CCP policies have not been limited to the latter concern, however. They have also included, at times, elements more in line with May 4th concerns for the

establishment of equal rights and the direct reform of values and social structures that oppressed women. At other times, both the participation of women in non-domestic production and the reform of oppressive social attitudes and structures have been actively discouraged. What has remained constant throughout CCP history is that, while the CCP has always claimed to be committed to gender equality, a concern for gender equality for its own sake has always been subordinated to other concerns, in particular, peasant support for the revolution, economic growth, and class struggle, and has been modified, downplayed or compromised in strategies designed to achieve these latter goals.

Between the 1920s and the 1940s the CCP emphasised that the most important task for the activists in its Women's Department was to draw as many women as possible into production, political activities, and support work for the Red Army.

In the Jiangxi Soviet area in the early 1930s, women's rights issues also received some attention with the introduction of the Land Law and the Marriage Law. Under the Land Law, land was to be taken from the landlords and distributed among the peasants. Peasant women were to have equal rights with men to land allotments, a move which would, it was expected, give women the economic independence necessary for their liberation. According to the Marriage Law introduced in 1931, marriage was defined as a legal tie between a man and a woman, to be forged without the interference of other parties

and to be ended by mutual agreement or upon the insistence of either spouse. After divorce, a woman was to retain her full property rights and, in a radical break with patrilineal custom, women were to be favoured over men in the custody of children (Davin 1976, p.28; Johnson 1983, p.55).

These laws were important because they symbolised the CCP's commitment to new values and goals for social change.

Implementation of the laws was, however, very uneven and imperfect. Indeed, in the Yan'an Soviet between 1937 and 1945, such implementation was actively discouraged. In 1943 a Party Central Committee directive proclaimed that 'women cadres must stop looking on economic work as unimportant' (quoted in Davin 1976, p.36). All work with women that did not directly contribute to an increase in their productivity was to be de-emphasised. There was no mention of the Marriage Law or of work to educate against oppressive customs, except those, such as footbinding, which directly hindered production.

The discouragement of direct attempts to alter attitudes and structures which oppressed women was perhaps adopted initially as a temporary measure for survival in the difficult period of civil war and war against the Japanese. However, it was also the beginning of a longer-term pattern in which efforts to change gender relations were limited by the CCP's reluctance to jeopardise the support of the poor peasantry who resisted strongly any attempts to dismantle the Confucian family model.

To the urban intellectuals who had been active in the May 4th movement and in the formation of the CCP, revolution was a chance for individuals to fight free of what they saw as the stifling restrictions of the Confucian family. Poor peasants saw it in a very different light, however. During the early twentieth century the disintegration of many poor peasant families in the face of poverty and socio-economic disruptions had resulted in severe hardship and indignity. Consequently, when the CCP and the Red Army became active in rural areas, peasants supported them, not in the hope of destroying family and other social structures, but of restoring some semblance of Confucian family order. They were, therefore, opposed to any moves on the part of the CCP that might lessen their power to achieve the Confucian family ideal, in particular, moves, such as the implementation of the Marriage Law, which would give more autonomy to young women.⁶

Kay Ann Johnson has pointed to the conflicts between the western individualist theoretical approaches of the May 4th Movement and Marxism-Leninism and the family oriented concerns of the Chinese peasantry as a major force shaping

⁶ Such legislation was opposed not only by male peasants. Women, who as mothers and mothers-in-law had, after years of subjugation, finally attained some measure of authority through control of daughters and daughters-in-law, also felt threatened by reforms that would give young women greater autonomy. Young wives had the most to gain from legislation such as the Marriage Law but they were also the most vulnerable. It was women from this group who were most active in the CCP's women's organisations, but at the same time, there were many who dared not fight the opposition of husband and mother-in-law.

CCP social policies after the 1949 revolution, as well as during the Jiangxi and Yan'an Soviet periods (Johnson, 1983). Johnson suggests that the CCP is not 'a Marxist leadership deterministically trapped by its inheritance of a disrupted but largely untransformed "feudal social base" in the countryside' (Johnson 1983, p.220), but neither has it completely destroyed or changed that base. Rather, it has sought to reform certain aspects of society, but to accommodate or make use of other aspects which are useful for, or at least not in conflict with, the achievement of its major priorities.

For women, the result of this process has been, as Johnson shows, that some very major improvements in their lives have been made, but these improvements have nevertheless been limited because certain fundamental aspects of peasant society have been left unchallenged. This was clearly illustrated by the land reform campaigns begun in the Yan'an Soviet in 1945. Under these campaigns peasant women, as well as men, were to be granted property rights. Many peasant women believed that ownership of land would make them economically independent from their fathers and husbands, thus improving their bargaining power within their families, and, under the most oppressive circumstances, enabling them to leave. As one woman put it,

If he divorces me, never mind, I'll get my share (of land) and the children will get theirs. We can live a good life without him (Hinton 1966, p.397).

This potential effect of land reform was blocked, however, because, due to the family-oriented nature of rural society, women's land was considered family land, and land reform authorities, unless strongly challenged by a local women's group, automatically gave women's land deeds to the male family head. During the 1940s the value of separate land rights for women was particularly limited because of the difficulty women had in obtaining divorce. This issue would be tackled by marriage reform workers in the 1950s, but until the end of the 1940s marriage reform issues were considered too divisive to be pursued with any vigour.

State Policies and Gender Relations in Rural China, 1949-1978

In March 1949, seven months before the CCP assumed leadership of the whole of China, the All-China Democratic Women's Federation was established and held its first national congress. The Congress passed draft regulations for the Federation and described, in a general way, its formal structure. It was not until the third congress held in September 1957 that the Federation's organisational structure was spelt out fully, however, at which time its name was also changed to the All-China Women's Federation. At the latter congress it was announced that the Federation would have representative groups at each level of government from the level of township (*xiang*) or street committee to that of county, province and national congress. Each group would

elect the members of the group above it (Davlin 1976, pp.65-66).

As a mass organisation, the dual task of the Women's Federation was to mobilise mass support for CCP policies and to defend and further the interests of women. In subsequent years the actions and policy statements of the Federation were to reveal a shifting and uneasy tension between these tasks. The rhetoric of both the Women's Federation and the CCP leadership has been that there is no conflict between the two, but from an outsider's point of view this has sometimes resulted in an acceptance by the Women's Federation of Party policies that are in fact detrimental to women's interests, and a failure, on its part, to tackle problems for women that the Party itself does not acknowledge, or regards as unimportant.

The first law promulgated by the CCP after Liberation was the Marriage Law of May 1950. This was followed in June by the Agrarian Reform Law, which was to guide land reform in those areas, amounting to approximately 75 per cent of the country, in which it had not already been accomplished (Johnson 1983, p.102).

The content of the 1950 Marriage Law was similar to that of the 1931 law, but this time more effort was put, by the Women's Federation especially, into the implementation of the law and to propaganda and education on gender equality and freedom of marriage and divorce. For all this, the law

achieved limited success in the countryside. In many areas cadres outside the Women's Federation were reluctant to implement it. Despite the fact that the Agrarian Reform Law and the Marriage Law were promulgated at the same time, and despite the limitations for women of having the former without the latter, many land reform cadres continued to find that marriage reform was far too difficult and divisive an issue to tackle until *after* land reform had been fully accomplished. Even then, those trying to implement the Marriage Law faced formidable resistance from peasants, resulting in some cases in severe physical violence against Women's Federation cadres and young peasant women. There was also a sharp increase in female suicides. By mid 1953, the persistence of resistance to the reforms led the CCP to the conclusion that direct political pressure was causing too much social unrest and disaffection among peasants, and that marriage reform would be a much slower process than they had previously expected (Wolf 1974, p.171).

During the First Five-Year Plan period of 1953-1957 there was a major change in policy on women in urban areas, and although their situation was very different, this also affected rural women. In the cities, the previously much publicised notion that a precondition for women's liberation was their participation in non-domestic production was quietly pushed aside, and instead, the housewife's role as a servicer of those who participated directly in production was glorified. In 1954 the Women's Federation's magazine

*New Women of China (Xin Zhongguo Funu)*⁷ published a series of articles entitled 'How housewives can serve socialism' and in 1956 the Women's Federation mounted a 'five good' family (*Wu hao jiating*) campaign to reward families in which women contributed to socialism by uniting with neighbourhood families for mutual aid; doing domestic work well; educating children well; encouraging the family in production, study and work; and working well themselves (Andors 1983, p.37). This shift in policy was the state's response to urban unemployment problems. Unemployment, endemic in urban areas at liberation, continued during the 1950s because the growth of industry could not match the enormous population growth, which was due both to natural increase and to migration from rural areas.

The First Five Year Plan period was not the only time when the state revoked its emphasis on women's participation in paid labour in urban areas. In fact, since 1949 there has been a rough pattern in which state policies related to women's work have swung from an emphasis on women's participation in non-domestic labour in one period, to a de-emphasis on their non-domestic labour and a greater emphasis on their domestic labour in the next. Thus, the years 1949-1952, 1957-1960 and 1966-1978 were periods in which strong efforts were made to increase the number of women in non-domestic production, while the years between 1953 and 1957, and between 1961 and 1965, and the period following reforms

⁷ This was the precursor to *ZGFN*.

in 1978 were periods in which women's participation in non-domestic production was de-emphasised. This pattern corresponds roughly to shifts between 'left' and 'right' economic and political strategies.⁸

With the exception of the Great Leap Forward period, national policies on women and the propaganda of the Women's Federation (for example, their magazine *ZGFN*) have been dominated by a concern for urban women. Consequently, the fluctuations in CCP attitude to urban women that I have outlined above have also carried over into the work of Women's Federation cadres in rural areas, even though rural and urban situations have generally been very different. Thus, in the early 1950s attempts were made in rural areas as well as cities to improve the image of the housewife, and the 'five good' family campaign was also carried out in the countryside.

In the countryside, however, unemployment was not the problem that it was in urban areas, and much stronger attempts were made to draw rural women into non-domestic work. Indeed, the expansion of opportunities to profitably employ labour in

⁸ I must stress, however, that the connection I am making here is between changes in economic strategy and changes in *policy* on women. This does not necessarily imply the same correlation between economic strategy and the real rate of employment amongst urban women. As I argue elsewhere, there is evidence to suggest that since 1978, for example, despite urban unemployment problems and pressures on women to withdraw from the paid labour force, the overall employment rate of women has not declined. Instead, it has declined in some sectors of the economy, but increased in others (Jacka 1990b).

non-domestic production, generated through collectivisation, was as important a motive for drawing women into the collective labour force as beliefs about women's liberation.

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

The Great Leap Forward was a development strategy put forward by Mao Zedong that was characterised by the policy of 'walking on two legs'. Under this policy, modern, large-scale urban-centred heavy industry would receive the greatest proportion of investment, but the agricultural sector would also be developed and become self-sufficient by relying on the mass mobilisation of rural labour for work in the fields, on large-scale construction and water control projects, and in local small-scale industries. It was found that the existing collectives lacked sufficient labour power and resources to meet these requirements, and consequently they were regrouped into communes. By the end of 1958, 99 per cent of all peasant families were members of rural people's communes, comprising an average of about 4,600 families (Thorborg 1978, pp.538-539).

Although few reliable statistics are available, it appears that during the collectivisation period, and especially during the Great Leap Forward, rural women's participation in 'outside' work increased significantly. According to Marina Thorborg's calculations, between 1929 and 1954, 30 to 50 per cent of rural women worked in collective agriculture. In 1955 the range was 40 to 55 per cent, and it rose to 60-70 per cent in 1956, 50-65 per cent in 1957, 80-95 per cent in 1958 and 1959 and 70 to 80 per cent in 1960 (Thorborg 1978, p.582). The time each woman spent in the fields also increased. In 1957 a survey of 228 Agricultural Producers' Cooperatives across the country found that women worked, on average, 166 workdays per year, while men worked 220 workdays. In 1959 women worked 250 workdays, while men worked 300 (Thorborg 1978, p.592).

An important result of collectivisation for women was a loosening of the authority of the (usually male) head of the family over other family members. Under the collective system, the production team leader, rather than individual male heads of families, made the important decisions concerning the use of women's labour power in 'outside' production (Parish & Whyte 1978, p.203). In many places this played an important role in improving the situation of women, since Party policy put pressure on production team leaders to treat women and men equally. In addition, women's participation in 'outside' production, and the contribution to the family income made by the work-points they earned in such work, helped to improve their bargaining power in the

family. In most cases, however, women did not have control over their earnings. Although their work-points were listed separately, payment was not made to individual women, but rather was added to that of other family members and handed to the head of the family (Parish & Whyte 1978, p.238).

A further aspect of the collectivisation drive of the late 1950s particularly important to rural women was that for the first, and to date the last, time in the history of the CCP, encouragement of women's participation in the 'outside' sphere was accompanied by large scale efforts to reduce women's work in the 'inside' sphere by socialising domestic work. Marina Thorborg estimated that, whereas in 1956, 7 to 10 per cent of children whose mothers took part in field work were taken care of in busy farm season child care stations, in 1959, 53 to 73 per cent of such children were taken care of in child care stations that functioned all year round (Thorborg 1978, pp.600-601). Other services developed on a wide scale during this period included sewing workshops, grain mills, health services, maternity centres and communal dining halls.

Another move which had the effect of lessening women's work in the 'inside' sphere was the discouragement of 'domestic sidelines' (*jiating fuye*). When communes were first established they took over all ownership of the land and almost all the means of production, and employed peasants to work in production teams in return for work-points entitling them to a share of the total output of the team. At the same

time, however, peasant families were assigned small private plots of land (*ziliudi*) and retained ownership of scattered fruit trees, domestic livestock and small farm tools. They were allowed to use time outside collective work hours and the labour of family members not engaged in collective work to gather wild plants, cultivate vegetables and fruit trees on their private plot or in their courtyard, rear small numbers of domestic livestock and make handicrafts on a small scale. Much of the work involved in these 'domestic sidelines' as they were called, was done by women (ZGFN March 1962, Editorial).

State policies towards domestic sidelines fluctuated from the 1950s to the late 1970s between cautious encouragement and repression. On the one hand, they were regarded by the state as competition with, and a threat to, the collective economy and as an area where class inequalities could re-emerge. On the other hand, they were a concession to the peasant population which, on the whole, was opposed to collectivisation, and, in addition, they could provide an important supplement to collective production. In most periods the latter considerations won out. Peasants generally obtained grain from collective distribution, but a large proportion of other food items and cash they obtained from domestic sidelines. This was reflected in the peasant saying 'We depend on the collective for grain, but on ourselves for cash' (RMRB 20 November 1964). During the Great Leap Forward, however, domestic sidelines were officially discouraged or banned, and many communes

confiscated private plots without compensation (Platte 1983, p.82).

The liberation of women was not a central focus of the Great Leap Forward. However, the demands of the Great Leap Forward strategy did mean that efforts made to fulfil what had been Engels' two main requirements for women's liberation - involvement in 'social production' and release from domestic work - were greater during this period than at any other time. As a consequence, the Great Leap Forward offers a particularly clear picture of the problems and limitations of the Chinese adoption of Engels' approach.

One problem was that the programme for the socialisation of domestic work ran into difficulties because of its financial costliness. Tasks formerly performed by women as unpaid domestic work continued to be done mainly by women, but became collective services that had to be paid for out of collective funds. In many areas the costs of such services were considered too high and they functioned for only a short time. After the Great Leap Forward ended a large proportion of collective services in rural areas ceased.

Other limitations of women's liberation during the Great Leap Forward were due to the fact that, as in the land reform campaign, certain attitudes and social structures remained unchallenged. No attempt was made, for example, to challenge the continued practice of patrilocal marriage in rural areas. This practice had a whole host of negative consequences: the

mistreatment of young daughters and a reluctance to teach them skills that would be lost to another family and, resulting from this and from the fact that upon marriage they were moved to an alien environment, an inability on the part of many young women to participate in production outside the home and in the political affairs of the commune.

Another phenomenon that remained largely unchallenged was the gender division of labour between 'inside' and 'outside' work. The establishment of collective child care and other services lessened individual women's burden of domestic work, but it left untouched the notion that domestic work was women's responsibility, not men's. The staff of collective services were almost all women, and where such services were minimal, individual women bore the entire responsibility for domestic work. Consequently, many women shouldered a heavy double burden during the Great Leap Forward.

Not only did the Great Leap Forward not eliminate the gender division of labour between 'inside' and 'outside', it also created a low opinion of 'inside' work and hence reinforced the devaluation and subordination of women. This, I would argue, was due largely to the fact that some of the assumptions on which the original Marxist approach to women's liberation was based were at odds with the Chinese situation.

Engels' claim that women's liberation was dependent upon their participation in social production and the reduction of their domestic duties was based, first of all, on a belief

that men's domination over women stemmed from the fact that in the middle stage of barbarism men began domesticating animals and were able to produce more than was needed for consumption. Consequently,

all the surplus now resulting from production fell to the man; the woman shared in consuming it, but she had no share in owning it... The woman's housework lost its significance compared with the man's work in obtaining a livelihood. The latter was everything, the former an insignificant contribution (Engels 1977, p.158).

Underlying Engels' claim was also what I discussed in Chapter 1 as a Victorian ideological dichotomy between a 'private', 'feminine' family sphere and a 'public', 'masculine' sphere of production.

Recent research has thrown doubt on Engels' version of world history. For example, there is much anthropological data which suggests that it was women, rather than men, who first developed horticulture and thereby generated productive surplus (Jaggar 1983, p.72). This problem aside, Engels' conception of gender divisions of labour clashes with what we know about women's work in 19th and 20th century rural China. As discussed in the first section of this chapter, in rural China before collectivisation a conceptual dichotomy between 'inside' and 'outside' spheres resulted in gender divisions of labour such that women's work was relatively concentrated in the home and family, and field work was undertaken largely by men. The dichotomy did not, however, also involve a distinction between 'family care' and 'production', and in practice, some aspects of women's 'inside' work, such as weaving and raising domestic livestock, did involve the

production of material goods, both for consumption and for surplus value. Furthermore, there is no evidence to indicate that in pre-revolutionary China work such as cooking and child care was devalued as 'non-productive', or that it was not recognised as any less necessary to the family economy than other work.

Thus, in adopting Marxist theoretical approaches, Chinese leaders in the 1950s added new, negative connotations to the 'inside' work undertaken largely by women. These negative connotations were then inscribed in the organisation of rural families into collectives and the subsequent distinction drawn between collective production and work undertaken for the individual family. Domestic work was devalued because it was seen as non-productive and as not contributing to the collective economy. Women's work in domestic sidelines was devalued both because of its association with 'unproductive' domestic work and, ironically, because it was, in fact, productive, and was part of a private market economy regarded as a threat to the collective economy.⁹

During the Great Leap Forward there were also a number of problems surrounding women's work in the 'outside' sphere. There were numerous complaints from the Women's Federation, for example, of women being overworked and of practices, such as assigning heavy work to pregnant women, which resulted in

⁹ For further discussion of the ways in which domestic work and domestic sidelines have been perceived since the 1950s see Chapters 6 and 8.

serious damage to women's health. It was claimed that some production team leaders regarded the protection of women's health as an impediment to fulfilling production quotas, rather than as a sound investment in maintaining healthy workers (Andors 1983, p.55; Thorborg 1978, pp.566-567).

In addition, a division was generally maintained in the 'outside' sphere between the work of men and that of women, and women's work was undervalued and remunerated less than men's, despite the often repeated slogan 'equal pay for equal work'. The evaluation process for the work-point remuneration system adopted in Chinese communes varied considerably from place to place. Apart from taking into account the number of hours a worker spent in collective labour, work-points were sometimes assigned according to the 'heaviness' or difficulty of the tasks performed and sometimes according to the skill or physical abilities of the worker. Almost invariably, however, the definition of terms such as 'skill', 'heaviness' and 'physical ability' was such as to discriminate against women. As in parts of rural China before 1949, work which was seen as involving heavy labour, usually done by men, was rewarded more than work done by women that required dexterity or stamina. For example, ploughing with a cow was defined as 'heavy' work and was done by men. As such, it was rewarded more than harvesting grain with a sickle, which was women's work and was considered

'light' even though it was considerably more tiring (Thorborg 1978, p.542).¹⁰

Rural men often strongly resisted equal remuneration for women's and men's work, and put pressure on local officials to divide work tasks in such a way that women would receive less pay. In some instances, for example, where there was not already such a classification in place, they called for certain tasks to be classified as 'heavy' work, to be done by men only, and to be remunerated at rates higher than those for tasks undertaken by women (Crook & Crook 1979, p.128; Thorborg 1978, p.551). Consequently, as will be discussed in Chapter 7, the gender divisions of labour between 'light' and 'heavy' work apparent in agriculture in the post-Mao period are a result, in part, of struggles over remuneration that occurred under the collective system.

Where rural industry was developed, or capital construction works undertaken, women generally took over agricultural work, so that men could be freed for the new tasks. Through the 1960s and 1970s this pattern was repeated, and after 1978, with a marked increase in rural industrialisation, it became even more evident. The implications of this will be discussed in Chapter 7.

¹⁰ For a brief account of such practices in pre-1949 rural China see the quotation from Fei Hsiao-Tung & Chang Chih-I (1945, p.31) cited above in the first section of this chapter. A similar account is given by Philip Huang in relation to Huayangqiao, in the Yangzi Delta (Huang, Philip 1990, pp.55-56).

The Great Leap Forward ended in economic disaster in 1960, and in the subsequent economic recession between 1960 and 1963 numerous collective services were closed down, communes were reduced in size, and many of the administrative functions of the commune were passed down to the production brigade and production team. Following this reorganisation, the basic structure of the commune changed very little until the end of the 1970s (Riskin 1987, p.170).

Rural employment opportunities contracted between 1960 and 1963, and rural women's labour force participation rate declined to 50-60 per cent. As the economy strengthened in the mid-60s more rural industries developed, employing mainly men, and more women were absorbed into agricultural work. Women's labour force participation rate rose to 60-70 per cent during these years, and to about 70 per cent by 1974 (Thorborg 1978, p.584).

After the Great Leap Forward the All-China Women's Federation shifted its attention from a concern primarily with women's participation in production as the key to their liberation, to a greater concern with ideology. In the early 1960s it initiated a movement aimed at raising the ideological consciousness of women, believing that women's social inferiority was grounded in traditional ideology, and that in order to solve this problem women had first to raise their own self-awareness (Croll 1978, p.290). Many articles in *ZGFN* at this time addressed women's problems of combining participation in paid work with domestic duties and, while

recognising that these problems were indeed considerable, claimed that with a strong will and 'correct thinking' they could nevertheless be overcome. The assumption was, of course, that domestic work would neither be thoroughly socialised, nor shared with men, but would remain the responsibility of individual women.

Although the Women's Federation's attempts to improve the ideological consciousness of women corresponded in a general way with the growing emphasis of the state leadership during this period on ideology and politics, during the second half of the 1960s they received harsh criticism because they were seen to conflict with attempts to raise women and men's class consciousness. Subsequently, the Women's Federation, along with other mass organisations, was branded revisionist and was disbanded. During the three years of the Cultural Revolution there was no separate work carried out among women.

Despite this, young women did play a major role in Red Guard activities and there was strong encouragement of women's participation in political affairs and in all areas of 'outside' production during this period. Notions that women were not fit for 'outside' roles were countered with the slogans 'times have changed, men and women are equal', 'what men can do, women can do too' and 'women hold up half the sky', and with stories of model women working alongside men or in 'Iron Girls' teams' in areas of production from which women were previously excluded, such as heavy industry.

The negative side to this propaganda was that women's lives as mothers and wives and the problems of combining 'inside' work demands with those of 'outside' work were ignored. In media accounts, model women's families were either not mentioned, or else 'selfish' concerns for the individual family were sacrificed for the revolutionary cause. Women were still expected to undertake all domestic work, but this contribution to the economy was not recognised. The suggestion that 'what women can do, men can do too', or that both women and men should do domestic work, was not raised (Johnson 1983, p.167).

Rural inhabitants were on the whole less affected by the turmoil of the Cultural Revolution than those of the cities. However, one policy that had a major impact on rural areas was the *xia-xiang* policy, in which, altogether, some 12 million urban school-leavers were sent to the countryside to learn from the peasants (Riskin 1987, p.187). The policy, which ran from 1968 until Mao Zedong's death in 1976, was unpopular, both with the urbanites who regarded it as akin to a sentence of hard labour, and with peasants who considered the young urban people a burden and a nuisance. Young women, both urban and rural, did sometimes benefit from the policy, however. Educated young urban women, for example, sometimes had greater opportunity to exercise their skills and gain positions of respect in rural industry and rural politics than they would have had in competing with their male counterparts in the cities. At the same time, they provided

a new model for young peasant women to emulate, and helped to break down rural prejudices about women (Andors 1983, p.146).

Following the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1969, separate work among women was given attention once more, and by 1973 the Women's Federation was re-established up to the provincial level throughout most of the country.¹¹

The revival of separate political work with women¹² was partly due to a major new attempt to reduce population growth (this being seen as largely women's responsibility). Such attempts had been made in the mid-1950s and early 1960s, but were given relatively little emphasis and had been discontinued during the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution. In the early 1970s a national population policy aimed at reducing the birth rate to 2 per cent was implemented. Late marriage was promoted (24 to 26 for women, 26 to 29 for men), two or three children were recommended as the maximum, and a spacing of at least four years between births was urged. Health workers and those involved at all levels of the political system, but especially members of the Women's Federation, were mobilised to educate the population on the need for family planning (Sidel & Sidel 1982, p.80).

¹¹ The next national congress was not held until 1978, however.

¹² This type of work is identified in Chinese as *funu gongzuo*. Henceforth in this thesis I will follow Delia Davin's practice of using the term 'woman-work' when referring to such work. Although clumsy, this term is, as Davin suggests, preferable to the common but misleading translation of *funu gongzuo* as 'women's work' (Davin 1976, p.17).

The greatest increase in woman-work during the 1970s was due, however, to the 'criticise Lin Biao and Confucius' campaign which ran from 1973 to 1976. This campaign resulted in a uniquely concentrated attempt to challenge the obstacles that Confucianism continued to create for the realisation of gender equality. In study groups across the country women read and criticised Confucian classic texts, in particular the *Classic for Girls (Nuer jing)*, and identified and analysed the effects of Confucianism on their own lives.

During these years some more direct and practical steps were also taken towards reducing gender inequalities in rural areas. For example, for the first time, a fairly strong propaganda effort was made to persuade men to share the burden of domestic work, matrilocal marriages were encouraged, and unequal work remuneration was challenged. In some areas these efforts were moderately successful. Kay Ann Johnson reports that in Hebei, for example, Women's Federation statistics recorded an increase in the work-point ratings of women, an increase in the proportion of production brigades funding public child care, and an increase in the number of women working in full-time agriculture. They also noted an improved willingness on the part of men to do domestic work (Johnson 1983, p.202).

William Parish and Martin Whyte claim, however, that although the official ideal of equal sharing of domestic work was known in the Guangdong villages they studied, no indication was given of any concrete attempts made to involve more men

in domestic work (Parish & Whyte 1978, p.204). This suggests that the 'criticise Lin Biao and Confucius' campaign, which was conducted at the time of Parish and Whyte's interviews, had little impact on gender relations in Guangdong.

Whatever the extent of the successes in realising gender equality engendered by the 'criticise Lin Biao and Confucius' campaign, they were, in any case, short-lived. After Mao Zedong's death and the fall of the 'Gang of Four' in 1976, there was a backlash against the campaign, as there was against everything that the new leadership chose to describe as a project of the 'Gang of Four'. Emily Honig suggests, for example, that one reason for the surprising strength of belief in women's biological inferiority among Chinese people in the 1980s was that a suggestion to the contrary might evoke the accusation that one was espousing the principles of the 'Gang of Four' (Honig 1985, p.335).

Conclusion

In this chapter I have drawn a brief sketch of gender relations, in particular gender divisions of labour, in rural China from the early twentieth century to the late 1970s. I have shown that throughout this period conceptual dichotomies, in particular between 'inside' and 'outside' spheres, and between 'light' and 'heavy' work, have played an important role in maintaining certain gender divisions of labour, which in turn have contributed to women's

subordination. The meanings surrounding these dichotomies, the significance attached to them, and the ways in which they have affected gender relations, have, however, varied over time.

In pre-revolutionary China, the Confucian ideal that women should be limited to an 'inside' sphere, although rarely fully achieved in practice amongst peasant families, did mean that women's movement and their interaction with people outside the family were restricted, and this in turn contributed to their subordination within the patriarchal family. Women's participation rates in agriculture were relatively low before 1949, although most women in poor peasant families did undertake some field work. Within agriculture, there were further gender divisions of labour. In some places these were not particularly marked. In others, however, there were clear divisions between 'light' work that was undertaken by women and remunerated at a relatively low rate, and 'heavy' work undertaken by men.

The theoretical approach toward gender issues adopted by the CCP derived from liberal concerns with the reform of family structures and legislation for equal rights on the one hand, and a Marxist emphasis on class struggle and on drawing women into production, on the other. In practice, whilst legislation such as the Marriage Law and the Agrarian Reform Law of 1950 have been of great importance for women, their effect in reducing women's subordination has been limited by the CCP's inability or unwillingness to implement them

thoroughly, and to remove or alter certain family structures, in particular the patrilocal marriage system.

Under the CCP, reform of family structures has generally taken second place to attempts to draw women into production, though the vigour with which this latter approach has been pursued has also varied from one period to the next. Between 1949 and 1978 there were marked increases in women's involvement in 'outside' production, which helped to improve women's economic status. On the other hand, the failure to reduce women's domestic workload significantly, whether through socialisation or through persuading men to undertake such work, resulted in a serious double burden for women. Furthermore, the introduction of Marxist conceptions of 'inside' work as non-productive and trivial, combined with the newly established structural distinction between the collective sector and the secondary and politically suspect private, family economy, not only reinforced a distinction between 'inside' and 'outside' spheres of work, but added new negative connotations to the former, and hence contributed to the devaluation of women's work in that sector. In the 'outside' sphere of collective production and collective politics, women were disadvantaged by the patrilocal marriage system which contributed to a reluctance on the part of families to educate their daughters, and which left women socially isolated after marriage. In addition, the implementation of the work-point system was accompanied by local struggles over remuneration in which, frequently, gender divisions of labour between 'light', relatively low

paid 'women's work' and 'heavy', more highly paid 'men's work' were strengthened, or in some cases newly created.

In Chapters 4 to 9 many of the issues and themes that have been raised in this chapter will be enlarged upon in a consideration of the impact of social and economic reforms on gender relations in contemporary rural China. As a preface to this discussion, the following chapter provides an outline of the key reforms introduced by the Chinese state since the late 1970s.

CHAPTER 3: POST-MAO REFORMS

Introduction

After Mao Zedong's death and the arrest of the Gang of Four in 1976, Deng Xiaoping and other leaders whom the Gang of Four had opposed, rose to prominence. They promoted values and goals very different from those espoused under the previous regime, and introduced policies for radical economic and social reform. In rural areas, this turn around was to have an impact on the economy and on social relations as profound as that caused by the collectivisation drive of the 1950s, which it was now reversing.

This chapter provides background information about the process of reform initiated by the state in the late 1970s and 1980s, and introduces issues relating to the ways in which the reforms have both been shaped by, and impinged upon, gender relations in rural areas. The first section of the chapter outlines the shifts in state ideology that have accompanied the introduction of reform policies; the second describes the key economic reforms introduced into rural areas, and the broad consequences of these reforms for economic, social and political relations; and the third section examines the one-child family policy and the impact it has had.

Shifts in State Ideology

In the first phase of post-Mao reform, between 1978 and 1980, the state leaders' attention was concentrated on the consolidation of their own power, and structural reforms were implemented only gradually (Davis & Vogel 1990, pp.3-4). During this early period, nevertheless, important shifts in state ideology and political and economic theory were expressed.¹ The Deng leadership distanced itself from the previous regime by criticising the latter's 'excessive' political radicalism and egalitarianism, promoting, instead, the depoliticisation of ordinary life, economic pragmatism, an improvement of living standards and balanced economic growth. The latter two goals were to be achieved through the 'four modernisations',² a greater opening to the outside world, more attention to the development of agriculture, consumer industries and services, greater division of labour and specialisation, and the promotion of material incentives and individual striving.

These broad shifts in ideology paved the way for radical structural change. Then, once structural change and social adjustment got under way, new concepts and slogans were developed, in some cases to legitimate changes that had

¹ Much of the groundwork for these shifts had, in fact, already been laid between 1976 and 1978 and was based on arguments made by Deng Xiaoping in 1974 and 1975 (Watson 1982, pp.87-103).

² Modernisation of agriculture, industry, science and technology, and defence.

already begun, and in others, to contain undesired consequences of those changes.³

This is not the place for a detailed account of these processes. Instead, in the following paragraphs, I wish to focus upon the 'gendered' nature of the shifts in ideology. As will become apparent, whether motivated by a desire to effect change, to legitimate change already under way, or to guide it into new directions, the shifts in state ideology that have occurred have included, as a core element, a reconfiguration of notions of womanhood and of women's position in society. These, in turn, have had a powerful impact on actual gender relations, and the ways in which gender relations have been affected by structural change.

I will also argue, however, that the images of womanhood created in the post-Mao period are not solely an imposition by the central state leadership, but have received powerful support from a range of people in different social positions, including women as well as men.

One of the symbols of Cultural Revolution 'radicalism' against which the Deng leadership, and indeed the ordinary population, have reacted most vehemently is that of the woman who is active in the 'outside', 'male' sphere of politics -

³ For example, as suggested below, the state's attempts to promote 'spiritual civilisation' have been a response to what is seen as a decline in morals and social order, these being regarded, in part, as undesired side-effects of the 'open door policy' and the development of a market economy.

the 'Red Guard Lady', epitomised, in particular, by Mao Zedong's wife and a member of the Gang of Four, Jiang Qing. As will be discussed in Chapter 5, a key mechanism through which Jiang Qing's radicalism, and by extension, the Gang of Four and their policies, have been discredited by the current regime has been through a portrayal of Jiang Qing as a 'white-boned demon', a witch and a prostitute - a woman who has acted outside the bounds of 'natural', 'proper' gender roles. The message to the Chinese people is two-fold; that the Gang of Four was bad, and that, as Marilyn Young has put it, 'there is something in the natural order of things that does not love a woman exercising public power' (Young 1989, pp.262-263).

A rejection of the Cultural Revolution and the Gang of Four also takes the form of denunciation and scorn at the 'Iron Girls' of the period, and a repudiation of the slogan 'what men can do, women can do too' (Young 1989, pp.261-263).

Whereas during the late Maoist period women were exhorted to behave like men, it is now insisted that 'women and men are different', and each have their special characteristics and abilities. As Emily Honig and Gail Hershatter point out, there is now a vast amount of media articles and other forms of popular literature providing advice on the physiological and psychological differences between women and men (Honig & Hershatter 1988, pp.14-40).

As will become apparent through this thesis, this discourse has reinforced gender inequalities in a number of ways. It

should also be noted, however, that it is supported by women themselves, and that this is not merely a case of 'false consciousness'. For many women as for men, living through the 'ten years of turmoil' (1966-1976) resulted in an equation between attempts at radical social and political change, and chaos and suffering, and Deng Xiaoping's restoration of order and of the 'natural order' were met with relief. Women also welcomed the chance to move away from the masculine style asceticism of the Maoist era and to enjoy the more traditional pleasures of femininity - changing out of their shapeless, worn Mao suits into colourful dresses, perming their hair and putting on make up. And finally, whilst some women, for example those who had been Red Guards, looked back on the late 1960s and early 1970s as a time of excitement and freedom from the restrictions of traditional femininity (Young 1989, pp.258-259), many others reflected that 'equality' during this period merely meant having to work twice as hard as men, whilst receiving fewer work-points in the fields and no recognition for their domestic work.

Yet there is more to the post-Mao discourse on gender difference than either a state or a popular rejection of political radicalism. On the one hand, as the billboards around China's cities testify, the rise of a commodity economy and consumerism has seen the image of woman as sex object being manipulated in the burgeoning advertising industry in much the same way as it has been in the West.

On the other hand, an emphasis on women's roles as mothers, and by extension, as the guardians of social order and morality, has been a central element in the state's attempts to combat post-Cultural Revolution cynicism and discontent amongst young people, to curb what are seen as the undesirable consequences of the 'open door policy' and the promotion of a market economy; that is, excessive materialism, selfishness, and 'spiritual pollution', and to promote values and standards of behaviour conducive to social stability and modernisation. As the then Party Chairperson, Hu Yaobang, put it in 1982: 'Women are not only an important force in national economic construction; they also have a particularly significant role to play in the building of socialist spiritual civilisation' (quoted in Robinson 1985, p.51).⁴ As I have discussed elsewhere, the primacy of the image of woman as mother has also been bolstered through the argument, seen frequently in the media in the 1980s, and acted upon by numerous employers, that women working in state-run factories should take extended maternity leave or should 'return to the kitchen' permanently in order to relieve pressure on urban employment (Jacka 1990b).

Finally, as I suggest in my discussion of gender segregation in vocational education in Chapter 5, an emphasis on gender difference contributes to a greater division of labour in the economy. For this reason it has been encouraged by the state

⁴ For further discussion of the reaffirmation of the image of woman as mother, and of the consequences for gender relations in rural areas, see Chapters 4-6.

in its attempts to improve efficiency and to meet contrasting demands, in particular, for modernisation on the one hand, and employment generation on the other. The notion of gender difference has also been reinforced through the policies of the state and of employers in particular sectors of the economy. For example, as I suggest in Chapter 8, domestic sidelines and the 'courtyard economy' have been promoted by the state in the post-Mao period as an area of work 'particularly suited to women's special characteristics', in part as a way of relieving female underemployment, and in part as a way of taking full advantage of the cheap and flexible labour of women working at home. And in township enterprises manufacturing textiles, employers hire a majority of female workers because, they claim, they are more nimble-fingered and patient than men, whilst in heavy industries, employers hire a majority of men because, they claim, the work is too heavy for women.

Having given a rough outline of the importance of the notion of gender difference to shifts in state ideology since the late 1970s and the ways in which this has been taken up by other elements in society, I will now turn to examine the reform policies introduced in rural areas, the structural changes that they have initiated, and, briefly, the effects on rural society that these structural changes have had.

Reforms to the Rural Economy and System of Governance

The Introduction of the Production Responsibility System

According to the post-Mao leadership, a major drawback of the collective system was that it did not provide incentives for workers to improve their productivity. Consequently, at the Third Plenum of the Eleventh Central Committee, held in December 1978,⁵ a form of what later became known as the 'production responsibility system' (*shengchan zerenzhi*) was introduced, with the aim of improving production incentives by linking production and remuneration more closely. It allowed a system of 'contracting output to the group' (*bao chan dao zu*), in which the production team signed a contract with a smaller work group stipulating the inputs, production quotas and work-point remuneration for a particular piece of work. Accounting, planning, control of tools and draught animals, irrigation, and capital construction projects continued to be the production team's responsibility, but the internal distribution of work-points among its members was undertaken by the group (Watson 1983, p.712; Riskin 1987, pp.286-287). This was the first in a number of different types of production responsibility system which became universal in rural areas by the early 1980s.

⁵ This meeting was later to be pinpointed as the beginning of the reform period, even though a number of the policy changes put forward had already been heralded at meetings earlier in the year (Solinger 1982, pp.1248-1249).

In September 1980 the CCP Central Committee issued Document 75, 'Announcement regarding several issues concerned with the further strengthening and perfection of the production responsibility system in agriculture'. The document allowed two other forms of household contracting to be implemented in poor and backward areas and in places where contracting to the household had already occurred. Under the first of these systems, known as 'contracting output to the household' (*bao chan dao hu*), the household signed a contract with the production team which stipulated an allocation of land to the household and a proportion of produce that the household was to give the team in return for a specified number of work-points. Machinery and draught animals were either managed by the team or divided between households (Watson 1983, p.717). Land was usually allocated according to the number of people or the number of labour powers in the household, or according to both.⁶ In theory, any changes to the population of the household, such as a birth or death, the exit of a daughter or the entry of a wife, were to be followed by an adjustment of the household's land holdings. However, this system resulted in enormous management problems, and in subsequent years was therefore replaced by other schemes, a common one involving the reassessment and readjustment of the land holdings of all villagers every few years. As will be discussed in Chapter 4, however, there continue to be serious problems relating to the allocation of land to women, especially divorcees and widows, under the new systems.

⁶ For details see Nongcun Diaocha Lingdao Xiaozu Bangongshi 1987, p.20.

Under the second type of production responsibility system, known as 'contracting everything to the household' (*bao gan dao hu* or *da bao gan*), the household took over all responsibility for production management, simply handing over land tax and a sales quota of a particular crop (usually grain) and paying a levy to the production team to help maintain basic collective services. Land was contracted in the same way as under the *bao chan dao hu* system, and tools and draught animals were distributed among households (Watson 1983, p.717).

Like other aspects of the reforms, the production responsibility system was not introduced uniformly across the country as part of a national policy. Even before the Third Plenum, forms of organisation other than that approved at the plenum were being tried out in some places (Watson 1987, p.24), and it was in view of these experiments that Document 75 was introduced. Thereafter, there was a good deal of regional variation in the timing of the introduction of the production responsibility system and the type of system adopted. In some places local cadres and peasants strongly resisted the decentralisation of production management that the new system implied (Zweig 1985). More commonly, however, pressures from peasants desiring a return to family farming pushed the implementation of the system faster and further than the central authorities had originally planned (Watson 1987, p.22).

By October 1981 approximately 98 per cent of all collective accounting units had adopted some form of production responsibility system. At that time 7 per cent had adopted the *bao chan dao hu* system and 38 per cent had adopted the *bao gan dao hu* system (Watson 1983, p.719). By late 1984 the *bao gan dao hu* system had been adopted by approximately 95 per cent of collective units, with the remainder using other forms of the production responsibility system (Watson 1987, p.4).

As will be noted below, collectives have not entirely given up their role in economic management since the introduction of the production responsibility system. Nevertheless, an important consequence of this reform has been that most decisions over work and the allocation of tasks have once more become internal to the family. An examination of family relations is, therefore, of particular importance for an understanding of the gender divisions of labour that have emerged in the post-Mao period. This topic will be pursued in Chapter 4.

Changes to Political and Administrative Institutions

As household contracting spread, it became clear that a re-examination of the role and structure of commune and sub-commune institutions of administration and governance was needed. Between 1982 and 1985, attempts were made by the central leadership to affect a separation between governmental and economic administration, and to reduce the

role of the Party in day-to-day administration and management. Governmental responsibilities of communes were taken over by township (*xiang*) and town (*zhen*) governments, and were formally separated from the township Party committee. Economic functions were transferred to economic management committees (*jingji guanli weiyuanhui*), subordinate to township governments. Similarly, production brigades were converted into administrative villages (*xingzhen cun*) led by villagers' committees (*cunmin weiyuanhui*) with governmental responsibilities and in some places 'joint cooperatives' or 'corporations' (*nong-gong-shang lianhe gongsi*) with economic functions. Production teams were renamed village groups (*cunmin xiaozu*), but became largely redundant, except where they coincided with a natural village (Watson, 1984-85, pp.624-627; White 1990, pp.38-39).

Despite these formal changes, however, there continues to be a good deal of overlapping between Party, government and economic institutions, both in terms of personnel and activities, and in general, people who held positions as local-level Party cadres before decollectivisation have tended to retain most control over local government and economic administration under the new arrangements. As one peasant put it, 'they are holding up a sheep's head, but they are selling the same old dog meat' (Potter & Potter 1991, p.281).

Across China there have been wide variations in the roles of township and village level institutions, and their relations

with peasant families. In some more wealthy townships and villages in particular, local cadres have played a major role in controlling or guiding the economy, for example by obtaining loans and investing in township- or village-run enterprises, by ensuring the provision of credit and other inputs and arranging sales outlets for peasant entrepreneurs, and by advising peasant families on profitable ventures. These townships and villages have, in addition, made use of their revenue, obtained in particular from township enterprises and levies on agriculture, to provide production, welfare and education services, and to maintain public works such as roads and irrigation (Nee & Su Sijin 1990, pp.18-21; Watson 1992b, pp.182-188).

Reports suggest, however, that in most places the role of the collective has greatly declined. Victor Nee and Su Sijin claim, for example, that in 15 of the 30 villages in Fujian that they studied in 1985, there was no sign of any collective activity. Public works were not being maintained and welfare services, such as aid to the poor and health insurance, were not being provided. Eleven villages reported

some collective activity, but at a level much lower than before decollectivisation (Nee & Su Sijin 1990, p.19).⁷

For rural women, the lack of collective services has particular significance. As will be discussed in Chapter 5, for example, many rural families have responded to the rising costs of education, resulting from declines in collective subsidies, by withdrawing their daughters from school. In addition, scarcity of child care facilities increases the workload on individual mothers and grandmothers (see Chapter 6).

Pricing Adjustments, and The Encouragement of Diversification and Specialisation in the Rural Economy

Concurrent with reforms in rural organisation and management have been changes in the pricing of agricultural products, and attempts to encourage diversification and specialisation in the rural economy. The Third Plenum of the Eleventh Central Committee in 1978 decided that, in order to stimulate agricultural production, the state purchase price for grain would be raised by 20 per cent, and the price for the amount

⁷ More recently, local governments have been increasing various levies and fees on peasant families. Indeed, in 1992-1993 in parts of rural China, such a heavy burden of charges was being imposed on peasant families, that they were reacting with riots and violence. There has been little sign, however, of any significant improvement in the provision of collective welfare and other services; much of the money being used instead either to line village and township cadres' own pockets, or to meet the demands of government departments at higher levels (*Inside China Mainland* March 1993).

purchased above the quota would be raised by an additional 50 per cent. The purchase price for various economic crops and agricultural subsidiary products would also be increased, and the cost of farm machinery, chemical fertilizer, insecticides and other agricultural inputs would be reduced (CCP 1978, p.13). In subsequent years other price changes followed, so that between 1979 and 1984 the average annual increase in the purchase price of agricultural and subsidiary products was 7.62 per cent and between 1985 and 1989 it was 13 per cent, although in the latter period there were also sharp increases in the cost of agricultural inputs (Ash 1992, p.555). At the same time, the state progressively decreased its direct control over, and intervention into, the marketing and pricing of agricultural products, to the extent that by the end of 1992 agricultural production, with the exception of cotton, oil crops and grain, was regulated almost solely by the market (Watson 1993).

The Third Plenum also reaffirmed peasants' rights to undertake domestic sidelines (CCP 1978, p.12), and encouraged local governments to invest, and expand employment, in rural industries, or township enterprises (*xiangzhen qiye*), as they came to be known ('Decision on some problems in accelerating the development of agriculture', quoted in Byrd & Lin Qingsong 1990, p.10). These moves were part of a broad shift in which the state abandoned its earlier policy of aiming for self-sufficiency in grain in each region in favour of an encouragement of peasant involvement in cash-cropping, forestry, animal husbandry, fishing, processing,

manufacturing and services. This trend toward diversification has both led to, and has itself been further increased by, improvements in agricultural productivity and the consequent release of 'surplus' labour from crop production (see Chapter 7), the opening of free markets, an improvement of transport and service facilities, and an increase in the movement of labour both within rural areas and between rural and urban areas.

In addition to promoting diversification of the rural economy, the state has encouraged peasant families to set up their own businesses, specialising in single areas of agricultural production, or in non-agricultural production, for the market. In order to make it easier for peasants to develop 'specialised households' (*zhuanyehu*) and 'private enterprises' (*getihu* and *siying qiye*) as they are termed, local governments often provide them with subsidised fertiliser and other inputs, and help them to market their produce. In addition, the state has made major changes to laws concerning the hiring of labour and the subcontracting of land. 'Document No.1' of 1983 allowed peasant families to hire labour, and 'Document No.1' of 1984 allowed peasant families engaged in non-agricultural production to subcontract their land to other families to farm for them, in return for a cash payment or a share of produce (Riskin 1987, p.289).⁸

⁸ For a more detailed discussion of specialised households and private enterprises, see Chapter 8.

Changes in Rural Employment Patterns

The introduction of the production responsibility system, combined with the encouragement of diversification and specialisation in the rural economy, have given peasant families more freedom to make their own decisions about what areas of production to engage in, according to their particular abilities and the interplay of local prices, supply and demand. The net income to be earned from growing grain crops has generally been much lower than that in other areas of agriculture, so there has been a strong incentive for peasants to move out of grain production. Similarly, non-agricultural activities, such as processing, commerce and transport, are more profitable than agriculture.⁹ These factors have led some peasant families to specialise in one area of agricultural production, or to abandon agriculture altogether. For most, however, the potential profitability of such a move has been offset by a lack of specialised technical skills, market information and capital, the risks involved in moving from largely subsistence agriculture to a new line of commodity production, and the uncertainties surrounding government policy. In addition, land is generally regarded by peasants as their most important form of economic security and they have been reluctant to abandon

⁹ A survey of 272 villages across the country found, for example, that in 1987 the average gross income earned from one person-day's labour in grain production was 6.49 yuan. The income earned in forestry was 1.18 times this amount, and the incomes earned in industry, transport, and in commerce, catering and services, were respectively 2.54, 3.16 and 1.37 times the amount earned in grain production (Nongcun Diaocha Bangongshi 1989, p.55).

it entirely in favour of more lucrative, but less secure, non-agricultural production. Most commonly, peasant families manage these conflicting factors by keeping a finger in each pie, as it were, with men and women in the family undertaking different economic activities. A woman might, for example, grow grain and vegetables, whilst her husband runs a private enterprise mending bicycles and their son and daughter work in nearby factories.¹⁰

Significant changes in rural employment patterns have occurred, nevertheless. In particular, the 1980s and 1990s have seen unprecedentedly large numbers of rural inhabitants shift from agricultural to non-agricultural occupations. Thus, whereas between 1952 and 1977 China's rural non-agricultural employment grew by only 2.4 per cent per annum, between 1978 and 1990 it grew at a rate of 13.3 per cent per annum. In 1977 total rural non-agricultural employment stood at 17.32 million people, or 5.6 per cent of total rural employment, but by 1990 it had increased to 87.56 million people, or 20.5 per cent of total rural employment (Wu 1992, pp.4-5 & pp.28-29). As will be discussed in Chapter 9, however, significantly fewer rural women than men are employed outside agriculture.

It is also important to note that although, in terms of their basic thrust, the economic reforms have been implemented

¹⁰ This kind of division of labour is well illustrated by the summaries of information on sample rural families given in Appendix 1.

right across rural China, the details of their implementation and the changes they have effected have differed from place to place. The most obvious difference has been between areas on the eastern coast and around large cities, and areas inland and far removed from large cities. In the former areas industries are now well developed, as are trade networks with other parts of China and with overseas markets. A relatively large proportion of peasants work at non-agricultural occupations and families are fairly well-off. In the latter areas the market economy and industries are as yet relatively underdeveloped, and most peasants rely on agriculture for their livelihood and are relatively poor.¹¹

Income Distribution

In the first half of the 1980s the economic reform policies introduced in rural China resulted in rapid improvements in peasant incomes and living standards. Between 1985 and 1991, however, real incomes stagnated. According to the State Statistical Bureau, net per capita rural income in 1978 was 133.57 yuan, of which 116.06 yuan or 86.9 per cent went on living expenditure. By 1984 net per capita rural income had increased to 355.33 yuan, of which 273.80 yuan or 77.1 per cent went on living expenditure. Thereafter, net incomes continued to rise, but the effects of inflation and rising living costs meant that the proportion of peasant income spent on living expenditure increased. Thus, by 1988 net per

¹¹ For an indication of the geographical distribution of township enterprise employment, see Chapter 9.

capita rural income had risen to 544.94 yuan of which, however, 476.66 yuan, or 87.5 per cent, went on living expenditure. In 1991 net per capita rural income was 708.55 yuan, of which 619.79 yuan (87.5 per cent) went on living expenditure (Guojia Tongjiju 1992, pp.307 & 310).

Roughly in tandem with these trends, the gap between rural and urban incomes and consumption narrowed in the early 1980s but then widened again in late 1980s and early 1990s. Thus, according to the State Statistical Bureau, the ratio of peasant (*nongmin*) consumption to non-agricultural urban (*feinongye jumin*) consumption increased from 1:2.9 in 1978 to 1:2.2 in 1985, but then declined to 1:3.0 in 1991 (Guojia Tongjiju 1992, p.276).

Income inequalities within rural areas have been increasing since the early 1980s. According to studies undertaken by the World Bank, rural Gini ratios decreased from 0.32 in 1978 to 0.22 in 1982, but then increased to 0.27 in 1984 and 0.31 in 1986. Another large-scale study undertaken by a team of western economists found that in 1988 the rural Gini ratio was 0.34 (Khan et al. 1992, p.1056).¹²

Much of the inequality in rural income distribution has been due to increasing regional variations in the reform period. According to one report, for example, in 1979 per capita

¹² This latter study was based on a survey of 10,258 rural households in 28 provinces. For a comparison of the methodology and findings of this and the World Bank studies, see Khan et al. 1992, pp.1055-1058.

incomes in China's central and western regions were respectively 69 per cent and 56 per cent of the per capita income in the eastern region. By 1988 these figures had declined to 52 per cent and 43 per cent (Kato 1992, p.118).

In addition, inequalities in the distribution of income between families and between individuals have increased as a result of increased occupational differentiation. Amongst the wealthiest families are those who run specialised households and private enterprises. As will be discussed in Chapter 8, such families are commonly larger than the average, have above average levels of education, and have connections with local government. In more general terms, as noted by the 1988 study mentioned above, wages are the most significant factor in income inequalities between families and individuals. Some 62 per cent of income from wages is received by the richest 10 per cent of the population, and the poorest 20 per cent of the population receive only 1 per cent of their income from wages (Khan et al. 1992, p.1040).

In light of this, the fact that rural women are much less likely than men to have jobs in industry or other areas of wage employment is particularly significant. Another important element contributing to gender inequalities in income is that within wage employment women receive lower incomes than men. The 1988 survey found, for example, that the mean monthly wage of female wage earners (103.8 yuan) was 81 per cent of that of male wage earners (127.9 yuan), and

women were consistently under-represented in the most highly paid jobs (Khan et al. 1992, p.1041-1042).

The One-Child Family Policy

One final reform which needs to be considered in an examination of women's work and gender divisions of labour in the countryside since 1978 is the CCP's one-child family policy. Under this policy, which was introduced in 1979, various forms of economic incentives have been given to couples who, after the birth of their first child, pledge to have no more, and penalties, often in the form of fines, have been imposed on couples who bear a second or third child.¹³ In urban areas, a relatively long history of family planning education, combined with socio-economic pressures for having fewer children, such as housing shortages, has made the implementation of the one-child family policy relatively easy. In rural areas, however, the policy has met with enormous resistance.

One reason for this discrepancy between urban and rural areas has been that there are few welfare services in the countryside. Most elderly peasants do not receive a pension, and children (or more particularly sons, because under the patrilocal marriage system daughters leave their native

¹³ For details of incentives and disincentives, and of exceptions to the one-child policy, see Croll 1985a, Davin 1985, and Davin 1990.

village upon marriage) are considered vital for the care they will provide their aging parents. For elderly peasants without relatives to support them, the collective does provide what is known as 'the five guarantees' (*wubao*), that is guarantees of subsistence requirements of food, health care, shelter, clothing and funeral costs. However, at the beginning of the 1980s only 3 per cent of people in rural areas aged 65 or more received the 'five guarantees', and since then the proportion has declined even further, both as a result of declines in collective welfare funding and because of an increase in the proportion of elderly in the population (Hussain & Liu Hong 1989, pp.56-82).

In a few places, the lack of social support for elderly peasants has been mitigated recently by the establishment of pension schemes by local government and private insurance companies (NMRB 29 December 1988). Concern over resistance to the one-child policy combined with greater wealth may make such schemes more common in the future, but they are unlikely to become widespread among peasants for some time to come.

A second reason for the resistance to the one-child family policy in rural areas has been that, to a great extent, the economic prosperity of a rural family depends on the amount of labour power it can muster. This has become more critical following the introduction of the recent economic reforms, since the closer link between remuneration and work performance, and the diversification of the rural economy, mean that labour power can now be used more effectively to

generate income. In addition, the increased autonomy of the family relative to the collective and the state has meant that CCP cadres have lost much of their authority over peasants' lives, and their exhortations for family planning have often been ignored, although draconian enforcement through abortion and sterilisation has also been reported.

Implementation of the one-child policy has had some serious negative effects on gender relations and on women's lives. For example, despite the state's attempts at education, women are still sometimes blamed for the sex of the children they bear and there have been numerous reports of husbands and in-laws abusing, beating or abandoning women following the birth of a girl (*ZGFN* September 1981 p.46; *RMRB* 9 April 1983). It is women, also, who bear the brunt of conflicting pressures from relatives and officials over whether to carry through an 'out of plan' pregnancy, and of course it is they who suffer from forced or late abortions.

Perhaps most seriously, peasant desires for boys, combined with pressures from the state to have only one child, have led to the reappearance of infanticide of baby girls (*ZGNMB* 16 January 1983; *GMRB* 14 October 1988). While statistics are unreliable, most writers agree that infanticide more or less disappeared between the 1950s and the 1970s. In the 1980s and early 1990s however, it has been significant enough to cause skewed sex ratios of registered newborns in some localities (Bianco & Hua Chang-ming 1988, pp.157-158).

In recent years, in reaction to problems such as these, the Chinese state has, in a sense, given up on the one-child family policy. Since 1989, all provinces except Sichuan and Anhui and the municipalities of Beijing and Shanghai, have allowed peasant families to have a second child if their first was a girl (Davin 1990). This change of policy is perhaps preferable to female infanticide. Unfortunately, however, it reinforces the attitude that females are inferior to, or less valuable than, males, and does not address the reasons for peasant desires for sons rather than daughters.

Family planning and the one-child family policy have brought some benefits to women. For example, the difficulties in implementing the policy, combined with a recognition of a link between women's status and fertility levels, have at least drawn attention to, and raised concern over, the persistence of gender inequalities. To some extent, as Elisabeth Croll and Delia Davin suggest, this has lent support to the efforts of the Women's Federation to combat discrimination and violence against women, and to improve women's education and employment opportunities (Croll 1983, pp.121-123; Davin 1990, pp.87-88). As will be discussed in Chapter 5, however, the Women's Federation's work continues to be hindered by a lack of resources and power.

Furthermore, the involvement of Women's Federation cadres in family planning work makes them unpopular amongst peasants, and hence actually compounds their difficulties in protecting and furthering women's interests (Davin 1990, p.86).

A more direct benefit to rural women of family planning is that reducing the number of children they bear reduces strains on their health. Fewer children may also mean a reduction in women's domestic workload, although it is doubtful that this is so in all cases, since the lesser workload resulting from fewer children is often offset by the lack of older children's contribution to domestic work tasks and the care of their younger siblings. In addition, in the long run, if the one-child policy succeeds, this will be offset by an increase in women's work in looking after four elderly parents.

Regardless of their actual effect on women's child care and domestic workload, family planning and declines in fertility appear to have had little impact on the widespread perception that motherhood and domestic work are women's chief roles in life. Indeed, I would argue that any such impact has been completely overshadowed by the reinforcement in the media and in state pronouncements of the image of woman as mother and guardian of social morality, stability and order. As will become apparent in later chapters, this perception of women as mothers, first and foremost, plays a central role in creating, maintaining and legitimating gender divisions of labour in which women are concentrated in the 'inside' sphere of domestic work, agriculture and home-based industry, and their involvement in the 'outside' sphere of large-scale industry, business, and political and economic leadership is limited.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have given a brief introduction, firstly, to the ideology framing the post-Mao leadership's reform policies, and the centrality of gender difference in that ideology; and secondly, to the reform policies introduced by the state in rural China and their broad consequences for economic, political and social relations.

While limited space has allowed me to do little more than outline key shifts in state ideology and policy and some of their main consequences, it should be apparent that the reform process is a complex one, in which outcomes stem not just from policies imposed on society by the state, but from interactions in which actors from different sections of state and society put pressure on each other, and respond to each others' moves, either by accepting them, by making compromises, or by resisting (Shue 1990, p.60).

The establishment of the production responsibility system is a clear example of this process. In some areas, in response to peasant demands for family farming, local leaders introduced the production responsibility system before it had been given central state approval. In others, however, local cadres and peasants delayed the implementation of the system. In this case, the central state overcame local-level resistance. In the case of family planning, however, the policy limiting peasant families to only one child was met with so much resistance that it was eventually relaxed.

The emergence of a powerful discourse on sexual difference in the post-Mao period is another example of state-society interaction. As discussed in this chapter, this discourse has, in part, been propagated by the state in attempts to bolster its legitimacy and its reform programme. However, it has also been supported and furthered by other elements in society, including both men and women.

In subsequent chapters I will examine in greater detail the ways in which state-society interactions in the process of reform have shaped gender divisions of labour in rural China, paying attention, in particular, to the changes in meaning and significance of gendered dichotomies between different spheres of work.

Before undertaking a direct examination of work patterns and gender divisions of labour, however, it is necessary to look at other aspects of gender relations and the ways in which they have been affected by reform, both in order to understand how these influence gender divisions of labour, and how, in turn, changes to gender divisions of labour affect other aspects of gender relations. This then, is the aim of the following two chapters, which discuss women's position in the family, and their involvement in politics and education.

CHAPTER 4: THE FAMILY

Introduction

In rural China today, as in times past, 'the family' (*jia*) is central to women's and men's perceptions of themselves, their work patterns and their relations with others. As in other cultures, however, the Chinese concept of 'family' is fluid. Associated with it are a range of meanings and spheres of significance.

On the one hand, in rural China, as in the West, women and the family have commonly been linked in discussions of one particular set of issues - woman as wife and mother (and in China, as daughter-in-law), woman as domestic worker, woman as belonging to, and being most strongly identified with, the 'inside' sphere. In this sense the family has been 'both central and delimiting for women's lives' (Wolf 1985, p.183) and has been defined in opposition to the 'outside' domain of men.

At other times, women have been cast as outsiders to the family, here defined in terms of patrilocality, patrilineality, networks of male kinship ties and the importance of male descendants.

This chapter examines the significance of the family in these two senses for an understanding of women's work patterns and gender divisions of labour, and the links between these and

other aspects of gender relations. The first section looks briefly at the processes of marriage and divorce, highlighting the power relations involved in these processes, and the ways in which these, in turn, shape women's position in the family and in the wider community. The second section provides background information about the size and structure of rural families, and indicates the ways in which family formation and evolution shape women's work patterns at different stages of their lives. The third section analyses intra-family power relations, and values and assumptions relating to the 'proper' place of individuals within the family. These, I argue, are both affected by gender divisions of labour, and, at the same time, play a part in determining and maintaining particular gender divisions of labour, and the meanings which these divisions have for women.¹

Marriage and Divorce

Marriage

Marriage is near universal in China, and about 98 per cent of rural women are married by the age of 29 (Guojia Tongjiju Renkou Tongjisi 1992, p.98). The legal marriage ages are 22 for men and 20 for women, however, a large number of

¹ For more detailed discussions of the Chinese family see Freedman 1970; Wolf 1972; Parish & Whyte 1978, Chapter 3; and Croll 1981.

marriages also occur before these ages (SWB 15 February 1989; RMRB 17 September 1988). Earlier marriage allows for earlier and more frequent childbirth, and is in part a strategy adopted by families as a way of gaining more labour, thereby maximising the economic benefits of the return to family farming.

According to the Marriage Law of 1950,² marriage is to be freely chosen without the interference of a third party, and as a result of the law, and of the campaigns surrounding it, marriages arranged by the older generation without young peoples' consent have become less common. However, marriage remains a family concern, and family members, especially sisters and mothers, commonly play an important role in seeking and introducing potential marriage partners, who then decide whether or not to agree to the match.

As in the past, most rural marriages are exogamous and patrilocal, which means that the bride and groom are from different villages, and that upon marriage, the woman moves from her natal family into her husband's family. The new couple may continue to live indefinitely in the man's family, especially if he is the youngest or the only son, in which case he and his wife will be expected to care for his parents as they grow old. Otherwise, the family will commonly divide

² The Marriage Law of 1980 is essentially the same as that of 1950, except that it no longer makes any reference to the remarriage of widows or to the traditional customs of taking child brides and concubines, it raises the legal age of marriage by two years to 22 for men and 20 for women, and it makes divorce somewhat easier.

its property and the young couple will establish a new family, often just after the birth of their first child.

Traditionally, marriage was accompanied by elaborate rituals. As part of the rituals, the conclusion of the first phase of marriage negotiations was marked by the presentation of a bride-price or betrothal gifts from the young man's family to the woman's family (Croll 1981, p.41). The prospective groom's family was also obliged to provide a wedding feast for friends and kin. For their part, the prospective bride's family customarily provided a dowry to be taken by the young woman into her new family.

The CCP under Mao discouraged elaborate marriage rituals and prohibited the payment of money and gifts in connection with marriage. It was critical, in particular, of the payment of bride-prices, because it symbolised the procurement of women, which perpetuated both women's low status and class inequalities; the latter because it made it harder for poor men to marry (Parish & Whyte 1978, p.180).

The payment of bride-prices and dowries did, however, persist. In their study of rural Guangdong in the early 1970s, William Parish and Martin Whyte reported that dowries had declined considerably in value, but bride-prices were high. In 36 villages the average family expenditure on the bride-price and wedding feast required for the marriage of a son was 728 *yuan*, or just over the national average for the annual net income earned by a rural family of four. This

expenditure was considerably higher than that reported by John Buck in his 1930 study of seven locations in Guangdong, in which he found that the average family expenditure for a man's marriage was 230 *yuan*, or just over half the national average for net peasant family income (Parish & Whyte 1978, p.188).

In the post-Mao period the CCP has adopted a less critical stance toward peasant rituals generally. In this more relaxed atmosphere, the performance of ritual has once more assumed an openly important role in village life, and, as numerous articles in the press have pointed out, one aspect of this phenomenon is an upsurge in elaborate and increasingly costly marriage rituals.

According to one extensive national survey, bride-price (*caili*) payments increased ten-fold between 1980 and 1985, from between 100 and 300 *yuan* (i.e., 10 to 40 per cent of the average net income of a rural family), to between 1,000 and 3,000 *yuan* (63 to 189 per cent of average net family income). In addition, in 1985 the families of prospective grooms paid 2,500 to 4,000 *yuan* for new housing for the new couple and also held large wedding feasts. The survey found that most peasants save for five or six years for a wedding, and must also borrow money from friends and relatives (ZGFNB 4 July 1986).³

³ For other survey reports on bride-price and dowry payments see Lu Ming & Si Xuelong 1986; *NMRB* 31 October 1986; *NMRB* 24 February 1987; and Zhao Xishun 1990, pp.111-122.

As Parish and Whyte had found in the 1970s in rural Guangdong, reports in the 1980s and 1990s suggest that in many areas the dowry involves considerably less expenditure than the bride-price.⁴

In discussing the significance of declining dowries and high bride-prices, Parish and Whyte draw on the work of anthropologist Jack Goody to argue that the payment of bride-price is part of a system of exchange in which what is gained is the right to women's labour. In Guangdong bride-prices are high because the income generated by a woman's labour is substantial, whereas in cultures where women contribute less to a family's income, bride-prices tend to be lower, and minimal exchanges or dowries predominate (Parish & Whyte 1978, pp.186-188).

Extending these ideas, one could suggest that the increasing value of bride-prices in the post-Mao period is in part related to the fact that the introduction of the production responsibility system put a premium on labour. Other factors

⁴ One investigation in Yichuan county in Henan province found, for example, that in 1987 the families of prospective grooms spent on average 1,723 yuan on betrothal and other gifts and on the wedding feast. The families of prospective brides spent only 752 yuan, of which 673 yuan was for the dowry (NMRB 24 February 1987). Elisabeth Croll (1977) and Margery Wolf (1985) also found that dowries were much smaller in value than bride-prices. However, Sulamith and Jack Potter report that in Zengbu, dowry was larger than bride-price. It included almost all the items from the bride-price plus a supplement provided by the bride's family. In 1979 the average value of a bride-price was 422 yuan and the average value of the supplement provided by the bride's family for her dowry was 178 yuan (Potter & Potter 1991, pp.208-209).

are also involved, however. Most significantly, as with the performance of ritual more generally, the payment of the bride-price, the staging of an elaborate wedding feast and the building of new housing for the married couple, are occasions for the enjoyment of increased income and for the display of the new wealth and status that at least some families have gained as a result of economic reforms.⁵ They are also important avenues for the maintenance and strengthening of ties with friends and kin; ties which have become more crucial with the decentralisation of economic management and the emergence of a market economy.

Whatever the causes of increased bride-price payment, one major effect has been, just as the CCP previously feared, the maintenance and reinforcement of the view of women as commodities exchanged between patrilineal families. This is most starkly illustrated by the abduction and sale of young women as brides. According to one report, almost 10,000 women and children are abducted and sold each year in Sichuan alone (*Time* 11 November 1991).⁶

The payment of high bride-prices also has negative consequences for women in marriage. Firstly, it tends to increase the expectation of a man and his family that a wife

⁵ High bride-price payments are not always an indication of wealth, however. As one article notes, in the competition for brides, poorer villages commonly pay high bride-prices in order to attract women to them, away from the wealthier villages (Zhang Sehua & Liu Zhongyi 1986).

⁶ For further reports see *GMRB* 3 September 1988; *SWB* 22 April 1989; and *SWB* 14 February 1990.

will do their bidding, and in some cases results in abuse of the woman if the family feels she is not serving them well enough (NMRB 31 October 1986). Secondly, it makes it more likely that a family will resist a woman who seeks divorce. This they can often do very effectively because they hold more sway amongst local officials, who may well be kin, than a woman who has married in and is still regarded as an outsider to the village. In addition, a demand that the bride-price be repaid can also make divorce very difficult for a woman.

For young rural women, even those who freely choose their partner, marriage is an event of considerable trauma, involving as it does, the break of old family ties and a shift to a household of relative strangers, often in another village. As Margery Wolf (1972), Ellen Judd (1989) and Sulamith and Jack Potter (1991) have argued, however, women are not merely the passive objects of oppression in the formation of patrilineal, patriarchal families. These writers have greatly enriched our understanding of the Chinese family by pointing out the various strategies and customary practices that women have developed for themselves around the dominant, patriarchal model of the family. Jack and Sulamith Potter point out, for example, that in choosing a marriage partner for her daughter, a woman seeks to make her a part of an already existing network of female relations and friends. She might, for example, suggest as husband the brother-in-law of a female friend or relative who will

provide some support for the young woman when she moves into the village (Potter & Potter 1991, pp.206-207).

Once married, a woman herself will make efforts to develop friendships and alliances with other women in the village which will ameliorate her sense of isolation, and provide help and support if she has trouble with her husband or in-laws (Wolf 1972, pp.38-40). The trauma of leaving home to get married is also softened by the considerable ties that a woman maintains with her natal family well after her marriage. Ellen Judd points out that in fact, not only do most women make regular visits to their natal family until the birth of their first child, many spend a large proportion of their early married years living in their natal family. This is particularly so in the increasingly frequent cases in which the husband is absent most of the time, working away from home (Judd 1989, p.533).

Despite these practices, however, it remains true that the patrilocal, exogamous nature of most rural marriages is one of the linchpins in the maintenance of women's subordination in rural China. Friendships amongst villagers take a long time to mature, and it is usually some years before villagers stop seeing married women as outsiders. Not only does this mean that newly married women are relatively isolated and vulnerable within the family, it also makes it particularly difficult for married women to gain the trust necessary to assume any form of leadership in the 'outside' sphere, whether it be in politics or in the local economy, and it

makes it harder for married women to develop the contacts necessary for successfully undertaking entrepreneurial activities.

Furthermore, anticipation of their daughters' marriage out of the natal family has continued to lead parents to discriminate against daughters, for example in education (see Chapter 5), and even, as discussed in Chapter 3, to kill a baby daughter so as to have another chance, under the one-child family policy, to give birth to a son.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, the 'criticise Lin Biao and Confucius' campaign of the 1970s included efforts on the part of the CCP and the Women's Federation to promote matrilocal marriage, both as a way of ensuring old age care for couples with no sons, and as a way of reducing gender inequalities.⁷ Today, however, patrilocal marriage is rarely identified as problematic and there is no longer any significant effort being made to promote matrilocal marriage.

Given that, as a result of family planning, there are now more families with only one child to care for them, the resistance to matrilocal marriage in which a family relinquishes its son will be high and it may not, in fact, be a workable strategy to encourage it. Ellen Judd suggests that an alternative strategy for improving the status of women might be to encourage intra-village marriage so that

⁷ For details see Johnson 1983, pp.197-200.

women can retain contact with their friends and natal family, and also provide support for their parents in old age.

Reports do in fact suggest some increase since 1949 in the incidence of intra-village, and also intra-surname, marriage (Potter & Potter 1991, p.200; Parish & Whyte 1978, pp.171-172; Chan et al. 1992, pp.186-212). However, such marriages are also not without their problems. Sulamith and Jack Potter found that one significant reason for the continuing reluctance of families to undertake such marriages in Zengbu is that they do not expand families' social contacts in any useful way. Also, villagers believe that quarrels between a husband and wife who are both locals can too easily escalate into quarrels between two families (Potter & Potter 1991, p.205. See also, Chan et al. 1992, pp.186-212).

It is clear then that any attempt to change existing patrilocal and exogamous marriage practices is extremely difficult because such practices perform important functions in village life. Nevertheless, given their centrality in the subordination of women, the fact that the CCP and the Women's Federation do not attempt to challenge the dominance of such marriage practices suggests that ultimately the issue of subordination is not of primary concern.

Divorce

Divorce rates in rural China are very low - in 1982 less than 0.3 per cent of rural women aged between 15 and 69 were divorced (Zeng Yi 1991, p.38). The Marriage Law of 1950

granted women across China equal rights with men to seek divorce, but despite this, the cultural and practical barriers facing a woman who wishes to divorce are enormous, and when a divorce occurs it is likely to result in more hardship for the woman than for the man. A divorced woman is widely considered immoral and runs the risk of economic hardship. According to the Marriage Laws of 1950 and 1980, and to the Inheritance Law of 1985 (the PRC's first inheritance law), husband and wife have equal rights to joint property. However, in cases of divorce in rural areas these rights are usually not implemented in practice. In most instances a divorced woman returns to her natal village (unless she remarries immediately), forfeiting all rights to property that she and her husband may have accumulated during the marriage, except for personal items such as jewellery and clothing. As mentioned, her husband's family may also demand that the woman return the bride-price originally paid for her. Furthermore, she may find that upon her return her natal village refuses to assign her land.⁸

Until the 1980s, in cases in which only one spouse requested divorce, the couple was required to undergo an extensive process of 'mediation' with local cadres in order to repair the marriage, and it was rare that divorce was granted afterwards. However, in contrast to the 1950 Marriage Law that stated that where mediation failed divorce *might* be granted, under the 1980 law it was stated that 'in cases of

⁸ For further discussion see the following section on control of land and other property.

complete alienation of mutual affection, and when mediation has failed, divorce *should* be granted (Marriage Law 1982, p.14, my emphasis). Partly as a result of this change, divorce rates in both urban and rural China, although still very low, increased through the 1980s, from one divorce per thousand married couples in 1981 to about 2.5 divorces per thousand married couples in 1986 (Zeng Yi 1991, p.31).

Following the new law, officials relaxed their attempts at preventing divorce. Members of the Women's Federation say that before 1980 they had discouraged divorce because they felt that it was a threat to women, who were less economically secure than men. Since then, however, they have discouraged it less because, they say, women are economically better off, and because they believe that if a relationship has deteriorated it is best for both parties to divorce. They claim that more women than men now seek divorce, and regard this as indicating a rise in the status of women (Interviews with members of Ling County and Guan County Women's Federations, September & December 1989).

Media reports confirm that rural women do indeed initiate divorce more often than men (Yu Xiangyang 1987-88, pp.97-98), but, in contrast to the Women's Federation, I suggest that this is not new and has little to do with women's status. Parish and Whyte report that in rural Guangdong in the 1970s divorce was already more commonly initiated by women than by men, despite the enormous social and economic difficulties faced by a divorced woman. They suggest that men were less

likely to initiate divorce simply because of the costs involved for them and their family in remarrying (Parish & Whyte 1978, p.193).⁹

It should also be noted that not all women share the Women's Federation's positive view of the changes to the laws on divorce. Some feel themselves to be victims of the law. This includes, in particular, women whose husbands divorced them when they gave birth to a girl, and those whose husbands divorced them after the latter's work and social status improved and he no longer felt he had anything in common with his wife (Honig & Hershatter 1988, pp.215-219).

In general, then, as Emily Honig and Gail Hershatter point out,

as long as the increased freedom to divorce took place within the context of basic social and economic inequality, women remained unequal beneficiaries (1988, p.226).

Family Size and Structure

When asked about the members of their family ('*jia li you shenme ren?*'), peasant women commonly discuss close relatives who share a common budget and live in the same house or compound of dwellings. They may also mention other close relatives who are living elsewhere but share the same budget,

⁹ The same argument is made by Yu Xiangyang (1987-88, p.98).

for example, a husband working away from home as a temporary labourer (Interviews in Beijing, Shandong and Sichuan, August-December 1989).¹⁰

Table 4.1: Average Family Size

Year	Average Family Size	
	National	Rural
1911	5.17	
1912	5.31	
1928	5.27	
1933	5.29	
1936	5.38	
1947	5.35	
1953	4.3	4.26
1964	4.29	4.35
1982	4.43	4.57
1987		4.4
1990	4.06	

Sources: 1911-1982: Guojia Tongjiju Shehui Tongjisi 1987, p.30. 1987: Guojia Tongjiju 1989, p.93.
1990: Guojia Tongjiju Renkou Tongjisi 1992, p.25.

¹⁰ This rough definition of the term 'jia' corresponds to that of Myron Cohen (1970) and other western scholars, and to the usage of the term in most Chinese surveys of the family (Guo Zhigang 1988, p.52). Some scholars, however, use the term 'hu' (household) to refer to this type of unit (e.g., Croll 1977, p.790; Potter & Potter 1991, pp.215-216). Figures on family size and structure taken from population census data also refer to the 'hu'. According to guidelines for the 1982 population census, the number of people in the household refers to all those with permanent household registration in that locality, excluding those who have been away from their place of household registration for more than one continuous year (Population Census Leading Group 1982, pp.1-3). In this thesis the terms 'family' and 'household' are interchangeable, unless otherwise indicated.

As can be seen in Table 4.1, the average Chinese family is now smaller than it was before the 1949 revolution. In 1947 average family size was about 5.4 persons. This declined to about 4.3 persons by 1953. Between the 1950s and the early 1990s average family size remained at between 4.1 and 4.4 persons. Thus, the most abrupt shift in family size occurred in the 1950s. As the following discussion indicates, this was due to an increase in the proportion of nuclear families, rather than a decline in birth rates.

Table 4.2 shows that in the second half of the twentieth century families in rural China were most commonly nuclear or stem families. Since 1949, the number of nuclear families has been greater than before and the number of stem and grand families smaller.¹¹ Improved health care and living standards after 1949 led to declines in infant mortality and an increase in life expectancy. However, a tendency for brothers to establish separate families after marriage or the birth of children, combined with the fact that more brothers were surviving, led to an increase in the number of nuclear families (Parish & Whyte 1978, pp.132-133). The number of grand families has greatly declined as a result of the fact that married brothers are now less likely than before 1949 to live in the same family for any significant time. The stem

¹¹ 'Nuclear' families are those containing one married couple or remnant thereof, with or without unmarried children. 'Stem' families contain two generations with one married couple, or remnant thereof, in each, with or without unmarried children. 'Grand' families contain two or more generations with two or more married couples, or remnants thereof, in each, with or without unmarried children (Wolf 1985, p.183).

family, however, continues to be an important family type because the prevalence of co-residence between parents and one married child has remained constant.

Table 4.2: Percentages of Rural Households Consisting of Single Persons, Nuclear Families, Stem Families and Grand Families

Year	Single Person	Nuclear	Stem	Grand
1930 (a)	3	34	63	
1973 (b)	12	50	37	2
1978 (c)	2.7	65.4	26.8	2.9
1982 (d)	7.6	69.3	16.4	5.8
1986 (c)	2.2	73.3	19.7	1.6

Sources: (a) Lewis & Smythe 1935, cited in Parish & Whyte 1978, p.134. Survey conducted in South China, N = 2,422.

(b) Parish & Whyte 1978, p.134. Survey conducted in Guangdong, N = 131.

(c) Liu Ying 1989, pp.38-39. Survey conducted in 14 provinces & municipalities, N = 7,285.

(d) Zhang Qiti 1988, p.48. Results from 1982 10% sample survey of China. This is the only survey listed here that includes non-family households (1% of total).

Recently some Chinese analysts have claimed that since 1949, and in particular since the reforms of the late 1970s, rural families have been undergoing a process of 'nuclearisation' (*hexin hua*) (*Ningxia Ribao* 29 August 1988; Liu Ying 1989, pp.38-41). Their explanations for such a trend appear to draw inspiration from the western structural functionalist arguments of Talcott Parsons and others, in which an increasing prevalence of nuclear, rather than more complex, families is seen as resulting from, and being functional to, the processes of modernisation and industrialisation.¹²

An argument for 'nuclearisation' was made, for example, by Liu Ying, head of the Marriage and Family Research Office of the Sociology Institute, the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, who explained to me the results of a sample survey of about 7,000 rural families undertaken in 14 provinces and municipalities in 1987 (Interview, Beijing, August 1989; Liu Ying 1989, pp.38-41). She said that between 1978 and 1986 the proportion of nuclear families rose by about 8 per cent, to about 73 per cent of the total surveyed. At the same time, the proportion of extended families (i.e., stem and grand) declined by 8 per cent to 21 per cent of the total. Liu Ying claimed that this 'nuclearisation' was mainly the result of brothers splitting off from their parents' families into separate families (*fenjia*) earlier than before.

¹² For a discussion of such arguments see Harris 1983.

In her published report Liu Ying attributed this trend to three main factors. First, following the introduction of the production responsibility system, families took over organisation of production and labour allocation. They became independent economic units, operating not just in agriculture, but more and more frequently in commerce, industry and other non-agricultural ventures. In these circumstances, Liu claimed, the nuclear family was the most convenient form for families to take (She may assume that larger families are more difficult to coordinate and manage). Second, the growth of rural commodity production and the release of peasants from basic agriculture increased occupational mobility, and hence led to an increase in the number of people living in nuclear families. Third, rural education improved and there was a greater transfer of urban values to the countryside than previously (Liu Ying 1989, p.40).

In conversation, Liu gave two more reasons for the earlier breakup of families into nuclear units. First, in large families relations between generations can be difficult, and with the rise of consumer values, the generation gap has widened. The older generation is generally reluctant for the family to split up, but their authority has declined and young people are now more independent. Second, argued Liu, the responsibility system put a premium on land and labour. The number of early marriages increased so that young people could have children sooner and receive more land, and this

put further pressure on the family to divide early
(Interview, Beijing, August 1989).

While these considerations *may* have led young people to set up their own families earlier than previously, there are also certain factors relating to the particular type of modernisation occurring in rural China that one would expect to work in the opposite direction. I have pointed out in Chapter 3 that a common strategy adopted by peasant families in response to the combination of risks and new opportunities opened up by rural economic reform has been to spread family labour between a number of areas of production. Such a spread, or division, of labour, clearly more feasible in a larger family, may also be a more efficient way of running commercial family enterprises. This argument has been used to explain the results of one family survey carried out in rural Sichuan, which found that among specialised households the average number of generations per household was 2.4, as compared to 2.2 generations in other families. Specialised households were comprised, on average, of 6.1 people. Among those surveyed 57 per cent were nuclear families, 21.3 per cent were stem and 18.3 per cent were grand families. In comparison, other families were comprised, on average, of 4.5 people. Among them, 59.7 per cent were nuclear, 17.4 per cent were stem and 8.1 per cent were grand families (Zhao Xishun 1988, pp.67-70).¹³

¹³ The survey covered a total of 2,035 ordinary households and 202 specialised households.

A second important factor that may work against 'nuclearisation' is the cultural and legal obligation for children to provide care for their ageing parents, and the continuing expectation that at least one married son will live on in the parents' family in order that he and his wife can provide care for the parents as they grow older.

It is possible to marshal evidence to show that *all* the motivational factors discussed above are at work in contemporary rural China. It is not possible, however, to establish with any certainty a causal link between any of those factors and the apparent recent increase in the number of nuclear families.

One Chinese analyst, Guo Zhigang, argues convincingly that while there has been an increase in the number of nuclear families since 1949, this does not necessarily imply that individuals' living arrangements have changed. It may be that, since over a lifetime an individual goes through different family configurations, the increase in the overall number of nuclear families is due, either solely or in part, to changes in the size and structure of the population. An increase in the number of nuclear families in the 1980s may have been caused simply by the fact that the particularly large cohort of people born in the 1960s before rigorous family planning campaigns were begun were, in the 1980s, entering childbearing age, that is, the period in which they were most likely to establish nuclear families separate from their parents (Guo Zhigang 1988).

Another scholar, Zeng Yi, after a detailed analysis of recent demographic trends, predicts that in the near future family dynamics in China (both urban and rural) will run counter to the western modernisation model, in the sense that the proportion of nuclear families will decrease. Zeng draws attention to the fact that the fertility decline resulting from strict family planning policies begun in the 1970s is reflected in the size of the average family in the 1980s, but the impact of fertility decline on family structure (i.e., the number of nuclear and extended families) is not yet visible because children born during the 1970s have not yet begun forming families. When they do, argues Zeng, assuming that the desire of parents to reside with at least one married son does not decrease dramatically, the proportion of nuclear families will decrease because people of the new generation, who have a reduced number of siblings, will have a smaller chance of moving out of their parents' family to form a separate nuclear family. It will only be when fertility declines below replacement level that the proportion of nuclear families is likely to increase once more (Zeng Yi 1991, pp.100 & 144).

To return to the present and recent past: Guo Zhigang's argument cited above suggests that although the total number of women living in nuclear families may have been higher in the 1980s than previously, women as they grew older experienced a series of different family arrangements similar to those experienced by women in previous decades.

This was confirmed by a sample survey of 2,000 families undertaken in rural Sichuan in 1987 (Wang Shuhui 1987a). The survey found that over the preceding fifty years women at the same stage in their life cycle were to be found in the same types of family.

Working from the results of this survey and from other information, we can construct a model indicating the type of family a woman has been most likely to find herself in at different stages of her life over the last fifty years.

Throughout this period, young, unmarried women have lived most commonly in nuclear or stem families, although in the 1980s and 1990s a small but growing proportion of young women have lived and worked away from home, for example as nannies or temporary workers in large cities (see Chapter 9).

In the Sichuan survey it was found that the age of marriage increased from about 19 amongst those married between 1939 and 1949, to 20.8 amongst those married between 1961 and 1971 and 20.9 amongst those who had married since 1979. However, amongst women of all age groups the proportion of nuclear families was lowest, and the proportion of stem and grand families highest, just after marriage. Over half of the women lived in stem families just after their marriage. This was because throughout the 50 year period most women moved into their husband's family upon marriage. Young couples usually set up their own family only sometime after the birth

of a child or after a brother of the man married (Wang Shuhui 1987a, p.14).

Between marriage and the birth of the first child some couples establish their own nuclear families. The number doing so increases as subsequent children are born (Wang Shuhui 1987a, p.15). Family planning policies have led to a decrease in the number of children born to each woman. In the Sichuan survey, the women who married between 1961 and 1971 gave birth 3.6 times on average, as compared to 5.9 among the women married between 1939 and 1949 (Wang Shuhui 1987a, p.15). Women who never gave birth continued to be very rare however. According to the 1982 10 per cent sample survey, rural families comprising a married couple without children were 4.7 per cent of the total. Most of these were newly married couples who would have children in the future, or elderly couples with grown up children living elsewhere (Zhang Qiti 1988, p.48).

Some women in the middle stage of their life cycle find themselves running a family single-handed. While they are in the minority, the number of women in this position has increased in the 1980s and 1990s as a result firstly, of an increase in the rate of divorce, and secondly, because more men are moving away from home in search of work than previously. According to the 1982 10 per cent sample survey, 2.8 per cent of rural families were comprised of a father and unmarried children, and 8 per cent were comprised of a mother and unmarried children (Zhang Qiti 1988, p.49). These

figures do not, however, include families in which the father works away from home temporarily, without changing his household registration.

In the last years of her life a woman most commonly lives in a stem family with a married son and his wife and children, and is supported by them.

Family Relations

Relations between members of a family are characterised by a complexity and variety to which I cannot hope to do justice in this short section. Instead, I will confine myself to a brief examination of three issues which, I believe, are central to an understanding of how gender divisions of labour are maintained, and how they affect women's lives. First, I will outline some of the key power dynamics and the roles that women are expected to play in the dyadic relationships likely to dominate an adult woman's life in the family, that is, the relationships between mother- and daughter-in-law, wife and husband, and mother and child. As will become apparent in subsequent chapters, these play an important part in shaping gender divisions of labour outside the family, as well as within it. Second, I will examine decision making processes in the family, and the extent to which women participate in decisions relating to the use of family income; and third, I will discuss the question of whether women are able to control or own land and other property.

These last two issues are important for an understanding of the extent to which women benefit from the products of their own (and other family members') labour.

My discussion of these issues is motivated by the following three key assumptions. First, individual men and women in rural China make decisions about work patterns not in isolation, but in relation to strategies for survival and advancement adopted by their families, which involve cooperation and interdependence between the activities of family members. Second, while these family strategies are the outcome of attempts to maximise economic benefits to the family, they are also shaped by expectations that individual family members will perform certain roles. Third, the decisions families make on how to use the products of their labour are arrived at through processes characterised by both agreement and conflict between individual interests, in which individual family members have different degrees of bargaining power.

These assumptions are neither new nor unusual. Although not spelt out, they are implicit in many anthropological studies of rural China (e.g., Parish & Whyte 1978). The first assumption, in fact, is common not just to studies of rural China, but to peasant studies in general (see, for example, Shanin 1971).

However, the second and third assumptions suggest a model of the family that is somewhat different from that implied in a

large range of studies on the rural economy in China, and more generally, in much of the literature on peasant economies world-wide. Some of these works treat the family or household as a homogenous unit and concentrate on the relations between the family and larger institutions. Others treat the family as if it was characterised, on the one hand, by a division of labour between its constituent members, but on the other, by either a single decision maker or by a process in which unanimous, 'rational' decisions are taken with the aim of maximising economic benefits to the family.¹⁴ These models have been useful for elucidating many aspects of peasant economies. From the point of view of this thesis, however, they are unsatisfactory because they obscure power relations and inequalities within the family, and ignore the effects of cultural values and role ascriptions on individuals' behaviour in the family economy. They consequently cast little light on the question of how or why particular gender divisions of labour are maintained, and what impact these divisions have on the lives of individuals.

What may at first seem a major problem for the view of the family suggested in my third assumption above, is that peasants often seem not to think in terms of their personal or individual interest, but rather in terms of the family

¹⁴ See, for example, Philip Huang 1990. Huang draws explicitly on a model of the family farm developed by A.V. Chayanov that has been extremely influential in peasant studies. In this model, peasant families seek to deploy their labour power in such a way as to achieve a balance between the satisfaction of family needs and the drudgery of work (Chayanov 1925, pp.5-7).

interest. Thus, a Chinese peasant woman when asked about her status or her personal welfare will very often either be completely nonplussed by the question, or will respond in terms of her family's welfare.¹⁵ I would argue that the notion of personal interest is not as foreign to Chinese peasant women as this might suggest. In the earlier section on marriage and divorce, I have discussed, for example, the strategies that peasant women have traditionally used so as to maximise their own personal interests within, but going against the grain of, a patriarchal system which ignores those interests. Most peasants have also, of course, been exposed for the past forty years and more to Communist policies and propaganda aimed in part at developing a greater degree of equality between individuals within the family. Thus, the establishment of the Women's Federation, the promulgation of the Marriage Law, and the recruitment of women into wage labour, have all played a role in identifying the interests of women as distinct from those of their family.

Even given that Chinese peasant women do not always recognise their personal interest or welfare as distinct from the interests of their family, 'it is far from obvious', as Amartya Sen points out in relation to traditional peasant societies generally, 'that the right conclusion to draw from this is the non-viability of the notion of personal welfare' (Sen 1990, p.126). Sen argues that, on the one hand,

¹⁵ Sen reports that the same is also true in South Asia (Sen 1990, p.126).

personal interest and welfare are not just matters of perception... For example, the "illfare" associated with morbidity or undernourishment has an immediacy that does not await the person's inclination or willingness to answer detailed questions regarding his or her welfare (Sen 1990, p.126).

On the other hand,

the lack of perception of personal interest combined with a great concern for family welfare is, of course, just the kind of attitude that helps to sustain the traditional inequalities (Sen 1990, p.126).

Expanding on these points, I would argue that not only is it analytically useful to counter the model of a unified family, it is also politically desirable, for it is only when Chinese rural women perceive their personal interests and the fact that, as things stand, these are far from always coinciding with family interests as others perceive them, that they will overcome inequalities within the family (cf. Papanek 1990, p.164).

Mothers- and Daughters-in-law

Just as before the revolution, it is commonly accepted in rural China today that after her marriage a woman's relationship with her mother-in-law will dominate her life at least to the same extent, and probably more, than her relationship with her husband (Baker 1979, p.43). However, expectations about the mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationship have changed somewhat since 1949. Previously, the ideal daughter-in-law was expected to be subservient to, and to care for, her mother-in-law, and to take over from her

most of the burden of domestic work. With increasing numbers of young women working in the fields and earning an income after 1949, however, mothers-in-law no longer had as much power over daughters-in-law, and they were expected to do a greater share of the domestic work. Understandably, in the 1950s there was a good deal of resentment amongst middle aged and older women over these changes in the division of labour and the balance of power between mothers- and daughters-in-law, and much propaganda was directed at improving the behaviour of older women *vis a vis* their daughters-in-law (Davin 1976, p.125).

By the 1980s, however, daughters-in-law had become the focus of greater attention in the media, and in campaigns run by the Women's Federation. As Honig and Hershatter point out, young women were now expected not only to be subservient to their mother-in-law, as before the revolution, but to take responsibility for maintaining harmonious relations with the older woman (Honig & Hershatter 1988, p.168-173).

In families where mothers- and daughters-in-law live together, it continues to be most common for them to share domestic work. The particular division of labour varies from one family to another. In some families the young woman works during the day in a nearby township enterprise, and her mother-in-law takes charge of domestic work and child care while she is away, and may, in addition, devote considerable effort and time to domestic sidelines. In other families, the younger woman works in the fields, and also undertakes

domestic work and domestic sidelines alongside her mother-in-law (see Appendix 1 for examples).

Woman as Wife

While there are obviously exceptions, most relationships between women and their husbands in rural China are characterised, as they have always been, by reserve and distance, in comparison to those in urban China and in western societies (Parish & Whyte 1978, p.213; Wolf 1985, pp.231-237). Women now enjoy considerably more equality with their husbands than before the revolution. However, the patrilocal marriage system and inequalities in property rights continue to bolster the husband's ultimate authority.

Perhaps the most alarming expression of the subordinate position of women in marriage is violence perpetrated by men against their wives. Such violence has been reported in the media with increasing frequency in the 1980s and 1990s. This does not necessarily mean that incidences of such violence are increasing - it may simply reflect greater awareness and concern. This is the case, I believe, with rape committed by husbands; reports of which were not discussed in the media until the early 1990s (ZGFN July 1991 p.24). Some kinds of violence, however, do seem to be related to recent social and political change. In particular, as discussed in Chapter 3, the conflict between the state's one-child family policy, and the need felt by peasant families for at least one son to provide labour and support for parents in old age, has given

rise to a spate of domestic violence, in which husbands (and in-laws) abuse and beat women following the birth of a girl. In other cases, high bride-prices are the issue. In one example reported in *ZGFN*, a man agreed to his wife's request for a divorce on condition that she pay back her bride-price. When she refused to pay the full amount the husband's brothers helped him to beat her up and held her down while he raped her (Song Meiya 1991).

While on the one hand, officialdom and the media have strongly condemned instances of violence by men against their wives in recent years, on the other hand, a shift in the images of model women seen in the media and in campaigns run by the Women's Federation has weakened the cause of equality and undermined the criticism of domestic violence by reinforcing traditional notions that it is a woman's duty, above all else, to serve her husband and her children. To give one example: between 1984 and 1987, *ZGFN* ran a discussion of 'what Chinese society today must expect of women and how today's Chinese women should mould themselves'. The discussion began with a focus on Tao Chun, the main female character in the film '*Xiang Yin*' - literally 'Sounds of the Country', but more usually translated as 'Country Couple' (Honig & Hershatter 1988, p.174). Tao Chun was the epitome of the traditional 'virtuous wife and good mother' (*xianqi liangmu*), devoting all her energy to caring for her husband and children, but receiving no acknowledgement from her husband until she was dying from cancer. A lengthy debate ensued over whether or not Tao Chun was a suitable

character ideal for women of the 1980s. While one writer praised Tao Chun and saw her undivided attention to her family as thoroughly good and proper (ZGFN June 1984, p.20), most felt that the traditional Confucian ideal of 'virtuous wife and good mother' had to be given a new meaning to suit the 1980s. In particular they believed that women should not devote themselves solely to their family, but should also work outside the home (ZGFN July 1984, p.17). Most participants in the discussion nevertheless defined the 'ideal woman' as a wife and mother whose primary role was to serve her family. As one writer put it:

Since nature has decided our sex, we must of course discharge our responsibilities as wives and mothers, and furthermore, we must be good wives and good mothers. Therefore, the question is not whether being a virtuous wife and mother is a good thing or not, but whether or not we need a new standard for the virtuous wife and good mother for the 1980s (ZGFN July 1984 p.7).

This was in stark contrast to the (equally one-sided) portrayal during the Cultural Revolution of model women such as engineer Wei Fengying who always put politics and production before her family, and who said that

when crucial problems appear in production I think up ways to make technical innovations and make models. Sometimes in the course of making these we (i.e., herself and her husband) forget to put soda in the dough, forget to put salt in our cooking and even forget our meals entirely. But we are happy, family life has not hampered us (RMRB November 1966; Peking Review 30 March 1973, quoted in Croll 1978, pp.311-316).

Woman as Mother

As suggested in Chapter 3, in addition to the greater stress on women's role as wife, the role of motherhood has also been given greater emphasis, and, despite family planning, the demands on mothers have in some ways increased, for while the CCP is anxious to see the number of children that are born reduced through family planning, it is also vitally concerned that those children that are born be inculcated with values and standards of behaviour conducive to social stability and modernisation. A reaffirmation by the state, via the Women's Federation, of the importance of the family, and especially of women as the key figures in the 'inside' sphere, has been a major element in attempts at achieving these goals.

Thus, Song Qingling, veteran of the Women's Federation, claimed in 1980 that

the Chinese women know well that it is their unshirkable duty to train and educate the children and youngsters so that they might become healthy both physically and mentally... Let us women set a good example for our children and shoulder the sacred duty of bringing them up in a proper way so they become reliable successors to our cause (*FBIS* 10 March 1980, quoted in Robinson, 1985 p.52).

In *ZGFN* a large proportion of articles are devoted to the rearing of children, including articles under the section headings of '(Information for) young parents', 'Education of the only child' and 'Family education'. These articles clearly illustrate the increasing demands placed on mothers by the Chinese state in its attempts to modernise. One

article, for example, praised mothers who study for their child's sake, arguing that

the amount of learning required to educate a child is very great. In order to educate a child, you must first understand children, you must understand psychology and must grasp the psychological characteristics of children at each age level. When you dress a child, you must be conscious of aesthetics, you must appreciate art, and in order to satisfy your child's thirst for knowledge, you must yourself be learned and able (ZGFN July 1986, p.11).

Articles such as these are aimed primarily at urban women. Nevertheless, I would argue that they also shape the thinking of rural women, especially young women in more developed rural areas who strive to be more like their 'modern', urban counterparts. They also influence the ideas of rural cadres in the Women's Federation, who then apply those ideas in campaigns with peasant women (see Chapter 5).

For rural women, bearing children, especially sons, continues to be one of the most important ways of ensuring respect and security for themselves within their husband's family.

Conversely, a woman who does not give birth, or who gives birth only to daughters, runs the risk of being abused or abandoned, and as has already been mentioned, this risk has increased as a result of the conflict between the state's one child family policy and the production responsibility system.

Apart from ties of affection with both sons and daughters, rural women cultivate their ties with their sons because it is they who will support them in old age, whereas daughters

'belong to someone else'. On the other hand, daughters are desired by women because while they are young, they will help their mother with the domestic work, whereas a son will not (Wolf 1985, p.223).

Control over Family Income

How, and by whom, decisions are made over the expenditure of family income is a subject on which we have very little information, and it is likely in any case that there is considerable variation from one family to another. It is possible, however, to construct a rough model and to discern some trends over time. Accounts of pre-1949 China suggest that the head of the family, who was usually the father, at least until his retirement from field labour when a son might take over, had ultimate control over family finances. The most common picture of traditional Chinese families is one in which the father alone decided all matters relating to the family expenditure, without consulting his wife or children. However, Martin Yang suggests that there was substantial consultation between husbands and their wives (Yang, Martin 1945). Also, Delia Davin claims that it was usual for the older woman in the house to be in charge of small-scale family expenditure, and that, of particular importance in a subsistence economy, it was she who decided what and how much each family member should eat (Davin 1976, p.76). That it was at least culturally acceptable for women to be the key decision makers on issues such as these, is further suggested

in the saying 'men rule outside, women rule inside' ('nan zhu wai, nu zhu nei').

As mentioned in Chapter 2, with the collectivisation of production in rural China from the 1950s onwards, women's participation in 'outside' work, and the income they earned from this work, helped to improve their bargaining power in family decision making, although it did not give them control over their income, since family members' earnings were usually pooled and the total given to the male head of the family.

Parish and Whyte, in their study of rural families in Guangdong in the early 1970s, found that decision making in the family had become somewhat more democratic, with more women being involved, or at least being consulted, by their husbands. However, in 65 per cent of the villages studied (N=40), it was still most common for a man to be regarded as head of the family, and for him to control the purse-strings. Generally, the father occupied this role until his retirement from field labour. In some families, as was common before 1949, the father continued to maintain close control over family finances and to demand respect and deference from other family members well after his retirement. It had become more common, however, for fathers to hand over control to their adult sons once the latter became the main income earners in the family (Parish & Whyte 1978, pp.209-215).

The interviews I conducted with rural women in 1989 confirmed that, as others have noted for earlier periods, (e.g, Croll 1981, p.159), in most rural families the income generated by all members is pooled into a common fund. Cash income is generally kept in a safe in the house and/or in a single bank account.

Table 4.3: Decision Making on Expenditure in Rural Families in Sichuan

The Main Decision Maker (% of families)	Expenditure in the Family Economy	Purchase of Expensive Items	Daily Living Expenditure
Man	13.3	9.7	2.5
Woman	30	9.7	70
No Single Person	56.7	80.6	27.5
Total No. of Families	30	31	40

Source: Interviews conducted in Xindu, Jinniu, Wenjiang, Guan & Mianyang Counties, October-December 1989.

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

Most women I talked to claimed that, apart from those relating to daily consumption, decisions on family expenditure are made through discussion between family members. In only three families did a man appear to dominate all decision making on issues involving substantial expenditure. Details on the gender divisions of labour in these families are given in Appendix 1 (families no.33, 44 & 47).

In another three families (no.27, 32 & 49, Appendix 1) most decisions relating to family expenditure are made by a woman. In all three of these families the woman runs a private business of some kind. This finding confirms claims, discussed in detail in Chapter 8, that the expansion of private production has provided an avenue through which at least a small number of women have improved their authority within the family.

Table 4.4: Decision Making on Specific Issues in Rural Families in Sichuan

The Main Decision Maker (% of families)	House Building	Purchase of Large Pieces of Furniture & Electrical Appliances	Education Of Children	Reproduction & Family Planning Issues	Expenditure in the Family Economy	Beginning New Economic Ventures	All Issues
Wife	7.7	7	15.6	9.4	13.9	8.1	11.7
Husband	38.9	33.1	22.8	13.6	29	32	35.5
Husband & Wife	47.6	54.9	59.5	76	51.8	55	45.2
Older Generation	5.7	5	2.2	1	5.4	4.9	7.6
Total No. of Families	1461	1383	1424	1461	1513	1423	1520

Source: Zhao Xishun 1990, p.162

Table 4.4 shows the findings relating to family decision making of a sample survey conducted in 1987 by members of the Sichuan Academy of Social Sciences and the Sichuan Women's Federation in villages in ten counties in Sichuan. The respondents were men and women aged between 16 and 60 (Zhao Xishun 1990, p.5 & pp.162-163). As can be seen from the table, the survey confirmed my own findings that in the majority of families husbands and wives make decisions on major issues together. However, the proportion of families in which the husband is the main decision maker is also substantial, and much larger than the proportion of families in which the wife dominates decision making. The table suggests that the role of parents in decision making is now much less than that of adult children, although it is unclear how many couples in this survey live with their parents.

Another approach which may help in constructing a fuller picture of the participation of individuals in family decision making processes is to examine the factors affecting that participation. The power dynamics and expectations of roles in family relations discussed above are one such factor. In addition, as has long been recognised by Marxists and feminists, gender divisions of labour, the type of work undertaken by adult family members and the way that work is perceived, and the income which each person contributes to the family, are factors of great importance.

Since the introduction of the production responsibility system, and the opening of new opportunities for employment

in domestic sidelines and non-agricultural ventures of various kinds, numerous articles in the media have claimed that women are now earning higher incomes relative to male family members than previously, and that as a result their power in the family has increased. As Elisabeth Croll has argued, however, the degree to which women's income has improved, relative to men in the family, and the extent to which their incomes have translated into greater power, has varied according to the type of economy practised, and the gender division of labour adopted, within the family (Croll 1987, p.126). The relationship between different gender divisions of labour and the power of women within the family will be examined from a number of angles in subsequent chapters. Here, I will just summarise my main points.

In what remains the majority of families, in which both women and men continue to work in agriculture, the removal of the work-point system of remuneration, in which women were consistently discriminated against, has enabled women to earn more. At the same time, however, any improvement that this might have made in women's power in the family may well have been cancelled out by the fact that the individual contribution to the family's income made by women is now no longer as clearly identifiable as under the previous system.

In the cases, discussed in Chapter 7, where men continue to work in the fields, but women withdraw to the 'inside' sphere to undertake domestic work, it is likely that women's power in the family is relatively weak, both because they earn a

lower income than male members of the family, and because of the low status of work in the 'inside' sphere. Many women in this position now also have less contact with people outside the family than in previous years when they worked in the fields, and as a result are more vulnerable in the family.

The role in family decision making of women who have developed lucrative domestic sidelines, or have expanded their domestic sidelines into private enterprises or specialised households, however, has in some cases improved substantially (as, for example, in the families outlined above). This is less often true in families where a man is also involved in the same venture, for he is then most likely to act as the manager of the business, making the major decisions on issues such as investment and marketing, and representing the business to the outside world.¹⁶ However, a small number of women whose husbands work elsewhere run specialised households on their own, and acquire considerable authority in doing so (see Chapter 8).

As will be discussed in Chapter 7, it is becoming increasingly common for men to work for long periods of time away from home, leaving their wives in charge of domestic work and agriculture. Some women in this situation will have gained a good deal of power over family decision making, although this may not always be the case. Studies in other

¹⁶ Examples of exceptions to this pattern are mentioned above. See also *NMRB* 7 March 1987. However, I would argue that these exceptions, singled out for comment as they are, merely confirm the general rule.

developing countries suggest that in families where the husband works away from home for much of the year and the wife is the apparent head of the family, it is nevertheless common for major decisions relating to family finances to be taken either by other senior male kin, or by the husband while he is at home (*Women in the Villages...* 1984).

In families in which women as well as men work in industry, it is likely that decision making over family finances will be a more democratic process, since each person's contribution to these finances will be clearly identifiable. Given the prevailing occupational segregation in industry, however, it is likely that women's earnings will be less than those of their male kin. Finally, young women who leave home to work as nannies or as temporary workers in urban industry will gain autonomy and at least some control over their individual earnings. As will be discussed in Chapter 9, however, it is commonly expected that young rural women working away from home will remit a substantial proportion of their earnings to their parents.

Land and Property

Apart from participation in decisions relating to the use of family income, control over land and property is commonly identified in the literature on women and development as a key factor affecting the extent to which women benefit from the products of their own (and other family members') labour.

Before 1949 women in China generally had no right to own or to inherit land or other property. As mentioned in Chapter 2, land reform in the 1940s and early 1950s in theory granted women, as well as men, ownership rights over a piece of land. The Marriage Law of 1950 also stipulated that husband and wife had equal rights in the ownership and management of property. In practice, however, a woman's land was usually considered the property of her family, and the title deeds were handed to the head of the family who, in most cases, was the woman's father, father-in-law or husband.

The collectivisation of land and the major means of production reduced the significance of inequality in property ownership. However, as demonstrated above, women continued to be disadvantaged in divorce because they were not accorded the right to independent ownership of property such as housing, consumer durables and savings. As unmarried daughters also, women's rights to a share of their natal family estate were not implemented because, with patrilocal marriage the norm, granting such rights would have meant allowing women to take property out of the family upon marriage (Davin 1987, p.58).

With the introduction of the production responsibility system, and the accumulation, in some families, of substantial amounts of property, the consequences for women of this basic inequality have become more serious. Thus, nowadays when a woman divorces she may well be forfeiting considerable capital which she has helped to build up (Ocko

1991, pp.324-325). As a consequence, divorce represents a significant threat to rural women, who then also feel that their bargaining position within the family is weak.

Problems relating to women's lack of ownership rights in land, and the fact that their use-rights are dependent on their relationship to men, have also been exacerbated by the introduction of the production responsibility system. As mentioned in the previous chapter, land is allocated to households according to their population. Rather than adjusting land holdings immediately following any change in the size of a household, however, it has become more common for local governments to adjust the land holdings of all households every few years. This has made the management of land allocation less cumbersome, but has also meant that some women who have just married or who have just divorced have been left without land for a number of years. Media reports claim that in some places, other types of land allocation systems, even more problematic for women, have been introduced. In a letter to *NMRB*, for example, a woman complained that in her village in Hunan women were being pressured to conform to particular marriage patterns by a fifteen year contract system that was introduced in 1985 whereby each member of a family was allocated land according to their age and sex. Males and females under 11 years of age were allocated the same amount of land. From then on, however, land allocated to males increased each year and they could also obtain land for a wife and child in advance of marriage. Females, on the other hand, lost land each year,

until by the age of twenty five they had none, the assumption being that by that age women will have married out of the village. Upon investigation, it was found that this method of allocating land was widespread in Hunan (*NMRB* 26 June 1985). In another example reported in the press, ten rural women who had married men with urban household registration themselves continued to live in their natal village and to retain their household registration there. However, when land was being divided up in the village, they were considered as having married out and were allocated no land on which to farm or build a house. Later their children also suffered discrimination, and when they left school were neither assigned land in the village nor given work in local industry (*RMRB* 21 April 1988).

In 1985 an inheritance law was promulgated for the first time in the PRC. The law reaffirms and draws attention to the rights of women to own and inherit property on an equal basis with male kin. However, as Delia Davin points out, the main purpose of the law is to provide a stable legal system of property ownership and inheritance, as a basis for the new family based rural economy. Any attempt made to implement women's rights, in the case of divorce, for example, will be regarded as a threat to the family based economy and is therefore not likely to be supported any more than previously (Davin 1987, p.62). Furthermore, under Article 13 of the Inheritance Law, it is stipulated that the rights of heirs who did not support their parents in old age may be less than those of heirs who did provide for their parents. This

further undermines women's right to inherit property, since the patrilocal marriage system means that most parents are supported primarily by their sons, and less by their daughters (Davin 1987, p.60).

Conclusion

Gender divisions of labour, women's work patterns and the extent to which women benefit from their labour are determined not solely by factors external to the family, such as the policies of the state or the characteristics of the market. Nor are they, however, the outcome simply of 'rational' responses to these factors made by a homogenous family unit. They are strongly influenced by the structure and size of the family, by power relations inherent in family structures and processes, and by expectations as to the roles of individuals within the family.

Thus, women's workloads and the type of work they undertake vary from one stage in the family cycle to the next. Before childbirth, for example, a woman's domestic workload is relatively light and there are comparatively few constraints on opportunities to work in the 'outside' sphere, for example in industry. Women with children generally have a heavier domestic workload and are more likely to work solely in the 'inside' sphere.

Women in contemporary rural China now play a more active role in decision-making processes within the family than they did before 1949, and hence have more control over their labour and over the products of their labour. Nevertheless, women's power within the family continues to be seriously undermined by certain structures and practices. In particular, the continuance of patrilocal marriage casts women as temporary members of their family before marriage and as 'outsiders' to the family after marriage. This has a number of serious consequences. As illustrated in this chapter, for example, patrilocal marriage combined with the practice of bride-price payment means that newly married women are particularly vulnerable to the dictates of their husbands and in-laws. Women's lack of power in the family is also reinforced by the difficulty that women have in obtaining divorce, and by their lack of control over land and other property. All of these were important factors in women's subordination before 1949. None have been overcome by the CCP, either under Mao Zedong or under Deng Xiaoping.

As discussed in this chapter, certain role expectations also reinforce women's subordination in the family. These include, in particular, the expectation that women should strive to maintain harmonious relations within the family, and that they should place the needs of other family members before their own. The centrality of such notions to popular perceptions of womanhood was challenged to some extent by the CCP under Mao, but in the post-Mao period it has been lent support once more.

Finally, women's subordination within the family both feeds into, and is compounded by, their lower rates of participation in education and in politics. These are topics that will be pursued in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 5: EDUCATION AND POLITICS

Introduction

This chapter examines the relationship between rural women's education and their involvement in politics, and the work patterns of women and men. It shows that both education and political participation (or lack thereof) have a major influence on gender divisions of labour. In dialectical fashion, gender divisions of labour also shape women's involvement in education and politics.

The chapter is divided into three sections. The first and second sections examine women's participation in education and politics, respectively. The third section discusses the All-China Women's Federation and the campaigns it has run in rural China in the post-Mao period.

Education

As is common across the world, rural women in China are on the 'bottom rung' when it comes to educational opportunities and attainments. For example, in 1990 approximately 70 per cent of the country's 182 million illiterates aged 15 and above were women. Of these, 84 per cent were rural residents (Guojia Tongjiju Renkou Tongjisi 1992, pp.63-65). The higher the level of education, the lower are women's and rural residents' participation rates, so that amongst all university graduates in 1990 only 30 per cent were women, the

vast majority of whom were urban residents (Guojia Tongjiju Renkou Tongjisi 1992, p.57).¹

In addition to gender inequalities in educational attainments, males and females are taught different messages about their future roles in society, and at, and above, secondary level are often segregated into different areas of specialised education.

In this section, after an introductory discussion of Maoist and post-Mao policies on education, I will examine in more detail the question of how rural girls and women have fared in education in the post-Mao period, in terms of access, achievement and the types of education they receive. I will also discuss the relationships between gender inequalities and differences in education and gender divisions of labour, arguing that in general the one reinforces the other.

Education Policy

Since 1949 Chinese educational policy makers have, broadly speaking, adopted two different approaches to education. These are most clearly apparent in the education policies of the Cultural Revolution and subsequent years (i.e., 1966-1976), and the reaction against these policies after 1976.

¹ Since so few rural women, or for that matter rural men, undertake tertiary education, the following discussion is of primary and secondary education only.

The paramount concern of Maoists in the late 1960s and early 1970s was to destroy the power of the existing educated elite, to expand mass education, and through education to inculcate political consciousness and break down divisions between knowledge and practice, and mental and manual labour. To this end, political education and manual labour were made important components of the curriculum at all levels of schooling, and academic criteria for entry into universities were downplayed, with more weight being given to the candidate's political attitude and practical experiences. 'Key point' schools, designed to provide high quality education to a small number of the most academically promising students, were abolished while 'people run' (*minban*) schools and a range of part-time schools and part-work, part-study schools were encouraged as a way of expanding basic education without increasing state expenditure (Pepper 1990, p.95).

These policies led to a 'gearing down' of education in urban areas (Parish & Whyte 1978, p.79) and severe declines in standards of education that were particularly noticeable at secondary and tertiary levels. At least quantitatively however, the results were beneficial to those at the lower end of education, that is rural residents and women in particular.

According to information from the 1982 census, the post Cultural Revolution period of 1970 to 1974 represents one of two peaks of progress in the growth of rural women's literacy

and primary school education since the 1940s, the other being 1951-1957. During both these periods rural women's literacy grew at a rate of about 3.5 per cent annually, whereas, in contrast, the years 1960-1964 and 1975-1978 saw declines. In terms of secondary school education, the beginning of the Cultural Revolution marked the start of very rapid growth of girls' enrolment in rural areas, peaking in 1972-1974 at about 5 per cent increase per year. This was followed by rapid deceleration, and then decreases of 5 per cent annually in 1979 and 1980 (Lavelly et al. 1990, pp.70-71).

The main thrust of reforms in education after 1976 was in direct opposition to the key values and innovations of the Cultural Revolution, with a 'two track' approach to schooling, similar to that of pre-Cultural Revolution years, being adopted. One 'track' in this approach was geared toward the cultivation of a small group of academically gifted students for entry into university, and centred on the newly revived 'key point' schools. The second track aimed to provide the majority of the population with a vocationally oriented basic education. In general terms, the need for a small core of highly educated people to lead the country through modernisation was given most weight, academic standards were raised, political education and manual labour were scaled down, and there was a move toward re-regularisation, 'rationalisation' and the reassertion of central control. Resources were concentrated in the first 'track', especially in a few elite 'key point' institutions, and the number of schools, especially of those providing an

alternative to full-time academic study, was reduced so as to promote quality (Pepper 1990, pp.70-71).

During the 1980s and early 1990s serious problems have emerged in education, particularly in rural areas.² These problems stem primarily from a lack of funding and from the aggravation of inequalities through the combination of the reforms undertaken within education itself, with reforms of the economy undertaken at the same time.

In rural areas, as previously, the state expects a large proportion of funding for primary and secondary schooling to be generated locally. As mentioned in Chapter 3, however, the introduction of the production responsibility system made it more difficult for local governments to collect funds for education. Such funds are now being generated, in part, by taxes on local township enterprises. However, local governments often do not see education as a priority, preferring to use the majority of the funds they receive from township enterprises either for lining their own pockets, or for further investment in economic ventures which will bring more immediate profit to the collective than education. In any case, though, it is only the wealthier, more developed townships that have enterprises that can afford to provide funds for education.

² This was so much so that in 1989 Deng Xiaoping admitted that education had been the biggest failure of the reform decade (Zhang Ning 1992, p.145).

The scarcity of state or collective funding for education has meant that many schools have closed. In rural areas this has often increased the distance that children must travel to school, which in turn has resulted in declining enrolments and high drop out rates (Pepper 1990, p.91).

In the case of rural secondary schools, declines in enrolments in the late 1970s and early 1980s resulted also from deliberate policy. In order to make more 'efficient' use of existing resources, and in its concern for quality rather than quantity, the state called for restrictions in secondary enrolments. In rural areas junior secondary school programmes attached to production brigade primary schools were abolished in the late 1970s, and in most places only one junior secondary school was retained in each commune. The senior sections of commune secondary schools were mostly closed, leaving no more than a few complete secondary schools in each county (Pepper 1990, p.97).

Lack of funding has meant, in addition, that many existing school facilities are in abysmally poor condition (NMRB 21 November 1988; Zhang Ning 1992, p.146). Furthermore, because of poor working conditions and because they are very poorly paid, many teachers are leaving the profession.

To make up for the shortfall in collective funding, individual families are being called upon to pay increasingly larger fees for their children's education. An investigation of primary schools in 14 counties in Hunan found, for

example, that tuition and incidental fees (*xuezafei*) amounted to an average of 19.40 *yuan* per person for the first semester of 1988.³ This was 3.15 *yuan* more than was charged for the same period in 1987 and 6.7 *yuan* more than in 1985 (*NMRB* 21 November 1988). Such fees mean that some poorer families cannot afford to send their children to school. Other families who may be able to afford the direct costs of educating their children, nevertheless decide that they cannot afford the costs of the labour power relinquished as a result. Yet others consider that rural education is of poor quality, and of little practical value, and believe that the family would benefit less from educating all its children than from keeping at least some of them (usually the girls) at home from an early age to look after younger siblings, help with domestic work or be involved in production.

In the mid 1980s the CCP responded to these problems, and to growing criticism of the education system, with a number of reforms. In 1984, for example, local authorities were instructed not to reduce secondary school enrolments any further (Pepper 1990, p.99), and consequently, the decline in secondary school enrolments was slowed (see below).

Legally compulsory education for all children has been extended from six years of primary school to three years of junior secondary school. The new nine year compulsory education law went into effect in July 1986, but different

³ As a point of comparison, net income per person in rural Hunan in 1988 was 515.35 *yuan*.

timetables were set for its full achievement. For one quarter of the population residing in cities and the most economically developed areas, it was expected that junior secondary school education would be made universal by 1990. The same achievement was expected for semi-developed towns and villages where roughly one half of the population resides by about 1995. For the remaining one quarter of the population residing in the poorest areas, local authorities were simply urged to popularise basic education as much as possible (Zhang Ning 1992, p.154).

As a statement of the CCP's intent to improve basic education, the compulsory education law is symbolically important, but its introduction into rural areas may have been premature given that problems relating to lack of funding, declining numbers of schools, shortage of teachers, poor quality and unsuitable courses, and low enrolment and high drop out rates are far from being solved.

The introduction of the law has, however, been accompanied by campaigns aimed at improving basic education, amongst females and rural residents in particular. For example, the 'Prairie Fire' plan aims to eliminate illiteracy among young and mature adults, to set up a range of cultural and technical educational establishments for rural residents, and to provide students at rural primary and secondary schools with technical training (Li Kejing 1992, p.30). The 'Hope Project', initiated by the China Youth Development Foundation in 1989, seeks donations nationally and internationally to

help school drop outs in poverty stricken areas return to school (SWB 1 November 1990).

At local levels, campaigns have been run in which girls are given preferential treatment in order to encourage them to attend school. Measures include waiving girls' tuition fees and subsidising the costs of their books and stationery, offering scholarships to girls who perform well, and allowing girls whose work duties prevent them attending the full school day to come late and leave early (ZGNMB 22 May 1983; Fujian Education Commission 1989, p.63). While it is probable that other causal factors are also involved, the fact that the female proportion of enrolments in primary and secondary schools increased slightly in the second half of the 1980s suggests a degree of success for 'affirmative action' campaigns such as these.⁴

Adult Education Bureaux have also targeted women for short term classes combining literacy and technical training, and in this they have been joined by other government departments

⁴ The female proportion of primary enrolments declined from 45.5 per cent in 1976 to 44.6 per cent in 1980 and 43.7 per cent in 1983. However, it then increased to 45.6 per cent in 1988 (Zhonghua Quanguo Funu Lianhehui... 1991, p.125). The female proportion of secondary school enrolments dropped from 40.4 per cent in 1976 to 39.4 per cent in 1980 and 1983, but then rose to 41.3 per cent in 1988 (Zhonghua Quanguo Funu Lianhehui... 1991, pp.136-137).

and, in particular, the Women's Federation (see Section 3, this chapter).⁵

Another set of reforms introduced in the mid-1980s concerned the increase of diversification and vocationalisation of schooling, particularly at the secondary level. The aim has been to provide the majority of the population with schooling which will be vocationally useful but which will not enable them to proceed to tertiary education. Central to this aim are three categories of vocationally oriented senior secondary schools: specialised schools (*zhong deng zhuan ye xuexiao*), which include technical schools (*zhongdeng jishu xuexiao*) and teacher training schools (*zhongdeng shifan xuexiao*); skilled-worker schools (*jigong xuexiao*); and

⁵ All these initiatives, it should be noted, rely on local resources and resourcefulness, with very little funding being provided by the state. One social scientist claims, for example, that according to regulations, state funding for rural adult education should amount to 1 per cent of the state education budget. In 1986, however, it was just over 100 million *yuan*, or 0.5 per cent of the state education budget, of which a 'trifling amount' was spent on literacy projects (Li Kejing 1992, p.31).

agricultural and vocational schools (*nongye zhongxue* & *zhiye zhongxue*).⁶

In a directive on rural education published in 1983 primary schools were called upon to orient their curricula to rural life, and junior secondary schools were required to undertake revisions to make 30 per cent of their courses vocational. By 1990 it was expected that at the senior secondary level, at least 30 per cent of all courses run in regular rural schools would be vocational, and that there should be at least as many students in vocationally oriented rural schools as in regular rural schools (Pepper 1990, p.108).

⁶ Specialised schools train kindergarten and primary school teachers and middle-level technical personnel in a variety of specialisations through mostly four year courses at senior secondary level. These schools are controlled at the national level by technical ministries as well as the State Education Commission and are managed by education, technical and labour bureaux at the local, district, county and provincial levels. Skilled-worker schools recruit junior secondary school students who are assigned to them by labour and personnel bureaux and train them through largely three year courses at senior secondary level. They are run by education bureaux and industrial units. They are less prestigious than specialised schools, but, like them, are in relatively high demand because students receive employment upon graduation. Agricultural and vocational schools, managed at the district and county level, train skilled workers through mostly three year courses at senior secondary level. They are the least prestigious of all the vocationally oriented schools because they do not guarantee employment upon graduation, although in some developed areas they have overcome this problem by forming close links with local enterprises that have a demand for skilled labour (Ross 1991, pp.77-79).

Participation Rates in Rural Education

Primary School

As a result of the problems described above, the number of students in rural primary schools declined from 128.8 million in 1978 (*Zhongguo Jiaoyu Nianjian 1949-1981*, 1984, p.1023) to 110.8 million in 1985 (*Guojia Tongjiju 1986*, p.756) and 92.5 million in 1991 (*Guojia Tongjiju 1992*, p.735).

The rate at which children withdraw from primary school part-way through has also increased. In fact, in the 1980s primary education was dubbed the '9-6-3' system: that is, nine out of ten children are enrolled in primary schools, but only six of them attend the full six years of primary school, three of them with satisfactory results (Bakken 1988, p.153).

The problem of low enrolment and high drop out rates from primary school is particularly serious amongst girls in rural areas, and has led to concern at the emergence of large numbers of new illiterates in the female population. A report published by the Fujian Education Commission suggests that the problems are even more serious than official statistics generally reveal. For example, according to statistics from thirty townships in Fujian, the primary school enrolment rate in 1986-87 was about 98 per cent for boys and 95 per cent for girls. These figures, however, were based on birth registration statistics which did not include significant numbers of children, especially girls, who,

because they were born outside the plan, were not registered and were not receiving an education. One survey of three villages found that in addition to 656 primary school age children listed in the household registration records, there were 32 not listed. In investigating the retention rates of female students in primary schools, the Commission found that in one district 491 boys and 446 girls were recorded as being enrolled in primary school. Of the 446 girls, however, only 203 or 45.5 per cent were enrolled in full-time primary school, while the remaining 235 were enrolled only in part-time or irregular schools. Furthermore, of the latter, only about 57 per cent were actually attending school. In the first to third grades of the full-time schools, girls comprised only 35 per cent of all students, and in the fourth and fifth grades the figure was 15 per cent (Fujian Education Commission 1989, pp.54-56).

Aside from the non-registration of girls born out of plan, one of the chief reasons for the large proportion of girls amongst children not attending primary school is the fact that when they marry, women usually leave their natal families, who, as a result, often see education for daughters only as an expense incurred on behalf of other families. In addition, in poor, isolated rural areas it is common for parents to limit their daughters' education in the fear that, having received an education, the girls will be harder to marry off, or they will refuse an arranged marriage from which the parents can obtain a high bride-price (Fujian Education Commission 1989, pp.56-57).

The other major reason for girls' low rates of participation in primary education is the fact that girls are often expected to undertake a large proportion of their family's domestic work and to care for their younger siblings. Since the introduction of the production responsibility system, the workload of some women has increased as a result of them taking over responsibility for agriculture and expanding domestic sideline production (see Chapter 7). In order to cope with the extra workload women often transfer more of the burden of domestic work onto their daughters, even at the expense of the latter's schooling, since this is seen as of relatively little benefit to the family (Wang Shuhui 1989, p.21).⁷ It is much less common for a boy to be withdrawn from primary school to help with work at home because it is believed that a boy's education will benefit the family more in the long term.

Secondary School

In 1978 the number of children attending regular rural secondary schools was 48.2 million (*Zhongguo Jiaoyu Nianjian 1949-1981* 1984, p.1005). This declined to just under 29 million by 1985 (Guojia Tongjiju 1986, p.750) and 27 million by 1991 (Guojia Tongjiju 1992, p.729).

⁷ This is not always passively accepted by the girls. In one instance in a mountain village, fourteen girls aged between 8 and 15 'went on strike', refusing to do any domestic work, mind children or work in the fields until their parents allowed them to attend primary school (NMRB 3 December 1988).

For the cleverer and more fortunate students enrolled in urban secondary schools, cutbacks in enrolments in the post-Mao period and the subsequent increase in competition may have resulted in improved educational standards. However, for large numbers of rural children, especially girls, they simply closed off educational advancement. Not only do relatively few rural students pass the examinations into senior secondary school, many, realising that they have little hope of passing, simply drop out of school beforehand. One investigation conducted in a relatively well-off rural county in Heilongjiang province found, for example, that in the period 1979-1982, of a sample of 2,778 students enrolled in junior secondary school, 44.1 per cent dropped out part-way through. In the period 1981-1984, of a total of 2,981, a full 72.3 per cent dropped out before the final examination (Bakken 1988, p.157).

Two factors greatly contributing to the high withdrawal rates of rural children from education before or part-way through secondary school are the widespread view that the secondary curriculum is of little benefit or relevance to rural life, and the costs of maintaining children through secondary school. Fees for secondary schooling are generally higher than in primary schools. So too are the opportunity costs of keeping a child in secondary school, because of the recent growth in demand for children aged between roughly 10 and 16 in township- and village-run enterprises, as well as in family based production, especially in the south-eastern coastal provinces.

In most cases that have been reported, the majority of child labourers and of children withdrawn from education before or part-way through secondary school are girls.⁸ Thus, according to an investigation carried out in Jinxiang Township, Wenzhou, in 1985 405 out of 483 children in the family workshops were girls. Thirty per cent of the children were illiterate and 20 per cent had only had one or two years of schooling (*China Daily*, 12 October 1985).

Patterns such as these are due, not just to the greater value placed by parents on boys' education than on girls', but also to the fact that in secondary school girls' grades are on average lower than boys', as are their pass rates in examinations.

In all seven counties in which I collected information on education in 1989 the proportions of girls and boys enrolled in primary school were reported to be roughly equal, but in secondary school, in particular senior secondary school, there was a marked drop in girls' enrolments. Education Bureau officials explained this in terms of girls' greater failure rates in examinations, which they all attributed solely to biological differences between the sexes. In Huairou and Xindu counties the explanation was that girls are

⁸ There are some exceptions to this pattern, however. In Wenjiang County, Sichuan, for example, Education Bureau officials told me that the drop-out rate from junior secondary school is higher amongst boys than amongst girls. The reason they gave was that boys can rely on their physical strength to earn money, whereas girls can only rely on their education (Interview, October 1989).

not as smart as boys. In primary school this is not apparent because the boys muck around. In secondary school, though, they knuckle down and then their grades outstrip the girls'. In Jinniu and Wenjiang counties it was claimed that in the earlier years girls' and boys' intellectual abilities are much the same, but that when they reach puberty girls' thinking becomes 'scattered' (*fensan*). Instead of concentrating on their school work girls start to think about boyfriends and establishing families (Interviews with County Education Bureau Officials, September-December 1989). Margery Wolf in her fieldwork in 1980-1981 was given similar answers by teachers and mothers (Wolf 1985, pp.130-133).⁹

From the media, girls receive somewhat conflicting messages. They are told that they are as clever as boys, but that they need to build up their self-confidence, and that discrimination against them in education and work is a result merely of traditional prejudices, held nowadays only by a minority of people, which can be overcome by those with the will to do so (Honig & Hershatter 1988, pp.14-23). The intelligence of females and males is described as equal but different. However, as Emily Honig and Gail Hershatter point out, because male characteristics are taken as the desired norm, female 'difference' translates into inferiority in much of the literature (Honig & Hershatter 1988, pp.14-16). For example, one author claims that there is little difference

⁹ These attitudes are by no means confined to rural areas, and interestingly, Margery Wolf noted that urban women are much more likely than rural women to say that boys are smarter than girls (Wolf 1985, p.131).

between the innate mental abilities of males and females but adds that 'this is not to say that women and men are completely alike in all respects'. Males, this author asserts,

have wide-ranging interests, a strong ability to get to work, and they like to think things out for themselves; but sometimes they are not careful or thorough enough. Female classmates often have stronger memory and language ability, and are more diligent and meticulous. But they have one-track minds, do not think dynamically enough, have a rather narrow range of activity, and easily become interested in trivial matters. Their moods fluctuate easily, they are shy, and they don't dare to raise questions boldly (*Gei Shaonu de Xin* [*Letters to Young Girls*], Shanghai, Shanghai Renmin Chubanshe, 1984, quoted in Honig & Hershatter 1988, pp.15-16).

What could be seen as superiorities in this list of female traits are glossed over. Instead, the author emphasises females' lack of capacity for independent thinking as the reason for their lower grades in senior secondary school, and urges them to try to overcome their deficiencies by emulating their male classmates (Honig & Hershatter 1988, p.16).

If media articles such as these give girls the impression that they are not as smart as boys, this message is further reinforced by a lack of female role models in positions requiring relatively high levels of education. The fact that there are fewer female teachers than male, particularly at secondary level and above, does not help here. According to the State Statistical Bureau, in 1991 women comprised 43.8 per cent per cent of all primary school teachers, but only 32.4 per cent of teachers in regular secondary schools (Guojia Tongjiju 1992, p.719).

Coming from a western feminist perspective which seeks to illuminate and focus on the social, rather than the biological, construction of difference and inequality between women and men, I argue that while there may well be differences between the patterns of thought common in boys and girls, socialisation plays an important role in the formation of these differences. Furthermore, there is no 'natural' or inevitable link between these differences and the inequalities between female and male educational achievements. Females fare relatively poorly in the education system firstly, because of socially constructed barriers to their participation, such as the patrilocal marriage system, the responsibility for domestic work that is placed on their shoulders, and institutional discrimination, evident, for example, in the requirement for entrance into some secondary schools of a higher examination result for females than for males (discussed below). Secondly, education for females is not valued as highly as for males. Thirdly, the patterns of thought and behaviour more common in females are deemed inferior in definitions of educational excellence. And fourthly, females internalise messages that they are not as clever as males which they receive from parents, educators, the media and the lack of female role models.

Some of the points I have made here relating to the social construction of gender inequalities in education are also commonly made in Chinese analyses. Thus, the patrilocal marriage system, traditional prejudices against educating

women, and girls' responsibility for domestic work are commonly identified as the key obstacles to improving female participation in basic education (even if little is done to overcome the obstacles). However, when it comes to analyses of females' lower grades and lower enrolment rates in education at senior secondary level and above, social factors largely drop out of sight and 'biology' takes their place. A corollary of this is that while female participation in basic education is seen as an issue on which social or political action can and should be taken, the same is largely not the case with female participation in higher levels of education.

The relatively low attainments of females in the formal education system and the message that females are not as smart as males clearly reinforce each other. They also have the effect of strengthening assumptions of female inferiority in aspects of social life other than education. Margery Wolf suggests that among rural women this may be less true than for their urban counterparts because the work and responsibilities that rural women take on are such as to enable at least some of them to see that they are as clever, or able, as men. Indeed, one woman in Jiangsu argued that

generally women are smarter, but some men are smart too. Men may be clever with outside affairs, I don't know about that, but they are really dumb about family affairs (Wolf 1985, p.138).

On the other hand, however, scholars commonly note the strong respect in which Chinese peasants hold formal (academic) education and the importance of education as a status marker (Wolf 1985, p.134; Pepper 1990, pp.3 & 103).

Lower levels of educational attainment also contribute to more concrete restrictions of women in employment and other aspects of the 'outside' sphere, which in turn reinforce existing divisions of labour. Economic development, especially technological advances and the development of a market economy since 1978, have made this a particularly important issue. As will be discussed in Chapter 8, successful entrepreneurial activity, for example, requires a certain level of education since it entails learning new, more efficient techniques of production, and developing an understanding of market dynamics, state regulations and accounting. Partly as a result, most specialised households are run either by men, or by households in which a woman provides most of the labour but her husband is in charge of marketing, sales and other aspects of managing the business. As will be noted in Chapter 9, rural women are also disadvantaged in rural industrial employment because many township enterprises now require a minimum level of formal education (usually junior secondary school) from their workers. Finally, it appears that pressure for better educated cadres may have contributed to an erosion of women's political representation since the late 1970s (see Section 2, this chapter).

Gender Segregation in Education

Gender divisions of labour are affected not just by unequal participation rates in education, but also by differences between the kind of education received by males and females.

Of particular significance, in this regard, are the shifts toward a greater degree of vocationalisation in education in the 1980s and 1990s.

As Suzanne Pepper argues, the education system at senior secondary level has been 'retracked and streamed in a manner deliberately designed to exploit and reinforce the existing social divisions of labour' (Pepper 1990, p.97). She has in mind here the reinforcement of divisions between the elite and the masses, and between mental and manual labour which have resulted from the 'two track' system of academic training for tertiary entrance on the one hand and vocationally oriented training on the other. I would argue further that the 'vocationalisation' of a substantial proportion of secondary schooling has also exploited and reinforced existing gender divisions of labour, involving, as it does, a shift from courses in which boys and girls undertake essentially the same academic curriculum (Ross 1991, pp.72-73), to one in which they spend a substantial proportion of their school time in vocational courses where gender segregation is marked.

To give an example from my own fieldwork: in Huairou County, Beijing, there are two specialised senior secondary schools (*zhongdeng zhuanYe xuexiao*): an automobile industry school in which female students comprise 30 per cent of the total, and Huairou Teachers' College, with 60 per cent female students. There are five vocational schools (*zhiye zhongxue*). Those teaching secretarial skills, and finance and accounting, both

have a majority of female students, and in the school teaching enterprise management, 50 per cent of students are female. On the other hand, in the school teaching machine processing and animal husbandry, only 45 per cent of students are female, most of whom are concentrated in animal husbandry (Interview with members of Huairou County Education Bureau, September 1989).¹⁰

To some extent, the differing enrolment rates of males and females in vocationally oriented schools are a result of overt, institutional discrimination. As Beverly Hooper claims, such discrimination is apparent in all types of secondary and tertiary education, but particularly so in vocationally oriented schools which often impose quotas on the proportion of girls enrolled, and enforce those quotas by requiring higher entrance examination results from girls than from boys (Hooper 1991, p.357; *RMRB* 26 September 1985). One

¹⁰ I have no figures for the fifth school which teaches skills in crop production, fruit growing and rubber production.

No national statistics are available to indicate the gender composition of enrolments in specialised, vocational and agricultural schools according to area of specialisation. Statistics collected by the Women's Federation do, however, indicate the proportion of females enrolled by skilled-worker schools run by the different industrial units and ministries under the State Council. Taken as a whole, these schools enrolled a quota of 30 per cent females in 1988. There was a good deal of variation in enrolments between the schools however. For example, there were 2,236 students in schools run by the Ministry of Textile Industries, of whom 41 per cent were females, but in the schools run by the Ministry of Railways there were 31,160 students, of whom only 16 per cent were female (Zhonghua Quanguo Funu Lianhehui... 1991, p.150).

of the chief justifications given for such discrimination is that many employers express a preference for male workers.¹¹

On the other hand, some vocational schools enrolling only women (*nuzi zhiye gaoji zhongxue*) have also been set up. The rationale given for the establishment of one such school in the city of Dalian in Liaoning Province was that

in the sphere of work one must take into consideration the biological differences (*shengli chabie*) between males and females; likewise in education. Only once we have seriously addressed the issue of women's vocational training and devoted major efforts to developing women's intellectual resources (*zhili ziyuan*), will we be able to raise their employment capabilities (*Renmin Jiaoyu* October 1985, p.12).

In its first year of operation the school enrolled five hundred girls in courses in secretarial and typing skills, tourism, pre-school teaching, and child care.

Apart from these forms of institutionally created gender segregation, the differences between the vocational courses taken by males and females are determined by the choices of the students themselves. These choices are, however, heavily influenced and restricted by social perceptions of biological difference between males and females, and assumptions that these differences should be reflected in certain differences in education and employment. In Jinniu District, for example, I was told by Education Bureau officials that boys do not choose kindergarten teacher training courses because if they were to become kindergarten teachers they would be

¹¹ For a more detailed discussion see Jacka 1990b, and Hooper 1991, pp.358-359.

looked down upon. The officials themselves condoned the choice, however, saying that women are more suited to kindergarten teaching because the bond that small children have with their mothers is stronger than that with their fathers, and because women are more patient, tender and caring than men (Interview, October 1989).

With the vocationalisation of much of secondary schooling, boys and girls are effectively segregated into separate specialised areas of training and work earlier than in the academic education system in which marked differences in the subjects taken by men and women are apparent in university enrolments, but not before. However, this segregation in vocational secondary schools and universities merely develops assumptions of difference between males and females that are already built into education at all levels and are apparent, also, in the media.

Thus, in regular primary and secondary schools girls and boys participate, by and large, in the same curriculum (with some exceptions, for example in sports programmes), but that curriculum teaches very different, and what is more, unequal, roles for males and females. This was strikingly illustrated by an analysis published in *ZGFN* in 1989 of the twelve-volume textbook used for courses in Chinese in full-time six year primary schools. The analysis found that, in total, the names of only 11 female personages were mentioned, in contrast to 82 male personages. Several tens of male writers were mentioned, but only three female writers. All the

scientists, literary scholars and artists mentioned were men, and a wide range of other roles for men, including many leadership positions in various fields were included. In contrast, a very narrow range of roles for women were mentioned, and most of them were relatively low status workers. Similarly, a wide range of personality traits were mentioned in relation to men, whereas women were characterised by a very narrow range of descriptions. Deng Yingchao, a veteran of the revolution and, at the time, the most powerful woman in the Communist Party, was portrayed only as a kindly, motherly figure - once giving a raincoat to a guard on duty and once sitting, mending pyjamas with sewing box, scissors and thread laid before her (Nan Ning 1989, pp.4-5).

Messages, such as are evident in this textbook, about the roles most suited to men and women, have been reinforced since 1978 by a vast body of literature which emphasises that physically, as well as mentally, men and women are different, and which presents the differences in such a way that women continually appear to fall short of the male standard. One article on 'labour and exercise for young women', for example, summed up its comparisons between young women and men by saying that

whether in functions of the kinetic system, blood, circulation, respiration, and adjustment of body temperature, or in endurance and adaptability in heavy manual labour and physical training, young women cannot match young men of the same age (*Zhongguo Qingnian Bao* [China Youth Daily] March 13 1982, quoted in Honig & Hershatter 1988, p.18).

Other articles then take these physical differences as the grounds on which to argue directly for particular divisions of labour. An article published in a women's magazine in 1986 argued, for example, that

in the past it was often said that what men can do, women can do too. This is not entirely scientific. In order to give full play to women's abilities, one must not require them to undertake work that does not suit their special characteristics, but rather develop to the full their superiorities... Apart from meticulous work such as embroidery, women generally achieve outstanding results in animal husbandry, processing and services (Yang Chengxun 1986, p.4).

It is significant that according to articles such as this, the 'superiorities' women apparently enjoy make them most suited to areas of employment which in general are relatively poorly paid and of low status.

In education and the media there is then a contrast in attitudes toward gender divisions of labour between the late Maoist period and the post-Mao era. In the Cultural Revolution women were urged to become 'Iron Girls' who, in challenging the existing gender division of labour, made superhuman efforts to overcome their 'inferior' biology and become more like men. Since Mao's death, on the other hand, women have been taught to accept that biology is destiny (Honig & Hershatter 1988, p.30), whether in relation to education or work. A striking similarity between Maoist and post-Mao approaches, however, is the degree to which women's worth is measured in terms of the extent to which they do, or do not, conform to a male standard.

Political Participation

Since the late 1970s the proportion of women occupying leadership positions at all levels of institutional politics has declined. In addition, with a return to family farming and a rejection of Maoist methods of political mobilisation, the active participation of ordinary rural women and men in political debate and action has been reduced. Both trends have limited the possibilities open to women for affecting change in gender relations and the position of women in their communities. These issues are the focus of the following section. In order to put them into perspective, however, it is necessary first to briefly discuss the nature and extent of women's political activity in Maoist China.

Political Participation Under Mao

One of the most striking results of Maoism in the countryside was, as Marc Blecher has noted, a radical increase in popular participation in politics and an expansion of the sphere of the political, by which is meant the range of social concerns subject to public or governmental determination, regulation and action (Blecher 1989, p.192).¹² Beginning with land reform, and through such processes as 'speak bitterness' sessions, village meetings and political study sessions, in

¹² The following discussion is limited to forms of political activity sanctioned by the state. It does not include peasant rebellions or other violence, forms of non-cooperation such as strikes, subterfuge, bribery, or corruption, all of which are, nevertheless, important avenues for the articulation of rural interests. See Burns 1984.

the establishment of peasant associations, and finally through the collectivisation of production, the CCP involved rural men and women in politics, and opened up political debate and action to include issues relating to basic livelihood and economic concerns, and further, to issues relating to class and gender relations, the family and personal values (Blecher 1989, p.193).

Some now see political participation in the Maoist era in predominantly negative terms, either as a process in which the state extended its tentacles further and further into ordinary people's lives, the better to control and manipulate them (Tang 1983), or as an empty ritual to which local officials paid lip service and in which 'the masses' only feigned interest and involvement, with real political power being held by a still remote, elitist and centralised state (Pye 1971).

Accepting that both these perspectives have considerable validity, it is nevertheless the case that

the break from a past in which politics was a realm open almost exclusively to elites and conducted behind closed doors, and in which productive relations were privatized and not subjected to political determination either in public or in private, could not be greater (Blecher 1989, p.200).

For rural women who were oppressed, not just by an authoritarian state remote from their daily lives, but also at the most intimate level by their fathers, husbands and other family members, and for whom contact with outsiders to

the family was severely circumscribed, the CCP's attempts to draw them into public meetings, study groups and the like, signalled a particularly radical change.

There were, however, formidable obstacles to getting women involved. Local male cadres were unenthusiastic, the women's families were often violently opposed, and most women themselves lacked the inclination, the confidence and the skills for speaking out in public. The women who did become active politically in the early years were frequently those who were seen to be on the margins of 'proper' society - widows, women with husbands who could not support them, sorcerers, prostitutes and beggars, all of whom had already learnt to make a living and defend themselves in the 'outside' sphere, and who, in doing so, had transgressed codes of behaviour, both social and sexual (Andors 1983, p.27; Johnson 1983, p.107). Even as late as the 1970s young women who participated in mixed sex political study groups or who worked as cadres were often regarded with suspicion (Andors 1983 p.121; Salaff 1973, p.119).

With the establishment of communes, production brigades often appointed women's representatives. Furthermore, all women participated in meetings at production team level, which made decisions on matters which previously had been controlled either by the male heads of individual families or by a remote, inaccessible state authority; decisions on production, work task allocation, and remuneration (Davin 1976, p.150). In brigades with strong female leaders,

peasant women were sometimes able to win improvements for themselves, for example in relation to the allocation of work-points. Usually, however, women, whether they were cadres or not, were marginalised in collective debates, and the decision making was done by male leaders. This was a characteristic of basic level politics right up until decollectivisation (Mosher 1983, pp.193-194).

Women's lack of voice in collective decision making in the Maoist period was very significant because of the high level of control that the collective exercised over all aspects of social and economic life. It meant, in effect, that subordination to men within the family was replaced by subordination to men in collective leadership, although it must also be acknowledged that women did benefit from the fact that there were greater pressures on male cadres to conform to a degree of equality in public relations with women than there were on men within their own families.

In the early 1950s vigorous campaigning on the part of the CCP and the Women's Federation succeeded in gaining modest levels of female representation in Party and government institutions then being established, but, as a proportion of the total, the number of women in institutional politics, especially at the highest levels, saw little increase during the 1950s and 1960s. For example, as shown in Table 5, in the Central Committee of the CCP the number of full women members increased from just 4 (4 per cent) in 1956 to 13 (7 per cent) in 1969.

Table 5: Female Representation on the Central Committee of the CCP

Year	Party Congress	Full Membership			Alternate Members		
		Total	Female		Total	Female	
			no.	%		no.	%
1956	8	97	4	4.1	73	4	5.5
1969	9	170	13	7.6	109	10	9.2
1973	10	195	20	10.3	124	21	16.9
1977	11	201	14	7	132	24	18.2
1982	12	210	11	5.2	138	13	9.4
1987	13	175	10	5.7	110	12	10.9
1992	14	189	12	6.3	130	12	9.2

Source: 1956-1987: *Zhonghua Quanguo Funu Lianhehui...* 1991, p.572. 1992: *SWB* 19 October 1992.

Interestingly, whilst during the Cultural Revolution any attempts to address the specific problems of women as a group were branded as 'revisionist', the late 1960s through to the mid 1970s also saw the most vigorous and successful state promotion of women's participation in politics since 1949, this being in line with the general call to 'put politics in command'. Thus, on the one hand, more women were drawn into political study groups (and in urban areas into the Red Guards), and on the other hand, women's representation in institutional politics also increased. At the Ninth Party Congress in 1969 two women (Jiang Qing and Ye Qun) were elected to the Politburo, where previously there had been no women. In addition, as indicated in Table 5, the number of

full women members on the Central Committee of the CCP increased from 13 (8 per cent) in 1969 to 20 (10 per cent) in 1973.

The 'criticise Lin Biao and Confucius' campaign (1973 - 1976) stepped up calls for greater participation of women in politics and, for the first time, also backed up these calls with attempts to overcome the cultural and structural obstacles to greater political participation amongst women. Apart from the prejudices against women participating in politics, the many hours of hard work that women, especially married women, put into domestic work and rearing children as well as production, meant that they were very often too tired to be able, or to want to become active politically as well. As mentioned in Chapter 2, some attempts were made at this time to persuade men to share domestic work. The patrilocal marriage system was also a target for criticism because it meant that women were regarded as temporary residents in their natal village, and strangers in the village into which they married, and hence compounded their isolation and exclusion from the informal networks of power amongst (male) villagers.

The degree of success of the CCP's attempts to increase women's political representation varied enormously from region to region, but it appears that by the mid-1970s most production team committees (consisting of five to seven people) and production brigade committees (six to eleven

people) had a minimum of one woman director or deputy director (Parish & Whyte 1978, pp.101 & 239).

Considerable limitations remained, however, on the effectiveness with which female cadres could exercise power to improve women's position in local society. Most women appointed as team or brigade leaders or deputy leaders were engaged mainly in 'woman-work'¹³ and exercised little general leadership, in contrast to male team and brigade leaders who held authority in all areas. Woman-work, moreover, was looked down upon and usually consisted of little more than family planning propaganda work and the mobilisation of women for work in the fields (Parish & Whyte 1978, p.239).

An additional problem was that of tokenism. As Whyte and Parish report, the local response to pressures from higher authorities to increase women's political representation was usually to add a female team head, rather than to replace a male cadre with a woman. Often these were young women who were not expected to retain their posts after marriage (Salaff 1973, p.120). Furthermore, because there were relatively few women with formal education beyond primary school and training or experience in leadership, the women appointed as leading cadres were in some cases poorly suited to the task (Andors 1983, p.134). This not only meant that as individuals they were ineffectual, but may also have given female leadership in general a bad reputation. It is

¹³ On the usage of this term, see Note 12, Chapter 2.

possible that this was a contributing factor in what appears to have been a backlash against female political activism after the overthrow of the Gang of Four in 1976, though as I will argue shortly, more powerful forces were also at work.

It appears that for all the promises of more democratic and participatory politics made during the early part of the Cultural Revolution, by the mid-1970s popular participation in politics had become little more than 'the subjection of the people to mindless recitation of officially sanctioned slogans and "quotations" that could only dull their political senses' (Dirlik 1989, p.31). Consequently, when Deng Xiaoping's new leadership rejected the Maoist approach to political participation, the population was more than ready for the change.

Political Participation in the Post-Mao Period

In rural areas, as mentioned in Chapter 3, areas of decision making relating to the economy and to government and administration which were formerly both controlled by officials in the commune structure, were in theory, at least, split in the post-Mao period.

With the introduction of the production responsibility system, much of the decision making relating to production devolved to individual families, so that families now had more freedom to choose for themselves what areas of production to engage in and how to use the products of their

labour. To some extent, as Sulamith and Jack Potter argue, in this context 'freedom'

is essentially a male-centred notion, signifying the men's right, reclaimed from team leaders, following decollectivisation, to direct the economic activities of the women and children of their households. Zengbu women do not have "freedom"; their former subordination to the team leaders who once directed their labour has merely been exchanged for subordination to their husbands (Potter & Potter 1991, p.336).

As discussed in Chapter 4, this is likely to be the case for the large numbers of families in which women work in agriculture and sidelines, though for a minority of women now running private enterprises or specialised households, or working in industry, the economic reforms may have brought greater autonomy.¹⁴

Governmental functions at local levels have been taken over by township governments and village committees. Mass political campaigns have been largely discredited and there has been a decline in the number of collective meetings held. This has led to a decrease in opportunities for direct contact between 'the masses' and representatives of the state.

¹⁴ As in other societies, however, the 'freedom' of both men or women to decide economic matters is constrained by various external factors over which they have little influence. In contemporary rural China these include central and local government policies relating, for example, to land tenure and usage, labour migration, and taxation; prices and forces of supply and demand; and the recruitment policies of local industries, as well as the decisions on village economic matters now taken by village committees or corporations in the place of production brigades.

On the other hand, more indirect or representational forms of political involvement have been encouraged and strengthened: mass organisations, such as the All-China Women's Federation (to be discussed in the following section), have been re-established and urged to be more active in representing their constituents' views, Party and government institutions have been rebuilt, and elections for positions in those institutions have been revived and improved as a channel for the expression of rural peoples' political views.

In formal institutions of political power, however, women's representation declined at the end of the 1970s and continued to decline through the 1980s and early 1990s. The declines in the proportion of women appointed to the Central Committee of the CCP are shown in Table 5. Between the 11th Party Congress and her retirement at the 12th Party Congress, Deng Yingchao was the only woman with full membership on the Politburo of the CCP, while one other woman, Chen Muhua, had alternate membership (*PRC Official Activities & Monthly Bibliography*, January 1979, p.27). At the 13th National Party Congress in 1987, and again at the 14th Congress in 1992, no women were appointed as either full or alternate members of the Politburo.

At the provincial level, as of July 1993, none of the thirty Provincial Party Secretaries, Provincial Governors or Military District Commanders were women (*China Monthly Data*, July 1993, pp.8-10).

At the other end of the scale, women's Party membership has also declined, and in recent years a number of letters complaining about the difficulties women have entering the Party because of prejudice against them have been published (*ZGFN* October 1984, p.48; *NMRB* 11 March 1986; *NMRB* 28 July 1986).

In Yiyang district, Hunan Province, an investigation of nineteen townships in six counties undertaken in 1988 found that of a total of 9,597 Party members, only 731 or 7.6 per cent were women. The highest proportion of women Party members per township was 11.8 per cent. Out of 322 villages, 35 or 10.9 per cent had no female Party members. The average age of women Party members was 42, and 21.1 per cent of townships had no female Party members aged 30 or under. According to the investigation, more than 70 per cent of women Party members joined during the Socialist Education Campaign and the Cultural Revolution. Only 14.2 per cent have joined since 1980. 31.6 per cent of townships have not had a new female Party member since 1987 (Zhang Jinyun & Hu Zhaoqing 1988, pp.14-15).

Media reports claim that the lack of women newly entering the Party is contributing to a situation in which the proportion of female cadres is declining at all levels, the average age of female cadres is relatively high, and there are few women newly joining the cadre ranks (*RMRB* 2 March 1988). Although not a formal necessity, Party membership is, in practice, required for participation in leadership at the township

level and above. As Ellen Judd points out, however, entry to Party membership is usually granted only after a lengthy period of observation, and in this a woman trying to gain membership to the Party is disadvantaged by the patrilocal marriage system. If she does not gain entry between the age of eighteen (the minimum entry age) and the time of her marriage, it will be many years after she has settled into her husband's village before the Party will reconsider her, by which time she may well be too busy with domestic work and production to be involved in politics (Judd 1990b, p.52).

Comprehensive statistics on women's political representation at local levels are not available, but the following reports give some idea of the situation in the 1980s and early 1990s. In their work report to the Fifth National Women's Congress in 1984, the Secretariat of the All-China Women's Federation claimed that in the provincial level Party and Government departments of 28 provinces women comprised an average of only 6.5 per cent of leading cadres.¹⁵ Nationally, at county or commune level, the report claimed, only 2 per cent of all Party Committee Secretaries and Deputy Secretaries were women (ACWF 1984, p.8).

In 1988 the Central Organisation Department of the CCP and the All-China Women's Federation claimed that nationally women comprised 43.6 per cent of the workforce but only 28.8

¹⁵ A 'leading cadre' is usually someone with the status of director, deputy director or secretary, or their equivalents, in any particular body.

per cent (8 million) of all cadres. At provincial, district and county levels they comprised about 5 per cent of leading cadres, and less at township level (Zhonggong Zhongyang Zuzhi Bu... 1988, pp.9-10).

Chen Muhua, Chairperson of the All-China Women's Federation claimed in 1990 that women account for 7.99 per cent of all officials at county level in the country. She called the ratio 'rather low', and drew the attention of Party committees at all levels to this problem (SWB 22 August 1990).

The reasons for the low numbers of women in institutional politics in recent years, especially in rural areas, relate to the continuation of the cultural and structural obstacles that I have already discussed in relation to the earlier periods, combined with a withdrawal of the CCP pressure on local leaders to improve women's political representation that characterised the early to mid 1970s.

Thus, in the Yiyang district example cited above, the reasons put forward to explain the decline in female Party membership were firstly, that some township and village Party committees were too demanding of prospective women members, claiming that young women were not eligible because they lacked stability, married women because they were burdened with child care, and older women because their education and health were not good enough. In some cases the regulations governing entry into the Party about age (under 40) and

education (upper secondary school) were applied very strictly to women, but not to men. Secondly, many township and villages trained the heads of Village Women's Congresses, but made no effort to train other promising women for Party service. Finally, since the introduction of the production responsibility system, many women (but fewer men) have stopped participating in political activities and have shown little interest in joining the Party (Zhang Jinyun & Hu Zhaoqing 1988, pp.14-15).

The decline in the number of women cadres stems also from the poor performance of women in elections for delegates to the People's Congresses, held in 1980, 1984, 1987 and 1991. This is an issue that has received a good deal of attention in the media in recent years.

The *Chinese Women's Daily* reported, for example, that in Yanshi county, Henan Province, in the county and township elections held in April 1987, none of the 8 women candidates were elected. Amongst the 50 township heads and deputy heads newly elected there were no women (ZGFNB 11 January 1988).

In accordance with the revised Election Law of 1979, direct elections were held for the first time in the 1980s for delegates to the People's Congresses at county level, and in elections at all levels, a requirement that there be more candidates than posts to be filled was introduced.¹⁶ In many

¹⁶ For details on aspects of the elections other than gender representation see Womack 1982, and Jacobs 1991.

rural areas the 1980s was also the first time, since the 1950s, that direct elections were held at the township level. In theory, villagers were previously supposed to elect the leaders, deputy leaders and management committees of production teams and brigades, but in practice, committee members were usually simply appointed by the leading local cadres (Burns 1984, pp.131 & 142). A further change was the removal of quotas. Previously, targets and quotas had commonly been set at the local level so that a 'reasonable proportion' of leading cadres would be women (Johnson 1983, p.185; ZGFN February 1988, p.4). During the 1980s many, though not all, counties dropped the quota system.¹⁷

These were the immediate causes of the poor showing of women in the elections: now that villagers had some choice in who their leaders would be, and pressure to elect a minimum number of women was reduced or removed, the extent of the obstacles facing women's involvement in politics became fully apparent.

Some further light was cast on this issue by a discussion of the probable reasons for individual women candidates' failure

¹⁷ Amongst the counties I visited in 1989, Ling County in Shandong maintained a target of 24 per cent women amongst delegates to the People's Congress. Guan County, Sichuan had a target of 20 to 22 per cent women delegates to the People's Congress, and had also maintained a quota system since before the reforms, whereby every group of leading cadres from village level up was required to include at least one woman. Xindu and Jinniu counties in Sichuan had dropped quotas, but in the latter a quota of one woman in each group of leading cadres had been reintroduced in 1989 in reaction to declines in women's political representation (Interviews with members of County Women's Federations, September-December 1989).

in the 1987 election in the report from Henan cited above.¹⁸ Before 1984, the report claimed, Zhu Miaohuan, a 34 year old primary school teacher, had no thoughts of becoming a county-level cadre. However, the leading group of cadres at county level had been pressured from above to appoint a woman to the post of deputy head of county. She had to be under 35, with an educational level of technical college or above, and not a Party member. Zhu Miaohuan was chosen as one of the very few women who met these requirements. She was appointed deputy head of township and after only a year was taking on leadership work at county level. She lacked self-confidence though, was always afraid to speak out and found the work hard to cope with. Just when she was getting accustomed to it she was sent to the provincial Party school where she studied for two years. Then the elections came up. This time it was said that the deputy head of county did not have to be a woman. People also questioned why they should elect Zhu when she was no longer really a non-Party cadre. Finally, during the pre-election proceedings, when Zhu's name came up as a candidate, one prominent cadre walked out and this was taken to mean that she should not be elected. The report concluded that 'many of our comrades are not used to thinking independently and exercising their democratic rights', and that neither Zhu Miaohuan's selection as a candidate, nor her failure in the elections, had much to do with her abilities or lack thereof (ZGFNB 11 January 1988).

¹⁸ Here I outline just two of the four cases discussed in the report.

The second case is somewhat different. Yao Guarong was already a deputy head of county with a strong track record, and other cadres did not doubt that she would be re-elected. Villagers were outraged however, that although she was in charge of publicising the one-child family policy, Yao herself had two children. In fact, she was within her rights because her first child had been born mentally deficient, but this was not readily discernible to others. The report claimed that had Yao's good work been publicised, and the reasons for her second birth explained in the run-up to the election, she would have been re-elected, but campaigning in her case had been neglected (ZGFNB 11 January 1988).

In my discussion so far, I have lent support to the argument that direct state intervention to improve gender equality is an important factor in increasing women's participation in institutional politics, and that lack of such intervention contributes to lower rates of political participation amongst women. However, I would argue that in post-Mao China, it has not only been the case that the state has neglected gender issues and hence *allowed* women's rates of political participation to slide. It has also actively, although not necessarily wittingly, promoted that slide.

As discussed in Chapter 3, a reconfiguration of gender relations and gender identities has been a central aspect of changes to social and political discourse which the CCP under Deng Xiaoping has encouraged in order to strengthen its reform programme and the legitimacy of its rule. One element

in this reconfiguration has been a denigration of women in positions of power. As Marilyn Young writes,

in dramatic writings about the "ten years of turmoil", women in political roles are universally depicted in the most negative way... Evil itself has been feminized, and the message to women is clear: there is something in the natural order of things that does not love a woman exercising public power (Young 1989, pp.262-263).

This is connected to the unpopularity, and the state's manipulation of the unpopularity, of Jiang Qing - Mao's wife and a member of the Gang of Four. Because she was a woman wielding power Jiang Qing is now portrayed as a 'white-boned demon', a witch and a prostitute (Terrill 1984, pp.16 & 391).

Ross Terrill goes so far as to say that Having struggled all her life to transcend the housewife's role, Jiang had been tried in part as a housewife - who exceeded a woman's proper functions and led her husband astray... Jiang Qing was not really guilty of wrong ideas ("counterrevolution"), but of playing the wrong social role (Terrill 1984, p.391).

The negative images used to portray her have helped to discredit not just Jiang Qing as an individual, but the Gang of Four and the 'ten years of turmoil' in their entirety. At the same time, they have been extended to all women who are active politically.¹⁹

¹⁹ However, despite, or perhaps in part because of, her trial and condemnation by the post-Mao CCP, popular perceptions of Jiang Qing are ambivalent. Ross Terrill points out that 'a younger generation schooled to passivity by communism found in the aggressiveness of Jiang, a person shaped in the pre-Communist era, a heartening celebration of individual will' (Terrill 1984, p.391). Marilyn Young also reports a conversation with three young women who, when asked their opinion of Jiang Qing, exclaimed 'She was great, Maggie Thatcher too! They make men afraid'. In response to the stunned expression on their American friend's face they added 'Of course Jiang Qing was also very bad' (Young 1989, p.253).

The effects of women's low level of political participation on women's work and gender divisions of labour are several. First, it means that at the macro level women have little input or representation in the planning of development strategies, and they have little power to alter existing policies or have new policies adopted so as to protect and further women's interests. Second, at the micro level, many women have little control over the allocation of their own labour, this being in the hands of male heads of families and male leaders in the local economy and government.

Third, the lack of women in politics, combined with the negative image of politically active women, reinforces notions that the 'outside' is men's realm. This then strengthens gender divisions of labour between 'outside' and 'inside' work. It also makes it difficult for women to attain positions of leadership in the economy, for example as enterprise managers, even in industries where the labour is predominantly female.

In China there is no organised women's movement and few groups concerned with improving the position of women that are independent of the state.²⁰ Within the state system the

²⁰ Important exceptions in the 1980s and 1990s have been the newly emerging women's research groups and women's studies departments in universities across China (For details see Wan Shanping 1988). In addition, in the 1980s many trade unions established women's groups and a number of professional women's organisations were set up. All such organisations belong officially, however, to the state controlled All-China Women's Federation (Article 6, Clause 25, Constitution of the All-China Women's Federation, *RMRB* 13 September 1983).

All-China Women's Federation has been given the task of furthering the interests of women, as well as of mobilising support for Party policy amongst women. As outlined in Chapter 2, the Women's Federation is a mass organisation consisting of a hierarchy of groups extending from the level of National Congress downwards, with indirectly elected representatives at each level of government, down to the village.

To some extent, the poor representation of women in institutional politics in China generally, has been offset by the existence of the All-China Women's Federation. In the following section, therefore, I examine the Federation's structure and status, and its activities in rural areas, and address the question 'Has the Women's Federation played any part in shaping or changing gender relations, in particular, gender divisions of labour, in rural China, and if so, to what extent and in what directions?'

The All-China Women's Federation

Structure and Status

Disbanded, along with other mass organisations, at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution because its concern with gender issues was seen as undermining the CCP's overriding

emphasis on class struggle, the All-China Women's Federation was rehabilitated at provincial and national level in 1978.

Along with the change in state and Party leadership, the repudiation of the Cultural Revolution and the call for the 'four modernisations', the revival of the Women's Federation was greeted by women across China with an optimism which, however, very quickly turned sour. As one young woman complained in a letter to Deng Yingchao,

When the Fourth National Women's Congress was held, we labouring women congratulated ourselves that after the ten years of chaos [1966-1976], we had at last found our 'mother'... Reports and decisions made at the Congress were very encouraging indeed. But three years have passed since then and the record of work among women is very disappointing... Violations of women's rights have been frequently reported by the press... After each incident the Women's Federation and women's magazines express their indignation. But it is really a pity that so many of these "Zhuge Liangs" [clever strategists] are never around when the incidents take place (ZGFN November 1980, pp.2-3, quoted in Honig & Hershatter 1988, p.318).

Throughout the 1980s and early 1990s the Women's Federation has continued to be held in low regard by Chinese women. By shifting its emphasis away from political rhetoric toward more concrete help in combating particular instances of discrimination and abuse of women, and in providing advice and training, the Federation has made its work somewhat more relevant and helpful to its constituency. Nevertheless, as I will show, the effectiveness of the Women's Federation as an advocate for women's interests has been severely constrained by lack of resources, lack of autonomy and authority and,

perhaps as a result, a failure to challenge the ideological and structural foundations of gender inequality.

During the 1980s there was some official support for the suggestion that the Women's Federation should speak out more boldly and independently in defence of women's interests (Croll 1983, pp.120-121). In practice, however, the present day Women's Federation is bound, as much as ever, by the dictates of the CCP.²¹

In establishing policies and principles to be handed down as guidelines for all lower level Women's Federations the national leadership of the Women's Federation is given explicit and detailed directions by the CCP.²² Lower level women's cadres, particularly those at county and township levels, frequently appear to be less constricted by Party rhetoric in their discussion of women's problems, and show more enthusiasm and initiative in carrying out their work, than cadres in the national and provincial Women's

²¹ In the late 1980s, suggestions that mass organisations such as the Women's Federation be given independence were supported by the then General Secretary of the CCP, Zhao Ziyang. In the Women's Federation the possibility that autonomy might soon become a reality generated a good deal of excitement, though there was also trepidation that this would result in a loss of funding and of authority that the Federation could ill afford (Interviews with Women's Federation cadres, Beijing and Chengdu, August-December 1989). With the demise of Zhao Ziyang and the brutal suppression of pro-democracy protests in 1989, however, Party control over mass organisations tightened once more.

²² See, for example, RMRB 18 April 1983, for a directive from the Secretariat of the CCP Central Committee setting out the main tasks of the Women's Federation.

Federations. Regardless of their enthusiasm, however, grass-roots women's cadres work under enormous constraints. Their wages and what little additional funding is received by women's organisations from provincial down to village level are determined and provided by local government, rather than through the Women's Federation, and according to the constitution of the Women's Federation, promulgated by the Fifth National Women's Congress in 1983, women's organisations at provincial, municipal, county and township levels 'carry out their work under the leadership of the local Party Committee' as well as with the guidance of the Women's Federation just superior to them (*RMRB* 13 September 1983). Personnel appointments to grass-roots women's organisations must also meet the approval of, and can be changed by, the local Party Committee (Endicott 1988, p.185).

These restrictions on the Women's Federation are compounded by lack of resources, and by the difficulties that the Federation has had in adjusting to the changes brought about by the demise of the commune and the introduction of the production responsibility system.

As with cadres in general, with the introduction of the production responsibility system, the authority of women's cadres and the relevance of their work came under attack from the general population, who argued that 'now that everyone can participate in production we don't need the Women's Congress; now that responsibility lies with the household, there's no need for cadres' (*'Shengchan jiajia hui, bu yao*

fudaihui, zeren dao le hu, hebi yao ganbu?') (Zhou Limin 1982, p.42). In the early years of the production responsibility system, a number of communes did in fact remove their women's representatives at production brigade and team level, in effect, doing away with separate representation for women at grass-roots levels entirely.

In response to such pressure, and in attempting to adapt to the new economic and political structures being established in the countryside, the Women's Federation stipulated that women in each village should be represented by a Grass-roots Women's Representative Congress (henceforth Women's Congress)(*jiceng funu daibiao hui* or *fudaihui* for short). According to the Women's Federation's 1983 constitution, the executive committee of the Village Women's Congress is to comprise one head, a deputy head and an unspecified number of committee members. Delegates to the Congress are to be elected every two years to represent the different residential areas and types of employment of the women in the village. The constitution stipulates that Women's Congresses are also to be formed at township (*xiang, zhen*), county and provincial levels. At township level these congresses are to meet once every two years, at county level once every three years, and at provincial level once every five years (RMRB 13 September 1983).

In practice, there is some regional variation in the form and extent of women's representation at grass-roots levels. In most of the counties that I visited in Beijing, Shandong and

Sichuan in 1989 I was told that Village Women's Congresses usually consist of one woman who may or may not be a full-time cadre, who, in addition to woman-work, usually does most of the education and propaganda for family planning in the village. In addition to the head of Congress, most Village Women's Congresses appoint several delegates to represent women from different occupations and residential areas.

These representatives may or may not play a significant role in representing women at Women's Congress meetings, but aside from this they only occasionally undertake tasks assigned to them by the Congress, for which they are compensated for labour-time lost (*wu gong butie*). Township Women's Congresses are generally staffed by one full-time head of Congress doing woman-work, which in some cases includes family planning education and propaganda, and other Party work. Township Women's Congresses generally also have a committee of anywhere between two and nine part-time members. County Women's Congresses are staffed by four to ten full-time cadres, doing mostly woman-work, but also other Party work (Interviews with members of County Women's Federations, Beijing, Shandong & Sichuan, September-December 1989).

In the Sichuan Provincial Women's Federation in 1989 a total of 145 people, including 19 men, were employed. The main work of the Federation was divided between an administrative office, a research office and four sections: propaganda, organisation, children's work and legal rights of women and children. In addition, affiliated to the Federation were a women's cadre school, a journal agency, a women's movement

research office and a women and children's centre.

Altogether, 88 people were employed in these affiliated enterprises (Interview with members of the Sichuan Provincial Women's Federation, October, 1989).

In addition to women's organisations based on residential and governmental structures, the Women's Federation has, since the early 1980s, encouraged the establishment of women's representative groups in different areas of women's employment, especially in township enterprises. As will be discussed in Chapter 9, however, only some township enterprises have set up such groups.

Many Women's Federations have claimed in recent years that at the grass-roots level women's organisations are understaffed and their members overworked. Particular resentment is expressed by some county women's cadres at the fact that township and village women's cadres must spend so much of their time on family planning. Cadres in the Jinniu District Women's Federation, for example, told me that there is no regulation requiring women's cadres to do family planning work, and they discourage village women's cadres from undertaking such work, both because it is time consuming, and because it is extremely unpopular with the villagers and therefore gives the Women's Federation a bad reputation. Village women's cadres, however, come under enormous pressure from the local government and Family Planning Commission to do the work, which is considered women's responsibility

(Interview with members of Jinniu District Women's Federation, October 1989).

Another major source of dissatisfaction among Women's Federations is that their members are poorly paid, and they have little authority or status, either with the local population, or among other cadres (Hunansheng Fulian Yanjiushi 1986, p.17; Tan Yingzi 1989, p.24; Zhang Jinyun & Hu Zhaoqing 1988, p.15).

It is recognised that in some cases women's cadres' lack of status or authority is due to the fact that they are poorly qualified, and, as in Party and government organisations, there have been calls for younger, better educated women's cadres to be appointed, and for women's cadres to undergo training in the theory of the women's movement, legal education and technical skills useful for developing the commodity economy (Shandongsheng Fulian 1986, p.13). As one Women's Federation report points out, however, women's cadres are given fewer opportunities to undertake training than their male colleagues, and even when such opportunities are made available, family responsibilities often prevent women's cadres from taking them up (Tan Yingzi 1989, p.24).

Finally, many Women's Federation leaders express dissatisfaction at the level of funding that their organisations receive. Amongst the counties that I visited, total funding for the County Women's Federation received from the county government varied from between 1,000 yuan per year

and 10,000 *yuan* per year. Women's Federation cadres at the level of township and below generally did not receive funding above their wages. Funding for training classes and the like generally came from local government departments (Interviews with members of county Women's Federations, September-December 1989).²³

Activities

Despite the many problems besetting the Women's Federation, it is probably fair to say that in the 1980s and early 1990s it has been more active in protecting the particular interests of women than at any time in the past, with the exception of the land reform and marriage campaigns of the early 1950s.

During this period the Women's Federation has shown greatest concern with the following issues: the protection of the legal rights of women and children, the care and education of young children, women's contribution to the development of 'spiritual civilisation', the improvement of women's 'quality', (which refers to their political consciousness as

²³ In some places, however, Women's Congresses now raise their own funds through entrepreneurial activities. In one county in Hubei, for example, village Women's Congresses have reportedly overcome a shortage of funding by cultivating land or fish ponds assigned to them by the village government, or by running private enterprises (ZGFN September 1988, p.30). The question that springs to mind here is how much time is left for woman-work, when such activities are undertaken.

well as their education and practical skills), and an improvement of women's employment opportunities.

In the early 1980s the protection of the legal rights of women and children was a particular focus of the Women's Federation's work. Across the country, women's cadres distributed leaflets and organised classes and consultancy services to educate women as to their legal rights and responsibilities. They also mobilised people to report crimes against women, investigated reports and complaints made to them, and in some cases intervened directly to protect women or to seek redress on their behalf (NMRB 17 March 1986). Of particular concern were cases, reported mainly in rural areas, involving forced marriage, the kidnapping and sale of women for marriage, female infanticide, the abuse of women who gave birth to a girl, and rape. As was discussed in Chapter 4, reports of such crimes against rural women have recently been very numerous in the Chinese press and there are some reasons to believe that they have increased in number since the 1970s.

Another aspect of the Women's Federation's work in protecting the legal rights of women and children has been their attempts to combat direct discrimination against women in industrial employment. Thus, one of the most vigorous and effective campaigns run by the Women's Federation to date has been that aimed at combating discrimination against women in the recruitment of workers into industry, the disproportionate retrenchment of women workers, and calls for women to withdraw from employment and 'return to the

kitchen'. These forms of discrimination have largely occurred in urban state-run industries, where, in trying to overcome problems of overstaffing, managers have targeted women because they must be paid maternity leave if they give birth, and because of their responsibilities for domestic work and child care (Jacka 1990b).

In rural areas, in addition to trying to improve women's representation in township enterprises, the Women's Federation has drawn attention to the poor working conditions faced by women in many such enterprises, and to instances of unequal pay. In terms of its overall programme, however, the Women's Federation has put relatively little effort into combating these problems, perhaps because there is a general acceptance of the notion that, in the early stages of development in particular, township enterprises cannot afford to meet the same standards of workplace equity and welfare as state-run enterprises.

In addition to combating violent crime and direct discrimination against women, Women's Federations devoted much of their energy during the early 1980s to improving family life and young children's education. As mentioned in Chapter 4, for example, a large proportion of articles in *ZGFN* have been devoted to the rearing of children. Women's Federations across the country have also worked with other bodies to increase the provision of child care and kindergarten places, to improve the training of nursery and kindergarten teachers, and in some cases to establish classes

and schools on good mothering (ZGNMB 29 May 1984; NMRB 13 November 1987).

As an extension of their responsibility for the upbringing of their children, women are further held responsible for the task of improving family life and furthering 'spiritual civilisation'. One of the Women's Federation's main activities in this area has been the campaign, similar to that of the 1950s, to select and reward 'five good' families (*wu hao jiating*). In 1983 the Chairperson of the Women's Federation, Kang Keqing, laid out the criteria for 'five good' families as follows:

- (1) Love the socialist fatherland and the collective and abide by the law.
- (2) Work and study hard and fulfil one's duties.
- (3) Enact family planning, educate one's children well and be thrifty and industrious in managing the household.
- (4) Alter prevailing habits and customs, be civilised and polite and maintain cleanliness and hygiene.
- (5) Respect the old and love the young, maintain democracy and harmony in the family and unite with and help one's neighbours. In family life husband and wife must love and respect each other, help each other and yield to each other, carefully rear the next generation together, fulfil their obligations to support the elderly, and oppose the maltreatment of the elderly and of other family members (Kang Keqing 1983, p.63).

It is noteworthy that the 'five good' families campaign is directed primarily at women. Furthermore, although mutual help between husband and wife is included in the criteria for 'five good' families, there is a noticeable lack, in the Women's Federation's work, of attempts to change the assumption that domestic work and child care are a woman's responsibility. Thus, the Women's Federation's work in improving family life has reinforced the image of woman as primarily mother and domestic worker, responsible for an 'inside' sphere, which is in turn subordinate to, and in the service of, the nation's economic and social well being. This has undermined the Women's Federation's own efforts in urban areas to combat calls from employers for women to withdraw from employment to 'return to the kitchen', and in rural areas, to train women so as to improve their participation in agriculture and the commodity economy.

In the mid to late 1980s, however, although concern with protecting women's basic legal rights and with children and family life was maintained, it was improvement of women's employment opportunities which was given the greater emphasis in the Women's Federation's campaigning.

In June 1986 the All-China Women's Federation convened a work conference for heads of Women's Federations of province, autonomous region and municipal levels, at which the Federation's work in rural areas was discussed, and its aims and tasks for rural areas in the period of the Seventh Five Year Plan (1986-1990) were set out (ACWF 1986, pp.2-5).

Women's Federations were called upon, first of all, to raise women's consciousness and improve their understanding of current CCP policies - 'to educate women to liberate themselves from the fetters of traditional concepts of small production and egalitarianism' (ACWF 1986 p.3), to improve women's self confidence, and encourage them to develop commodity production. These were to become the main elements in the ongoing 'four selfs' campaign to develop women's self respect (*zizun*), self confidence (*zixin*), independence (*zili*), and strength (*zhiqiang*) (Zhang Guoying 1988, p.1).

The other task given particular emphasis at the work conference was that of providing practical support and training for women to overcome poverty, improve their involvement in the rural market economy and raise their incomes. In poverty-stricken areas it was argued that the aim should be not merely to provide relief funding and grain, but also to arouse enthusiasm, teach skills and help with technology and the supply of information. Prosperous areas were to emphasise vocational training and, where appropriate, girls' vocational schools were to be established. Training was to focus on young and middle-aged women, in particular, educated young women.

In all areas women, it was argued, were to be encouraged to make full use of their 'particular strengths and abilities' in crop planting and animal husbandry, processing, textiles, services, foodstuffs, electronics and traditional

handicrafts. Elsewhere, in a summary of the Women's Federation's work in alleviating poverty made in 1989, the Women's Federation stressed that while local conditions must always be taken into account, development of the courtyard economy (i.e., small-scale agriculture, non-agricultural production, especially of handicrafts, commerce and services undertaken in the home or courtyard) is one important way of alleviating poverty and raising incomes that can be implemented everywhere. It is particularly important given that the area of arable land is decreasing and that women are the dominant labour force in courtyard production (Huang Qizao 1989, p.2).

In the late 1980s and early 1990s numerous favourable reports appeared in the Chinese media describing the successes of the Women's Federation's efforts in training and supporting women in the courtyard economy. One newspaper article reported, for example, that in 1986 the Shandong Provincial Women's Federation made plans to train 10 million rural women in the Seventh Five Year Plan period. In that year various levels of the Women's Federation in Shandong ran more than 30 thousand classes (sessions) for women on horticulture, animal husbandry, processing, spinning and weaving, and sewing, involving 1.17 million women.²⁴ Classes run by Women's Federations in conjunction with other departments numbered 20,000 (sessions), and involved more than 800,000 women.

²⁴ A woman is counted each time she participates in a session, regardless of how many other sessions she has participated in.

According to incomplete figures, in 1986, 2 million women in Shandong learnt one or more technical skills (NMRB 9 March 1987).

In Ling County, Shandong, I was given a more detailed account of the Women's Federation's campaign at the grass-roots level. The Ling County Women's Federation started running technical training classes in 1986. In the earliest classes a large majority of the participants were members of township and village Women's Congresses - the rationale being that having once been trained themselves, these women would pass on their skills to others. In October 1986 the Women's Federation ran two training sessions, each of five days duration, on courtyard viniculture, mushroom and fungus cultivation, and tailoring. Altogether 93 women participated. Of them, 50 were cadres in the Women's Federation and 13 were kindergarten teachers. The participants were aged between 16 and 48. All had at least primary school education, and the majority were graduates of junior secondary school. During 1986 the Women's Federation at county and township levels on its own ran a total of 649 classes (sessions), involving 7,277 women, the majority of whom were learning skills in crop growing (2,300) or animal husbandry (2,400). The participants were mostly aged between 16 and 45, with upper primary to upper secondary school education. The teachers were local university students and members of the Women's Federation. Participants in the county run classes were charged one yuan a day. This was the only source of funding for the classes. Many of the teachers

worked voluntarily. Classes generally ran for a few sessions of a day each and were held in the county kindergarten. In addition, the Women's Federation in conjunction with other bodies, ran 325 sessions involving a total of 3,255 women, most of whom, again, were learning skills in crop growing or animal husbandry.

According to the County Women's Congress, at the end of 1986 there were 94,100 female labourers in the county, of whom 1,900, or 2 per cent, had learnt one or two technical skills that year, through the training classes (Interview with head of Ling County Women's Congress, September 1989).

Aside from organising technical training classes, the Women's Federation also provides legal advice to women and makes links with other bodies to help women obtain bank loans and to assist them with the supply of raw materials and feed for livestock etc., and with the marketing of their produce. For example, in one township near Tianjin, the Women's Federation helped poor women raise their incomes by organising interest free loans for them to provide the necessary capital to start small business ventures, for example in raising chickens. They also provided the women with information about the market (*RMRB* 27 January 1985).

One of the largest and most successful campaigns to have been undertaken by the Women's Federation in rural areas since 1978 is the campaign to 'study culture, study technology; compete in results, compete in contributions', or 'double

study, double compete' ('shuang xue, shuang bi') campaign for short. Begun in 1989, the campaign was initially planned to run for five years but was then incorporated into the Five Year Plan (1991-1996) and the Ten Year Plan (1991-2001). It is being run by the Women's Federation in conjunction with a number of government ministries. The latter are responsible for the formulation of principles and policies, overall planning and command of production and the provision of services, while the Women's Federations attempt to coordinate the activities of the different government departments, publicise the campaign, and mobilise and organise women to be involved. At the national level the campaign is led by a coordinating committee chaired by the head of the Women's Federation, Chen Muhua, with the deputy secretary of the State Council, and the heads of the Ministries of Agriculture and Forestry as deputy chairs (ACWF 1989, pp.11-12).

The aim of the campaign is to encourage and help women to improve their skills and productivity in commercial agricultural production (both as part of the courtyard economy and on a larger scale), the focus on agriculture being, according to the deputy chairperson of the Women's Federation, Huang Qizao, both a reflection of the Party's emphasis on the fundamental importance of agriculture to the national economy and because, as a result of the rural reforms and ensuing development, women are increasingly becoming the major force in agriculture, while more and more men are moving into non-agricultural production (Ma Lizhen 1992, p.4).

According to the *China Daily*, between 1989 and 1991 approximately 120 million women were involved in the campaign. Of them, more than 80 per cent received technical training and mastered at least one technical skill. Some 240,000 women were awarded certificates as agro-technicians (*China Daily* 20 September 1991).

There is no doubt that the 'double study, double compete' campaign and other campaigns run by the Women's Federation to improve women's participation in the economy have contributed to the employment opportunities and incomes of rural women, at least to some extent. It is probable, however, that the impact of such campaigns is considerably less than the enthusiastic media reports would suggest; that such enthusiasm is more indicative of CCP policy orientations than of the real situation. Thus, the claim that in 1986 2 million women in Shandong learnt one or more technical skills is less impressive in light of the fact that the skills are very basic, having been acquired in sessions lasting usually no more than a few days, and that while 2 million women is a lot in absolute terms, it represents only about one per cent of Shandong's rural female labour force.

Furthermore, accounts of the Women's Federation's success in various counties across China are likely to be atypical. I myself found that in Ling county, Shandong, 5 out of 7 women aged between 14 and 45 (excluding cadres and delegates to the Women's Federation) participated in training classes run by

the Women's Federation. However, amongst the 42 women in this age group that I interviewed in other counties in Beijing and Sichuan, none participated in training classes run by the Women's Federation, although some had received other forms of short term training. Most women said they only participated in the Women's Federation's March 8th activities and, at most, one or two other meetings with the Women's Federation each year.

Insofar as the Women's Federation has any impact at all on women's participation in the rural economy, the effect is primarily to reinforce certain gender divisions of labour. As we have seen, its activities in improving family life and 'spiritual civilisation' have resulted in a strengthening of the image of woman as mother and domestic worker. In other areas of their work, more directly concerned with improving women's position in the economy, the Women's Federation has hailed the courtyard economy and agriculture as particularly suited to women's 'special strengths and abilities'. In general, in fact, the Women's Federation is one of the strongest advocates of the argument that women and men are biologically different and therefore suited to different types of work.

Gender divisions of labour are also, of course, reinforced by what the Women's Federation does *not* do. Of greatest importance in this regard is that since the late 1970s it has taken no significant action in relation to domestic work; whether it be to lobby for the recognition of the importance

of such work to the economy, to argue for its socialisation, or to pressure men to share domestic work with their female family members. As discussed in Chapter 4, the Women's Federation's failure to challenge the prevailing patrilocal marriage system also reinforces particular gender divisions of labour.

The support that the Women's Federation lends to existing gender divisions of labour can be interpreted from a number of different perspectives. I argue that it should in part be regarded as failure - whether it be failure to recognise the importance of gender divisions of labour to the perpetuation of women's subordination, or failure, because of limitations placed upon them by the CCP, to challenge the dominant ideology in this respect.

It is important to also understand, however, that there are powerful reasons for the Women's Federation, as for Chinese women generally, to choose to condone, and even strengthen, existing gender divisions of labour. First, a reaction against Maoism is important in this respect, for, as we have seen, the particular ways in which gender divisions of labour were challenged during the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution caused a number of problems for women: they meant that women's 'inside' work in domestic work and as mothers was devalued or ignored, but not, on the whole, shared or reduced. Women were judged according to how well they met male standards of achievement in the 'outside' spheres of education, employment and politics, yet the social

and structural obstacles to their achievement in these areas were not overcome. In addition, the claim that 'what men can do, women can do too' lent justification to some appalling cases of women being overworked and strained beyond their physical capacities. As mentioned in Chapter 3, women as well as men, also supported a return to more traditional gender relations as part of a reaction against the upheaval of the Cultural Revolution and a desire for stability and order.

Second, the Women's Federation believes that the promotion of women's 'natural' dominance in particular areas of work will bring them certain advantages. To take the courtyard economy as an example: in Chapters 7 and 8 I argue that an increasingly strong association is being made between both the courtyard economy and agriculture, and the 'inside' sphere. Not coincidentally, the concentration of women in these areas of employment signifies, in some respects at least, a marginalisation of both women and these types of production. It has been a common dream of the peasantry through the ages to get off the land and off the farm, and now in the 1980s and 1990s, with rapid industrialisation and the development of a market economy, that dream is being fulfilled by more and more rural inhabitants. From this viewpoint, those who work on the land and on the farm are the unlucky ones, and by reinforcing notions that farm work is women's work, the Women's Federation is colluding in a perpetuation of women's lower status. The Women's Federation, however, promotes women's dominance in the

courtyard economy, in part because work in this sector can be accommodated relatively easily with a woman's other commitments in domestic work and child care, and in part because it is an area in which a woman can develop a far greater degree of autonomy and control over her own labour power than in industry. Furthermore, as long as the courtyard economy is seen as 'women's work', and as long as the CCP continues to encourage development of the courtyard economy, rural women will have open to them an area of income generation in which they need not compete with, or antagonise, men.²⁵

Finally, as this thesis demonstrates, gender divisions of labour are constructed and maintained through a formidable web of institutions, power relations, social acts and beliefs. Given this, and given its own limited resources and power, the Women's Federation perhaps feels that the most worthwhile strategy is not to continually challenge existing gender divisions of labour, but rather to concentrate on making those divisions work as far as possible to the benefit of women.

²⁵ For a similar analysis of the Women's Federation's support of gender divisions of labour in urban industry see Jacka 1990b, pp.17-18. A more detailed examination of the Women's Federation's support for women's work in the courtyard economy is undertaken in Chapter 8.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have shown that the particular nature of women's participation in education and politics has a major impact on gender divisions of labour. For example, women's commonly lower levels of education and high levels of illiteracy disadvantage them in the 'outside' spheres of politics and industrial employment. In addition, the increasing gender segregation of rural education, especially at secondary level, reinforces gender divisions of labour in which women are concentrated in 'light' work, or work associated with the 'inside' sphere.

Similarly, gender divisions of labour, in particular between 'inside' and 'outside' spheres, are perpetuated both by the low levels of participation of women in formal politics, and by the particular strategies of the few women in positions of formal political authority, especially those in the Women's Federation, whose brief it is to further the interests of women.

In turn, gender divisions of labour also influence women's education and political representation. For example, recent trends which make agriculture, domestic sidelines, light industry and services the most likely areas in which rural women will find employment, lead to an emphasis on the skills required for such work in the education of girls and in the strategy of the Women's Federation for improving rural women's position in society.

In the thesis so far, I have provided a theoretical and historical framework for an examination of the impact of reform on gender divisions of labour in contemporary rural China. I have also considered a range of factors, from state policies through to family structures and relations, and women's participation in education and politics, which both shape, and are shaped by, shifts in gender divisions of labour occurring in the process of reform.

I will now turn to a detailed examination of gender divisions of labour themselves, to the processes through which these divisions, and the meanings associated with them, have been formed or re-formed in recent years, and to the implications of these divisions for women's lives and for gender relations in rural China.

CHAPTER 6: DOMESTIC WORK

Introduction

This chapter has three main aims: first, to discuss the meaning of the term 'domestic work', the status of such work and the associations it has, in particular as 'women's work' belonging to an 'inside' sphere, and as something less than 'real work'. Second, it examines the nature of the tasks undertaken as domestic work, the circumstances in which they are undertaken, the division of labour in domestic work, and the time spent by women in such work. Third, this chapter discusses the implications for women's domestic work, and the meanings associated with it, of rural reforms and modernisation.

Definitions and Perceptions

The notion that domestic work is in some way oppressive has been central to Chinese Marxist approaches to women's liberation. Yet for all the centrality of this idea there has been little rigorous discussion of why this is so. Furthermore, what exactly is meant by 'domestic work' is almost never spelt out. It is taken for granted that we all know what it is.¹ I would argue, however, that one of the

¹ This is also a common feature of western discussions of domestic work, as Christine Delphy has pointed out (Delphy 1984, pp.78-92).

most important steps to take in order to understand the part domestic work plays in maintaining women's subordination is to recognise that definitions of domestic work are both arbitrary and constantly changing. In this chapter, therefore, we need to examine the particular ways in which certain tasks are defined as domestic work and the changing meanings associated with that term, as well as changes in the content of domestic work and the way it is organised.

In my interviews with rural officials and peasant women the activities discussed as domestic work (*jiawu laodong*) were the preparation of food for family consumption, cleaning the house, washing family members' clothes, family shopping and tending domestic livestock. Private child care and the sewing and mending of clothes for family members were also considered either as domestic work or as closely associated with it.

Interviews with peasants and rural cadres suggested to me that they associate domestic work tasks most strongly with three attributes: first, they are 'women's work'. Second, they are not as important as other work, or they are not 'real' work, in part because they are 'unproductive' and unremunerated; and third, they are 'inside' tasks, conducted within the boundaries of the family house or compound.

To take these attributes, either separately or together, as a definition of domestic work is highly problematic. On the one hand, some of the individual tasks known as domestic work

display only some of these attributes. On the other hand, some of the attributes can also be used to describe tasks not usually recognised as domestic work. For example, certain aspects of domestic work, such as collecting firewood and water, shopping, and even washing, can involve long periods of time at considerable distance away from the house. On the other hand, some 'inside' tasks, such as repairing the house or family furniture are not considered to be 'domestic work', and are done more commonly by men than by women. Similarly, it is not always possible in practice to make a distinction between one activity termed 'unproductive' domestic work and another termed productive. The care of domestic livestock is a case in point. While livestock is kept partly for family consumption, pigs and eggs, for example, are often sold. Yet the care of domestic livestock is considered domestic work.²

These characterisations of domestic work are inexact and arbitrary. For the purposes of understanding how certain gender divisions of labour are perpetuated or changed, and what links exist between gender divisions of labour and other aspects of gender relations in contemporary rural China, however, it is important not to attempt to impose a new, more 'exact' or 'rational' definition. Rather, it must be recognised that these characterisations have formed the framework for local evaluations of domestic work and the people who do such work. Therefore, in the following

² However, it is also seen as a domestic sideline, and when larger numbers of domestic livestock are kept and bring in substantial cash income, the activity is redefined as a family business or 'specialised household'. See Chapter 8.

paragraphs I want to explore in more detail the attributes accorded to domestic work and the ways in which these attributes contribute to evaluations of domestic work, relative to other types of work.

The notion that domestic work is women's work is very strong amongst Chinese peasants. This was brought home to me in the field by the laughter that commonly greeted my question as to who did most of the domestic work in a couple, and the response that it was the wife, *of course*.

This assumption has remained fairly constant since 1949, being unaffected by either state policy or modernisation. As discussed in Chapter 2, the effects of the attempts made by local authorities during the 'criticise Lin Biao and Confucius' campaign to persuade men to share domestic work with their wives were limited and short lived. Since then, the attempt has not been revived on any significant scale and, as mentioned in Chapter 5, Women's Federation officials in rural areas nowadays do not regard the gender division of labour in domestic work as an issue of concern. Nor is there any sign that this division and the assumption that domestic work is 'women's work' have been altered as an indirect result of the massive rural industrialisation, rise in

peasant incomes or other changes that have followed the introduction of reforms since 1978.³

The majority of the rural women I interviewed in 1989 either shared domestic work with other women in the family, or were responsible for all domestic work (see Appendix 1). In only 16 out of 58 families (27.6 per cent) was there any mention of a male in the family doing any domestic work. Of the 16, almost all played a subsidiary role, doing no more than about one-third as much as the main woman in the family. Of the men who did some domestic work, all except one were husbands of women aged between 28 and 51, most of whom had no other women in the family to help them with domestic work. Whereas girls and unmarried women were commonly reported as sharing domestic work with their mothers, there was no mention of unmarried sons doing such work.

The assumption that domestic work is not 'real work' is apparent at a number of different levels. In Chapters 1 and 2 I traced the origins of this perception and lesser evaluation of domestic work to the adoption of the Marxist paradigm of a dichotomy between production and 'unproductive' domestic work. This dichotomy was further reinforced in rural China through collectivisation, which instituted a clear separation between remunerated work undertaken for the

³ In Chinese cities, surveys suggest that nowadays men do more domestic work than do their rural counterparts. Nevertheless, in urban families, also, domestic work continues largely to be seen as women's responsibility (Whyte & Parish 1984, pp.177-181).

collective, and domestic work and domestic sidelines undertaken 'for the family'.

One consequence of this dichotomy for the ways in which domestic work has been perceived in rural China since the 1950s is that officially it is regarded as petty drudgery: a burden, rather than work.

As discussed in Chapter 2, during the Great Leap Forward child care centres, laundries and other services were set up in an attempt to 'transform most household work from petty irksome drudgery into socially run large-scale undertakings' (*Xinhua* 29 February 1960, quoted in Andors 1983, p.51), so as to enable women to contribute more to production. These services may indeed have benefited women, but apart from the child care centres, they were short lived in all but the wealthiest communes. A more lasting effect of their establishment, however, was a reinforcement of the perception of domestic work as drudgery, that ideally *should* be relieved.

The view of domestic work as a burden, hampering women from contributing more to society, was given further reinforcement during the Cultural Revolution by stories, such as that cited in Chapter 4, of the model woman engineer, Wei Fengying, who neglected the cooking for the sake of making a greater contribution to production. The Cultural Revolution slogan 'what men can do, women can do too' is also revealing in this

regard. It has never been claimed that what women can do (domestic work) men can do too.

In 1978, in her speech to the Fourth National Congress of the All China Women's Federation, the chairperson of the Federation, Kang Keqing, called, once more, for the socialisation of domestic work. The Women's Federations, she argued,

must actively assist and support relevant departments, and take effective measures to gradually 'convert all petty domestic work into a large-scale socialist economy'... Running nursing rooms, nurseries and kindergartens is an important aspect of socialising domestic work... If we run public canteens and food and beverage services, we can lessen the eating problems of the workers and save their time. We must support the relevant departments and set up all kinds of canteens and food processing enterprises... We must extend the number of sewing groups, laundries, shops and other types of everyday services, and work hard to lessen the burden of domestic labour (ZGFN April 1978 p.16).

Later calls made by the Women's Federation for the socialisation of domestic work have been considerably less vigorous, however, and apart from child care services there has been no sign of such public services being established in rural China. In urban areas 'domestic service companies' and nannies have been performing similar functions, but as yet these have not reached most of the countryside. As during the Great Leap Forward, the dominant effect of the Women's Federation's rhetoric has been, I would argue, not to reduce women's domestic workload, which does of course hamper women in 'production'. Instead, it has reinforced the notion that domestic work is 'petty' and, as a corollary, the notion that

to the extent that they are engaged in domestic work, women are contributing less to society than men.

Yet at times there have also been official attempts to challenge the view of domestic work as being less of a contribution to society than other activities. However, these attempts have, I argue, been framed by, and themselves reproduce, another problematic dichotomy; that between 'work' and 'family concerns'.

Thus, in the 1980s, as discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, the 'five good' family campaign of the 1950s was revived, and numerous other attempts to give greater importance to women's roles as domestic workers were made. Readers' letters to *ZGFN*, discussed in Chapter 4, suggest that these attempts both reflect, and have an important impact on, notions of femininity. They reinforce an image of the ideal woman as an attentive, care-giving daughter-in-law, wife and mother. However, this discourse does not enable recognition or acknowledgement of the fact that what women do in this role is *work* - it is regarded as care, love, duty to the family, perhaps self-sacrifice, but not work. At the same time, nevertheless, the emphasis on women's domestic roles has altered and heightened expectations and pressures on women in domestic work. It is not so much that women are expected to do more, or devote more time to, domestic work, but that they are required to take on more responsibility for the psychological, emotional and moral, as well as physical, well being of other family members. Thus, for example, media

articles and the 'five good' family campaign exhort young women to take responsibility for maintaining harmonious relations with their mothers-in-law and husbands, ZGFN runs articles on the need for mothers to gain an understanding of child psychology, and schools and classes are being established by the Women's Federation to teach women how to be better mothers (see Chapter 5).

Peasant women themselves express a number of different attitudes towards the value or importance of the domestic work they do. Some of these attitudes were apparent in the responses made by Sichuan women to my question 'in your family, whose labour is most important, in your view?' ('*ni jue de shei de laodong shi zui zhongyao de?*'). Amongst a total of thirty-one women, only eight said that their husband's labour was more important than their own. Two reasons were given; that his was the heaviest work, or that he was the income earner. Ten women said that their own labour was most important. They justified this claim in terms of their longer working hours or by saying that they did the domestic work in addition to other work. Some of the thirteen women who claimed that their own and their husband's labour were equally important cited their labour in domestic work as being their contribution, while his work in the fields was his contribution.⁴ Others said that the man's work was heavier, but their own was more time consuming. One

⁴ This was the case even in instances where the woman clearly also did a large proportion of the work in the fields.

woman claimed that her own and her husband's labour were equally important, but that while she could manage on her own, he could not manage without her because he could not wash clothes. Margery Wolf quotes a Jiangsu peasant woman as saying, in similar fashion, that

among farmers, women are more capable. They can do everything - both indoors and outdoors - but men can only do outdoor things. For example, they can't sew or mend the winter clothes. They are very dependent on women. Without women they couldn't live because they couldn't take care of themselves, but women can (Wolf 1985, p.138).

These responses suggest a widespread recognition, amongst women themselves, of the importance of their domestic work within the family economy. On the other hand, however, it is noteworthy that grandmothers commonly say that the 'only' work they do is look after their grandchildren, feed the pigs and chickens, and do the cooking and cleaning. Also revealing, is that women often trivialise and underestimate the total amount of time they spend each day doing domestic work.

The association made between domestic work and confinement to an 'inside' sphere that limits a woman's activities 'outside', in terms of movement as well as time, is indirectly apparent in a number of contexts, and has important consequences for women's involvement in other areas of work and social life. For example, two aspects of rural reforms that peasant women point to as being most welcome, are the devolution of production management to the family, and the expansion of domestic sidelines. Together, women

claim, these reforms have enabled them to organise their own time and labour so as to best accommodate productive tasks to their domestic work responsibilities. Underlying this is, of course, the assumption that domestic work is a woman's primary responsibility and that this responsibility limits her in certain ways.

As will be discussed in Chapter 7, the limitations that their responsibility for domestic work impose on women also mean that fewer women than men travel away from home in search of non-agricultural employment, although this is also related to the relatively high status of non-agricultural work, and a shift in the responsibility for agriculture onto women.

The Impact of Reform

I have argued that the gender division of labour in domestic work and the assumption that domestic work is 'women's work' have been essentially the same in the 1980s and 1990s as they had been decades previously. Reform policies and economic growth have, however, wrought important changes both on the content of domestic work and on the context in which it is undertaken. In the following section I will outline the types of domestic work tasks undertaken by women in rural China today, the time spent by women in these tasks and how particular domestic work tasks are changing as a result of economic growth.

First, though, I wish to reflect, in more general terms, upon the effects that reform and economic growth are having on domestic work in rural China. In so doing, I will be summarising some of the points already made, as well as foreshadowing the discussion to come.

One effect of economic growth and of a general improvement in peasant incomes and living standards since 1949, and in particular since the reforms of the late 1970s, has been a reduction in the amount of time and effort required in domestic work. As I will discuss in the following section, the greater availability on the market of, for example, ready-made clothes and shoes, the provision of electricity and running water, and the use of appliances, especially washing machines, have reduced, for better-off women, the amount of time and effort spent in domestic work.

Clearly, in the less developed areas of rural China and in poorer families, there is much potential for domestic workloads to be further reduced through an improvement of basic amenities. It is questionable, however, whether in better-off areas even further reductions in workloads will result from the use of a wider range of consumer items and domestic appliances than is now available. U.S studies have shown that domestic appliances have not reduced the time women spend on domestic work in recent decades. Rather, they have simply altered the type of work performed and have resulted in expectations of higher standards (Bose 1982).

While the domestic work loads of many women have been reduced since the 1970s, some reports suggest that at the same time the total number of women engaged *solely* in domestic work may have increased.

An article published in *ZGFN* (Zhang Juan & Ma Wenrong 1988) and debated at some length in the press⁵ claimed, for example, that in Daqiu Village, near Tianjin, before the Third Plenum of the Eleventh Central Committee (December 1978) 95 per cent of women had participated in collective labour. Among these, there were approximately 100 women over 60 years old who had engaged in part-time or full-time employment. Following the Third Plenum, however, all the women over 60 retired from collective labour and 525, or 84 per cent, of married women under the age of 45 withdrew from employment and became housewives.

The two main factors the authors put forward to explain this withdrawal of women from the paid labour force were first, that the pace of work in industry is very fast, there is a lot of heavy work and hours are long. They claim that this type of work 'not only repels women, it is also very stressful for men' (Zhang Juan & Ma Wenrong 1988, p.9), and it makes life easier if the women can stay home to do the domestic work for their husbands. Second, wages in Daqiu are now high enough that couples are able to live on just one

⁵ For example, *RMRB* 9 July 1988; *RMRB* 17 September 1988.

person's salary and can afford to have the spouse stay at home (Zhang Juan & Ma Wenrong 1988, p.9).

The authors of this article, and of others on Daqiu Village, stress that the women of this village were not retrenched or discriminated against in the paid labour force, and that they became full-time housewives of their own accord. I am somewhat suspicious of this claim, given certain remarks made by the manager of the Daqiu Village Corporation which strongly suggest that he may have pressured women into withdrawing from employment. He said firstly, that it is not a bad thing if, after marriage and especially during and after pregnancy, women stop working. Secondly, he felt that educated women should participate in employment but their hours should be shortened to, say, six hours a day to enable them to look after their families. Thirdly, he felt that all women over fifty years of age should not participate in employment (RMRB 9 July 1988). It should also be noted that the reports on Daqiu Village have been used for a particular purpose in the media: to support and condone the pressure that has been applied on women in urban, state-run industry to withdraw from employment and 'return to the kitchen' (*huigui guotai*) in response to unemployment problems and the attempts of employers to 'streamline' their workforces.⁶

Aside from these suspicions, I would argue against the suggestion that a voluntary withdrawal of women from

⁶ For a more detailed discussion of this topic, see Jacka 1990b.

employment into full-time domestic labour has been, or will in the near future become, a common trend, or that it is 'an inevitable transition phase in the development of productive forces in the initial stage of socialism' (Zhang Juan & Ma Wenrong 1988, p.10). There are two aspects of Daqiu's economy which may have contributed to women's withdrawal from paid labour. First, incomes are high enough for it to be feasible for a married woman to depend on her husband's wage and not be employed herself. It is understandable that this might be an attractive proposition to some, especially given the strength of the assumption that women are responsible for domestic work, and the demands of such work. Second, Daqiu's agricultural labour force is now very small, there is no private sector, and the majority of the newly established industries are heavy industries. This probably contributes to a low employment rate for women because the prevailing gender divisions of labour in employment in rural China are such that women are engaged primarily in agriculture, the private courtyard economy and light industry. Both these factors are however, highly unusual. In most rural (and urban) areas incomes are such that the majority of women at present, and for the near future, will feel it necessary to have some form of remunerated employment. In addition, agriculture continues to be a mainstay of rural employment, while in the more developed provinces along the eastern seaboard, an important aspect of reform has been the development of light industries and of the private sector, both of which employ relatively large numbers of women.

There are other reports which suggest, however, that in some areas the number of women engaged solely or primarily in domestic work increased during the 1980s as a result of somewhat different trends.

In a 1986 study of rural families in six counties in Sichuan, Wang Shuhui, a member of the Sichuan Provincial Women's Federation, found that a relatively high proportion of women were spending more time in domestic work than 'productive' work.⁷ She reported that 23.4 per cent of all rural women surveyed undertook domestic work as their sole or primary occupation. This included 63.1 per cent of women over the age of 55, 16.0 per cent of middle-aged women and 20.9 per cent of young women. In contrast, she claims that before the introduction of the production responsibility system, amongst all women except the elderly and the weak, domestic work was subsidiary to collective work (Wang Shuhui 1987b, p.20).

The survey report gives no statistical evidence to back up the latter assertion, but I do have the original results Wang Shuhui and her co-workers obtained in part of the survey, conducted in Jiahong Township, Guan County, Sichuan, among 357 married women. These are given in Table 6.1.

⁷ By domestic work she is referring to meal preparation, cleaning and washing (Interview, October 1989).

Table 6.1: Domestic Work as a Primary Occupation

Age group	Total No. of Women	Percentage whose primary occupation upon marriage was domestic work
Elderly (Married 1920-1960)	118	22
Middle Aged (Married 1950-1980)	120	11.7
Young (Married 1980s)	119	17.7

Source: Sichuansheng Fulian Xuanjiaobu 1986. Statistics from a sample survey conducted in Jiahong Township, Guan County, Sichuan.

These figures suggest that in this township there was a 6 per cent increase between the late 1950s to late 1970s period and the late 1980s in the number of just-married women undertaking primarily domestic work. The number of just-married women undertaking primarily domestic work in the latter period was approaching that of women who married before or shortly after the revolution.

In her report, Wang Shuhui suggests that an increase in the number of women in rural Sichuan undertaking solely or primarily domestic work is related to the appearance of a large amount of surplus labour in agriculture in some areas, and the lack of alternative employment (Wang Shuhui 1987b, p.20).

Other media reports support the notion that in some places surplus workers in agriculture have been unable to find alternative employment, and that most such workers are women. This trend will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter. For now, however, I will just point out that while it appears that this was a serious issue in the early stages of reform, and is likely to continue to be important in less developed areas, the general thrust of rural reform has been toward an expansion of employment opportunities outside agriculture which has been eagerly embraced by both women and men.

A number of Marxists and socialist feminists have argued that in the west, modernisation, or more specifically, industrialisation and the maturation of capitalism, resulted in a sharper split between domestic work and commodity production, and that this split altered and intensified women's subordination. For example, Jill Matthews, in her work on the historical construction of femininity in twentieth century Australia, has written that until the 1890s small family farms, on which whole families worked to produce goods for both the market and household consumption, were common in Australia. In the following decades, however, such family farms, while continuing to produce some basic goods for household consumption, also became increasingly dependent upon money to buy a wider range of goods in the public market (Matthews 1992, p.56). Matthews argues that the importance of the small family farm for women had been that its work could be accommodated to the patterns and demands of domestic

work, which was regarded as the primary responsibility of married women (Matthews 1992, p.57). However, as the commanding economy took over local production, it became increasingly difficult for women to combine paid and domestic work. Consequently, some women became full-time housewives and suffered the effects of isolation and demoralisation that later became known as 'suburban neurosis'. Others, attempting to do both paid and domestic work, struggled with a heavy double burden (Matthews 1992, p.57).

At the same time, Matthews shows how various processes contributed to a downgrading of women's work. Thus, whereas before 1891 the entire range of women's work 'had been acknowledged as valuable and part of the productive activity of the nation' (Matthews 1992, p.58), in the 1891 census the Australian colonies

accepted a new definition which divided the population into breadwinners and dependents. The new principle involved in this distinction, the basic criterion for having an occupation, became the receipt of income or wages for work... In the absence of a clear statement otherwise, women working in the sphere of the household, including helping in family concerns without pay, were classified as dependants. Such women were definitively labelled as non-workers for all purposes of economic discussion. Women's legitimate activities, under this new ideological dispensation, were restricted to the home, producing children, training them, maintaining the health and well-being of all family members (Matthews 1992, p.59).

Women who *did* work outside the home in remunerated employment received lower rates of pay than men, this being justified with the assumption that men were family breadwinners and therefore needed a 'family wage', whilst women were either

single and working merely to fill in time before marriage, or were married and supported by their husbands, and therefore required a lower income.

How then does the situation regarding domestic work in rural China, following decollectivisation, the growth of markets, massive industrialisation and growth in incomes, compare with this scenario?

In one respect, the impact of modernisation in rural China has so far been very different. As I will discuss shortly, the growth of a commodity economy has meant that more items consumed by peasant families are now bought, rather than produced at home. However, this has not resulted in a greater division between domestic and other types of work.

I have argued that one consequence of collectivisation in the 1950s was a greater division between domestic work and 'production' than had hitherto existed, and associated with this, a devaluation of women's domestic work. However, decollectivisation and the diversification of the rural economy from the late 1970s onwards meant that the commonly perceived distinctions between domestic work and other work shifted and were blurred once more. One aspect of this was that with the introduction of land contracts to individual families, a distinction between agricultural labour for the collective and labour spent tending a private plot of land was no longer meaningful. Consequently, whereas before the introduction of the contract system tending the private plot

was regarded as a domestic work responsibility, nowadays this task is subsumed under that of agriculture.⁸

As a result of decollectivisation, each person's time is now no longer clearly divided between a full work day in the fields and after-hours at home. As mentioned, many women cite this as a benefit of the reforms, since it means that they are free to organise their own time between domestic work and other tasks in a more integrated and efficient manner.

In addition, with the expansion of markets and of small-scale commodity production many women have become involved in profitable domestic sidelines, such as making handicrafts or growing cash crops inside the home or in the courtyard. While such activities had also been undertaken under the communes, they were then done on a smaller scale and were less profitable. Women's work in these sidelines tended to be 'invisible' - often their income was not recognised and their work was linked with 'mere' domestic work. In practice, there is considerable overlap between domestic work tasks and those involved in domestic sidelines, especially in the case of animal husbandry, but an improvement in the status of domestic sidelines has not led also to any significant re-evaluation of domestic work. On the contrary, in the 1980s, as will be discussed in Chapter 8, the state's attempts to encourage women's involvement in domestic

⁸ This is the reason for the inclusion of the private plot in Table 6.2 and its exclusion in Table 6.3.

sidelines involved an ideological disassociation of those sidelines with the negative attributes accorded to domestic work. Thus, the income earning potential of domestic sidelines was stressed, both in terms of its contribution to society and its liberating effects for women. In addition, 'domestic sidelines' were renamed with the somewhat more important sounding title 'courtyard economy', or in cases where such activities generated a large proportion of total family income, they were termed 'specialised household' production.

Rural reforms have resulted not just in an expansion of opportunities for income generating work within the courtyard, however. As mentioned, whilst the early stages of reform were characterised by underemployment and unemployment, the longer term trend has been toward an expansion of employment opportunities in the 'outside' sphere. Thus, in more developed areas the reforms have resulted in the development of rural industries and in a large movement of labour into urban industry, construction and transport work. This has not had any significant impact on the perception or valuation of domestic work or on the distinction between domestic and non-domestic work. It has, however, resulted in a redefinition of the dichotomy between 'inside' and 'outside' work, and has in some respects made that dichotomy a more salient aspect of gender divisions of labour than the domestic/non-domestic dichotomy. The newly emerging dichotomy is one between women's work on the farm, which includes not just domestic work but also domestic

sidelines and agriculture, and men's work in industry or other non-agricultural work away from the home village. Just how this dichotomy has emerged, how it has been legitimated, and its effects on gender relations are topics to be taken up in the following chapter.

Time Spent in Domestic Tasks

The time spent by peasants in domestic work, and the nature of that work, is a topic on which we have very little information. One of the few recently published studies which address this topic is a report of a survey undertaken by Elisabeth Croll in rural Shanghai and rural Beijing in the summer of 1980. During the survey, Croll collected statistics on the time spent in particular domestic work tasks related to the procurement and processing of food. Her findings are summarised in Table 6.2.

Table 6.3 is a summary of the information given to me by peasant women in rural Beijing, Shandong and Sichuan in 1989, on the time they spent each day in preparing meals, cleaning the house, washing clothes, tending domestic livestock, and shopping.⁹

⁹ It should be noted that whereas the figures in Table 6.2 refer to the time spent in particular tasks by the family as a whole, those in Table 6.3 refer to the time spent in each task by the individual women interviewed. Information on the gender division of labour in domestic work in these women's families is given in Appendix 1.

Table 6.2: Procuring and Processing Food in Rural Shanghai and Rural Beijing (Average Daily Hours)

	Average no. of persons in household	Cooking	Shopping	Livestock Care	Private Plot
Rural Shanghai (N=23)	4	1.8	0.3	1	0.6
Rural Beijing (N=17)	4.4	2.2	0.13	0.74	0.1

Source: Croll 1982, pp.298 & 300. Survey conducted Summer 1980.

Table 6.3: Time Spent by Women at Domestic Work Tasks (Average Daily Hours)

Average no. of persons in household	Meal Preparation	Cleaning	Washing	Livestock Care (a)	Shopping	Total domestic (b)	Primary non-domestic
4.7	2.9	0.8	0.7	1.7	0.3	3.5	5.7
N = 50	N = 38	N = 21	N = 33	N = 12	N = 6	N = 17	N = 31

(a) This does not include 15 families that did not keep domestic animals or whose domestic animals were the main source of family income.

(b) This refers to the length of time reported by the interviewee for all her domestic work, rather than to the sum of times she spent in individual tasks.

Source: Interviews with rural women in Beijing, Shandong and Sichuan, August-December 1989.

The time women said they spent at these domestic work tasks varied from no time at all in the case of one 73 year old woman whose daughter-in-law did all the domestic work of the family (see Appendix 1, family no.36), to 9 hours a day in the case of a 51 year old woman who did most of the domestic work for herself, her husband, four children, a daughter-in-law and a grandchild (family no.46).

In general terms, although we have no detailed statistics on this issue, it can be expected that women's domestic workloads vary according to their own and their families' life cycles. As discussed in Chapter 4, upon marriage women commonly live with their husband's family. Their domestic workload is likely to be considerably heavier than before marriage, but will be shared, in most cases, with their mother-in-law. The domestic workload is generally heaviest for women in the middle stage of their life-cycle, both as a result of the demands of small children and because they are more likely to be living in a nuclear family without female relatives or in-laws with whom to share domestic work. In later years, the majority of women live in a stem family with a married son and his wife and children, and share domestic work tasks with their daughter-in-law.

Meal Preparation

In her 1980 survey, Elisabeth Croll found that in rural Shanghai the number of hours spent each day preparing meals ranged from 1 to 3, with an average of 1.8 hours (N=23)

(Croll 1982a, p.298). In rural Beijing the preparation of meals took longer, mainly, Croll suggests, because of the time spent preparing flour products. The times spent ranged from 0.3 to 6 hours, with an average of 2.2 hours (Croll 1982a, p.300). The times women spent in meal preparation that I recorded in 1989 were similar to these latter figures, ranging from 1.5 hours to 6 hours, with an average of 2.9 hours (N=38). This did not in all cases refer to the time spent continuously working at preparing meals: many women said that while the rice was cooking they did other tasks, especially feeding domestic livestock and sweeping the house. Nevertheless, during this time they had to remain close to the kitchen, and hence the range of activities they could undertake was restricted.

Rural women commonly prepare three meals a day. In central and south China rice is the staple, eaten with vegetables and small amounts of eggs, meat or fish. In northern China the staple consists of both rice and other grains and flour products such as noodles, steamed bread, buns and dumplings, which are more time consuming to prepare than rice. In both north and south the preparation of vegetable and meat dishes involves a good deal of chopping, so as to cut down on the use of fuel for cooking (Croll 1982a, p.299).

In most of the families that I visited the stoves were fuelled with either coal or dried rice or wheat stalks. With the latter fuel, women had to bend down frequently to feed

fuel into an opening in the front of the stove, in order to keep it hot.

In many families another particularly time-consuming and laborious aspect of preparing meals is collecting water. There are still many areas in China where women must travel hundreds of metres to collect water from a well or stream, which they carry back in pails weighing forty kg, balanced from shoulder poles (Croll 1985b, p.114). A World Bank study in 1984 found that in rural areas clean water in sufficient quantity was available to 40 per cent of the population, of whom 15 per cent received piped water and the rest used wells and hand pumps. They estimated that approximately 40 million people suffered from water shortage and at least 500 million required improved water supply, including 150 million who drank untreated surface water (World Bank, 1984). In recent years there have been major improvements, however. One report from Xinhua News Agency noted that, as a result of a heavy investment in the construction of rural public facilities during the Seventh Five Year Plan period (1986-1990), tap water was available in 50 per cent of towns in 1990¹⁰ (SWB 5 December 1990). In Sichuan most of the families that I visited in 1989 had hand water pumps in their courtyards. Women said they drew water once or twice a day, taking 20 minutes each time. In rural Beijing some families had internal water taps.

¹⁰ It is unclear, however, how many rural families had water taps.

Cleaning and Washing

The women I interviewed claimed they spent from a few minutes to two hours a day cleaning. As mentioned, many did at least some of the cleaning while meals were cooking. For many women in the Chinese countryside, cleaning may have become easier in recent years with the building of large numbers of new houses with concrete instead of earth floors. It is possible, however, that such improvements in living standards may also have been accompanied by increased standards of cleanliness, and hence more work. This is suggested by the claim made by Anita Chan and her co-researchers that in Chen Village in the 1970s 'with the animals penned outside, and with cement replacing the earth flooring, the peasants began to make vigorous efforts to keep their homes, belongings, and selves clean' (Chan et al. 1992, p.215).

In the families that I visited clothes washing took an average of 42 minutes a day (N=33). Those who washed by hand commonly spent more than twice the time of those who used a washing machine. Moreover, whilst washing clothes by hand required constant, heavy work, the use of a washing machine enabled women to do other things while the clothes were being washed. Women who did not have a washing machine commonly spent half a day once or twice a week scrubbing and pounding clothes by hand. They generally worked outside, in the company of other women, by a pump or squatting by a nearby river or, as I saw in Sichuan, by an irrigation channel (cf. Mosher 1983, p.211).

Using a washing machine means that washing clothes becomes much more of a private or 'inside' activity, rather than a time for interacting with other women in the village. On the other hand, it cuts down enormously the amount of work involved in washing clothes, although in most places I visited in my fieldwork houses did not have interior water taps. The washing machine had to be filled manually from a hand pump outside. In addition, of course, the clothes still had to be manually hung out to dry.

Most of the women I talked to who had washing machines were pleased with them because they cut down their workload. One woman, however, said that the machine did not wash the clothes properly and another, that she rarely used her machine because the electricity was too expensive. One woman who did not own a washing machine said that the reason was that the supply of water was too limited.

It should be noted that in terms of washing machine ownership, my sample is highly unrepresentative, even of the provinces that I visited. Amongst the families that I interviewed, 81 per cent (N=57) owned a washing machine (many of which, however, had been purchased only within the last five years). According to the State Statistical Yearbook, however, across the whole of China only about 8 per cent of rural families owned washing machines at the end of 1989. In rural Beijing 61 per cent owned one, in Shandong 4 per cent and in Sichuan 2.5 per cent (Guojia Tongjiju 1990, p.322).

The production of consumer durables has increased dramatically in the post-Mao period. However, it is probable that for some time to come the purchase of larger items, such as washing machines, will be limited to families in cities and suburbs and the wealthier families in rural counties. This is not just because of the high cost of the items themselves, but also, and equally importantly, because not all rural areas yet have access to, or can afford frequent use of, electricity. In 1989 the energy ministry estimated that 29 counties and 25 per cent of rural families were without electricity (NMRB 11 January 1989). In the case of washing machines, the lack of piped water discussed above is also, of course, a severe limitation.

Care of Domestic Livestock

Most rural families keep domestic livestock; usually at least a few chickens and one or two pigs. Both are an important source of fertiliser. Apart from this, I found in my survey that pigs were generally kept to be sold at market and the eggs and meat of most chickens were consumed by the family. Caring for these domestic livestock is regarded as a domestic work task and is done by women at the same time, or in between, other domestic tasks. It involves cleaning the area in which the animals are kept, and preparing and distributing feed. Some feed is bought, some is grown, and some is household waste. Green feed for pigs is often chopped and cooked - a time-consuming task.

In my survey the times reported for tending domestic livestock ranged from half an hour to four hours a day. These times refer only to the tending of domestic livestock where this did not constitute the main source of income for the family.

My results were somewhat higher than those reported by Elisabeth Croll in 1980. Croll found that in rural Beijing families spent between 0.3 hours and 2 hours a day tending domestic livestock, with an average of 0.74 hours per day (N=17) (Croll 1982a, p.300), and in rural Shanghai they spent 0.5 to 1.5 hours a day, with an average of 1.0 hour a day (N=22) (Croll 1982a, p.298). The differences appear to relate to the number of animals kept. Croll reports that fewer animals were kept in rural Beijing than rural Shanghai. In the latter location, families kept an average of 3.6 pigs and 9.6 chickens (Croll 1982a, p.177). In my survey, the families with domestic animals kept an average of 3.9 pigs and generally between 10 and 20 chickens or other poultry.

Shopping

Elisabeth Croll reports that in rural Shanghai in 1980 shopping was usually undertaken three to four times a week in the nearby town five minutes' walk away, and took an average of 18 minutes a day (Croll 1982a, p.299). This is similar to my findings in 1989 that shopping for groceries was commonly done locally between 1 and 4 times a week, taking from half to 1.5 hours each time, with an average of about 18 minutes a

day. Croll reports that in rural Beijing, however, shopping took an average of only eight minutes a day once or twice a week. The shops were further away, but the shoppers usually travelled by bicycle (Croll 1982a, p.299).

There are a number of opposing trends which in recent years may have influenced the time spent by peasants in shopping. On the one hand, with the growth of a commodity economy, peasants are now buying, rather than themselves producing, more goods for consumption than previously. Thus, whereas in 1978 only 24 per cent of peasant consumption of food (measured in *yuan*) was of bought items, by the end of 1989 this had increased to 52 per cent. Similarly, for clothing, the proportion of total consumption that was of bought, rather than home made, items increased from 89 per cent in 1978 to 98 per cent in 1989, and for other articles for family use the proportion that was bought increased from 88 per cent to almost 100 per cent (Guojia Tongjiju 1990, p.316). These factors may have led peasants to devote more time to shopping than previously.

On the other hand, the increase in the number of shops and markets may, for some, have reduced the time spent travelling to do the family shopping. For a very small number of rural families food shopping will also have been reduced by storing food in a refrigerator. At the end of 1989 0.9 per cent of rural families across China owned refrigerators (Guojia Tongjiju 1990, p.322).

Sewing and Mending

Rural women nowadays spend relatively little time sewing, as most family clothing is bought. In addition, many families own sewing machines which reduce the time spent in sewing and mending. In my survey, the women who did not own sewing machines said it was because they did not know how to sew. According to the State Statistical Yearbook, at the end of 1989 54 per cent of rural families in China owned sewing machines. In Beijing the figure was 63 per cent, Shandong 64 per cent and Sichuan 18 per cent (Guojia Tongjiju 1990, p.322).

This picture is in stark contrast to that of earlier periods, when most clothes were made at home, and sewing and mending were time-consuming and arduous tasks. In *Report from a Chinese Village*, an account of life in Liu Ling, Shaanxi, in the 1960s, Jan Myrdal recorded the timetable of a 29 year old woman, Li Yangqing. Sewing took up a very large proportion of her time. Throughout the year she spent most of her evenings, and in winter much of the afternoon, sewing. She did not own a sewing machine, and in fact at that time only one person in the village did. In January and February each year her primary task was to make clothes and cloth shoes for the family. She made all the family's clothes - a new or remade quilted coat, an unquilted coat, and one pair of quilted and one pair of unquilted trousers for each person each year. She also made all the family's shoes - ten pairs

each person, each pair taking about 10 days to make (Myrdal 1967, pp.295-306).

By the mid 1970s Delia Davin reported that most women bought factory made plastic soled shoes, but they still sewed most of their families' clothes (Davin 1976, p.130).

Child Care

As mentioned in Chapter 3, the introduction of the production responsibility system resulted, at least initially, in a widespread decline in rural welfare services, including child care centres. According to the State Statistical Bureau, between 1976 and 1984 the proportion of kindergartens situated in rural areas declined from 94.8 per cent to 73.3 per cent. In 1985 34.4 per cent of urban children in the relevant age group were in kindergartens, as compared to only 6 per cent of rural children (Bakken 1988, p.135). A letter published in *ZGFN* in 1981 claimed that in one commune in Guangdong, following the introduction of the production responsibility system, half the production brigades had closed down their kindergartens (*ZGFN* July 1981, p.29). Another letter from a rural county outside Shanghai complained that brigade leaders did not provide enough funds for kindergartens. The buildings were small, the tables and chairs broken and there were few toys for the children to play with. The teachers were untrained and treated the children badly, so that the older ones ran away and the younger ones were unhappy. Yet if women took their children

with them to the fields instead of leaving them in the kindergarten they were told that they would have work-points deducted (ZGFN July 1981, p.29).

Penny Kane claims that the decline in the provision of collective welfare services

seems to have been as shortlived as it was shortsighted. In fact, additional prosperity in the countryside should help to strengthen collective welfare systems (Kane 1987, pp.192-193).

Undoubtedly, some townships do now provide better social child care facilities than ever before. In particular, where reforms were followed by the development of township enterprises, local governments have controlled a large proportion of enterprise profits and in some cases have used part of these profits to provide child care and other social services for the local population. Some local governments, for example, stipulate that 30 per cent of the after tax profit of a township or village-run enterprise be used to subsidise local agriculture and welfare (Oi 1990, pp.17 & 26). However, in poorer areas, where township enterprises are less well developed, little revenue is available to local governments for social welfare. Furthermore, even where revenue is available, local officials are, as I have mentioned, often reluctant to spend it on social services or welfare.

In most places in the 1980s and early 1990s child care has been high on the agenda of the Women's Federation, and some of the grass-roots women's representatives that I interviewed

devoted considerable effort to pressuring for the establishment of child care services and to the training of child care staff. The Women's Federation, however, has relatively little power and no money. While it can pressure village officials, the provision of child care is ultimately dependent not on them, but on the will of the village government leaders who are usually male and who may not attach much weight to such matters.

In the counties that I visited in 1989, children up to the age of 2 or 3 were looked after largely by their mothers or their grandmothers. Children between the ages of 2 and 6 were looked after by mothers or grandmothers or were sent to kindergarten. In most of the counties that I visited the majority of villages had kindergartens. Some of the wealthier ones also had nurseries for younger children. For example, in Huairou county, Beijing, there were 250 nurseries and kindergartens for 293 villages. They admitted 80 to 90 per cent of small children. In Jinniu, Sichuan, there were 200 kindergartens for 2-6 year olds, run either by townships or villages. Wenjiang and Guan counties, Sichuan both had kindergartens in each village. In Mianyang county, Sichuan, 89 per cent of villages had kindergartens for 3-6 year olds. There were 394 kindergartens altogether, taking 13,000 children, or 76 per cent of the total.

Recent media reports suggest, however, that women in many, if not most, other villages are considerably less fortunate with regard to the availability of social child care facilities.

A 1987 article claimed, for example, that in Jilin province many villages had no child care facilities and during the busy agricultural season parents were forced to leave their children at home alone or to take them to the fields (*NMRB* 9 March 1987). Even in Shandong where there had been a 64 per cent increase in the number of year-round child care centres run by villages, the admittance rate of children over the age of 3 was still only 56.5 per cent in 1987 (*NMRB* 29 May 1987). An extensive nation-wide study undertaken by the Central Institute of Education Research revealed that in 1991 only 20 per cent of rural children aged between 4 and 6 attended nurseries or kindergartens (*China Daily* May 24 1991).

As a point of comparison, Marina Thorborg estimates that in early 1959 during the Great Leap Forward, which represents the peak in Maoist attempts at providing public welfare services, 53 to 73 per cent of pre-school children of women working in agriculture were taken care of by child care stations (Thorborg 1978, p.601).

Conclusion

In contemporary rural China domestic work tasks, including meal preparation, cleaning and washing, tending domestic livestock, shopping, sewing and mending, and child care, are undertaken almost entirely by women. This is an important element in women's subordination; not so much because of the work itself, but because firstly, it is, in a number of ways,

devalued, relative to other work; secondly, women are expected to undertake such work in addition to other work and hence suffer a 'double burden'; and finally, due to the above two factors, it has certain negative consequences for women's involvement in other types of work.

Reform policies introduced since the late 1970s, and the consequent economic growth, have had a major impact on the nature of domestic work tasks undertaken in rural families, and the time spent in such tasks. In particular, the improvement of basic amenities, and the greater availability of consumer goods on the market, have reduced the amount of time and effort spent in domestic work.

The form of economic development that has occurred in rural China in the post-Mao period, involving, in particular, decollectivisation and a large increase in rural non-agricultural employment, has also had important consequences for the relations between domestic and other forms of work. On the one hand, the devolution of economic management to individual families, combined with the expansion in small-scale commodity production, has blurred the distinctions between 'inside' domestic work and 'outside' production, that had been so clearly delineated under the commune system.

On the other hand, in more developed areas the employment of large numbers of men in non-agricultural work which takes them away from home for much of the year, and the subsequent 'feminisation' of agriculture, have been accompanied by a

devaluation of agricultural work and the formation of a new conceptual dichotomy between women's 'inside' work, which now includes not just domestic work and domestic sidelines, but also agriculture, and men's 'outside' work in non-agricultural employment away from home.

Rural reform has not, however, resulted in any change to the division of labour in domestic work, or to the value attached to such work. Domestic work continues to be 'women's work' and to be regarded less as work, contributing to the economy, than as a petty burden, and the time and effort spent by women in domestic work tasks tends to be invisible to peasant women and men, officials, and researchers.

CHAPTER 7: AGRICULTURE

Introduction

Reform in the post-Mao period has resulted in significant changes to the type of agricultural work undertaken by rural people, the organisation of that work, gender divisions of labour in agricultural work and between agriculture and other work, and the way in which agriculture is perceived and valued in comparison with other activities.

This chapter is not a detailed empirical study of the work of women and men in agriculture. Instead it seeks to outline gender divisions of labour within agriculture, and then to discuss two key trends relating to gender divisions of labour between agriculture and other forms of remunerated work that have emerged in the 1980s and 1990s. The first of these is a withdrawal of women from agriculture in areas where there is a surplus of agricultural labour, but a lack of alternative employment. The second is a contrasting trend in which responsibility for agriculture has been taken over by women, whilst larger numbers of men have been absorbed into non-agricultural employment.

Gender Divisions of Labour in Agriculture

On the eve of reforms in the late 1970s the majority of both men and women in rural areas worked in some form of

agricultural labour. There were, however, significant differences in their patterns of employment. These differences relate, first of all, to a division between an 'inside' sphere of work, dominated by women and comprising those activities undertaken within the family house or compound for family consumption or cash income, and an 'outside' sphere dominated by men, comprising labour allocated by the production team and undertaken for the collective. Thus, the care of domestic livestock and maintenance of the private plot were regarded as domestic work or domestic sidelines and were commonly carried out by women (Croll 1982a, p.313), but collective agriculture was dominated by men. Women's participation rate in collective agriculture was about 70 per cent and women formed between 40 and 50 per cent of the collective agricultural labour force (Thorborg 1978, p.584 & p.586). However, only one-third of women working in collective agriculture (i.e., about 23 per cent of all working-age women) worked full-time, defined as more than 250 days per year, while two-thirds worked part-time or less than 150 days per year. In contrast, one-third of the men worked part-time and two-thirds worked full-time (Thorborg 1978, p.596).

Within collective agriculture there were further divisions of labour. As was the case before the revolution, it was generally expected that men would undertake the 'heavier' tasks while women would do the 'lighter work'. Consequently, ploughing, for example, was considered 'men's work' while the picking of tea was done mostly by women.

It appears that in some instances, however, the categorisation of certain tasks as 'heavy' men's work or 'light' women's work was as much a result of previous local negotiations and struggle over work remuneration, as of actual differences in physical demand. As mentioned in Chapter 2, under the work-point remuneration system the principle of equal pay for equal work prevailed in theory, but rural men strongly resisted attempts on the part of cadres to remunerate women for agricultural work at the same rate as themselves. In some places work-points were allocated on the basis of an evaluation of the *labourer*, in which case lower rates for women were justified on the grounds that they were not as physically strong as men. More common, however, was a system based on the evaluation of the *task* performed. Under this system, the basis for the commonly lower rates of pay for women was a gender division of labour in which the tasks usually done by women were rewarded at a rate lower than that for tasks done by men, on the grounds that they were 'lighter' or that they required less skill. In some places the gender division of labour in agriculture was the same as, or was an extension of, the division that existed before liberation. However, it appears that a division of labour between 'heavy' 'men's work' and 'lighter' and lower paid 'women's work' was in some places newly created or made more rigid than previously. Isabel and David Crook report, for example, that in Yangyi Commune

men who opposed raising women's rates agreed that women were better not only at pruning but at certain other jobs as well; but, they argued, men were better at heavier work, such as ploughing and contouring. So they proposed that some jobs should be assigned to women only - and paid at women's rates; others to men only - and paid at men's rates. This, they said, could be called 'the rate for the job!' And while avoiding comparison between men and women it would still get the best out of each. At the same time it would maintain the solid basis of the household economy by keeping the man as the main breadwinner. So ran the argument (Crook & Crook 1979, p.128. See also, Thorborg 1978, p.551).

Margery Wolf, in her survey conducted in 1980, pointed to a number of variations and inconsistencies in the categorisation of tasks as 'heavy' men's work or 'light' women's work. These inconsistencies suggest, once more, that contrary to local claims that gender divisions of labour between 'heavy' and 'light' work are 'natural', they are in fact a site of conflict and negotiation. In this negotiation women have generally been disadvantaged, both by their lack of authority in the community, and by the ability of men to manipulate claims as to the 'naturalness' of particular divisions. Thus, Wolf reports that

in each of our field sites there were one or two jobs that were listed for me as just too heavy for women to manage. In Fujian it was managing the water buffalo pulling the plows in the wet paddy, so instead the women carried fifty-pound sacks of chemical fertiliser to the fields while the men trailed along after the water buffalo (Wolf 1985, p.84).

In Shandong Wolf was told that wooden barrows were too heavy for women to manage. In collective work only men used them and they were paid at a higher than average rate. However, one woman, when asked if she could use such a barrow, said

'Of course. With my husband away in the army I would be in a bad spot if I couldn't, wouldn't I?' (Wolf 1985, p.85).

Wolf reports also that where machinery was used it was monopolised by men, and that this frequently made nonsense of the supposed distinction between 'heavy' men's work and 'light' women's work. For example, in one instance, Wolf's assistant came across three people working in the fields.

One was a man who was squatting next to the pump house. He told her he was waiting for the women in the field to tell him to turn off the pump that was feeding water into the wheat. To do this he had to pull a switch. As a technician, he earned 10.5 workpoints a day. Walking on, she interviewed the two women, both in their thirties, who were rushing back and forth ditching and damming to keep the water moving evenly through the fields. Although the evening was cool, they were sweating with the effort it took to move the heavy waterlogged earth onto the banks of the ditches. They were unskilled workers and earned 6.5 workpoints for their day's labor (Wolf 1985, pp.83-84).

Other reports confirm that women have generally been assigned the most menial tasks in agriculture, whilst men are given more skilled work or work involving the use of machinery, and where new technology is introduced for a particular task, that task is often taken over by men (Wu Kaitai 1979, pp.38-42).

Tables 7.1 and 7.2 summarise the findings of two recent studies on gender divisions of labour in agriculture.¹ These suggest patterns in the post-Mao period similar to those found in earlier years.

¹ Appendix 1 also contains some information on the gender division of labour in agriculture in the families that I interviewed in 1989.

Table 7.1: Agricultural Occupations in Two Production Teams in Rural Shanghai

Production Team	Agricultural Occupation	Male	Female	Total
		(no. of persons)		
Xinfeng	Vegetable Cultivation		18	18
	Nursery Work (growing seedlings)	1	5	6
	Pig Raising	3	3	6
	Duck Raising	1	2	3
	Administration/Transport	6		6
	Machinery Operation	2		2
	TOTAL	13	28	41
Wanxi	Field Work	12	24	36
	Mushroom Cultivation	5	2	7
	Pig Raising	1	1	2
	Tending the Team's 2 Water Buffalo	1	1	2
	Responsibility for Irrigation	1		1
	Responsibility for Machinery	1		1
	TOTAL	21	28	49

Source: De Koninck 1985, pp.56 & 59. Survey conducted September-November 1983.

**Table 7.2(a): The Gender Division of Labour in Crop Production
(Percentage of Average Time Spent Annually)**

Crop		Ploughing	Planting	Day-to-Day Management	Harvesting	Marketing	Total Prod. Process
Fruit	Women	18	21	37	36	18	26
	Men	82	79	63	64	82	74
Wheat	Women	11	19	57	42	14	29
	Men	78	70	43	54	86	66
	Machinery*	11	11	0	4	0	5
Corn	Women	11	28	59	50	17	33
	Men	81	67	41	48	83	64
	Machinery	8	5	0	2	0	3
Vegetables	Women	37	42	47	54	0	36
	Men	63	58	53	46	100	64
Cotton	Women	13	69	69	72	42	45
	Men	87	31	31	28	58	55

* Gender of operator not specified.

Source: Li Xiaoyun et al. 1992, pp.4-6. Survey conducted amongst 100 families in Ningjin County, Hebei Province, 1992.

Table 7.2(b): The Gender Division of Labour in Livestock Production (Percentage of Average Time Spent Annually)

		Bying young animals	Feeding	Disease Management	Marketing	Total Prod. Process
Chickens	Women	96	96	85	88	91
	Men	4	4	15	12	9
Pigs	Women	38	90	51	26	51
	Men	62	10	49	74	49
Large Livestock*	Women	6	32	25	10	18
	Men	94	68	75	90	82

* Cattle, horses and donkeys.

Source: Li Xiaoyun et al. 1992, p.6. Survey conducted amongst 100 families in Ningjin County, Hebei, 1992.

The first study was undertaken in 1983 in two separate production teams in the vicinity of Shanghai. The first production team consisted of 82 families, of which 41 drew a part of their income from agriculture. In each of these families, one adult worked full-time in agriculture. Nine raised pigs or ducks on specialised contracts. The others were all involved in producing vegetables, mainly for the Shanghai market. In the second production team 49 of the 84 working adults were engaged in agriculture, mainly growing grain. In both teams the study found that women were concentrated in field work, while technical tasks, transport

and administration were undertaken by men. It will be noted that in contrast to most earlier surveys, this study found that the majority of agricultural labourers in both production teams were women. This pattern, which has become increasingly common in the 1980s and 1990s, will be discussed shortly.

The second study was undertaken in 1992 in Ningjin County, Hebei Province. During the study 50 men and 50 women from separate families selected at random were interviewed. Table 7.2 shows that in terms of crop production in Ningjin County women contribute most to cotton growing, an activity in which they have traditionally played a major role, and vegetable growing, which in Ningjin County is considered part of the domestic sideline, or courtyard, economy. In more general terms, ploughing and marketing are two tasks largely done by men. Planting is also dominated by men, except in the case of cotton. Harvesting and day-to-day field work is fairly evenly distributed between men and women, except, again, in the case of cotton production, in which women play a larger role. In livestock production women play a dominant role in rearing chickens and pigs. This is undertaken mainly for family consumption. They play a lesser role in rearing other livestock which are sold on the market.

The Withdrawal of Women from Agriculture

As mentioned in Chapter 3, one important effect of the reforms initiated in rural areas in the late 1970s has been to improve agricultural productivity. This, in turn, has made apparent previously concealed underemployment and surplus labour in agriculture.

The problem of 'too many people, too little land' [*ren duo, di shao*], and correspondingly high levels of rural underemployment, have always been issues of concern to the CCP. Under Mao Zedong, these issues were addressed by increasing the labour intensity of crop production, by recruiting rural labour during the winter months for the construction of irrigation canals and other forms of rural infrastructure, by developing small-scale rural industry and by recruiting rural labour for temporary work in urban industry (Taylor 1988, p.743). Until the late 1970s western analysts largely believed that these measures had successfully overcome the problems of rural underemployment. However, such beliefs were brought seriously into question by reports published in the 1980s suggesting that between one-quarter and one-third of all rural labour was surplus to requirements (Li Qingzeng 1986).

Explanations for this high level of rural underemployment generally point to the fact that, under the collective system, far more labour was employed in the fields than was necessary. The work-point system of remuneration was such

that all labour was remunerated, regardless of its marginal contribution to output (Taylor 1988, p.748). After the introduction of the production responsibility system, however, it was no longer profitable for labour that was surplus to requirements to be kept employed in the fields, hence the 'emergence' of large numbers of surplus workers, especially out of grain growing, in which roughly 89 per cent of agricultural labour was concentrated in the early 1980s (Li Qingzeng 1986, pp.6-7).²

The 'emergence' or 'release' of this surplus labour from grain growing has, from one point of view, enabled the development of more profitable forms of agriculture and of non-agricultural enterprises and hence has been a most important step toward modernisation and the improvement of rural incomes and livelihood. From a slightly different perspective, however, it has also resulted in enormous strains on the Chinese economy and society. Thus, one report estimates that by the year 2000 the number of surplus rural workers may have grown to 250 million and claims that

² Taylor points to two factors that have further contributed to the emergence of surplus labour in agriculture over the 1980s. These are first, the substitution of chemical fertilisers for natural fertilisers, since the latter take a good deal more time and effort to collect, process and apply than the former; and second, a shift in production patterns that favoured crops with a low labour intensity, such as sorghum, millet and sugar beets (Taylor 1988, p.749).

hundreds of millions of such workers will in the long run be unemployed. This is not merely an economic problem; it is capable of becoming a serious social and political problem, as well (Zhongguo Nongcun Chanye Jiegou Yanjiu Ketu Zu 'Report on the study of the structure of rural production in China, 1982-2000' p.7, quoted in Taylor 1988, p.737).

As it turns out, by the late 1980s and early 1990s in more developed rural areas, especially on the southeastern seaboard, the pressure of surplus agricultural labour had been greatly reduced, with rural people taking up employment in a wide range of agricultural and non-agricultural ventures. As will be discussed shortly, these areas are also now absorbing immigrant labour from poorer areas across China, where employment is scarce.

However, in the early stages of reform and even today in the least developed areas, not all the surplus workers from agriculture are able to find alternative forms of employment. One report claimed, for example, that in Huairan County, Shandong, shortly after the introduction of the production responsibility system (but before 1983 when new lines of production were developed) one-third of all labourers were no longer needed in agriculture and the majority of women had no paid work (FNGZ September 1984, p.24). Similarly, a survey carried out in 1986 in Heze Prefecture, a very poor region also in Shandong, found that local enterprises were developing very slowly and there were no outlets for surplus female labour. Women were keen to earn money, but lack of

funds, skills, avenues for work and sales outlets thwarted their enthusiasm (*FNGZ* July 1986, p.12).

In areas inland and far from large cities, in particular, markets, services and transport are all relatively underdeveloped. Many such areas still have few local industries and those that exist often employ workers on only a part-time, temporary basis. In addition, peasants in these areas lack the capital and the skills necessary for work outside agriculture. All this makes it difficult for peasants in less-developed areas to find non-agricultural employment, either in their home county or elsewhere, or to start up their own non-agricultural ventures. Nevertheless, many peasant families have found it advantageous to withdraw surplus workers from full-time agriculture (rather than that person be underemployed in the fields as would have happened under the commune system) so that they can do the family's domestic work.

In such circumstances, as the above examples suggest, women have been the first to be withdrawn from agricultural work. This illustrates a continued identification of women primarily as 'inside' domestic workers and only secondarily as workers 'outside' in agriculture. Thus, on the one hand it is assumed that since women already carry responsibility for domestic work, it is most efficient for them to concentrate on such work, while the man or men of the family work in the fields.

At the same time, women's withdrawal from agriculture also stems from the perception that women are less capable of agricultural work than men, since they lack technical skills and are not as physically strong. Some reports suggest, furthermore, that mechanisation has not only resulted in changes in women's work in agriculture, as suggested above, but in some cases has led to women being pushed out of agriculture altogether (see, for example, Wu Kaitai 1979, pp.38-42).

Such reports confirm for rural China a trend similar to that found in other developing countries in which the use of new agricultural machinery is monopolised by men, and women are either marginalised in the most tiring and monotonous manual work in agriculture, or are pushed out of employment (Bridger 1987, p.2 & pp.220-222).³

In rural China, however, the impact of mechanisation on women's employment in agriculture was an issue of greater concern before the introduction of rural reforms in the late 1970s than it has been since. This is because the introduction of the production responsibility system has fragmented land holdings, making it difficult to use large machinery. Furthermore, the machinery that is used is usually shared between a number of families since it is too expensive for most peasant families to afford on their own. The following account of the situation in Zengbu following

³ Bridger discusses these issues in relation to Third World countries generally, and the USSR.

the introduction of the production responsibility system is typical:

Plowing is less mechanized than before. The small and medium-sized tractors used by the teams are too expensive for a household to use on the small area of its production responsibility fields. Similarly, maintaining a water buffalo is too expensive for one household. The tractors have been sold. The teams retain formal ownership of the buffaloes, but allocate each buffalo to a group of households. One family is paid to care for the group's buffalo throughout the year, and at plowing time the households take turns using the animal to plow. (This is reminiscent of the mutual aid teams of the early 1950s.) Threshing is also less mechanized. The motorized threshers used by the collectives in 1979 are too expensive for a single household or a small group of households. Peasants are threshing grain by hand, beating sheaves of rice into a wooden tub, as they did before Liberation. The household is so small a production unit that only simple technology can be economically employed (Potter & Potter 1991, pp.335-336).

In rural China in the post-Mao era, rather than mechanisation resulting in a withdrawal of women from agriculture, it appears that *lack* of mechanisation may be contributing to another very different trend, which will be discussed in the following paragraphs. As William Hinton has suggested,

the women are going to be left farming the land by primitive methods and the men are going to go off and do anything but farming and earn a decent livelihood. Or you're going to get tremendous polarization, since anyone left on the land is going to be considered an unfortunate boob: all the women, the maimed and the halt and the blind and the men who can't make it are going to be left on the land, because no-one can work on the land by hand and make a decent living (Hinton 1984, p.13).

The Feminisation of Agriculture

Where opportunities for non-agricultural employment have become available, men have been the first to leave agriculture to take up such employment, and agriculture has increasingly become the responsibility of women, especially married women. As will be discussed in Chapter 9, women are also employed in industry, but in smaller numbers than men, and there are significant differences between their occupations.

According to census data, nationally men still outnumber women in agricultural work. Nevertheless, in 1982 women already comprised 46 per cent of the agricultural labour force, and by 1990 this had increased to 47.4 per cent. Furthermore, while 70 per cent of the total male labour force was engaged in agriculture in 1982 and 69 per cent were so engaged in 1990, 78 per cent of the female labour force was engaged in agriculture in 1982 and 76 per cent in 1990 (Guojia Tongjiju Renkousi 1992, p.73; Zhonghua Quanguo Funu Lianhehui... 1991, p.253).

In certain areas, reports suggest, there is a greater proportion of women engaged in farming. In fact, some areas note a 'feminisation' (*funuhua*) of agriculture. This trend has been most apparent in South China. Philip Huang claims, for example, that by the mid-1980s in the majority of villages in the Pearl River Delta farming was being done by what was jokingly referred to as the 'Three Eight Team'

(*sanba duiwu*) - a reference to March 8, Women's Day, and off-farm employment was dominated by men (Huang, Philip 1990, p.213. See also Woon, Yuen-fong, 1991 p.156).

Similar trends have also been reported for other parts of China, however. For example, in an article published in 1984 it was claimed that following the introduction of the production responsibility system in Xinjin county in Sichuan, a large proportion of men went to work outside the county. Women now perform 60 per cent of work in agriculture and more than 80 per cent of work in domestic sidelines (ZGNMB 29 April 1984). Another article published in 1987 claimed that in well-off areas in Shandong after the introduction of the production responsibility system the majority of men went away to work in commerce or become workers in city factories. The women stayed in the villages and undertook agriculture, domestic sidelines and domestic work, and worked in village-run factories (ZGFNB 16 October 1987). In 1988 a survey of 4,700 members of 1,110 families in three townships in Fugou County, Henan, found that 70 per cent of the male labour force was occupied in communications, transport or handicraft production, or had migrated elsewhere to work, and women performed the bulk of agricultural labour (ZGFNB May 2 1988, quoted in Huang Xiyi 1992, p.89).

In her survey of two villages in Shandong, conducted in 1986 and 1987-8, Ellen Judd also found that as non-agricultural production expanded, agriculture became largely the responsibility of women, or, more particularly, married

women. The processes through which this occurred differed somewhat between the two villages, however. The first village, Qianrulin, was unusual in that it had not been decollectivised. Judd says that even though agricultural labour accounted for only 14 per cent of total recorded work-days in Qianrulin,

people must be found and, as it is still a collective economy, allocated to do this least preferred form of work. Married women, consistently referred to by male leaders as "housewives", are a disproportionate component of this labour force. Essentially, this is the result of decisions made by the village leadership, which women modify as differentially able, with decisions on early retirement and, in some cases - and with advantages of education or kinship ties - alternative employment in other sectors of the village economy (Judd 1990a, p.28).

In the second village studied by Judd, Zhangjiachedao, the economy had been decollectivised, at least formally, although there was still a strong village government. Rural industry was well developed, and there were plenty of opportunities for non-agricultural employment for both men and women in the village. In the early 1980s agricultural work was done by families that undertook to specialise in that area. These families, however, received less income than those engaged in non-agricultural production, and so, in an attempt to reduce inequalities between families, the village government replaced this system by one in which each family was allocated a small amount of land and made responsible for its cultivation. Villagers employed full-time in local industry commonly also participated in their family's agricultural work after hours. Only ten men in the village were engaged

primarily in agriculture, all of whom were elderly, had poor health or work records, or combined agriculture with commerce or craft work. In contrast, however, in a number of families agriculture was undertaken largely by an older married woman, for whom this was the primary form of employment. Judd reports that

although women preferred to work in the well-paying village enterprises where their domestic conditions permitted, an alternative of combining primary agricultural and domestic (and, at times, childcare) responsibilities as the contribution of one mature woman was a household-oriented strategy which many adopted (Judd 1990a, pp.29-30).

As Judd concludes, then, in these two villages

women are distinctly more concentrated than men in agricultural labour, for reasons connected both with local policy decisions and with household configurations, although the results are not uniform either between communities or within them (Judd 1990a, p.30).

My own fieldwork confirmed many of the patterns that have been outlined in these examples. In Ling County, Shandong, and in Wenjiang and Guan Counties in Sichuan, for example, officials in the Agricultural Bureaux claimed that in a large proportion of couples the husband works in a township enterprise whilst the wife works primarily in agriculture. The reverse division of labour is much rarer. In Wenjiang County officials talked explicitly of a feminisation and ageing (*laohua*) of the agricultural labour force. During the busy seasons (one month in May-June and one month in September-October) all those in the villages help with

agriculture,⁴ but otherwise it is managed largely by women and older men. Of a total rural labour force of 119,565, 19.1 per cent are employed in township enterprises. Of these, however, only 23 per cent are women (Figures checked with Jiang Xuegui 1989).

Table 7.3: The Division of Labour Between Agricultural and Other Remunerated Work in Sixty Families in Rural Beijing, Shandong and Sichuan

Families engaged solely in agriculture	10
Families in which interviewee is engaged primarily in agriculture and her husband is engaged in non-agricultural work	20
Families in which interviewee is engaged primarily in non-agricultural work and her husband is engaged primarily in agriculture	0
Families in which neither the interviewee nor her husband are engaged in agriculture, but other family members are	2
Families in which no members are engaged in agriculture	6

Source: Interviews with rural women, August-December 1989.

⁴ This does not include approximately 1,500 contract and temporary workers employed outside the county. The majority of these workers are men in the construction industry. They generally do not return home in the busy season because they are too far away.

Table 7.3 summarises information on the division of labour between agricultural and non-agricultural employment in the sixty families that I visited in 1989.⁵

In total, only ten of these families (16.7 per cent) were engaged solely in agriculture. In eight families (13.3 per cent) neither the woman interviewed, nor her husband, were engaged in agriculture. In two of these families agriculture was undertaken by other members of the family, and in six families either workers were hired to do agriculture or the land had been given or subcontracted to a relative or a neighbouring family. There were no families in which the woman interviewed was engaged primarily in non-agricultural production, whilst her husband worked primarily in agriculture. In contrast, however, there were twenty families (33.3 per cent) in which the woman's primary remunerated work was in agriculture, whilst her husband worked primarily in non-agricultural employment.

By the late 1980s, a dominance of women in Chinese agriculture was widely taken for granted by Chinese commentators. Ellen Judd comments, for example, that

the current division of labour in agriculture may be illustrated by the off-hand comment of a Qianrulin village leader that he supposed that in the West, too, women did most of the agricultural work (Judd 1990a, p.25).

⁵ Further information on divisions of labour in these families is given in Appendix 1.

Similarly, a case study of women's contribution to rural development claimed that women are the most important labour force in agricultural production in rural China, comparing their contribution to agriculture to that of women in Africa (Li Xiaoyun et al. 1992). The report made no mention of the fact that while Africa has been described as traditionally 'the region of female farming *par excellence*' (Boserup 1970, p.16), in China before 1949, women's contribution to agricultural production was minimal, and in fact, according to most analyses, continued to be significantly less than men's until the late 1970s.

The feminisation of agriculture is a trend that has been reported in many other countries as a corollary of industrialisation. Ester Boserup, in her pathbreaking study of women's role in economic development, noted, for example, that in the 1960s there were more women than men in Japan's agricultural labour force, and that in the United States a decrease in the agricultural labour force was accompanied by an increase in the proportion of women in it (Boserup 1970, p.81). Similarly, Barbara Jancar reported in 1978 that women predominated in farming in all the countries of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, and that the feminisation of agriculture was a central concern of Eastern European regimes (Jancar 1978, p.20).

Nor is the feminisation of agriculture in rural China in the 1980s and 1990s without precedent in China itself. As was noted in Chapter 2, the development strategy adopted during

the Great Leap Forward involved the recruitment of women into agricultural labour to replace men who were then employed in rural industry and capital construction projects. In 1959 Tan Zhenlin, a member of the CCP Central Committee, said that

This year the women of China played a great role in the great leap, especially in agricultural production. This situation will develop and women will take up the duty of becoming the principal force in agricultural production. In general these industrial departments (of iron and steel) use mostly male labour power and offer few types of work that women workers can do. Therefore, up to a certain level of socialist construction most women will have to take up agricultural production (ZGFN January 1959, p.6, quoted in Thorborg 1978, p.566).⁶

In later years, this pattern was repeated, and, in the late 1960s, as Marina Thorborg has pointed out, it was promoted as a national model in Daqing. There, the men and some young women worked in the oilfields, while the majority of the women were given the responsibility of agriculture (Thorborg 1978, p.580).

Yet it remains true that the dominance of women in agricultural work across much of rural China is a very recent phenomenon, and represents a radical shift in work patterns.

⁶ In areas of South and Southeast China the feminisation of agriculture has a longer history. Kathy Walker claims, for example, that in Nantong County in the Yangzi delta, commercialisation and industrialisation of the rural economy in the early part of the twentieth century involved women taking over family farming, while men moved into off-farm wage labour (Walker 1993, pp.370-376). Yuen-fong Woon argues that in Chikan Zhen, in the Pearl River Delta, a feminisation of agriculture between the mid-nineteenth century and 1949 was connected to the migration overseas of thousands of people, most of them young men (Woon, Yuen-fong 1991, pp.154-155).

Given this, the questions that must be asked are firstly, what have been the processes contributing to the feminisation of agriculture in the 1980s and 1990s, and how has such a trend been legitimated and made to appear ordinary?

Secondly, what are the consequences for gender relations and for women's lives of such a trend?

The greater rate of absorption of rural male labour into non-agricultural employment and the feminisation of agriculture must first of all be seen in the context of long-standing peasant desires to leave both the land and the village on the one hand, and restrictions on the mobility of rural men, and especially women, on the other. In comparison with work in industry, agricultural work is widely seen as arduous, tiring and 'bitter' (*ku*), and rural/urban inequalities are such that rural residents suffer not just lower living standards, but lesser access to services, education and entertainment than urbanites. In addition, and associated with these inequalities, peasants have for centuries been looked down upon by city dwellers; a stigma that has persisted despite Maoist attempts at levelling distinctions between urban and rural dwellers (Potter & Potter 1991, pp.299-300).

It is only in the last 15 years or so, however, that any more than a tiny minority of peasants have been able to improve their status. Until the late 1970s opportunities for non-agricultural employment in rural areas were relatively scarce, and the household registration system strictly limited labour movement, especially that from rural to urban

areas. Under this system, introduced in the mid 1950s primarily as a way of keeping labour in agriculture and of preventing excessive strain on urban resources, all Chinese are registered at birth as belonging either to a 'rural agricultural household' (*nongye hukou*) or an 'urban resident household' (*chengshi jumin hukou*). One of the defining characteristics of the latter is that it entitles the holder to subsidised grain from the state. Peasants, on the other hand, must produce their own grain, or buy it at a higher price on the market.

Household registration is inherited from the mother and can be changed only in exceptional circumstances. Sometimes, however, in suburban counties adjacent to a town or city, expanding state enterprises will appropriate peasants' land and in return provide employment and/or award them a cash payment, new housing and urban household registration.⁷

Since 1984, in an attempt to encourage rural non-agricultural employment, the state has also allowed some peasants working in rural enterprises and private businesses in small towns to settle there permanently. These peasants are given 'self-supplier household' status (*zili hukou*), that is, they are treated as urban residents, except that they are not entitled to state-subsidised grain (Christiansen 1990, p.36). In addition, urban male workers married to women with rural registration have, in some cases, been permitted to transfer

⁷ This was the case, for example, in family no.41, Wenjiang. See Appendix 1. For a more detailed discussion of this practice, and of variations of it, see Christiansen 1990, pp.32-33.

their job and household registration to one of their children, providing that they themselves have been reclassified as rural residents (Potter & Potter 1991, p.306).⁸

Otherwise, a tiny minority of peasant men are able to obtain urban registration as a result of entrance into university, or by rising through the ranks of the Communist Party. In addition, in the Maoist period those who joined the army were, after demobilisation, given preference when peasants were recruited for employment in industry (Potter & Potter 1991, pp.306-311).

These avenues for status improvement are largely beyond the reach of peasant women. However, marriage is one further strategy that peasant women are able to use to improve their status. As William Lively has discussed, peasant women and their families frequently try to improve their living standards and their status by marrying into a family of higher standing than their own (Lively 1991, p.288).⁹

⁸ The system of job inheritance in urban industry was formally abolished in 1983, but may still be practised illegally (Christiansen 1990, p.31).

⁹ It is much rarer for a man to marry a woman with a higher status than his own, in part because of a traditional resistance to such marriages (Ji Ping et al. 1986, p.293), and in part because, under the patrilocal marriage system, a woman's status and standard of living are greatly influenced by the status of the family she marries into, but a man's status is little affected by that of his wife's family (Lively 1991, p.288).

Not surprisingly, given their higher status and often higher incomes, amongst the most sought-after husbands for peasant women are those with urban household registration.¹⁰ A woman marrying a man with urban household registration will not, however, have her own registration changed. She might live temporarily with her husband in an urban area, but this is relatively rare because she would have difficulty finding a secure job and would not be entitled to the subsidies given to urban workers. It is more common, therefore, for women in such marriages to remain in the village of their husband's family, working in agriculture and/or in township enterprises. This, then, helps to explain one particular manifestation of the 'feminisation' of agriculture most apparent in suburban counties, that is the prevalence of couples in which the man is an industrial or administrative worker with urban registration, while his wife is primarily an agricultural labourer with rural registration (for examples, see Appendix 1).

Outside suburban counties, however, families with split household registration are relatively rare, and the benefits of urban registration, or even of association with someone with urban registration, are out of reach for the majority of peasants. Apart from the introduction of the 'self-supplier household' category in 1984, economic reforms introduced since the late 1970s have not greatly altered this picture.

¹⁰ These are generally men who were originally classified as peasants but who then obtained rural registration. It is much rarer for a man born with urban household registration to marry a peasant.

However, as will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 9, they have resulted in a large expansion of opportunities, indeed demand, for temporary employment of rural labour in urban industry and services, and for a range of non-agricultural forms of employment in villages and townships.

At the same time, though, there are a number of pressures on rural families to continue to undertake some farming, so that even where the opportunity for all members of a family to give up farm work and undertake non-agricultural employment is available, it is not always taken up. Thus, it is usual for rural families to continue, at the least, to cultivate grain to meet the state's tax requirements and to grow vegetables and grain for their own consumption, rather than buying it at higher prices on the market. As mentioned in Chapter 3, land is also an important source of security for Chinese peasants, and while it is often less profitable, agriculture provides a more stable source of income than work in township enterprises or private entrepreneurial activities. Many families therefore continue to engage one or more members in farming as a way of balancing the risks involved in other forms of employment.

As Ellen Judd suggests, the reasons for the concentration of *women*, in particular married women, in agriculture are related both to local policy decisions and to the strategies of families and individual women themselves. One reason why it is women, rather than men, who continue to work the land is that women's right to land (and other property) is

tenuous, and is likely to be lost if the land is not used. As discussed in Chapter 4, under the prevailing patrilocal marriage system when a woman marries she loses the right to land in her natal village and is in time allocated land in her husband's village. As a relative outsider, however, her rights in her husband's village are tenuous. If she divorces, or if her husband dies, a woman's right to land in the village comes under question, and might be withdrawn, particularly if it is contested by a relative of her husband. However, if she has been farming that land, she will have a much stronger claim on it than if she has not. In contrast, a man who leaves the land and even the village for many years will still retain the right to return to it.

The 'feminisation' of agriculture relates also to the comparatively low cost of keeping women, especially married women, in farm work, due to the lesser opportunities available to them in industry. As will be discussed in Chapter 9, in the township enterprise sector, for example, fewer women than men are employed, in part because the recruitment policies of some industries, especially heavy industries, discriminate against them. Some township enterprises also do not employ women after they have married or had a child. Furthermore, women have fewer chances for promotion than men in township enterprises and their wages tend to be lower. On the other hand, women are often able to supplement their incomes from agriculture with earnings generated through non-agricultural production in domestic sidelines.

Finally, the predominance of women in agriculture is related to the strong identification of women with an 'inside' sphere of work in child care and other domestic work, and domestic sidelines. This tie has meant that it is largely only unmarried women who leave home to work, for example in the urban service sector, and the assumption is that they will return to the village after a few years to get married, have children and take over domestic duties and agriculture. As Margery Wolf found in her survey conducted in 1980, their responsibility for domestic work also leads many married women, especially those with children, to prefer farm work, or a combination of farm work and part-time work in a local factory, to full-time work in a factory. As one woman in Jiangsu explained,

the reason farm work is better for women is that the hours are irregular. During harvest or planting you might have to put in long hours, but you can catch up with the household work in the slack season. Also women do most of the work on sideline products. It would be hard to keep factory hours and do the rest of the work after (Wolf 1985, p.107).

These then, are the chief reasons for the 'feminisation' of agriculture, and the reasons why women themselves often choose to work in agriculture rather than industry. Chinese officials and economists at times express concern that the 'feminisation' of agriculture is causing a decline in agricultural productivity (*Nongye Jingji Wenti* October 1986, pp.16-18). However, it is important to note that the trend is at the same time being supported and bolstered by the state, in particular through the Women's Federation. In an

article published in *ZGFN* in 1991, for example, the 'feminisation' of agriculture was hailed as a 'quiet revolution' for women, and the benefits of being close to the land were extolled (without those benefits being elaborated or explained, however) (Wang Jinjin 1991). In more concrete terms, the Women's Federation's support for the 'feminisation' of agriculture is manifested in the campaigns it runs to improve rural women's technical skills, these being focused, by and large, on developing skills in agriculture and the courtyard economy (see Chapter 5).

In official explanations and legitimations of the 'feminisation' of agriculture, women's responsibility for domestic work is commonly cited as an important factor. For example, in the article just mentioned it was claimed that

with the growth of township and village enterprises, large numbers of men "left the land but not the area" (*li tu bu li xiang*) but women could not leave the family, and hence they could not leave the land (Wang Jinjin 1991, p.8).

It is interesting to note that the identification of women with the family and domestic work functions here very differently from the way in functions in other contexts. Thus, where demand for agricultural employment cannot be fully satisfied, women's domestic responsibilities are used as a legitimation for keeping women *off* the land. Where, on the other hand, a maintenance of labour in agriculture is of more concern, women's domestic responsibilities are used as a legitimation for keeping women *on* the land.

Other attempts to explain and legitimate the predominance of women in agriculture invert arguments about male and female physiology. As discussed above, before the availability to many peasants of work in industry, a restriction of women's participation in agriculture was justified by claims that such work was too heavy for women. Now that possibilities for more desirable, non-agricultural work are opening up, however, new claims are being made. The author of one article published in 1986 said, for example, that when industries were developed,

in determining who did what work within the family, not only levels of skills but also biological characteristics had to be taken into account, so it was natural that women, the young and the old should stay on the land and young, fit men should go into industry (*Hunyin yu Jiating* May 1986, p.13).

The view as to the 'naturalness' of women's dominance in agriculture is not held by all officials and researchers. An interesting article written by Shi Chenglin claimed that in 1987 rural China had entered a second period of movement of labour out of agriculture into other forms of production (the first period was 1979-1986) and proposed that in this second period women should be the driving force. Shi claimed that

agriculture in China still requires heavy physical labour. If the majority of male labour leaves agriculture this will be hard on women and detrimental to agriculture. Whereas if the majority of women were to move out of agriculture, old members of the household could take over domestic work or else the women could move into industry nearby and still do some domestic work after their eight hours in industry (Shi Chenglin 1987, pp.54-56).

This is, however, the only example I have come across of a challenge to the rationale behind the feminisation of agriculture. The question that remains then is, 'how is it that the feminisation of agriculture is generally taken for granted; why are the inversions of accepted values and perceptions that it involves not challenged or questioned on a wider scale?'

The key to answering this question is, I would suggest, indicated in a survey report published in 1987 in which the author describes the dominance of women in agriculture in rural Sichuan in terms of a new form of the traditional gender division of labour exemplified in the phrases 'men plough, women weave' (*nan geng, nu zhi*) and 'men rule outside, women rule inside' (*nan zhu wai, nu zhu nei*): nowadays women's 'inside' work includes not just domestic work and domestic sidelines but also work in agriculture. Men's 'outside' work involves leaving the land and going to work in industry or in other non-agricultural activities such as transport or construction (Wang Shuhui 1987b, pp.20-29).

In Chapter 6 I showed that although reform and modernisation have reduced the burden of domestic work on individual women, the assumption that such work is women's responsibility has not been altered, and indeed, it has been strengthened by the state in a number of ways. As has been made apparent in this chapter, the subsequent reinforcement of a division of labour between women's 'inside' sphere and men's 'outside' sphere has contributed to a concentration of women in agriculture -

the area of remunerated work with lowest status. Other chapters show that this division also plays a major part in the perpetuation of other aspects of women's subordination.

Wang Shuhui's article cited above suggests, however, that equally important in the maintenance or re-formation of women's subordination has been a shift in the perception of what constitutes 'inside' and 'outside' spheres of work. Thus, under the commune system, as mentioned, the care of domestic livestock and maintenance of the private plot were considered as belonging to the 'inside' sphere of work, as domestic tasks or tasks closely associated with domestic work, but other agricultural tasks were seen as 'outside' work. In the post-Mao period, however, the downgrading of agricultural work and its corresponding feminisation has occurred, and has been accepted as ordinary, both by peasants themselves and by officials and researchers, because of a conceptual shift of the whole of agriculture from the 'outside' sphere to the 'inside' sphere of work, and a closer association made between agriculture and domestic work.¹¹

In preceding paragraphs I have outlined the lower status of agricultural work compared to other work, but what are the

¹¹ It is probable that earlier instances of the feminisation of agriculture in parts of rural China were accompanied by similar shifts in perception. This is suggested in Kathy Walker's discussion of the feminisation of agriculture in Nantong County in the early twentieth century (see note 6 above). Walker argues that women 'were not merely left behind as men moved into off-farm work but were deliberately "defined back" to the home/farm where their added roles in agriculture became, in effect, a new variant of older seclusion norms' (Walker 1993, p.374).

material effects on women's lives of the feminisation of agriculture?

Some reports suggest that a corollary of a decline in agricultural productivity is that women in agriculture are overworked. A letter from Shaanxi, published in *Zhongguo Funu* in 1982, claimed, for example, that one production team organised its 70 male workers to work outside the area, leaving 50 women in charge of agricultural production. The women were allocated too much land and their workload was more than they could manage. The local Women's Federation was concerned that their health would be damaged, but was powerless to rectify the situation (*ZGFN* May 1982, p.30. See also *Hunyin yu Jiating* May 1986, p.13).

Comments from some of my interviewees suggested that they were able to adjust their work in such a way that they were not overburdened. For example, a woman in Ling County, Shandong (Appendix 1, family no.10), who was responsible for her family's agricultural production, said that she did not grow grain because that entailed too much work for one woman to manage. It may be, however, that in some villages or production teams where production management is still relatively centralised, women are not able to make such decisions themselves. Even where families have more autonomy, individual women may be under considerable pressure from other family members to take on a heavy workload in agriculture and domestic work, so as to relieve others working full-time in industry, for example, or simply to

maximise family income. As mentioned in Chapter 5, reports suggest that some women in this situation manage by transferring a portion of their domestic work onto their daughters' shoulders, even if this means withdrawing them from school at an early age.

With regard to income, the removal of the work-point system of remuneration will have helped to equalise the earnings of women and men working in agriculture. However, in families in which the women work in agriculture and the men work in non-agricultural employment, it is most likely that the women's income will, once more, be considerably less than the men's.

In some areas the income to be earned from agriculture is similar to, or even higher than, that earned in local industry. This is the case, for example, in parts of South China.¹² In other areas where the average income earned in agriculture is considerably lower than industrial wages, there are nevertheless a few women running specialised households in agriculture who are able to earn incomes significantly higher than those of their husbands and most other villagers (see Chapter 8).

¹² See, for example, the quotation cited below referring to the situation in Chen Village. Helen Siu reports also that 'evidence from Nanxi and Minlong rural communes shows that agricultural income increased severalfold after the reforms and at times might have surpassed wages in the factories. But young peasants are leaving the villages at an alarming rate' (Siu 1990, p.76).

More usually, however, non-agricultural employment generates higher incomes than agricultural work (this being one reason why it is sought after). One survey conducted in Sichuan in 1986 found, for example, that the daily individual gross income earned in crop production was 4.9 *yuan*, and in animal husbandry was 4.4 *yuan*. In contrast, the processing of agricultural by-products and engagement in commerce or catering earned daily incomes of 8.4 *yuan* and 8.6 *yuan* respectively. Industrial processing and transport earned a daily income of 15 *yuan* (NMRB 13 May 1986, cited in Odgaard 1990, p.107).¹³ Thus, the feminisation of agriculture involves a concentration of women in the lowest-paid areas of work. This may have a negative impact on women's power and involvement in decision making within families (Tang Hua 1989, pp.16-22), especially as in many families a large proportion of agricultural produce is consumed, hence the income earned is not as easily reckoned as the cash income earned from employment in industry, for example.

On the other hand, as I have discussed, one reason why women themselves choose to work in agriculture is that it gives them a degree of flexibility in combining their various responsibilities. In addition, numerous media stories show women taking over full control of agricultural production, and in the process gaining a good deal more control over their labour and the products of their labour than they would

¹³ See also, Note 9, Chapter 3.

have had under the commune system, or than they would have working in local industry (Wang Jinjin 1991, pp.8-11).

As I will discuss in Chapter 8, however, my own fieldwork shows that even in families where a woman runs a specialised household, whether it be in agricultural or non-agricultural production, it is often the case that her husband is in charge of business matters, arranging bank loans, seeking customers, making decisions on investments, and keeping accounts.

It may be that a woman is more likely to assume greater responsibility and control over resources in families in which the man or men work away from home for most of the year. Some reports suggest, also, that women take on a greater role in formal politics in places where a large proportion of men have left to take up work elsewhere (ZGNMB 29 April 1984).

Reports from other developing countries suggest, however, that male out-migration does not always leave women with greater power or control over resources. A UNESCO study covering Bangladesh, India, the Republic of Korea, the Philippines and Thailand, found, in fact, that in families in which the men migrated temporarily to the city, leaving women in the village, patterns of family authority changed very little. Final decisions on major issues continued to be made by the husband on visits home, or through letters, and women

also deferred to other senior male members of the family.

More generally, the study found that

contrary to common belief, migration and exposure to modernity have served to cement the bonds of kinship and to reinforce tradition. It is through the network of kinship that people move into the city; it is in the kinship and village circle that they move; and back home the degree of dependence on kinsmen increases with the departure of the male to the town (*Women in the Villages...* 1984, pp.299-300).

Further Trends

So far I have discussed a withdrawal of women from agriculture and a 'feminisation' of agriculture as contrasting trends occurring in response to different stages or different types of development following the introduction of rural reforms. These were the most important trends relating to gender divisions of labour between agriculture and non-agricultural employment in the 1980s and early 1990s. However, by no means all families conformed to these patterns. Furthermore, these patterns will not necessarily remain dominant in the future. They may remain important in some areas but not in others. Indeed, it should be noted that in some parts of South China, the 'feminisation' of agriculture has already been superseded by further developments.

According to Philip Huang, for example, while in most villages in the Pearl River Delta in the mid-1980s agriculture was done largely by women, in some, it had been

sidelined even further, and was being undertaken on only a very small scale, using spare-time labour. In Shenxianglang village in Fengqiao commune, on the outskirts of Suzhou city, for example, villagers were classified as part of the 'population working in industry who farm only consumption grain land' (*zhi zhong kouliangdi de wugong renkou*). In 1985 almost all the villagers, both male and female, had off-farm jobs. They continued to cultivate small plots of land only to cover their grain consumption needs and to meet state tax requirements. During the busiest agricultural periods they took off from industrial work a few days for farm work, but otherwise this was done only in their spare time (Huang, Philip 1990, p.213).¹⁴

Anita Chan and her co-researchers report yet another set of trends in South China. They note that by the mid-1980s most of the farming in Chen Village and neighbouring villages was being done by immigrant labour. Usually this was on a share-cropping basis. Families living in their employers' storage sheds would undertake to pay the state grain levy and to provide their hosts with rice for home consumption in return for the right to cultivate land and reap the profit. In addition, some people in Chen Village rented their land to Hong Kong capitalists who developed large agro-businesses

¹⁴ I noted a similar pattern in some of the families I interviewed in 1989 - see Appendix 1.

growing vegetables for the Hong Kong market, using immigrants as wage labourers.¹⁵

Few local people in Chen Village worked in the fields themselves. As the authors report,

during the 1980s a prejudice had rapidly developed in Chen Village against agricultural labour, even though farming one's own land could net about the same amount of pay as factory work. But farmwork had come to be seen as "backward" and physically onerous, unlike the "modern" and thus more high-status factory labour (Chan et al. 1992, p.297).

In the 1980s a large proportion of young men in the village did no work at all, preferring instead to depend on their relatives in Hong Kong. Young local women were generally more willing to work than their husbands and brothers, but they too shunned agricultural labour, preferring to work in the factories of Shenzhen or in local township enterprises (Chan et al. 1992, pp.267-308).

Conclusion

I have argued in this chapter that distinctions between 'inside' and 'outside', 'light' and 'heavy' and 'unskilled' and 'skilled' work have played a major role in organising and legitimating divisions of labour within agriculture, and between agriculture and other forms of remunerated work, that

¹⁵ For further discussion of the use of immigrant labour in agriculture in the Pearl River delta region see Tao Xiaoyong 1986, pp.16-18.

have marginalised or disadvantaged women in a number of ways. I have demonstrated, however, that while claims as to the naturalness of such distinctions have been used to legitimate particular gender divisions of labour, the meanings of these distinctions have in fact been shaped as much by local negotiations and economic and social change as by 'nature', and that they have changed markedly from one context to another.

Under the work-point system of remuneration, for example, women were concentrated in 'light' work, which was remunerated at a lower rate than 'heavy' work. Where machinery was introduced and made work less physically demanding, however, it was monopolised by men and was remunerated at a higher rate than women's heavier, but 'unskilled', manual work. Following the introduction of the production responsibility system, in areas where there was a shortage of employment opportunities women were withdrawn from agriculture to concentrate on domestic work. This occurred both through a reassertion that women cannot do agricultural work as well as men because it is too 'heavy' and they lack the necessary technical skills, and through the strengthening of the association between women and the 'inside' sphere of work. In contrast to this trend, however, where industrial employment has become available as an alternative to agricultural work, men have taken up such work in disproportionate numbers while women, especially married women, have been relatively concentrated in agriculture. This has occurred through a submergence of the idea that

agricultural work is too heavy and technically skilled for women, and a re-characterisation of agriculture as 'inside' work undertaken alongside domestic tasks, as opposed to industrial work 'outside'.

In the 1980s and early 1990s, in more developed regions of rural China, the most important trend relating to gender divisions of labour between agriculture and other remunerated work has been the 'feminisation' of agriculture. It is no coincidence that this shift in work patterns has coincided with a re-conceptualisation of agriculture as 'inside work', associated with domestic work, which as we have seen in Chapter 6 is held in low regard relative to other types of work, and that both these changes have followed the downgrading of the status of agricultural work as a result of the expansion of other employment opportunities. Yet the feminisation of agriculture cannot be understood solely in terms of conspiracy or discrimination against women, whether it be by the state or at any other level of society. As I have shown in this chapter, this trend is primarily a result both of social structures and attitudes which constrain women in particular ways, and of decisions that women themselves make to concentrate in agriculture because, for all its drawbacks, it offers them advantages not possible in 'outside' industrial employment.

CHAPTER 8: ENTREPRENEURS ON THE FARM

Introduction

In Chapter 7 I discussed the feminisation of agriculture, that is, a trend in which women are increasingly taking charge of agriculture, while more and more men move into off-farm non-agricultural work. Chapters 8 and 9 add a further degree of complexity to this picture, discussing trends which are occurring within or alongside this one.

This chapter focuses first of all on the recent development of domestic sidelines and the courtyard economy; areas of work dominated by women. Secondly, it looks at the emergence of specialised households (*zhuanyehu*) and private enterprises (*getihu* and *siying qiye*) run by women as an extension of, or specialisation in, activities in the courtyard economy. The chapter analyses the development of women's work in the courtyard economy in terms of the motives of both the state and women themselves, and undertakes a critical examination of the Women's Federation's emphasis on the courtyard economy as a key element in a strategy for improving the economic and social position of rural women.

It will become clear that what distinguishes the areas of work considered in this chapter is not so much their content, as their organisation and their perceived location, both physically and in the economy. Thus, while domestic sidelines and the courtyard economy include work defined as

domestic work and as agriculture, they are also regarded as a separate set of activities by Chinese peasants, officials and researchers, defined in terms of their location in an 'inside sphere', their income-earning potential, but also their lesser importance in comparison to the main income generating activities of the family.

Similarly, whilst (non-agricultural) specialised households and rural private enterprises are a subset of rural township enterprises, they are also considered separately, as small-scale, family-based ventures, many of which are direct extensions of the courtyard economy. In this chapter they are discussed in terms of their significance as ventures developed and managed by rural women on the farm, and from within the 'inside' sphere. In Chapter 9 they are included in a discussion of sources of off-farm non-agricultural employment, from the viewpoint of women employees.

Domestic Sidelines and the Courtyard Economy

In the simplest terms, the expression 'domestic sidelines' (*jiating fuye*) refers to those areas of production engaged in by peasant families as a supplement to their main productive activity, either for consumption or for cash profit. In China this has included four main types of production: (1) the cultivation of crops, fruit trees and vegetables on land around a peasant's house, on private plots, in between the

chief crops or on land not suitable for the chief crops, (2) the rearing of domestic livestock and poultry on land as above or in courtyards (3) the gathering of medicinal herbs and berries, hunting and fishing, and (4) the home production of handicrafts, including weaving, sewing and embroidery, the home processing of foodstuffs and the home production and repair of farm tools and other implements. Obviously, however, the types and extent of domestic sidelines engaged in by families vary according to their different material and labour resources. Furthermore, the relation of this type of production to others has varied over time with changes to the overall relations of production. The most marked changes have been brought about by the shifts from a family economy to a collective economy in the 1950s and back to a new form of family economy in the 1980s.

As outlined in Chapter 2, following the collectivisation of agriculture and rural industry in the 1950s, peasants' chief occupation became their work in collective production, whilst the term 'domestic sidelines' referred to production undertaken by members of a family not employed in collective production or by others outside their collective work hours. These sidelines were undertaken using small farm tools, scattered fruit trees and domestic livestock which peasants still owned themselves, in the home or courtyard or on the private plot. The most important domestic sidelines in the Maoist period were the cultivation of vegetables and fruit trees, and the rearing of domestic livestock, especially pigs

and chickens.¹ The private production of handicrafts declined somewhat in this period, relative to pre-revolution years, in part due to the nationalisation of textiles in the 1950s and in part due to the centralisation of commerce and restrictions on rural markets.

In terms of gender divisions of labour, the Women's Federation now claims that domestic sidelines have always been women's work. This is not entirely true - for example, hunting and fishing have commonly been done by men, and in the Maoist period men, children and the old all contributed, at least to some extent, to work on the private plot (Huang, Philip 1990, p.203). However, handicrafts, sewing and the day-to-day care of domestic livestock have been undertaken mainly by women, especially older women. As discussed in Chapter 6, these activities are intertwined with domestic tasks. It is common, for example, for a woman to feed the chickens in the yard whilst the rice is cooking.

As a consequence of the association with domestic work, and the fact that they are considered 'women's work', domestic sidelines have, until recently, suffered a kind of invisibility. Despite their importance for the food intake of the family and also for the cash income they bring in, domestic sidelines have tended to be omitted in peasants' accounts of their productive activities, and women's work in this area has often not been recognised, by themselves or

¹ These activities were also undertaken to some extent by collective units.

others, as a contribution to the family economy. Elisabeth Croll gives an example of an elderly woman who described herself as 'too old to work in the fields' and as 'only able to do her bit by cooking the meals, taking care of the grandsons and raising two pigs and some chickens'. What she did not say was that the sale of the pigs, chickens and eggs amounted to just under half of the total annual cash income of the family (Croll 1983, p.36). I also found, even in 1989, that small numbers of domestic livestock were commonly not included in peasant accounts of family sources of income.

While work in domestic sidelines has had a low status or a kind of invisibility because of the associations with the 'inside' sphere and with 'unproductive' domestic work, as mentioned in Chapter 2, it was also regarded with suspicion by the CCP under Mao Zedong, ironically, because it was in fact productive and was part of a private market economy which could potentially detract from or threaten the commune economy.

Consequently, while domestic sidelines were generally recognised by the state as an important source of supplementary foodstuffs and cash income, at times, most notably during the Great Leap Forward and the years following the Cultural Revolution, they were suppressed. Under the Gang of Four, some areas confiscated private plots, rural markets were closed and in some cases women engaging in domestic sidelines were severely criticised. Domestic sidelines and rural fairs were variously described as 'hot

beds breeding capitalism', 'the soil that generates capitalism' and 'capitalist tails' (Croll 1982b, p.237).

As discussed in Chapter 4, the right of commune members to engage in domestic sidelines was reaffirmed at the Third Plenum in 1978. Peasants were informed that according to Party policy, they were

allowed to keep a small number of pigs, sheep, rabbits, chickens, ducks, geese and other domestic animals; they may also keep sows; they may engage in small-scale sideline production such as weaving and knitting, embroidery, collecting wild crops, fishing, hunting, bee-keeping and so on which are not suitable for collective or unified undertaking; and they may plant and own bamboos, trees and fruit trees in front of and behind their houses. As to what crops to plant on private plots, the commune members have the right to make their own arrangements according to their own needs (SWB 27 April 1978).

Following this, domestic sidelines were further promoted as a means of diversifying the rural economy, and their development was enhanced by the devolution of economic management to individual families, price adjustments, and the development of free markets.

Domestic sidelines have thus taken on a new role in the rural economy, and perceptions of them have changed. As Philip Huang has written,

It is interesting to note how the term "sidelines" is taking on new connotations. Rural cadres today boast about the climbing share of sidelines and industry in total rural output. For them a "sideline" is no longer a low return activity that is secondary to agriculture, but a pursuit that, like industry ranks above crop planting (Huang, Philip 1990, p.218).

Since about 1984, the term 'domestic sidelines' itself has increasingly been displaced in the media by the term 'the courtyard economy' (*xiao yuan jingji* or *tingyuan jingji*). The two terms do not refer to exactly the same activities, however. The latter term is used in reference to vegetable and fruit growing, animal husbandry, handicraft production and services (including commerce and small-scale tourism) undertaken in the home or courtyard, but does not usually include hunting, fishing or gathering (Zhang Ruihua 1987, p.65). The significance of the change of name is two-fold. Firstly, the new term stresses the physical location of certain activities in the home or courtyard. Secondly, it removes the sense that such activities are less important than collectively organised activities. By giving them the title 'economy', the state has accorded these activities with a greater value than was perhaps possible using the older term 'domestic sidelines', given the connotations of the latter, as outlined above.

Enthusiasm for domestic sidelines and the courtyard economy is part of a general enthusiasm for commercialisation and industrialisation in the rural economy. In this respect, the courtyard economy is seen as belonging to the same category as more specialised, larger-scale and more capitalised forms of rural industry. Part of the importance of the courtyard economy for the state is that it is seen as being transitional to, and acting as a springboard for, developing these other more capitalised forms of production. And indeed, as will be discussed in the second section of this

chapter, it is the case, for example, that many specialised households started off engaging in agriculture and sidelines and then, finding the sidelines to be more profitable, made these their main form of production.

However, the courtyard economy is important to the state not only as a transitional stage on the way toward more capitalised development. It is also valued, in its own right, as a set of subsidiary occupations existing in between primary agriculture and industry, that requires little capital investment and can make use of 'surplus' or 'auxiliary' labour, time and resources, to produce goods at very low cost.

Two examples may help to illustrate the role which the state sees domestic sidelines and the courtyard economy as playing. In an article published in 1986 the head of the Rural Policy Research Office of the Central Committee Secretariat stressed the importance of small-scale, family based animal husbandry, crop planting, handicrafts, sewing and services as sources of employment for surplus labour. He stressed, in particular, the importance of such work for the numerous women who are 'clever and dextrous', yet underemployed (ZGFNB 18 August 1986).

Another article published in 1988 claimed that in Pingyuan County, Shandong, 100,000 women participated in the courtyard economy. It said that

in rural commodity production the county government found that because of women's physiological, psychological and biological characteristics, their abilities were not being given full play. In order that this group might also contribute to commodity production, the county government called on women to develop the courtyard economy, this being particularly suited to their special characteristics (NMRB 17 May 1988).

The article does not explain the features of the courtyard economy that make it 'particularly suited to (women's) special characteristics'. The usual meaning attributed to this phrase, however, is that the work is 'light' or not as physically demanding as other work, and/or that it is related in some way to women's roles as mothers and domestic workers.

That it is recommended as an area of work particularly suited to women is, I would argue, an integral aspect of the state's encouragement of the courtyard economy. This is partly related to the fact that, as discussed in the previous chapter, the problem of surplus agricultural labour is chiefly a problem of *female* surplus labour. Thus, the courtyard economy has been encouraged by the state, in part, as a way of relieving unemployment and discontent amongst women who have lost their jobs in agriculture.²

More recently, and in particular in more developed areas, where a large shift of labour into non-agricultural

² This is not to say, however, that the development of the courtyard economy has been solely an initiative of the state or of local-level leadership. Indeed, reports suggest that in some places in the late 1970s and early 1980s (when qualms were still held about the expansion of the private sector), official support for the courtyard economy came only after considerable pressure was exerted by women who had no alternative form of employment (ZGFN March 1979, p.5).

occupations has occurred, the courtyard economy has served to boost the incomes of women 'left behind' in agriculture and domestic work. This has, in turn, both helped to keep agricultural production going and to relieve pressure on the state and collective sector to provide non-agricultural employment.

From the state's point of view there are further advantages of the courtyard economy which relate to its particular relationship to other parts of the economy, to its 'subsidiary' nature, and its location, both physically and conceptually in an 'inside' sphere.

In some cases the 'subsidiary' aspect of the courtyard economy means that women are relatively more keen to undertake the production of specialist commodities that other business people and enterprises avoid because of the high risks involved. Production in the courtyard economy can prove very lucrative in the short term, but in general, no one line of production in this sector is highly profitable for very long. As Philip Huang explains,

When there is a demand for some unfamiliar product, only a few pioneers turn to it, demand exceeds supply, and prices are high, enough to make the activity more worthwhile than farming. The relatively high returns, however, quickly attract more producers, and sooner or later prices are pressed downward. When prices drop below what peasants will tolerate for spare time work, they simply stop producing the item until the market recovers. To judge by the examples of crocheting, rabbit raising and earthworm gathering, despite the rather violent swings that seem to characterise the specialty market, the farm household production unit is able to adapt readily to the changes. The shocks are cushioned by the fact that the

production is only a sideline, so that the household can move out of the activity without devastating consequences to its fundamental livelihood. At the same time, its low-cost and spare-time nature enables the household to move back into production rapidly once the market shifts (Huang, Philip 1990, pp.217-218).

Another advantage of the courtyard economy is that it makes full use of the family's existing material resources, including building space, water and electricity (where it is available), sewing machines and other tools. In addition, the existence of women working in the courtyard economy, whilst simultaneously minding children and doing domestic work, obviates the need for larger-scale collective enterprises to provide child care facilities, and reduces the domestic workload of workers in those larger enterprises. The fact that most families retain at least one woman on the land, combining crop growing with work in the courtyard economy, also means that families produce most of their own food, and consequently, factory employers do not have to pay their peasant workers wages sufficient to cover the total cost of reproducing their labour (Potter & Potter 1991, p.331).

Finally, by subcontracting tasks to women working at home, both local and international capitalists have taken direct advantage of the old link between unproductive domestic work and domestic sidelines, and the belief that what women earn in the courtyard economy is merely a secondary addition to the primary income of the family, to keep down workers' incomes, and hence to maximise profit

(Nee & Su Sijin 1990, p.9). Indeed, anecdotal evidence suggests that a large proportion of women's work in home-based sewing, weaving and handicraft production is tied in with the rest of the economy in this way. In Ling County, Shandong, for example, one large carpet factory in the county town subcontracts work to factories at the township level. These, in turn, subcontract much of the weaving to women who work as individuals in their own homes or in small village workshops. One township enterprise I visited employed 150 women (including apprentices) in the factory, and another 350 working at home or in village workshops, on looms owned either privately or by the village (Interviews conducted in Ling County, September 1989). In Xindu County, Sichuan, 10,000 women undertake embroidery and another 10,000 women do basketwork, all in their own homes. The finished products are collected by the County Foreign Trade Company for export (Interview with members of Xindu County Women's Federation, October 1989).

Writers such as Maria Mies have shown that in India and other developing countries women's work in household-based handicraft production has been encouraged as a way of tying them into an international market economy that thrives on their exploitation. Mies' study of the lace makers of Narsapur is a good example of this. In Narsapur, Andhra Pradesh, India, poor rural Christian and Hindu women produce lace doilies at home. These are then sold through an extensive network of male agents, traders and exporters. Lace production contributes about 90 per cent of the state's

handicraft export earnings and has become very profitable for the male traders. But the women who make the lace earn appallingly low wages, and in spite of a 6-8 hour day at lace work, on top of 7 hours of other productive work and domestic work, they are not considered 'workers' but rather 'housewives'. The women originally took up lace making as a spare-time activity in order to supplement their husbands' insufficient incomes. As Mies says,

As they are defined as housewives, this production does not upset the patriarchal reproduction relations within the family and it prevents the women at the same time from demanding a just wage.

Thus,

Although the lace industry has seen several phases and changes, this basic structure of exploiting female labour, defined as non-labour, namely housework, in a process of capital accumulation, has not changed (Mies 1982, p.172).

Mies goes on to argue that

This *housewifisation*, based on older forms of sexual segregation... is the necessary precondition for the extraction of super profits from the lace workers. The domestication of women and the propagation of the ideology that women are *basically housewives* is not merely a means to keep their wages below the subsistence level but also to keep women totally atomised and disorganised as workers. From the point of view of capital accumulation, this mode of production seems to be optimal insofar as it reduces the economic and political costs of production to a minimum and allows for unrestricted maximisation of profits (Mies 1982, p.176).

As far as I know, the degree of exploitation of the lace makers of Narsapur is worse than anything yet occurring in China. Yet, the structures through which such exploitation occurs in rural India are also in place in rural China, and it is possible that in the future women working in the

Chinese courtyard economy will be exploited in the same way and to the same extent as in India. On the other hand, if rural development in China continues to expand the range of employment opportunities available to rural women, this will increase their power to demand higher incomes in the courtyard economy as well as in other sectors. Another important factor in determining the degree of exploitation of women in the courtyard economy will be the extent to which the women are able to work together to defend their interests, and the extent to which their interests are supported by the state and local government. In this regard, as I will argue shortly, the role of the Women's Federation and of successful women entrepreneurs will be of great importance.

In this chapter so far, I have suggested that the motives of the state in promoting women's work in the courtyard economy have little to do with improving the position of women and a lot more to do with making full use of a flexible and cheap source of labour. Yet, as with the 'feminisation' of agriculture, the concentration of women in the courtyard economy cannot be understood solely as the top-down manipulation or exploitation of passive women. We must also take into consideration the fact that families and women, themselves, see important benefits to working in this sector.

In the majority of rural families, one or more women are engaged in the courtyard economy, at least to the extent of raising one or two pigs and a few chickens to provide

fertiliser, eggs for home consumption and a supplementary cash income. As I have suggested, women sometimes seek more substantial work in the courtyard economy as a result of underemployment or unemployment in agriculture and the lack of alternative forms of work. In other cases, women, especially older women, choose to work in the courtyard economy as a way of supplementing their income from agriculture. The limitations on opportunities for female employment in industry are often a factor in their decision to work in these sectors (see Chapter 9).

Sometimes, however, women choose to work in the courtyard economy in preference to employment in industry. Sulamith and Jack Potter claim, for example, that in Zengbu in the early 1980s young rural women were eager to work in the factories being established as joint ventures with Hong Kong capitalists. However, where well-paying work in the courtyard economy was available it was preferred to work in a factory. In Pondsides, for example, the young women chose to work at home making bamboo sticks used in the production of fireworks, rather than work in local factories. Undertaking such work, they were able to earn more money than they could in the joint-run factories. They also said that 'we like the freedom of working at home at our own speed; if we work for ourselves we don't have to add shifts or work all night' (Potter & Potter 1991, p.321).

The benefits of the courtyard economy most commonly cited by rural women are its income earning potential, the flexibility of the work, and the autonomy it affords them.

The range of incomes that can be earned from the courtyard economy is enormous - from very little to more than half the family income in the case of specialised households. For most women, the income earned from work in the courtyard economy is a welcome supplement to the main family income, but is well below the average rural income. Thus, in 1983 a national survey of rural household income and expenditure covering 22700 rural households found that average per capita net income from domestic sidelines reached 102.8 yuan (ZGNMB 22 May 1983). This was about one-third of the average per capita net income in rural areas at that time. Other, smaller-scale surveys confirm that the average per capita net income earned in domestic sidelines or the courtyard economy amounts to roughly one-third of the average (Shanxisheng Huairenxian 1984, pp.24; NMRB 8 March 1985; NMRB 17 July 1986).³ As Delia Davin points out, 'much sideline production is monotonous, isolated, undercapitalized and, even by Chinese standards, poorly remunerated. Only exceptionally are large amounts of money made' (Davin 1988, p.140).

³ The lack of any clear definition of the category 'domestic sidelines' or 'courtyard economy', and the considerable overlap between activities undertaken in this sector and in other sectors means, however, that any statistics on the subject should be taken only as a rough guide.

A minority of women working in the courtyard economy have, however, earned very high incomes, usually by engaging in a new and novel line of production, and/or by specialising in one line of production and developing it into a specialised household or private enterprise. The successes of such women have been given a good deal of publicity. In the March 1979 edition of *ZGFN*, for example, an editorial extolling the merits of domestic sidelines was accompanied by an article about an elderly woman whose income from selling fur from rabbits that she had raised at home amounted to 530 *yuan* in 1978, which was enough to buy four months worth of grain for her eleven family members when the harvest failed, to buy the family's condiments, and to pay for the children's education expenses that year (Huang Shuqing 1979, pp.8-9).

It is, in part, examples such as these that attract women to the courtyard economy. Discussions with peasant women, and reports in the media, suggest, however, that two other equally important factors drawing women to work in the courtyard economy are firstly, the work's flexibility - the fact that it can be done at any time and can easily be fitted in with women's domestic work - and secondly, the autonomy and control over their own time and labour that women have in this sector. This is contrasted favourably with employment in the fields under the commune system, when women's labour was managed by production team cadres, and (as the quotation about Pondsides above indicates) with employment today in township enterprises, where few women attain management

positions and female employees have little freedom or control over the production process.

These positive statements should not, however, blind us to the ways in which women's power and autonomy in the family are constrained, and may indeed have become more so as a result of a return to family farming. By shifting the management of labour allocation and income distribution from the production team back to the family, the introduction of the production responsibility system has once more strengthened the authority of the male head of the family - an authority that continues to be underpinned by women's relative insecurity in the family due to the patrilocal marriage system.

In addition, in some cases women's work in the courtyard economy has itself further reinforced men's authority. This is partly because of the strong associations between domestic sidelines and domestic work, which tends to render the former invisible. Thus, where, as in the past, women's work in the courtyard economy consists of raising a small number of domestic livestock, the strong associations between such work and domestic work, combined with the relatively low cash income from such work, may render its contribution to the family economy invisible, consequently maintaining the lower status of the women who do such work. However, with the newer and more lucrative sidelines, high income and public prestige is likely to translate into greater authority for women in the family.

Pointing to a more concrete problem of the 'inside' nature of the courtyard economy, Delia Davin has suggested that under the commune system the majority of women worked in the fields with women and men from other families, but under the new system women working in the courtyard economy have fewer opportunities to communicate with people outside their family, and hence are more vulnerable to the dictates of parents, husbands and in-laws (Davin 1988, p.138).

This is indeed true of women whose work in the courtyard economy is solely for family consumption. An important part of the reform programme has been, however, to encourage, once more, the commercialisation of production in the courtyard economy. As a result, the situation regarding women's interaction with people outside the family has become more complicated. Some women now take their produce to market and interact with numerous people there.⁴ In addition, in some cases women's work in the courtyard economy involves them negotiating loans and arranging business deals, as well as marketing. On the other hand, as mentioned, much of the work that women undertake in activities such as weaving and handicraft production is subcontracted, and in these cases women are not involved in the business side of the work, and have little interaction with people outside the family.

⁴ One study notes that in rural markets in the county towns of Heilongjiang there has recently been an increase, in both absolute terms and as a proportion of the total, in the numbers of women selling produce. In a survey of 2,803 people marketing produce it was found that 66 per cent were women (*Zhongguo Nongcun Jingji* June 1988, p.63). This is similar to the pre-1949 situation discussed in Chapter 2.

Furthermore, even where work in the courtyard economy is not subcontracted in this way, it is more common for women *not* to be involved in business transactions with non-family members. As in pre-1949 China, such activities are considered to belong to the male 'outside' sphere, and are commonly undertaken by the woman's husband, even though he may not be involved in the production itself.

In this section I have argued that the expansion of women's work in the courtyard economy since the late 1970s has occurred as a consequence of the advantages that both the state and women themselves see to work in this sector. For women, work in the courtyard economy is seen to offer the *potential* for generating substantial incomes and for providing them with a degree of autonomy and flexibility not possible in larger-scale industry. I have argued, however, that just as there is the potential for the courtyard economy to bring important benefits to women, there is also the potential for women working in this sector to be severely constrained and exploited. Both the potentially negative and positive aspects of the courtyard economy relate to its 'inside' and subsidiary nature. Thus, while the fact that the work is undertaken by women at home gives women more flexibility than employment in industry, it also leaves women vulnerable to the demands of husbands and other relatives and to exploitation by capitalists, both Chinese and foreign.

In the final section of this chapter, I will examine the activities of the Women's Federation in encouraging women in

the courtyard economy and will ask whether, or to what extent, the Federation is helping women to maximise the benefits to be gained in this sector and to minimise the potential for exploitation.

First, however, I wish to discuss the position of the small number of women entrepreneurs who have developed their activities in the courtyard economy into specialised households and private enterprises, for it appears that these women have been able to develop the potential of the courtyard economy to the full, and consequently are amongst those to have benefited most from rural reform.

Women Running Specialised Households and Private Enterprises

Private enterprises include *getihu* and *siying qiye*.⁵ *Getihu* are mainly family-based enterprises engaged in small-scale non-agricultural production, commerce and services, and employing no more than seven people. Between 1984 and 1988 the number of *getihu* registered in rural China increased from approximately 3.3 million to 16.1 million. Political insecurity resulting from the Tiananmen massacre of 1989 resulted in a small decline in the number of *getihu* registered, but by the end of 1991 numbers had increased

⁵ Not mentioned here are 'joint household enterprises' (*lianheti*), which are non-agricultural enterprises run jointly by two or more families. In 1991 there were approximately 849,000 such enterprises registered across China (*Zhongguo Xiangzhenqiye Nianjian*, 1992, p.137).

again to about 16.8 million (*Zhongguo Xiangzhenqiye Nianjian*, 1992, p.137).⁶ *Siying qiye*, formally recognised only since 1988, are non-agricultural enterprises that employ eight or more people and can include hundreds of employees. Some originated as *getihu* and then expanded. Others were collectively owned enterprises that were taken over by individuals. Most are engaged in industry, mining, transport or construction. In 1988 the Bureau of Industry and Commerce estimated that there were 225,000 *siying qiye* across urban and rural China (Young 1991, pp.117-119).⁷

Specialised households (*zhuanyehu*) are high-earning rural households which derive most of their income from just one area of production or services, whether it be agricultural or non-agricultural. One report claimed that in 1984 there were 10 million specialised households in China (Zhou Qiren & Du Ying 1984, p.65). With a tightening of standards, estimations of the number of specialised households were,

⁶ Both these statistics and subsequent ones referring to *siying qiye* and specialised households should be taken only as rough indications of the real situation. Because of the political insecurity of the private sector for much of the 1980s, *getihu* have sometimes avoided registration, or have falsely registered as collectives or as specialised households. Consequently, the statistics are likely to under-represent the number of *getihu*. At the same time, however, these statistics are likely to have been boosted by the inclusion of non-agricultural specialised households. Statistics that I collected from county Township Enterprise Bureaux in Sichuan in 1989 included non-agricultural specialised households as private enterprises. It is not clear, however, whether this is also the case for the national statistics cited here.

⁷ The majority of these, however, had been falsely registered as *getihu*, as joint household or joint-share enterprises, or as collectives (Young 1991, p.118).

however, subsequently revised downwards. A report published in 1988 estimated that there were approximately 4 million specialised households (SWB 5 October 1988).⁸

Amongst the women involved in running agricultural specialised households that I interviewed in 1989, one was engaged in grain production (see Appendix 1, family no.4) one in growing medicinal fungi (no.5) and one in growing bonsai and flowers (no.38). One woman was involved in raising cows (no.6), two raised pigs (no.1 & 2) and four raised chickens (no.29, 35, 36 & 43). The women involved in non-agricultural specialised households or private businesses included three involved in some form of food processing (no.7, 52 & 53), two involved in running hotels (no.8 & 25), two who ran tailoring schools (no.37 & 57), one who ran a grocery shop and

⁸ This figure is also likely to be inflated, however. In 1985 the State Bureau of Statistics stipulated in 1985 that specialised households must conform to the following criteria: (1) At least 60 per cent of the household's labour time must be devoted to specialised production or marketing. (2) At least 60 per cent of the household's income must be derived from the specialised line of production. (3) At least 80 per cent of specialised products or services must be for sale (except for grain-producing households, for which the commodity rate is set at a minimum of 60 per cent) (4) The income the household derives from selling its specialised product or service must be at least double the average income from sales earned by local non-specialised households (*Jingjixue Wenzhai* January 1986, p.59). Considerable regional variations in the standards set for specialised households nevertheless persist. Another factor contributing to statistical inaccuracies is the false registration of some ventures as specialised households. This occurs largely because, although in practice they function in the same way as *getihu*, specialised households are commonly seen as specialisations of the collective economy. As such, through the 1980s they were more politically secure than *getihu*. They were also more often given preferential treatment by local governments, for example with respect to credit and the supply of raw materials.

recreation room (no.56), one who ran a business machine-knitting jumpers (no.32) and two who undertook sewing (no.3 & 30).

Unfortunately, little survey data is available on the characteristics of the people running private enterprises in rural areas. Therefore, the following discussion is limited to the women who run specialised households. It is likely, however, that much of this discussion could apply equally well to women running *getihu*, since the distinction between non-agricultural specialised households and *getihu* is largely only an administrative one, with little significance in practice (see Note 8). It should be noted, however, that given the more general patterns discussed in Chapter 7, according to which men are the first to move into non-agricultural occupations whilst women remain working in agriculture and domestic sidelines, it is likely that the proportion of women running non-agricultural specialised households and *getihu* is lower than the proportion of women running agricultural specialised households. It is also likely that there are considerably fewer women running large *siying qiye* than smaller private enterprises, firstly, because the former requires greater accounting and management skills, in which women are disadvantaged because of their lower education levels (see Chapter 5). Secondly, the managers of larger enterprises are also more dependent on political contacts to ensure such things as security, the supply of inputs, and sales outlets. In this, women are again disadvantaged by their marginalisation in local

politics (see Chapter 5). Finally, women are less likely to manage large enterprises, employing non-family members, because of a still powerful cultural resistance against women leading, or having authority over, men outside the family sphere.

According to an investigation carried out by the Women's Federation in fourteen regions across China, specialised households run by women (*funu wei zhu de zhuanyehu*) comprise 35 to 40 per cent of all specialised households and in some developed regions the figure is as high as 55 per cent (*RMRB* 31 October 1986).⁹

County officials told me in 1989 that the proportion of specialised households run by women was highest amongst those engaged in animal husbandry. For example, as illustrated in Table 8, in Huairou County, Beijing, there were no women running specialised households in transport, but 67 per cent of specialised households engaged in animal husbandry were run by women (in absolute terms, however, most women running specialised households in this county were engaged in processing).

⁹ In comparison, another large-scale study undertaken by a team of American economists in 1988 found that women constituted only 21 per cent of owners of private enterprises (Khan 1992, p.1042).

Table 8: Specialised Households in Huairou County, Beijing

Speciality	No. of households	% Run by Women	Average Net Income (Yuan/Year)
Crop growing	612	36	1700
Animal husbandry	1200	67	1800
Forestry	n.a.	n.a.	2000
Commerce	500	57	1800
Processing	5633	45	2600
Transport	n.a.	0	2800

n.a. = not available.

Source: Interview with members of the Huairou County Agricultural Work Department and the Huairou County Women's Federation, September 1989.

In comparison with the tiny proportion of collective industries with women in management positions (see Chapter 9), the proportion of specialised households run by women is high. This may be because firstly, specialised households are family-based and usually employ no more than a few non-family members, if any. A woman running a specialised household is, therefore, more acceptable in terms of the view that women's work should be confined to the 'inside' sphere. Secondly, the majority of specialised households have evolved from domestic sideline production, which, as we have seen, is

dominated by women.¹⁰ The fact that there are not more women running specialised households suggests, however, that once a woman's activities in the courtyard economy reach a certain scale and become more profitable than other productive activities available to the family, their management is often taken over by the male head of the family.

In an investigation of 403 specialised households run by women conducted in Huairou County, Beijing, in 1988 it was found that 65 per cent of the women earned incomes higher than their husbands and in 80 per cent of the households the women managed all financial matters (Interview with head of Huairou County Women's Federation, 6 September 1989). Other examples cited in the media show women running specialised households in control of most aspects of the production process, including contracting with other bodies, taking out loans and being responsible for investments and the sale of produce. In addition, some women running specialised

¹⁰ In the early 1980s, a distinction was commonly made in the Chinese literature between two categories of specialised households, according to the ways in which they had evolved. 'Contract' specialised households (*chengbao zhuanyehu*) were those that contracted specific production tasks from their production team. In most cases, the work contracted was in agriculture. 'Self managed' specialised households (*ziying zhuanyehu*) were those that had started out as households that contracted land and at the same time undertook domestic sidelines. Then, finding the 'sidelines' to be most profitable they concentrated on turning them into their major line of production (Zhou Qiren & Du Ying 1984, pp.50-52). According to a number of reports, in the early to mid-1980s the latter type of specialised household clearly outnumbered the former (Conroy 1984, p.21; Song Linfei 1984, p.118). They engaged primarily in animal husbandry and handicraft production. More recently, however, specialised households have also engaged in other activities such as cash crop production, catering and transport (Conroy 1984, p.15).

households achieve positions of considerable status in their village by employing other people, by teaching others their skills or by helping them to set up their own businesses, and by joining the Party or receiving 'labour model' status (Jilinsheng Fulian Xuanjiaobu 1984, pp.14-15; ZGFN May 1986, p.12; NMRB 12 June 1986).

It might be supposed then, that women running specialised households have a high degree of authority in their own family, and that they are also breaking down the inside/outside division of labour, or, to put it another way, that they are successfully using their work in the 'inside' courtyard economy as a launching pad from which to enter the 'outside' male preserve of business and of public prestige.

There are a number of caveats to be made to this proposition, however. In the first place, there are considerable variations in meaning attached to the term 'running a specialised household' and in the powers and responsibilities a woman in this position has. Thus, some of the women running specialised households that I interviewed did seem to be in control of their line of production. Others, however, did most of the work and it was they who had the technical skills required, for example, to raise chickens, but their husband was also involved in the venture, and, in keeping with the traditional inside/outside gender division of labour, it was he who arranged loans, signed contracts, sought business, and in general was the family representative to the outside world. In Jinniu County an official that I

interviewed in the Township Enterprise Bureau confirmed that in the private sector generally, it is common for men to do the 'outside' work; that is buying, selling and making business deals. Women often sell goods in the market, but where produce is sold to a company, or in cases where business negotiations are involved, this task is undertaken by men. The reason this official gave for such a division of labour was that 'women can't smoke or drink, so they can't discuss business' (Interview, October 1989).

Researchers in Chengdu told me that in other cases where the husband works in another line of business the fact that a woman runs a specialised household tells one very little about her status, for the man might still be the household's business representative and major decision maker. It does not even necessarily mean that her income is higher than her husband's. Often specialised households are defined locally in terms of a standard of output. For example, 5,000 chickens might be the standard set for a chicken-raising specialised household, but in any one household the income from this number of chickens might in fact be less than the man's income in another line of production (Interviews with Ran Moying, Research Office of the Sichuan Provincial Women's Federation, and Li Dongshan, Institute of Sociology, Sichuan Academy of Social Sciences, October 1989).

It must also be recognised that the people who run specialised households are a privileged minority among peasants. Such people are commonly set apart from others by

a number of characteristics. Their families tend, first of all, to be larger and to contain more able-bodied labourers than the average, allowing for the greater and more efficient deployment of family labour, and reducing the need to hire outside workers. As mentioned in Chapter 4, a survey conducted in rural Sichuan found, for example, that specialised households contained, on average, 6.1 members, whilst other rural households contained an average of only 4.5 people. Amongst the specialised households only 10.9 per cent contained fewer than two able-bodied labourers, whilst 56.9 per cent included more than three. In contrast, 31.6 per cent of ordinary rural households contained less than 3 able-bodied labourers, and only 8.5 per cent contained more than 3 (Zhao Xishun 1988, pp.67-68).

People who run specialised households also tend to have above average levels of education. In the Sichuan survey just cited, it was found that in most specialised households, members had received an average education of between 4 and 6 years (i.e., primary or junior secondary level). This compares with an average education of between 0 and 4 years amongst members of ordinary rural households (Zhao Xishun 1988, p.73). Similarly, an investigation of 212 specialised households run by women in Huaide County, Jilin Province, found that 38 per cent of the women had junior or senior secondary school education and 95 per cent had upper primary school education. Among all women in the county aged 18 to 45, however, 57 per cent were illiterate or had junior

primary school education (Jilinsheng Fulian Xuanjiaobu 1984, p.14).

Lack of education is likely to limit any increase in the number of women running specialised households, both in terms of absolute numbers and as a proportion of the total. As discussed in Chapter 5, approximately 70 per cent of all illiterates are women, and drop out rates amongst girls in rural primary and secondary schools are high.

Last, but by no means least, many of the people who run specialised households are able to do so because they have contacts with cadres who give them preferential treatment in terms of securing credit and arranging contracts, for example, or because they themselves are cadres. Thus, in a survey of over 20,000 specialised households conducted in 1984, it was found that 43 per cent were run by production brigade or team leaders, or former cadres¹¹ (*Beijing Review* no.9, 1984, p.18, quoted in Conroy 1984, p.23).

To conclude this section, some rural women have been able to greatly increase their incomes and their authority, both in the family and in the 'outside' sphere, by expanding their activities into specialised households and private

¹¹ Of the remainder, 42 per cent were run by educated youth or demobilised soldiers, 9 per cent were run by 'skilled peasants', 5 per cent were run by 'talented people' (i.e., people formerly accused of being 'capitalist-roaders') and 1 per cent were run by people 'engaged in illegal activities' (*Beijing Review* no.9, 1984, p.18, quoted in Conroy 1984, p.23).

enterprises. The proportion of such ventures run by women is larger than in collective industry. However, it must be recognised that in some cases in which it is claimed that a woman runs a specialised household, it is in fact her husband or another male relative who is in charge of the business side of the enterprise, whilst the woman does most of the production work. Furthermore, women managers of specialised households and private enterprises are an elite minority. There are formidable obstacles to a woman developing her courtyard activities into a more specialised business, and even when she does, once the business develops to a certain size and becomes particularly profitable, it is often taken over by the male head of the family.

Development of the Courtyard Economy as a Strategy for Improving the Position of Rural Women

In light of the somewhat ambivalent picture drawn here of women's work in the courtyard economy and as managers of specialised households and private enterprises, what are we to make of the Women's Federation's efforts to support and encourage women in these areas, and the centrality of such efforts to the Federation's work with rural women?

As discussed in Chapter 5, a large proportion of the Women's Federation's work in rural China takes the form of short-term classes designed to provide women with technical skills for use in the courtyard economy. The Federation also helps

women in the courtyard economy and those running specialised households and private enterprises by providing legal advice, helping to arrange bank loans, and assisting with the supply of raw materials and the sale of produce.

The Federation justifies this focus in terms of both the overall importance of developing the commodity economy and of the advantages for women that it perceives in this sector. For example, in an article published in 1984, one county Women's Federation in Shanxi province explained that it became involved in promoting the courtyard economy in response to the large numbers of women surplus to the needs of agriculture, with no alternative employment, and upon observing that some women had become wealthy by working in the courtyard economy. It cited the following advantages to work in this sector: first, the work is flexible, and can be accommodated with women's domestic work responsibilities. Second, it arouses women's enthusiasm for studying science and technology and trains a large number of women managers. Third, it provides women with an income and hence raises their economic status and helps to protect their legal rights; and finally, it advances the development of the commodity economy (Shanxisheng Huairenxian Fulian 1984, pp.24-25).

In Shanxi, this article implies, the courtyard economy was encouraged by the Women's Federation in a context in which large numbers of women were unemployed or underemployed and had no income. In this context, I would argue, support for

women in developing the courtyard economy is indeed an initially expedient way of providing women with an income and hence of improving their status and self respect.

Yet women are being encouraged to develop the courtyard economy, not just in the poorer, less developed parts of rural China where there are few alternatives for employment, but also in the most economically developed regions. The question here becomes, does work in the courtyard economy enhance women's opportunities for income generation, personal development and status improvement, in a way that is comparable with work in other areas of the economy, or is the encouragement of women in this sector merely supporting a marginalisation and exploitation of women in a 'dead-end' part of the economy? In considering this question it is worth reflecting both on Maria Mies' discussion of 'housewifisation' and on Ester Boserup's statement that

some developing countries... have programmes for training women in crafts and home industries. Where women live in seclusion, to teach them a craft which they can do at home may be the only possible first step towards bringing them into the labour market. Thus, training in hand spinning in India, and in embroidery in Tunisia, may help towards the eventual abandonment of seclusion. But the effect of offering this kind of training to women who do not live in seclusion may be to drag them into low-productivity jobs rather than to help them to find more productive and remunerative employment. Indeed, the training in crafts and home industries is frequently offered to women as a sort of compensation for the refusal to give them jobs in the modern sector and as a deliberate method of reducing the number of women competing with men for employment in the modern sector (Boserup 1970, p.221).

On the other hand, in China, as we have seen, the courtyard economy is a dynamic and growing aspect of the rural economy, which provides the potential, at least, for earning high incomes and improving one's authority and status in the family and in the wider society. Furthermore, echoing claims made by peasant women themselves, Women's Federation officials point out that the most attractive alternative to work in the courtyard economy generally available to rural women, that is employment in larger-scale rural industry, offers them less autonomy and scope for self-development than the courtyard economy, and management of such industries is overwhelmingly male (Judd 1990a, p.37).

In light of these factors, I would suggest that in China, support for women in the courtyard economy *is* a viable strategy for enhancing women's social and economic position. I would nevertheless argue that such support cannot be effective without including certain elements.

First of all, in view of the fact that the market for goods from the courtyard economy is constantly in flux and no one line of production in this sector seems to be highly profitable for very long, what is most required in terms of training for the courtyard economy is basic literacy and numeracy, a grounding in generally applicable technical skills, and some knowledge of accounting and of the workings of the market. These are also the types of skills that will enable women either to move out of the courtyard economy if

it ceases to be a viable form of production or to move onto something bigger and better.

Second, in order to avoid exploitation and to help women retain control over their labour and the products of their labour, some training in legal matters and management skills is also required. As I have suggested, there is a further need for women working in this sector to be organised to defend their interests, and for support from the state to protect them against excessive exploitation, for example by subcontractors.

Looking then, at the efforts of the Women's Federation to support women in the courtyard economy, I would argue that in terms of training, there needs to be a shift away from the current emphasis on short-term classes in specialised technical skills, and more effort directed at improving basic education and developing skills in accounting and management.

The prevention of exploitation is not a major focus of the Women's Federation's current work in the courtyard economy. Nevertheless, the Federation does play a useful role in liaising with other bodies, for example, local government, banks and contractors, on women's behalf. It also encourages solidarity amongst women in the courtyard economy by organising meetings for women in this sector to exchange their experiences and by urging successful women entrepreneurs to pass on their skills and lend support to other women starting up ventures in the courtyard economy

(Shanxisheng Hairenxian Fulian 1984, pp.25-26). Finally, although it has few resources, and its reputation amongst women is poor, the Women's Federation has shown in recent years that it can act as an important lobby group to defend women against the worst forms of exploitation, discrimination and abuse.¹²

Conclusion

I began this chapter with a discussion of domestic sidelines and the courtyard economy as areas of production generally characterised as 'light' work belonging to the 'inside' sphere, as subsidiary to other productive activities, and as particularly suited to women. These characterisations have, I argued, been integral to the state's encouragement of the courtyard economy in the 1980s and 1990s. Thus, the characterisation of the courtyard economy as 'light', 'inside' work, particularly suitable for women, has been important in the use of the courtyard economy for the absorption of the mostly female surplus labour from agriculture. In addition, its 'inside' and 'subsidiary' nature has meant that production in the courtyard economy has required little investment from the state and employers, and women have been willing to undertake work in this sector that is most commonly either poorly paid, or is highly profitable

¹² An important example is the Federation's campaign against calls for women to 'return to the kitchen' to relieve employment pressures in state-run industries. See Jacka 1990b.

for only a brief period. From one perspective, then, the characterisations of the courtyard economy as 'light', 'inside', 'subsidiary' work suitable for women have been manipulated by the state in order to exploit women's labour. From this perspective, the Women's Federation's encouragement of women's work in the courtyard economy looks like either co-optation or an attempt to make the best of a rather gloomy situation.

At the same time, however, its 'inside' nature means that there are certain important advantages for women to work in the courtyard economy. Most importantly, the work is flexible and allows for a degree of autonomy not possible in larger-scale industry. Furthermore, some women entrepreneurs have been able to expand their activities in the courtyard economy into specialised households and private enterprises, earning substantial incomes and gaining authority and prestige, both in the family and in the 'outside', 'male' sphere of business, in the process.

In view of this more positive perspective on the courtyard economy, I have argued that the Women's Federation's encouragement of women in this sector could well be a viable strategy for improving the social and economic position of rural women. This is, however, on condition that measures be taken to protect women working in the courtyard economy from exploitation, and that women are given a broad education covering literacy, numeracy, a range of basic technical skills, and skills in accounting, legal matters and business

management. This would enable them to make the most of the potential benefits of work in the courtyard economy, while at the same time not limiting them to this area of employment.

CHAPTER 9: INDUSTRY

Introduction

The focus of this thesis so far has been on the construction and legitimation of gender divisions of labour in which the majority of rural women are concentrated in the home and on the farm. As has been indicated, relatively few women, compared with men, are employed in non-agricultural work off the farm. Such work is, however, becoming an increasingly important source of employment for women, especially young unmarried women, as the economy develops.

This chapter, then, discusses rural women's work in off-farm non-agricultural employment. It is divided into four sections. The first section discusses the overall development of rural off-farm non-agricultural employment in the post-Mao period, and the second section examines the gender divisions of labour apparent in this area of work. The third and fourth sections discuss the ways in which these gender divisions of labour shape rural women's experience of non-agricultural employment, in urban industries and services, and in rural township enterprises, respectively.

The Development of Rural Off-farm Non-agricultural Employment

As mentioned in Chapter 3, moves toward a new rural development strategy made by the CCP at the end of the 1970s included encouragement of greater investment in rural

industry.¹ In December 1978 the Third Plenum of the Eleventh Central Committee of the CCP published a 'Decision on some problems in accelerating the development of agriculture' in which it was declared that 'commune and brigade enterprises should strive for great development' and that

as long as it is in conformity with the principle of rational economic development, commune and brigade enterprises should gradually engage in the processing of all farm and sideline products that are suitable for rural processing. Urban factories should shift part of their processing of products and parts and components that are suitable for rural processing to commune and brigade enterprises and help equip the latter with necessary equipment and technology... In addition, the state should adopt a policy of allowing tax breaks or tax exemptions for commune and brigade enterprises in light of their situation (quoted in Byrd & Lin Qingsong 1990, p.10).

In March 1984 the CCP, in line with the changes in administrative structures that had occurred, renamed commune and brigade enterprises township enterprises. It also urged local governments to support and encourage the development of township enterprises, including those run privately and by cooperatives (Findlay & Watson 1992, p.64-65).

Meanwhile, a number of other changes were occurring which made a shift to off-farm non-agricultural employment both feasible and attractive to peasants and local governments. Increases in the productivity of agricultural labour led to increases in peasant incomes and savings which then provided the necessary capital base with which to develop non-

¹ For discussions on the development of rural industry prior to the reforms see American Rural Small-Scale Industry Delegation 1977; Sigurdson 1977; and Rawski 1979.

agricultural ventures of various types. The increases in the productivity of agricultural labour also enabled a surplus of labour in agriculture to be drawn both into newly established local industries, and into employment in urban industry and services.

Township Enterprises

Most people drawn into off-farm non-agricultural employment work in township enterprises in their own village or in a nearby county town. 'Township enterprise' (*xiangzhen qiye*) is a term used in Chinese statistics to refer to various economic entities in rural areas and small towns operating outside the state plan. They include undertakings in all sectors of the economy, including agriculture, industry, construction, transport, commerce and services. The proportion involved in agriculture is very small however (see Table 9.1).

Table 9.1: Township Enterprise Employment, 1978-1991

Year	All Industries		Agriculture		Industry		Construction		Transport & Communications		Commerce, Catering & Services	
	Enterprises	Workers	Enterprises	Workers	Enterprises	Workers	Enterprises	Workers	Enterprises	Workers	Enterprises	Workers
	(in Millions)											
1978	1.52	28.27	0.49	6.08	0.79	17.34	0.05	2.36	0.07	1.04	0.12	1.44
1979	1.48	29.09	0.44	5.33	0.77	18.14	0.05	2.98	0.08	1.17	0.14	1.47
1980	1.42	30.00	0.38	4.56	0.76	19.42	0.05	3.35	0.09	1.14	0.15	1.53
1981	1.34	29.70	0.32	3.80	0.73	19.81	0.05	3.49	0.09	1.07	0.16	1.53
1982	1.36	31.13	0.29	3.44	0.75	20.73	0.05	4.21	0.10	1.13	0.17	1.62
1983	1.35	32.35	0.27	3.09	0.74	21.68	0.06	4.83	0.09	1.10	0.18	1.66
1984	6.07	52.08	0.25	2.84	4.81	36.56	0.08	6.83	0.13	1.29	0.79	4.55
1985	12.22	69.79	0.22	2.52	4.93	41.37	0.08	7.90	0.11	1.14	6.88	16.86
1986	15.15	79.37	0.24	2.41	6.36	47.62	0.89	12.70	2.62	5.41	5.05	11.23
1987	17.03	88.05	0.23	2.44	7.08	52.67	0.90	13.74	3.25	6.23	6.03	12.97
1988	18.88	95.45	0.23	2.50	7.74	57.03	0.96	14.85	3.73	6.84	6.23	14.23
1989	18.66	93.67	0.23	2.39	7.36	56.24	0.97	14.04	3.80	6.99	6.37	14.00
1990	18.50	92.65	0.22	2.36	7.22	55.72	0.91	13.47	3.81	7.11	6.34	13.99
1991	19.08	96.09	0.23	2.43	7.43	58.14	0.89	13.84	4.00	7.32	6.53	14.36

* Figures for the years 1978-1983 do not include private enterprises, while those for subsequent years do.

Source: Zhongguo Xiangzhenqiye Nianjian 1992, pp.134-135.

Township enterprises include both collective and private ventures. They may be run by local government at the levels of town (*zhen*), township (*xiang*), district (*qu*) and village (*cun*), or by peasants in co-operation with their village, as partnerships (*lianheti*) or as individuals (Chen Chunlai, Watson & Findlay 1990, p.2).²

As a result of economic reforms, between 1978 and 1991 the total number of township enterprises increased from about 1.5 million to about 19.1 million, and the total labour force employed in township enterprises increased by almost 68 million people, from 28.3 million in 1978 to 96.1 million in 1991 (see Table 9.1.).

The growth of township enterprises has been very uneven, both temporally and geographically, however. Thus, between 1978 and 1983 township enterprise employment grew at an annual rate of about 3 per cent, but between 1983 and 1988 it soared

² Numerous changes have occurred in recent years in the reporting of rural enterprise statistics. Until 1984 the statistics were limited to those enterprises run by communes and brigades. After 1984 the term 'township enterprise' was adopted and enterprises run co-operatively or privately were included. The statistics given in Table 9.1 originate from the Agricultural Ministry's Bureau of Township and Village Enterprises. There are some disparities between these statistics and those provided by the State Statistical Bureau in the Statistical Yearbooks. Ole Odgaard claims that the chief cause of the disparities is an underestimation by the State Statistical Bureau of the number of very small private enterprises and those involved seasonally in non-agricultural activities (Odgaard 1991, p.23).

to about 39 per cent.³ A credit squeeze imposed by the government between late 1988 and 1989 resulted in a decline in township enterprise employment of approximately 3 million people. By the end of 1991, however, the figures had once more increased to above those for 1988 (see Table 9.1).

Between 1978 and 1991 the sectoral composition of township enterprise employment also changed. In particular, the proportion of people employed in agricultural township enterprises declined, while the proportion employed in commerce and in food and service industries increased (see Table 9.1).

In geographical terms, township enterprise employment is greatest in areas around large cities and in the coastal provinces. According to a World Bank study published in 1990, in the provinces of Liaoning, Hebei (including Beijing and Tianjin), Shandong, Jiangsu (including Shanghai), Zhejiang, Guangdong, and Shanxi, where township enterprises are most developed, the rural labour force accounts for about 38 per cent of the national total, but township enterprise employment makes up about 57 per cent of national township enterprise employment. In the provinces of Henan, Hubei, Fujian, Jiangxi, Hunan, Anhui, Shaanxi, Heilongjiang, Jilin and Sichuan, the rural labour force accounts for 46.1 per

³ The change in statistics in 1984 meant that private enterprises that had developed in previous years were counted for the first time. Consequently, the actual increase in growth rate for the period 1983-1988 may have been exaggerated.

cent of the national total and the labour force in township enterprises comprises 40.7 per cent of the national total. In the provinces where township enterprises are least developed, that is, Nei Monggol, Ningxia, Gansu, Qinghai, Xinjiang, Guangxi, Yunnan, Guizhou, and Xizang, the rural labour force accounts for 16.2 per cent of the total, while the township enterprise labour force accounts for only 8 per cent of the total (Wang Tuoyu in Byrd & Lin Qingsong 1990, p.260).

Differences in the availability of natural resources and in overall levels of economic development determine that there are marked regional differences in the type of activity undertaken by township enterprises. In the provinces where township enterprises are least developed, for example, the construction industry, which, incidentally, employs few women, is more dominant than in other regions. In areas with a relatively well developed township enterprise sector, on the other hand, a larger proportion of enterprises are engaged in industrial production (Wang Tuoyu in Byrd & Lin Qingsong 1990, p.261). Finally, there are also regional differences in the composition of the industrial sector of township enterprises, such that generally speaking, light industries, which employ larger proportions of women, become more dominant as one moves from the northwest to the coastal areas in the southeast (Wang Tuoyu in Byrd & Lin Qingsong 1990, pp.260-261).

Employment in Urban Areas

In addition to the growth in local township enterprise employment, the 1980s and 1990s have also seen a far greater movement of rural labour into towns and cities and between regions than previously. Moves toward a more decentralised and market-oriented economy have created pressures for increased labour mobility and flexibility among both employers and rural inhabitants seeking work. For example, the implementation of a type of 'responsibility system' in the urban state sector, involving contracts for managers linked to enterprise profitability has led to pressure on managers to employ rural residents as contract workers (*hetong gong*) or temporary workers (*linshi gong*) since such workers can be hired more cheaply, can be made to work in conditions that urban workers will not tolerate, and can be more readily retrenched than the latter.⁴ Employers of foreign and joint-venture enterprises, encouraged as part of China's new 'open door' policy to set up in the Special Economic Zones of South China, have also found rural

⁴ Contract employment was introduced in state-run urban industries in the mid-1980s. Under this system workers are no longer guaranteed life-long employment. They are employed on contracts of usually a few years duration. The contracts stipulate conditions of employment, welfare benefits, company rules etc. Contracts for rural workers, however, differ from those for urban workers. In Hangzhou, for example, rural contract workers are not entitled to the unemployment insurance and superannuation (*yang lao baoxian*) payments made to urban contract workers (Zhejiang Province Economics Society 1989, p.2). Temporary workers are hired without a contract, for anything between a day and a number of years. They have no security of employment and are entitled to none of the bonuses or housing, education or welfare benefits accorded permanent and contract workers.

temporary workers to be a particularly cheap and convenient source of labour.⁵

Meanwhile, rural residents are attracted to such employment because the wages are still higher than what can usually be earned in agriculture. Large numbers of peasants have also been flooding into cities to sell their produce or to engage in other forms of business. Peasants moving from rural to urban areas, or between urban areas, form the majority of what is known as the 'floating population' (*liudong renkou*), that is, people who do not live in their place of registration. They continue to be registered as rural residents, but come into the cities either on temporary work permits or illegally. They are able to manage in the cities because they can now buy grain and other goods on the free market, and so are not as limited by their rural registration as they would have been previously.

In 1987 the floating population numbered roughly 1.2 million people in Beijing, or 22 per cent of that city's permanent population. In Guangzhou they numbered 880,000 or 33 per cent of the city's permanent population, and in Chengdu, 530,000 people, or 25 per cent of the permanent population (Guo Furen 1990, p.8).⁶ Tightened restrictions on rural-

⁵ Four Special Economic Zones, Shenzhen, Zhuhai, Shantou and Xiamen, were set up in 1979. In 1988 Hainan island was also declared a Special Economic Zone (Ng 1989, pp.445-446).

⁶ The figures cited in this study should be taken as conservative estimates only, since they do not include people entering the cities illegally.

urban migration following the Tiananmen massacre of 1989 resulted in a temporary decline in the size of the floating population. In Chengdu in 1989 the floating population numbered approximately 426,000. Of these, some 73 per cent had come on business or for employment. The single most important occupation into which they were employed was construction, which alone hired about 63,000 people, almost all of them men. Roughly 69 per cent of the floating population were peasants. Approximately 35 per cent were women, and those aged between 18 and 35 comprised about 59 per cent of the total (Guo Furen 1990, Appendix).

Gender Divisions of Labour in Off-Farm Non-agricultural Employment

In Chapters 7 and 8 I argued that changing interpretations of gendered dichotomies between 'inside' and 'outside', 'light' and 'heavy' and 'manual' and 'technical', have been central in the creation of a new set of assumptions in which agriculture and the courtyard economy are considered to be women's work, whilst women's lower rates of off-farm non-agricultural employment are seen as natural. Equally importantly, however, within the sphere of off-farm non-agricultural employment, similar assumptions have also contributed to major differences between the work patterns of women and men. Thus, the majority of women in off-farm non-agricultural employment either work in local industries close to home, or where they work away from home it is only for a

few years at most.⁷ Furthermore, while men tend to be involved in heavy industry, construction or transport work, women are concentrated in light industry and in employment which is seen as a flow-on from their domestic roles as wives and mothers (for example, as nannies or in other service occupations). And finally, within particular industries women are concentrated in the most 'unskilled', poorly paid areas of work.

Township Enterprises

Nationally, women form somewhere between 30 and 40 per cent of the labour force employed in township enterprises (NMRB 27 November 1986; RMRB 31 October 1986; Quanguo Fulian Quanyibu Shengchan Fulichu 1988, pp.6-7; Duan Daohuai et al. 1988). However, in light industry and in commerce, catering and services, the proportion of women is somewhat higher. One report estimates, for example, that in Guangdong 90 per cent of the labour force working in township enterprises engaged in wool spinning, clothes making, handicrafts, toys and electronics are women (RMRB 31 October 1986). A survey of 90 township enterprises in Zhejiang, Hebei and Shaanxi, conducted in 1991 by the Rural Development Research Institute of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and the Chinese Economy Research Unit at the University of Adelaide (hereafter RDRI/CERU), found that women comprised 64 per cent

⁷ Men working away from home are also usually 'temporary' workers but in contrast to most women they might spend several years moving from one temporary position to another, only very occasionally returning home.

of workers in textiles, but only 20 per cent in other industries (Wu 1993, p.3).

Tables 9.2 and Appendix 2 show the number of women employed in the township enterprises in the counties in Beijing, Shandong and Sichuan that I visited in 1989. The proportion of women in township enterprise employment ranged from 22.8 per cent in Wenjiang County, Sichuan, to 50.0 per cent in Ling County, Shandong. In some individual textile enterprises, however, women comprised as much as 98 per cent of the labour force.

Table 9.2: Township Enterprise Employment in Sample Counties in Beijing, Shandong and Sichuan

County	No. of Township Enterprises	No. of Township Enterprise Workers	% of Female Workers in Township Enterprises	% of Rural Labour Force Employed in Township Enterprises
Huirou (b)	700	40 000	37.50	44.40
Ling	3827	32 438	50.00	n.a. (a)
Jinniu	25 828	168 675	38.50	70.00
Wenjiang	5275	22 837	22.80	19.10
Xindu	13 988	80 818	35.40	33.40
Guan	9607	50 064	24.70	21.40
Mianyang (c)	2650	30 000	46.70	n.a.

(a) n.a. = not available.

(b) All figures refer to township- and village-run enterprises only. There are 20 township-enterprises, the rest are village-run.

(c) Enterprise numbers include all township enterprises, but worker numbers refer only to those in township- and village-run enterprises.

Agricultural township enterprise employment figures are included in this table. By county they are as follows: Huairou n.a; Ling 28 ent, 354 workers; Jinniu 5 ent, 116 workers; Wenjiang 40 ent, 381 workers; Xindu 29 ent, 302 workers; Guan 54 ent, 485 workers; Mianyang n.a.

Sources: Interviews with representatives of the Township Enterprise Bureau in each county, September-December 1989. Figures for Jinniu & Wenjiang checked with those in Jiang Xuegui 1989, pp.69-92, 138-143, 626, 639.

The majority of women working in township enterprises are fairly young. Duan Daohuai and co-authors claim that nationally 60 per cent of the women working in township enterprises (of all types, including private enterprises and non-agricultural specialised households) are aged between 18 and 25, 30 per cent are aged between 26 and 36 and 10 per cent are more than 36 years old (Duan Daohuai et al. 1988, p.84). The 1991 RDRI/CERU survey mentioned above found that 65.6 per cent of female employees in township enterprises were aged between 17 and 29, and 24.7 per cent were aged between 30 and 39 (Wu 1993, Table 6.4).⁸

Because of assumptions that they are responsible for agriculture and domestic work, it is generally considered that for women, and especially married women with children, employment in a local township enterprise is a far more viable proposition than work away from home. As Duan Daohuai et al. argue,

⁸ The survey found that the female labour force in township enterprises was on average younger than both the male labour force in township enterprises and the total working-age population. 55.2 per cent of male employees in township enterprises were aged between 17 and 29, and 25.4 per cent were aged between 30 and 39. In the national labour force, 43.4 per cent were aged between 17 and 29, whilst 25.7 were aged between 30 and 39 (Wu 1993, pp.7-9 & Table 6.4). It should be noted that none of these figures take into account child labour, which, however, has been substantial in the 1980s and early 1990s. Surveys from Hebei Province suggest, for example, that child labour makes up 10 per cent of the labour force in some counties (*Liaowang* [Overseas edition], no.24, 1988, cited in Odgaard 1992, p.170).

the advantage for women workers with rural enterprises in their hometown is that they are able to adjust their working hours in the factory to suit the seasonality of farmwork. They are also able to work on the farms after their shift in the factory. In addition, the daily life of their families is not significantly affected as would be the case if rural-urban migration occurred (Duan Daohuai et al. 1988, p.84).

In at least some places, however, women's employment in township- and village-run enterprises also terminates after either marriage or childbirth. I was told, for example, that in Ling County only 20 per cent of female workers of township- and village-run enterprises return to their factory after the birth of their child. In one cloth shoe factory in this county the women's representative told me that although they do not wish to, most women give up their factory job after their child is born. They find it too hard to look after a baby and keep working in the factory at the same time, so instead they do agricultural work. In a township-run carpet factory employing almost all women the pattern was that young women worked in the factory until marriage, whereupon they took up carpet weaving as a form of outwork in their own home.

In these cases it appears that the withdrawal of older women from employment in township enterprises relates to the difficulties of combining such employment with child care and other domestic work duties. Ellen Judd suggests, however, that such a pattern also relates to the patrilocal, exogamous marriage system. Judd found that in Qianrulin Village, Weifang Prefecture, Shandong, village-run factories are not willing to employ married women, who, as is the norm across

rural China, come from other villages. In Zhangjiachedao Village, also in Weifang Prefecture, Judd found that in theory a woman who had married out could continue to work in her natal village but in practice this was rare, and the shift work in the largest and preferred factory made such an arrangement extremely difficult (Judd 1990a, p.32).

As with other areas of work, the patterns of women's employment in township enterprises that I have discussed here result partly from decisions made by women themselves and by families in managing their economies: decisions that are in turn influenced by assumptions about gendered dichotomies between 'inside' and 'outside' spheres, and 'light' and 'heavy' work. However, these patterns also result, in part, from the recruitment policies of township enterprises.

In private enterprises most workers either belong to the same family as the manager, or have obtained their job through personal connections or recommendation. In government-run enterprises, however, recruitment is more formalised. In all but two of the thirteen township enterprises run by township or village whose management I questioned on this issue, the main method for recruiting workers was by advertising and then requiring potential workers to sit an examination conducted either by the enterprise itself or by local government (cf. Meng Xin in Byrd & Lin Qingsong 1990, p.305). This is somewhat different from the practice of commune- and brigade-run enterprises in the past, when the concern was mainly to provide employment for members of poor households

or those with surplus labour, as well as for workers' children and those with personal connections with enterprise leaders. As others have noted, there has been a tendency in the 1980s to put more emphasis on skill or ability when recruiting into township enterprises, so as to improve profitability (Griffin & Griffin 1984, p.219).

Nevertheless, various other factors are also taken into consideration. For example, the children of present workers are sometimes still given preference, and often attempts are also made to equalise incomes in a community, either by assigning enterprise employment to members of poorer households, or by ensuring that at least one member of each household is employed in a township enterprise (cf. Oi 1990, p.31).

In addition, many enterprises have requirements for workers of a particular age or educational level. Commonly, the age of workers when first employed is between 18 and 25, though child labour is also recruited for the most unskilled work, and older, more experienced people are sometimes employed in management, or in the most skilled work. Requirements for junior, and in some cases senior, secondary education amongst new workers is becoming increasingly common. Six enterprises that I visited stipulated this requirement, though in one it had been introduced only the preceding year (see Table 9.3). In one sense this requirement works to the disadvantage of young women, since overall they attain lower levels of education than men. It may be, however, that a township

enterprise requirement for junior secondary education will provide the incentive for families to keep their daughters at school for longer.

Enterprises also often stipulate the number of female and the number of male workers they require. I found this to be the case in six out of thirteen enterprises I visited. One village-run clothing factory in Xindu County, Sichuan, for example, had a quota of 90 per cent female workers. In contrast, the managers of a township-run car parts factory said that in the last two years they had limited female employment to 30 per cent because most of the factory work was too heavy for women.

Five other enterprise leaders whom I interviewed did not stipulate particular requirements as regards the gender of their workers but nevertheless expressed preferences. These reflected some of the widespread assumptions about women discussed elsewhere in this thesis. The two female managers of a township-run factory producing metal door and window frames said, for example, that they preferred hiring men because much of the work was too heavy for women. On the other hand, the head of a village-run cotton textile plant in Ling County voiced a preference for female workers, saying that textile making is female work since it requires patience and meticulousness.

Interestingly, the leaders of three enterprises employing mainly women said that this was not their preference. The

(male) head of a township-run clothing factory in Huairou County, for example, said that he preferred to hire men. He claimed that men can do fine work as well as women and they are stronger. After marriage and especially after childbirth women do not work as effectively as men because they have too many other worries. He claimed that in a case where a choice had to be made between a potential male worker and a potential female worker with the same examination results he would take the man. Similarly, the head of a children's clothing factory said she preferred to hire men because women's burden of domestic work is too great. Most of her workers, however, were women, and in general, men were embarrassed at the thought of applying to work with so many women. Finally, the two female heads of a village-run chemical and electroplating enterprise said they preferred to hire men because they were more 'able' (*neng gan*), but, in practice, 70 per cent of workers were women. These remarks suggest that particular assumptions about the type of work suitable for women do not always coincide, and that even those industries commonly thought of as suitable for women often prefer to hire men.

Employment in Urban Areas

In the employment of rural people working in urban areas, there is, once more, a sharp gender division of labour. In Chengdu, for example, in 1989 95 per cent of the 63,000 members of the floating population hired to work in the construction industry were male, whereas about 84 per cent of

the 12 thousand members of the floating population hired as nannies were female (Guo Furen 1990, p.14). One large construction company hired 1,063 temporary rural workers in 1989, all of them male (Guo Furen 1990, p.250). In contrast, a leather clothing factory employed 90 temporary rural workers, 98 per cent of whom were young unmarried women (Guo Furen 1990, p.254). On Chengdu's Shaanxi Street, in the many private tailoring and shoe repair stalls that had been set up, 112 rural people were employed, of whom 70 per cent were women (Guo Furen 1990, p.258).

These kinds of gender division of labour in Chinese industry are, of course, nothing new. Despite the Cultural Revolution claim that 'what men can do, women can do too' relatively few women worked in heavy industry, even in the 1970s. More women were employed in light industry, in particular, textiles, where they often comprised more than 50 per cent of the labour force. From the 1960s onwards, women also formed a significant proportion of the labour force in the newly established urban industries producing precision instruments, chemicals and drugs.⁹

It is important to note, however, that between the late 1950s and the 1970s the state did at least make some efforts to increase the number of women employed in traditionally male

⁹ Phyllis Andors relates this to the fact that many of the experiments in small-scale 'street industry', designed in part to draw 'housewives' into production, were in these areas, and that 'women's participation in the pilot projects ensured their absorption into the larger projects that evolved' (Andors 1983, p.87).

industries, and these efforts met with some success. Phyllis Andors claims, for example, that in the heavy industry sector women formed a significantly larger proportion of the labour force in factories set up during or after the Great Leap Forward, than in older factories. She suggests that this is because

management policies and traditions in some of the older heavy industry establishments might have discriminated against female labor... However, the more egalitarian policies of the Great Leap and the general atmosphere of mass mobilization presented a greater likelihood that the newer plants would assimilate significant numbers of women (Andors 1983, p.87).

After 1978 even the rhetoric changed, however, with the notion that 'what men can do, women can do too' being explicitly rejected as exaggerated (ZGFN July 1979 p.9; RMRB 24 June 1988). In the 1980s and 1990s there has been considerable criticism, by the Women's Federation and others, of direct discrimination against urban women by state-run enterprises, for example in light industry, in which the work is considered 'suitable' for women (Jacka 1990b). However, there has been no criticism, but rather endorsement, of a segregation of industrial employment along gender lines.

The following two sections of this chapter examine the implications of gender divisions of labour (and, in the case of urban employment, of an urban/rural division of labour) for the experiences of rural women in both urban employment and in rural township enterprises. The first section focuses on women's experiences in urban industry and services. This

is not a comprehensive analysis of rural women's work in urban areas. Instead it concentrates on the experience of rural women in just three key areas of urban employment; as nannies, in private enterprises, and in state- and collective-run textile factories.¹⁰

The final section of the chapter is a more detailed examination of women's experience of employment in township enterprises, this being by far the largest area of rural women's off-farm non-agricultural employment.

Rural Women's Experiences of Urban Employment

Employment as Nannies

Among the young rural women working away from home in non-agricultural occupations, a significant number are domestic workers or nannies (*baomu*) in urban households. According to one report, at the end of 1988 there were approximately 3 million rural women working as nannies in towns and cities across China (*NMRB* 11 January 1989). In Chengdu in 1989

¹⁰ One important area of employment for rural women, which is, however, beyond the scope of this thesis, is in the industries of the Special Economic Zones. The experience of rural women in the Special Economic Zones is discussed in Andors 1988 and Leung 1988. Prostitution is also not discussed in this thesis. According to one estimate, in 1993 between 600,000 and 800,000 people were employed in the prostitution industry, mostly in the Special Economic Zones and large cities in the coastal provinces, but also in interior cities (Central People's Broadcasting Station 1993, p.71).

approximately 12,000 rural women worked as nannies (Guo Furen 1990, p.268). They comprised about 13 per cent of the total female floating population employed or engaged in business in Chengdu (Guo Furen 1990, p.14).

The practice of hiring nannies, and the ways in which such employment is commonly perceived today, have antecedents in the employment of maids, or domestic servants, in pre-revolutionary China. Girls and women, most of them from very poor families, were bought by well-off families to undertake domestic work. Often, they would be bought at the age of eight or nine and then married out at the age of eighteen or so. While in service, they were commonly not given regular wages, and their labour was entirely under the control of their owners (Watson 1991; Jaschok 1988).

After the 1949 revolution, the sale of women for domestic service largely ceased. However, in the 1950s and 1960s a small number of rural women continued to work in cities as maids or nannies for wealthier households. According to one report, these were mostly middle aged women who left their husbands and children in search of work in order to overcome economic difficulties, resulting for example, from natural disasters hitting their village or from the loss of a working member of the family. Many stayed in the city with the one employer for several years (Chen Baoming & Sun Zijun 1984-85, p.97).

During the Cultural Revolution the hiring of nannies was definitely frowned upon as a form of bourgeois exploitation. Even with the revival of the practice in the 1980s and 1990s, considerable effort has had to be put into explaining that the practice is not exploitative. It is, it is argued, a practical solution to the problems that so many urban couples face in coping with domestic work and child care. At the same time, it provides attractive employment for rural women for whom there is little other employment available, and it provides opportunities for them to gain new skills and contacts which will benefit both them and their village when they return home (Guo Furen 1990, pp.274-275).

What is generally not acknowledged by those arguing in this way, however, is that very few young urban women are willing to take on work as a nanny. A short story by Huo Da entitled 'Nanny', first published in 1983, clearly illustrates the low status of such work: when a young woman arrives seeking work as a nanny, her prospective employer assumes she is a peasant from outside Beijing, and is amazed when she learns that, in fact, the young woman is a Beijing resident waiting for employment (*daiye qingnian*). She thinks to herself:

Does being a nanny count as a profession? (As a nanny) you are not a member of staff (i.e., you are not entitled to the kind of welfare benefits available to staff of state-run enterprises and you can be dismissed at any time), and neither do you have any chance of promotion. You must go into someone else's family, be meek and subservient and let others order you around; you have to do hard labour just in order to feed yourself; you're not much better than a beggar. To put it crudely, you're just a servant, a maid who can be ordered around, a little "maidservant" ("*lao mazi*") (Huo Da 1985, p.719).

Being a nanny, then, is scarcely considered a real job, for it has associations, on the one hand, with domestic work which lacks status because it belongs to an 'inside' sphere, and on the other hand, with servitude.

Most women now seeking employment as nannies are young and unmarried rural women, the majority of whom work in the city for only a few years at most, returning to their village in their early twenties to get married. An investigation of 30,000 women working as nannies undertaken in 1983 in Beijing found that approximately 66 per cent were single and under the age of 25. On average these women had about four years of schooling. Most came from rural areas, either in the vicinity of Beijing or from other provinces. Amongst the approximately 20,000 live-in nannies, the largest single group, 8,700 or 44 per cent, came from Anhui Province. 83 per cent of these came from the single county of Wuwei. The second largest group, 3,822, or 19 per cent, came from various counties in Hebei Province (Beijing Demographic and Urban Development Research Group 1987-88, pp.36-37).

In a second investigation of 1,257 nannies undertaken in Chengdu in 1989 it was found that 83.7 per cent were women. 90.4 per cent were peasants, and the majority came from suburban counties of Chengdu (33.3 per cent) or from other counties or municipalities in Sichuan province (62.8 per cent). Some 23.2 per cent were 18 or below. There were also some older nannies however, with 14.6 per cent aged 50 or more. This study found that most women employed as nannies

had either primary school education (40.1 per cent) or junior secondary school education (39.9 per cent) (Guo Furen 1990, p.270).

Women seeking work as nannies frequently come from the poorest, most backward rural areas. They are no longer necessarily motivated by desperate poverty, so much as a lack of work resulting from a scarcity of land for agriculture and the paucity of any alternative employment (Guo Furen 1990, p.274). For example, in Wuwei County, Anhui Province, a traditional supplier of nannies to Beijing, in 1985 agriculture could only absorb 50 per cent of the labour force. Township enterprises and sideline activities were only just developing, and 30 per cent of the labour force was without employment. Men, therefore, sought temporary work in urban factories or undertook long-distance transporting, and young women took jobs as nannies (*Jingji Ribao* 4 August 1985).

In my conversations with five young rural women working as nannies in Beijing, the reasons they gave for seeking such work were firstly, to help their families financially, secondly, to escape farming or because there was 'too much labour and not enough land' at home, thirdly, to earn money for a dowry and fourthly, to see the capital (Interviews conducted in Beijing, August-September 1989).

The majority of rural women (and men) coming to urban areas find jobs through personal connections or recommendations,

or, once they get to the city, by waiting in informal labour markets on the street. However, since the early 1980s a number of women employed as nannies have also been recruited by domestic service companies. For example, the Beijing March 8th Domestic Service Company, established by the Beijing Municipal Women's Federation in 1983, recruits 4,000-5,000 nannies each year from across the country. The company's method of recruitment is to pay county Women's Federations a small fee to find women for them (Interview with representative of March 8th Domestic Service Company, Beijing, August 1989).

The conditions under which nannies work are extremely variable. On the open market there are few guarantees of any sort, for either employer or employee. Women from areas with a tradition of sending young women to work as nannies, or from places which send large numbers of women, often belong to an elaborate network or clique which may provide them with some support. In Beijing, the 'Anhui clique' (*Anhui bang*) has a reputation for providing very competent, but very wily, and sometimes criminal, nannies.¹¹ The older women teach the new, younger nannies all the 'tricks of the trade', and the nannies maintain contact in the city and help each other in times of need.

¹¹ For this reason, the Beijing March 8th Domestic Service Company now refuses to hire nannies from Anhui, but they nevertheless still find employment in Beijing.

The domestic service companies fulfil an important function in protecting nannies, as well as providing a service to the urban population. Contracts written up with the Beijing March 8th Domestic Service Company stipulate, for example, that the employers must provide the nanny with meals and accommodation of the same standard as their own, and must pay a certain percentage of the nanny's medical expenses,¹² as well as a cash wage that has been agreed upon by the two parties. In theory, the nanny is required to report any maltreatment or infringement of her legal rights to the Domestic Service Company, which will then either take action itself, or in more serious cases will report the matter to the Public Security Bureau. In practice, however, the company has little control over what happens in individual households and cannot always prevent serious suffering. One young woman told me, for example, that in her first job as a nanny she had been badly physically abused by the grandfather of the child she was minding. She left and took a job with another family, who, however, worked her very hard and did not give her enough to eat. She wanted to leave but they prevented her from doing so. She herself was unwilling to leave or to contact the Domestic Service Company because she did not want her parents to find out about her troubles (Interview conducted in Beijing, August 1989).

Compared to the income they might gain from work in the fields the wages nannies earn are reasonable, but not

¹² 30 per cent in the contract I saw.

outstandingly good. In Beijing and Chengdu in 1989 I was told that the average wage earned by nannies was between 35 and 60 yuan per month (on top of food and accommodation) (Interviews with March 8th Domestic Service Company, Beijing & Chengdu Municipal Women's Federation, August & October 1989).¹³ In comparison, in 1989 the national average rural per capita net income was about 50 yuan per month (Guojia Tongjiju 1990, p.315).

As with employment in industry, the wages earned as a nanny have the added advantage of being 'cash in hand'. A portion of this, at least, can be spent by the young woman for her own personal needs, although nannies commonly send a large proportion of their cash earnings home to their family. This visible contribution to the family's income may give the woman more status in the family when she returns. Members of the Women's Federation certainly regard income contributed to the family as very important for improving women's status in the family with regard to decision making and the use of resources. It may not necessarily have this effect, though. Research on young rural women working in Taiwanese factories suggests that despite the newness of the phenomenon, daughters' contributions to their families' incomes are simply accepted as the parents' due. This belief is reinforced by the fact that in Taiwan (as in rural China)

¹³ More recently, however, because high attrition rates amongst nannies have pushed up demand, wages have also increased. Sally Sargeson claims that in 1992 nannies in Hangzhou demanded minimum wages of 100 yuan per month (Personal communication, August 1993).

young women marry out of their family and village. Any income they contribute before marriage is thus seen merely as part repayment for bringing up a 'useless' daughter (Kung 1983, p.xv).

Employment as a nanny is one of the most important routes for young rural women seeking to leave their villages and experience city life. Once there, however, they discover that nannies' wages are among the lowest for non-agricultural employment. According to the Chengdu study cited above, wages for nannies are lower than in any other trade in which the floating population is concentrated. In addition, their work hours are long, there are no fixed hours for work or rest, and clashes with employers are common (Guo Furen 1990, p.272).

This, combined with the social stigma attached to such work, means that many young women who come to the city as nannies quickly leave their jobs in search of an alternative.¹⁴

Employment in Urban Private Enterprises

Some women turn from domestic work to employment in urban private enterprises (*getihu* and *siying qiye*), because the possibilities for earning higher incomes are somewhat

¹⁴ For discussions of rural women's work as nannies or domestic servants in urban households in other developing countries see Jelin 1977; Palabrica-Costello 1984; and Robinson 1991. These accounts echo many of the comments made here about nannies in China.

greater, although very low wages are also common and rural workers in private enterprises are often paid no more than one-third or one-quarter of the wage paid to local workers (Guowuyuan Yanjiushi 1986). In 1989 the rural people working in private tailoring and shoe repairs stalls in Shaanxi street, Chengdu, of whom 70 per cent were women (see above), earned monthly net incomes ranging from 100 yuan to 300 yuan (Guo Furen 1990, pp.260-261).¹⁵ In 1993, however, a report claimed that workers hired by private enterprises earned an average of only 80 yuan a month (*Gongren Ribao* 9 February 1993).

For their part, private employers find that rural people are more willing to work in private enterprises than urban people, even with less pay. As Susan Young reports, urban young people are reluctant to take up private employment for fear of losing out on the benefits and security of work in the state sector. Even unemployed urban youths are sometimes reluctant to take work in a private enterprise because of the political insecurity surrounding the private sector and because they fear that such work might jeopardise their chances of getting a job in a state or collective enterprise (Young 1991, pp.123-124). As a result, a large proportion of employees in urban private enterprises are rural residents. One investigation of 1.05 million *getihu* workers in Shenyang found, for example, that 0.52 million were rural surplus labour. The rest were job-waiting youth, people who had

¹⁵ The report gives no indication, however, as to differences between the incomes of employers and employees.

retired or resigned from state-run enterprises and 'socially idle personnel' (including ex-criminals and unemployed women) (He Jianzhang & Zhu Qianfang 1987, p.1). Another report claimed that in Shanghai, whereas previously job-waiting youth and socially idle personnel had dominated employment in private enterprises, by the end of 1987, 56 per cent of about 150,000 workers surveyed were people from rural areas (Lu Zhonghe 1988, p.55).

Media reports suggest that both men and women, but especially young rural women, working in urban private enterprises frequently endure exploitation and very poor working conditions. One report claimed that among the 15 thousand or so workers hired by private enterprises in Beijing, the average workday is 9.4 hours. One quarter of them work more than 10 hours. In the food and beverage trade, hired workers, most of whom are young rural women, work more than 12 hours a day. This report also claimed that some private employers also exploit inexperienced young peasant women, by paying only a portion of their wages each month or withholding wages for several months, so that they are forced to keep working against their will (*Zhongguo Laodong Renshi Bao* 1988. For further examples, see *Qianjiang Wanbao* 24 December 1992).

Employment in Urban Textile Factories

Some nannies, fed up with domestic service, turn to temporary work, not in private enterprises, but in state- or

collective-run factories, especially textile factories, where they are once more desired as a cheap, flexible labour force, willing to undertake jobs that urbanites shun. Wages in such work tend to be little better than those that can be earned in domestic work, and working conditions are, in many cases, considerably worse. Nevertheless, young women seek such jobs because they feel that their status as a worker in a state- or collective-run factory will be better than as a nanny (Interview with representative of March 8th Domestic Service Company, Beijing, August 1989).

Since the 1940s, and earlier in some cities, women have comprised a large proportion of the labour force in textile factories.¹⁶ In the early years of industrialisation most workers were drawn from the countryside, but between the 1950s and 1980s, urban women made up almost the entire labour force, with strict limitations being placed on the employment of rural residents.

In the 1980s, however, patterns of employment shifted once more. There is a saying in Chinese cities today that 'heavy

¹⁶ For accounts of the employment of women in textile factories in Shanghai and Tianjin in the first half of the 20th century see Honig 1986 and Hershatter 1986. According to Honig, in Shanghai from the 1920s until 1949 women formed the majority of the labour force in cotton mills. Hershatter claims, however, that in North China women did not form a significant proportion of the labour force in the cotton mills until the Japanese takeover of mill ownership. Thus, in Tianjin women comprised only about 9 per cent of the cotton mill labour force in 1929. This increased to about 50 per cent in 1947. Hershatter puts forward a number of possible explanations for this difference (Hershatter 1986 pp.54-57).

industry is not heavy, light industry is not light' ('zhonggongye bu zhong, qinggongye bu qing'): it is widely felt that workers in state-run light industries work harder and for longer hours for less pay and under worse conditions than in heavy industry or in the tertiary sector (Duan Chengde, Sichuan Provincial Women's Federation, personal communication, October 1989). For this reason, since the early 1980s when young people were no longer allocated work and had a greater variety of employment to choose from, young urban women have been giving textile mills, in particular, a wide berth and have sought jobs in commerce and tourism instead (Wu Jikang 1987-88, p.21. See also Rofel 1989, p.246).

In order to alleviate labour shortages, employers in the textile industry have turned increasingly to hiring young rural women as contract or temporary workers.¹⁷ In Wuhan, for example, by the mid 1980s approximately 10,000 rural women were working in the textile industry as contract workers. They comprised about one-third of workers on the production line in these industries (Bao Ronglan 1989, p.6).

Workers' incomes in the textile industry are low, in part because in the last decade or so, due to price adjustments for textile inputs and products, factory profits have been low (Wu Jikang 1987-88, p.23). Rural contract and temporary

¹⁷ The media reports on the situation in textile mills all claim that it is shortages of urban workers that is driving employers to recruit rural women. Yet it may be that in some cases employers are retrenching urban women while recruiting rural women in preference because they are cheaper (Personal communication, Ma Guonan, 1992).

workers' incomes are even lower than those of urban contract or permanent workers. The majority of both urban and rural production workers in the textile industry are on piece-rate wages. Rural workers are disadvantaged, however, in part because they are employed in tasks defined as being of lowest skill and remunerated at the lowest rate. They also tend to be put to work on the oldest, least reliable machines, so their productivity is low and, hence, they earn less (Sally Sargeson, personal communication, August 1993). Consequently, in state-run textile factories in Hubei in 1988, for example, the average basic monthly wage for an urban contract or permanent production worker was about 70 yuan. Temporary workers earned a basic monthly wage of about 50 yuan (Hubeisheng Fangzhi Gonghui & Hubeisheng Fulian 1988, p.19). Equally importantly, as mentioned, urban contract and permanent workers are entitled to substantial bonuses, subsidised housing, and education and welfare benefits, which rural contract workers receive only in part and which temporary workers do not receive at all.

Working conditions in textile mills are also widely acknowledged as being amongst the worst found in state- and collective-run urban industries. According to one report on textile mills in Suzhou, much of the machinery dates back to the 1950s and 1960s and production is highly labour intensive. Workers are on their feet eight hours or more a day, constantly moving and under a good deal of mental stress. They work in dimly lit workshops with bad air circulation, extreme temperatures and high noise levels (Wu

Jikang 1987-88, pp.22-23). The work is done in three rotating shifts, and unlike in other industries which suffer from a labour surplus, work regulations and work quotas are strictly enforced with very little flexibility. Workers must spend eight hours a day to complete their quota, often without meal breaks (Wu Jikang 1987-88, p.24).

Furthermore, rural women workers often work under harsher conditions than urban women, even within the same factory. Sally Sargeson reports, for example, that in Hangzhou textile factories, while urban women work only one or two shifts, rural women are commonly expected to work three shifts. In addition, rural women are concentrated in the oldest workshops with the least reliable machinery and the worst working conditions. Urban women refuse to work in these workshops, but because they are young and ignorant, the rural women workers are more easily exploited (Personal communication, August 1993).

Aside from low incomes and harsh working conditions, young rural women working in urban textile mills, as in other areas of urban employment, also suffer humiliation from other workers and employers who look down on them as 'second class' workers and country bumpkins (For examples, see Bao Ronglan 1989).

Rural women are far from passively accepting of the poor treatment they receive in textile mills, however. In the textile mills in Wuhan, for example, as a general rule one-

third of rural workers stay only six months before returning home (Bao Ronglan 1989, p.6). In Suzhou in 1985 one factory hired 250 rural contract workers. Three months later almost all had left, some losing deposits they had made on signing their work contracts (Wu Jikang 1987-88, p.21).

There are also instances of rural women workers going on strike. In one instance in a textile factory in Wuhan in April 1989, the rural women workers went on strike for two days in protest at the fact that they received no cost-of-living subsidies while urban workers in the factory received a monthly subsidy of 13.60 yuan to compensate for rising commodity prices (Bao Ronglan 1989, p.7).

It is clear from the above discussion that in hiring rural women, urban employers in a range of trades exploit certain divisions: between male and female, and urban and rural workers, and between 'inside' and 'outside', 'light' and 'heavy' and 'unskilled' and 'skilled' work. Thus, as rural residents, such women can be expected to take on 'unskilled', low paid tasks that urban women refuse. In service and light industries young rural women are preferred because they are believed to be physiologically and temperamentally more suited to such work than men, who for their part are seen as more suited to 'heavy' work, for example in construction. Women, especially young women, are also regarded as more docile and tractable than men. Furthermore, as temporary workers whose strongest ties are still with their village, they are less likely to unite, for example, against poor working conditions. They can also be retrenched more easily

in times of business contraction, or, in the case of textile and other light industries, once their eyesight and dexterity have deteriorated. In employers' eyes this advantage is reinforced by the expectation of the women themselves that after a few years they must return to their village to get married and take on domestic and agricultural duties.

From the point of view of rural women, employment in urban areas provides a much sought-after opportunity to get out of the village and gives them higher incomes than they would have earned in agriculture. As I have argued, a gender division of labour between 'inside' and 'outside' means that fewer rural women than men enjoy such opportunities. Gender divisions of labour, in particular between 'heavy' and 'light' work also mean that within urban employment, the experiences of rural women and men are rather different. This is not to say, however, that the experiences of the former are, in all respects, worse than the latter - in some ways they are, in some ways not.

Thus, on the one hand, it is likely that, as a group, young rural women working in urban areas suffer more exploitation and abuse than rural men, both because of their gender, and because a greater proportion of the women are very young. In Chengdu in 1989, for example, a survey found that amongst the floating population 20 per cent of the women were under the age of 18, as compared to 13 per cent of the men (Guo Furen 1990, Appendix). Furthermore, for rural women exploitation

includes not just lower wages and poor working conditions, but also sexual exploitation. As one report put it,

long working hours in sweatshops, and filthy dormitories to sleep in at night are hazards for both men and women who drift towards the coast in search of work. But it is women who are most vulnerable in a world where strict Communist morality has crumbled and sex has become an exploitable commodity... These days a free labour market in large parts of the country has presented Chinese women with the same problem of harassment that has become one of the hottest issues among feminists in the West. Armed with the power of hire and fire, male managers are more likely to abuse their female staff and, according to the accounts of Chinese women, will probably get away with it (*South China Morning Post* 18 March 1993).

On the other hand, there appears to be no clear-cut difference between the wages earned by rural men in construction and heavy industry, and those earned by rural women in services and light industries - the variation in rural wages between urban enterprises within the same industry is as great as that between rural wages in different industries. And within any one industry, both rural women and men are concentrated at the very lowest end of the pay range. Furthermore, the conditions under which rural women work are not necessarily worse than those in which rural men work. The conditions endured by young rural women in textile mills, for example, are poor in comparison to those under which most urban people work, but so are those under which rural men work in the construction industry.

In this instance, an urban/rural divide, and the creation of an 'underclass' of rural workers in China's cities, is as significant in defining the experience and status of rural

women workers, as is a gender division of labour. What then, has rural women's experience been in employment in rural township enterprises, where at least the stigma of being a 'country bumpkin' is reduced?¹⁸ This is the question to be addressed in the following section of the chapter, which examines women's participation in management, incomes, working conditions and labour regulations in township enterprises.

Rural Women's Experience of Employment in Township Enterprises

Participation in Management

The young women who work as nannies or as temporary workers in urban areas have almost no chance to gain a position of any kind of authority or leadership status. For women working in township enterprises the chances are better, but are still very slim.

¹⁸ For some township enterprise workers a similar kind of stigma is, nevertheless, still a problem. In the 1980s and early 1990s most township enterprise employees worked in the same village or county in which they were resident (Meng Xin in Byrd & Lin Qingsong 1990, p.303; Wu 1993, p.4), and my comments in the following section relate to these workers. It should be noted, however, that with increases in labour mobility, the employment in township enterprises of migrants from other counties and provinces is increasing. These migrants are hired as temporary workers and suffer similar forms of discrimination as do temporary workers in urban employment. For examples, see Siu 1990, p.77; and Chan et al. 1992, p.304.

In township- and village-run enterprises leaders are usually appointed by the township or village government or by other leaders (Gelb in Byrd & Lin Qingsong 1990, p.286). Township Enterprise Bureaux commonly reported to me that women comprised approximately 25 per cent of workers appointed to full time positions in management or administration (including factory directors and deputy directors, workshop directors, accountants and statisticians). Most of these women, however, occupied clerical positions and a smaller number were workshop or section chiefs. In most counties no more than a few per cent of township enterprise factory directors or deputy directors were women.

In Jinniu District, Sichuan, for example, members of the Township Enterprise Bureau told me in 1989 that of the 12 to 15 per cent of workers involved full-time in management or administration 25 per cent were women. However, of the 1,250 managers and deputy managers of township- and village-run enterprises only 8 per cent were women. The representative of the bureau explained this poor representation of women in leadership positions in terms of three factors. First, women's lower levels of education. Second, a traditional division of labour in which women work at home and men outside; and third, men's greater will power (*yizhi*) (a manager's work, it was claimed, is very demanding).

In Wenjiang County, Sichuan, where women comprise only about 2 per cent of managers in township-run enterprises this was explained in the same terms as in Jinniu, with the additional

comment that women are not appointed as factory directors because such a job requires a large amount of travelling to attend meetings and to seek out business.

Representatives of the Ling County Township Enterprise Bureau denied that education was a factor in determining the low proportion of women in enterprise leadership positions.

Their explanations were otherwise the same as those given by the officials in Jinniu and Wenjiang, except that they also said that men do not like working under a woman, and men are better organisers than women.

Two final factors directly limiting the number of women gaining leadership positions in township enterprises are the small number of women in local government and Party organisations, and the patrilocal marriage system. Township enterprises depend heavily on a network of personal connections for obtaining raw materials and funds and for securing business, and hence many of the most successful entrepreneurs in this sector are local government or Party cadres or former cadres.¹⁹ Since, as discussed in Chapter 5,

¹⁹ In addition, local governments often appoint cadres from their midst to management positions in township enterprises in order to maintain influence or control over the enterprise (Wu 1993, p.18; Guowuyuan Yanjiushi Nongcun Jingjizu... 1990, p.148). According to the 1991 RDRI/CERU survey, 24.4 per cent of the 90 enterprise managers also held village cadre positions, 20 per cent held township cadre positions and 1.1 per cent held county cadre positions. Furthermore, 47.8 per cent of the managers were former township and village cadres, 10 per cent were former cadres above township level, or had worked in state-owned enterprises, and 17.8 per cent had worked in local supply and marketing cooperatives or credit cooperatives, or in other rural enterprises (Wu 1993, p.18).

relatively very few women are appointed to positions in local governments or Party branches, women are also disadvantaged in relation to the management of township enterprises.

Furthermore, in enterprises at village level and below, even those married women who might otherwise have the necessary skills and experience in leading an enterprise, are disadvantaged by their break with their natal village and the perception of them as outsiders to the network of personal relations in the village they married into. Their chances of gaining positions of responsibility tend to depend on their husband or father-in-law occupying some kind of leadership role in the village. Ellen Judd, in her investigation of three villages in Shandong, found, for example, that the small number of women in minor positions of responsibility in village-run enterprises were not only all very able, but also well connected through kinship ties. They included a daughter-in-law of the village Party secretary, an uxori locally married woman and wives of factory heads (Judd 1990a, p.33).

Although I have no statistics, I suspect that in the larger privately run township enterprises the proportion of women in leadership positions is similar to that in township- and village-run enterprises. As discussed in Chapter 8, however, women appear to form a larger proportion of managers in small private enterprises and specialised households. This is in part because many of these are extensions of women's work in the courtyard economy, and in part, I suggest, because the small-scale and family based nature of such enterprises means

that management of them is a less obvious contravention of popular notions that women belong in the 'inside' sphere, whilst the 'outside' sphere of business is a man's realm.

Incomes

The incomes earned in township enterprises are generally lower than those earned in state-run enterprises. In my study of township- and village-run enterprises, average employee incomes (including bonuses) ranged from 100 *yuan* to 200 *yuan* per month (see Appendix 2). These findings are similar to those of the 1991 RDRI/CERU survey, according to which 22.6 per cent of township enterprise employees earn below 100 *yuan*, 65 per cent earn between 101 and 200 *yuan* and 12.4 per cent earn more than 201 *yuan* (Wu 1993, Table 6.9). In contrast, a 1991 national survey of incomes amongst employees of state-run enterprises found that only 6.8 per cent earn below 100 *yuan*, 52.7 per cent earn between 101 and 200 *yuan* and 40.5 per cent earn more than 201 *yuan* (Guojia Tonjiju 1992, p.137, cited in Wu 1993, pp.19-20).

In the narrowest sense of the terms, the township enterprises I visited all practised the state policy of equal remuneration for equal work. The Women's Federation reports however, that sometimes this is not the case (Shanxisheng Fulian Diaoyanshi Quanyibu 1988, pp.25-27). The 1990 World Bank study mentioned above also found that when other variables (county, ownership and size of enterprise, enterprise profitability, worker occupation and age, and days

worked) were held constant, women's incomes were 14 per cent lower than men's (Gelb in Byrd & Lin Qingsong 1990, pp.292-294).

In practice, these differences in income are further exacerbated by differences in the ownership and industry of the enterprises in which women and men are employed, the profitability of the different enterprises, and the differences in male and female occupations within enterprises. Of these four factors, the latter two are the most significant.

Incomes vary a great deal between enterprises, but according to the 1990 World Bank study and to the officials I interviewed, this relates primarily to enterprise profitability, which is not necessarily linked either to the ownership of the enterprise or to the type of production it is engaged in. The World Bank study found that an increase of 10 percentage points in the ratio of profit to sales of an enterprise was associated with a 5 per cent increase in the level of pay (Gelb in Byrd & Lin Qingsong 1990, p.292). It found that there was no significant difference in average profitability between private and other enterprises, and although incomes in private enterprises were somewhat less

than in the others, this was mainly a regional effect (Gelb in Byrd & Lin Qingsong 1990, pp.291-292).²⁰

When I asked Township Enterprise Bureaux leaders about differences in levels of pay between light and heavy industries, they said that there is no obvious and consistent difference between the two. In my own limited survey of enterprises, I found only a very marginal difference in average worker incomes between light and heavy industries (see Appendix 2). These findings suggest, at least tentatively, that the gender division of labour whereby female enterprise workers are found predominantly in light, rather than heavy industry, does not result in lower incomes.

Occupational differences within enterprises are, I would suggest, of far greater significance in determining wage differentials between male and female township enterprise workers. Not surprisingly, the fact that there are so few women in leadership positions means that very few women earn the highest incomes available: the 1990 World Bank study found that technical and management personnel earn between 10 and 30 per cent more than production workers (Gelb in Byrd & Lin Qingsong 1990, p.297). In addition, while there is a

²⁰ Other surveys suggest, however, that while average profitability and incomes in private enterprises are similar to, or lower than, those in township or village-run enterprises, the range of profitability and incomes is much greater. One national survey estimates, for example, that 700,000 private enterprises earn more than 10,000 yuan per year. However, there are also private enterprises that earn incomes substantially below 3,000 yuan per year (*Jingji Cankao* 8 April 1990, cited in Odgaard 1992, p.161).

good deal of variation between enterprise wage systems, most assign different wage-rates according to the length of time the worker has been employed and/or the skill and arduousness of the tasks they perform. Women are disadvantaged in this system, both because they tend to work for shorter periods and because they are concentrated in areas of work defined as 'unskilled' and 'light'. Table 9.3 gives an illustration of the resulting pay differentials in two different enterprises in Huairou County, Beijing.

Table 9.3: Graded Wage Rates in Township Enterprises in Huairou County, Beijing

(1.) Township-run Agricultural Machine Factory			
Work Classification	Income (Wage + Bonuses, Yuan/Month)	No. of Male Workers	No. of Female Workers
Heavy	275-300	130	0
Medium Heavy	170	0	20
Light	140-150	0	20
Apprentice	75	6	1
(2.) Township-run Clothing Factory			
Worker Classification	Income (Wage + Bonuses, Yuan/Month)	No. of Male Workers	No. of Female Workers
Worked more than 3 years	290	40	100
Up to 3 years	180	32	200
Apprentice	100	24	80

Source: Interviews with enterprise managers, September 1989.

Somewhat surprisingly, however, the 1991 RDRI/CERU survey found the overall pattern of income distribution amongst female employees in 90 enterprises to be not very different from that amongst male employees. In fact, a slightly larger proportion of male employees (24.0 per cent), than of female employees (21.2 per cent) were found in the 'low' income range (below 100 yuan). The biggest differences between male and female incomes were observable in the 'middle' income range. Thus, 49.6 per cent of women had incomes in the 101-150 yuan range and 16.6 per cent had incomes in the 151-200 yuan range. In contrast, 40.1 per cent of men had incomes in the 101-150 yuan range and 23.7 per cent had incomes in the 151-200 yuan range (Wu 1993, Table 6.9).

Working Conditions and Labour Regulations

National regulations governing the protection of female workers in state-run enterprises do not apply to township enterprises, and, in general, working conditions for women (and men) in township enterprises are poorer than those in the state sector. Beyond this it is difficult to generalise. However, reports from the mid-1980s indicating that the Women's Federation devoted some attention to improving conditions for women in township enterprises suggest that there were, indeed, significant problems in relation to labour protection, but that at least attempts were being made to remedy these problems.

In May 1986 the Women's Federation, in conjunction with the Ministry of Labour, the Ministry of Health, and the All-China Federation of Trade Unions, promulgated a trial draft of provisional regulations on labour protection for female workers in township enterprises. At the same time, concerted efforts were begun across the country to investigate and improve labour protection and working conditions for female workers in township enterprises, and to have local governments formulate regulations on these matters. By late 1987 thirteen provinces and municipalities had drafted local regulations on labour protection for female workers. Since 1986 the Women's Federations in thirteen provinces and municipalities have also strongly urged for the establishment of women's congresses in township enterprises (Quanguo Fulian Quanyibu Shengchanfulichu 1988, pp.6-7).

In the following paragraphs I present a brief sketch of actual working conditions and labour protection measures for female workers in township enterprises at the end of the 1980s. This information is drawn firstly, from my own sample of 17 relatively large township- and village-run enterprises in rural Beijing, Shandong and Sichuan, and secondly, from a report, published in the internal journal of the Women's Federation, of an investigation of 180 township enterprises (including private enterprises as well as those run by villages and townships) in Shanxi province, undertaken by

members of the Shanxi provincial Women's Federation
(Shanxisheng Fulian Diaoyanshi Quanyibu 1988, pp.25-27).²¹

The Shanxi Women's Federation reported that working conditions, safety standards and labour protection regulations were generally better in township-run enterprises than in village-run enterprises and the latter were better than those run privately. Working conditions tended also to be better in older, more established enterprises and those with larger profits, than in more recently established enterprises or those making smaller profits.

It found that in most township enterprises, factory buildings were simple and crude, equipment was backward, working conditions were poor and there were no safety or protective measures, for example, in handling chemicals. In 90 per cent of township enterprises there were no regulations on labour protection for women during menstruation, pregnancy and lactation. In 36 per cent, although there were no fixed regulations, in fact labour protection measures were taken, but in 54 per cent no protection measures were taken for female workers. In village-run, joint-run and individual-run enterprises there was no protection for female workers.

²¹ The report claims that at the end of 1987 women working in township enterprises in Shanxi numbered 780,000, or 34.7 per cent of the total workforce in these enterprises. In textiles, clothing, printing, food and beverages, services and processing industries, they made up 80 to 90 per cent of workers (Shanxisheng Fulian Diaoyanshi Quanyibu 1988, pp.25-27).

The Federation reported that in many enterprises working hours were very long - in some as long as 15 hours. They reported that welfare provisions were severely lacking. Among 22 enterprises only one had a clinic. None of them had female workers' washrooms, nursing rooms or change rooms, rest rooms for pregnant women, or child care facilities.

In contrast to the findings of the Shanxi study, almost all the enterprise managers that I interviewed claimed that they gave maternity leave, the periods generally ranging from 50 to 110 days.²² Women commonly received a basic wage during this period, but no bonuses. A typical example was a village-run clothing factory in Xindu County, Sichuan, that had printed regulations to the effect that maternity leave was 90 days. During this time, workers on monthly wages would be paid their full wage. Workers on piece-rate wages would be paid 63 yuan. This compares to an average piece-rate wage of 70 yuan per month and an average income, including bonuses, of 150 yuan per month.

Most of the enterprises I visited gave nursing women time off for two periods of 30 minutes each, per day, but only one - a long established agricultural machinery factory in Huairou County - had established a nursing room. Only one enterprise, in Ling County, provided any child care facilities. Representatives of other enterprises said that women with small children generally left them with relatives

²² In state-run enterprises women are entitled to 90 days maternity leave.

or in a village-run kindergarten.²³ The general lack of child care facilities in township- and village-run enterprises is justified by officials in terms of the small number of women with babies working in such enterprises. However, at the same time this does, of course, reinforce the pattern whereby women withdraw from employment in township- and village-run enterprises after childbirth.

Some, but not all, township- and village-run enterprises that I visited had a Women's Congress and/or a Trade Union branch which included a women's representative, though in most of these cases the enterprise had only one women's representative and she was also a full-time worker. In Xindu County, the County Women's Federation advised that for every 30 women workers in a township enterprise there should be one women's representative. In actuality, in one village-run clothing factory that I visited there were three women's representatives for 306 workers, and in a township-run metal door and window frame factory employing 27 women there was one women's representative.

In the Shanxi survey it was found that 53.9 per cent of the township enterprises had established women's congresses, but not all of these had taken any measures toward women's labour protection. Usually the head of the women's congress was a

²³ While few township enterprises themselves provide child care, in some places they have nevertheless improved public child care facilities more indirectly through taxes and other funds to local governments. In other places, however, local governments prefer to use such revenue for more immediately 'profitable' ventures. See Chapter 6.

female deputy factory director or other woman involved in management, and other members were full-time workers.

Conclusion

In off-farm non-agricultural employment, as in other areas of work, gendered dichotomies between 'inside' and 'outside', 'light' and 'heavy', and 'unskilled' and 'skilled' have contributed to major differences in the work experiences of women and men.

Thus, because of their ties to the family, a larger proportion of female than of male industrial workers are employed in local township enterprises rather than in urban industry, and where women do work away from home it is usually for only a short period before they are married. Similarly, women are concentrated in light industry, commerce, catering and services, while men are employed predominantly in heavy industry, construction and transport work.

Rural women have suffered a number of problems in industrial employment in the 1980s and early 1990s. In urban areas, in particular, they have been exploited as both rural workers and as women who, it is assumed, will accept low paid unpleasant work and harsh working conditions that urban residents shun, will be docile and uncomplaining, and will be good at work requiring dexterity and patience. In rural

areas, some township enterprises discriminate against women in recruitment, and in others, women lose their jobs after marriage or the birth of a child. Work in township enterprises is often undertaken in poor conditions with few controls on safety or labour protection, women tend to be concentrated in 'unskilled', lower paid occupations, and there are few women in management. On the other hand, there is surprisingly little difference between the range of incomes earned by women in township enterprises and that earned by men. Furthermore, in recent years there has been a burgeoning growth in small, private enterprises, in which the chances for women to be involved in management and to have a degree of autonomy in their work are greater than in other sectors of non-agricultural employment.

Despite the problems, in comparison to alternative patterns, the process of industrialisation seen in rural China in the 1980s and 1990s has had a number of advantages and benefits for women. The increasing shift toward light industry, commerce, catering and services has, for example, meant that a relatively large and growing proportion of women have been able to fulfil a desire to shift out of agriculture into industrial employment. China's particular focus on developing rural township enterprises has also provided more opportunities for women to be employed in industry. In addition, it has reduced the exploitation of rural women in industrial employment, and to some extent has increased the potential for them to develop skills and a sense of autonomy and status, as well as receive an income.

CHAPTER 10: CONCLUSION

Reforms undertaken in rural China in the period between 1978 and 1993, including, in particular, decollectivisation, diversification of the rural economy and strict family planning, have resulted in both change and continuity in the types of work undertaken by women and men, in gender divisions of labour and in the values associated with those divisions.

In some cases women have been able to take advantage of new work opportunities to enhance their position in society in terms of relations with others and access to, and control of, resources. On the whole, however, women have not benefited from the reforms to the same extent as men, and the reforms have not led to an improvement in rural women's position, either within the family or in the wider community. Rather, certain aspects of women's subordination have intensified and others have been altered or broken down, only to form new patterns of subordination.

In this thesis I have argued that central to this process has been a reinforcement and a redefinition of conceptual dichotomies between outside/inside, heavy/light and skilled/unskilled work. In each dichotomy the former term is associated with men and the latter with women. These dichotomies can be thought of as sets of values and assumptions relating to work and to gender identity. They shape the work opportunities and choices of women and men and

the ways in which different types of work are perceived, and they contribute to the construction and maintenance of gender identities.

On the eve of reform, although women and men were, in reality, by no means confined to work in the 'inside' and 'outside' spheres respectively, expectations embodied in the traditional saying 'men rule outside, women rule inside' ('*nan zhu wai, nu zhu nei*') continued to exert an important influence on work patterns. They served to maintain and legitimate a gender division of labour in which domestic work and domestic sidelines were considered 'women's work'. Such work was seen as belonging to an 'inside' sphere in the sense that firstly, it was physically located primarily within the home or courtyard. Secondly, it was seen as involving interaction largely only with family members, and it was undertaken for the benefit of the family, rather than for the collective.

Between the 1950s and the 1970s the state had made some attempts to reduce women's work in the 'inside' sphere. While these attempts met with little lasting success, a significant side effect was the devaluation of 'inside' work as secondary to 'outside' production for the collective, and a corresponding view of women who were engaged primarily in such work as contributing less to society than others.

Although the CCP under Mao Zedong had increased women's involvement in 'outside' production undertaken for the

collective, and in political and economic leadership, in the late 1970s, women's participation in these areas continued to be constrained both by beliefs that the 'outside' realm was a 'man's world' and by the demands of 'inside work' on their energy and time.

In addition, women's involvement in collective production was shaped by assumptions that women were less capable of 'heavy' and 'skilled' work than men. Such work was generally remunerated at higher rates than 'light' or 'unskilled' tasks. The categorisation of tasks as 'heavy' or 'light', 'skilled' or 'unskilled' varied, however, from one locality to another, and was, in many cases, linked with male peasant attempts to control labour-saving technology and to win higher remuneration rates for their work.

As a result of reforms that were initiated in rural China in 1978 there have been radical re-conceptualisations of the boundaries between outside/inside, heavy/light and skilled/unskilled dichotomies. Nevertheless, I have argued in this thesis that since 1978 women have been constrained by the fact that such dichotomies still operate, and indeed have in some respects been reinforced. This has meant that despite major changes in work patterns, in the nature of different types of work, and the ways in which work is organised, the rural reforms have resulted in neither a breakdown of gender divisions of labour, nor, on the whole, a re-evaluation of women's and men's sides of the divisions. Instead, what is happening is that the content of women's

work and men's work is changing, but the divisions remain, as does the secondary value placed on women's work, relative to men's.

Thus, shifts in strategies for economic development, and corresponding improvements in rural living conditions, have changed the nature of domestic work and the amount of time spent in such work by individual women. In particular, the improvement of basic amenities and the greater availability of consumer goods have reduced the time and effort required for domestic work. The implementation of strict family planning policies has also reduced domestic workloads in some families, although most continue to have at least two children.

No change has occurred, however, in the perception of domestic work as 'inside' women's work. On the other hand, the notion that women are, first and foremost, domestic workers has been reinforced by the state in the post-Mao period in its emphasis on women's roles as mothers and as the keepers of social stability and morality. The low regard in which domestic work is held has, however, been unaffected by reform. Thus, despite the value placed by the state on motherhood, and also despite the fact that decollectivisation and the diversification of the rural economy have blurred the boundaries between domestic work and income-generating work, a discourse in which the contribution of women's domestic work to the economy is trivialised, and in which domestic

work is seen as petty drudgery rather than as 'real work', remains strong.

Domestic sidelines, now more commonly known as the 'courtyard economy' have also continued to be regarded as 'inside' work that is 'particularly suited to women'. Indeed, this view has been reinforced by the state, it being a central element in the encouragement of work in this sector as a source of employment for the mostly female labour deemed 'surplus' to the needs of agriculture, following the introduction of the production responsibility system. The characterisation of domestic sidelines as 'inside' women's work that is secondary to the main income earning activities of the family has also enabled the state and individual capitalists to exploit women's labour in lines of production that are most commonly either poorly paid, or are highly profitable for only a short period.

As I have argued, however, over the last fifteen years work in the courtyard economy has also had a number of advantages for women. It has, for example, provided them with a greater degree of autonomy than industrial employment. In addition, some women have been able to use their work in this sector as a 'springboard' into larger-scale, more profitable production, and to gain entry into the 'male', 'outside' world of business leadership. It is, still, however, more common for management of a production venture to be taken over by the male head of the family once it has developed beyond a certain size.

The courtyard economy is now one of the most dynamic sectors of the rural economy, and, as is recognised by the All-China Women's Federation, it is possible that in the coming years women will develop their activities in this sector in such a way as to improve their economic and social status. I have argued, however, that the extent to which women will benefit from the courtyard economy or will be exploited depends very much on the kind of support and training with which they are provided.

Since 1978 some of the most radical shifts in rural gender divisions of labour and the ways in which work is perceived have occurred in relation to agriculture. In the early stages of reform, and still today in some less developed regions, a shortage of employment opportunities has led to the withdrawal of women from agriculture. This has been justified both by reference to the constraints on women imposed by their responsibility for 'inside' work, and through a reassertion that women cannot do agricultural work because they are not physically strong enough and they lack the necessary technical skills.

In contrast, however, the expansion of opportunities for industrial employment that has characterised the reform process in more developed regions has led to a shift of men out of agriculture into more prestigious industrial jobs, while women have been left with the responsibility for agriculture, which is now regarded as the least desirable form of employment. This new gender division of labour has

been achieved through, and legitimated by, a re-characterisation of agriculture as 'inside' work. Ironically, also, following the devaluation of agricultural work and its conceptual shift from the 'outside' to the 'inside' realm, the same references to women's physiological characteristics that were previously used as a justification for the restriction of women's employment in agricultural work are now being used to justify a concentration of women in such work.

The majority of rural women in the post-Mao period have continued to work either in the home or in the fields, but economic development has also involved major increases in the number of rural women, especially young, unmarried women, employed in off-farm non-agricultural work. The experiences of women in such work, as in other sectors, are shaped by gendered dichotomies and divisions of labour between outside/inside, heavy/light and skilled/unskilled work, and, in the case of employment in urban areas, by a rural/urban divide. Young rural women working in urban areas, for example as nannies, and as temporary workers in the private service sector and in state-run textile mills, are exploited by employers both as young women who, it is assumed, will be naive, docile and uncomplaining, and as rural residents who will accept temporary, low-paid menial work that urban workers shun.

Fewer rural women than men work in urban areas, however, and they usually return to the countryside when they are in their

early twenties in order to get married and to take over responsibility for the 'inside' sphere of domestic work, domestic sidelines and agriculture. Larger numbers of women work in local township enterprises, although even there they comprise only about 30 per cent of the labour force on average. They are concentrated in light industries and in the lowest paid, unskilled occupations, with very few being involved in management. Differences in income between male and female workers do not appear to be very marked however.

Whilst the focus of this thesis has been on the impact of reform on women's work and gender divisions of labour, I have emphasised throughout that the changes that have occurred in gender divisions of labour and in the social implications of those divisions cannot be understood simply as a straightforward consequence of the implementation of reform policies by the state. It must be recognised, first of all, that the changes in gender divisions of labour and in conceptual dichotomies that I have discussed in this thesis have both fed into, and themselves been constructed, maintained and legitimated through other aspects of gender relations. For example, the continuation of the patrilocal marriage system, in which most women leave their natal family and village to join their husband's family upon marriage, leads to the perception of women as only temporary members of their natal family. As a consequence, girls are often given less education than boys, a problem that has become more serious in recent years as a result of rising education fees. In addition, upon marriage women are regarded as strangers to

their new family and village, and to the kin and friendship networks that are so important in rural China for undertaking business and wielding power, as well as for providing emotional and material support. Both their lower educational attainments and their marginalisation in local networks in turn disadvantage women in the 'outside' spheres of industrial employment, entrepreneurship and formal politics.

Gender segregation in education and the particular activities undertaken by the small numbers of women in positions of power, in particular the members of the Women's Federation, also shape, and are shaped by, perceptions of work and gender identity, and gender divisions of labour. Thus, a concentration of women in 'light' work, such as textiles and handicraft production, and in work associated with the 'inside' sphere, including domestic work and the courtyard economy, leads to an emphasis on training in these areas in vocational education for girls, and in the campaigns run by the Women's Federation on behalf of rural women. This in turn reinforces the view that women are most suited to 'light' and 'inside' work, whilst 'heavy' and 'outside' work is most appropriate for men.

Gendered dichotomies between heavy/light and outside/inside work have been further bolstered over the past fifteen years by state-sponsored shifts in social and political values. These shifts, transmitted through official pronouncements, through media articles, and through education, have included a reaction against women who are successful in the 'outside'

sphere of politics and areas of 'male' work, such as heavy industry, as the epitome of Cultural Revolution-style radicalism and anarchy. The rejection of the Maoist slogan 'what men can do, women can do too', and the emphasis on physiological and psychological differences between the sexes, apparent in a vast array of media articles as well as in education, is also related to the current leadership's view that divisions of labour in general contribute to economic development and modernisation. Finally, a strong emphasis on the role of woman as mother and nurturer has been a central element in the post-Mao state's attempts to curb social disorder and to promote 'spiritual civilisation'.

Aside from examining the links between gender divisions of labour and other aspects of gender relations, we must also take account of the fact that changes in gender relations, along with other social, economic and political change, have been the outcome of a complex set of interactions between state and society, rather than the result merely of a top-down state imposition of policies on the people. Thus, for example, the shifts in social and political values discussed above, would probably not have taken place were it not for the fact that the new values have received strong support from a wide section of the population, including women. To refer back to another example, the emergence of domestic sidelines and the 'courtyard economy' as one of the most important areas of employment for rural women cannot be understood solely in terms of a state manipulation of women as a cheap and flexible labour force, nor solely as a result

of unequal power relations between women and men, although these factors are of great importance. It must also be recognised that women themselves choose to work in this sector because of certain advantages that it offers in comparison with other types of employment.

In this thesis I have developed an approach to the study of gender relations which integrates an examination of the material causes and consequences of gender divisions of labour with a study of the cultural values attached to those divisions, and which takes account of the complex interrelations between gender divisions of labour and other aspects of gender relations. I have used this approach to analyse the key dimensions of change in gender divisions of labour in rural China in a period in which major social, political and economic reforms have taken place. My study suggests that in rural China, divisions of labour and the meanings associated with those divisions are strongly influenced by the fact that a cultural dichotomy between 'men' and 'women' is linked with other dichotomies, by the particular forms those dichotomies take, and how they change. This is something that must be taken into account if the impact of reform on gender relations is to be understood, and if attempts to overcome women's subordination in rural China are to succeed.

It is to be hoped that in the future, more detailed micro-studies will be undertaken in which regional differences in gender divisions of labour in rural China and the meanings

attached to them are explored, and in which divisions within particular areas of work, for example in individual industries, are examined in more detail than was possible in this study. I would anticipate that such studies would bear out the importance of the conceptual dichotomies discussed in this thesis, and may reveal that other dichotomies, for example between 'dangerous' and 'safe' industrial work also shape gender relations in rural China.

In the course of this thesis I have made comparisons between aspects of gender relations in rural China and in other developing societies. Furthering these comparisons may provide additional insights into the relationship between economic and social development and change in gender relations. I would argue, in addition, that while the particular conceptual dichotomies discussed in this thesis may not operate in societies other than rural China, the theoretical framework that I have developed may prove useful for the examination of the mechanics of change in gender relations in other societies.

APPENDIX 1: SUMMARY OF INFORMATION ON SAMPLE FAMILIES IN RURAL BEIJING, SHANDONG AND SICHUAN

Location & Family No.	Family Membership	Amount of Cultivated Land and Crops Grown	Division of Labour in Agriculture*	Division of Labour in Other Remunerated Work	Division of Labour in Domestic Work
Huairou County, Beijing 1	Interviewee (54) husband, son daughter-in-law granddaughter (pre-school)	3 mu - corn and wheat	Son and daughter-in-law do field work. Interviewee runs specialised household rearing pigs. She hires 30 person-days per year to help.	Husband is retired worker. Son does occasional trading. Daughter-in-law works in factory.	Daughter-in-law makes breakfast. Interviewee does rest of the cooking, cleaning, makes clothes and looks after grandchild.
2	Interviewee (46) husband 2 daughters young male relative	3 mu - corn and wheat	Interviewee runs a specialised household rearing pigs. Her daughters and male relative help. The four of them do field work.	Husband works in army factory in another township and comes home once a month.	Interviewee does all domestic work.
3	Interviewee (37), husband, 2 sons (at school) father- & mother-in-law	4 mu - vegetables	Father- and mother-in-law do most field work.	Interviewee runs a private enterprise making quilt covers, and hires workers. Husband works in grocery shop.	Mother-in-law does most of the domestic work. She raises 13 chicken. Interviewee spends 3hrs/day on domestic work - mainly cooking. She also does the shopping.
4	Interviewee (36) husband son & daughter (both at school)	58 mu - grain specialised household 2 mu - grain 3.2 fen - vegetables	Interviewee runs grain specialised household and works 7 hrs/day in fields. Husband runs a specialised household rearing pigs - 2 hrs/day, and helps wife in fields 4-5hrs/day. During busy season, the children and relatives help. Whoever has time tends the ziliudi.		Interviewee does all domestic work.
5	Interviewee (44) Husband, son & daughter (both at school)	3 mu - grain 4 mu - vegetables	Interviewee runs specialised household growing fungi for Chinese medicine.	Husband is a carpenter.	Interviewee generally cooks, though husband sometimes helps. Interviewee does the washing and shopping. Whoever is around cleans.

Location & Family No.	Family Membership	Amount of Cultivated Land and Crops Grown	Division of Labour in Agriculture*	Division of Labour in Other Remunerated Work	Division of Labour in Domestic Work
6	Interviewee (27) husband son (at school)	a few fen : vegetables and corn	Interviewee does field work. She and husband run specialised household rearing cows. Each work 4 hrs/day. He does the heavier work.		Interviewee does all domestic work.
Ling County, Shandong 7	Interviewee (37) husband son & daughter (both at school) father- & mother-in-law	3 mu - sesame and grain		Interviewee and husband run specialised household processing sesame seed paste. She does 6 hrs/day.	Interviewee raises 2 pigs and several chickens. Mother-in-law does the rest of the domestic work.
8	Interviewee (48) husband 3 children (at school & university)	All land (1 mu 2 fen) given to nephew		They run a private hotel.	Interviewee does all domestic work.
9	Interviewee (43) husband daughter son (at school)	3 mu plus 2 mu wild land that interviewee developed herself; grain for own consumption; cotton and vegetables to sell.	Interviewee, husband and daughter grow grain and cotton. Husband tends vegetables. Interviewee, husband and daughter all involved in raising bees.		Interviewee raises 4 pigs and she and daughter do the shopping. Daughter does the rest.
10	Interviewee (39) husband 4 daughters (at school) father- & mother-in-law	5 mu - cotton 7 fen - vegetables for own consumption	Interviewee does field work - 6 hrs/day. (She does not grow grain because it is too much work for one woman and they do not need it for livestock feed).	Husband is electrician.	Mother-in-law does some washing. Otherwise interviewee does all domestic work.

Location & Family No.	Family Membership	Amount of Cultivated Land and Crops Grown	Division of Labour in Agriculture*	Division of Labour in Other Remunerated Work	Division of Labour in Domestic Work
11	Interviewee (37) husband son and daughter (both at school) mother-in-law	4 mu - cotton 5 fen - vegetables	Interviewee does most of the field work - 5 hrs/day. Husband shares work tending vegetables.	Husband works at cotton collection station 7 - 8 months/ year.	Interviewee does all domestic work.
12	Interviewee (60) husband son daughter	3 mu 5 fen - cotton and grain 3 fen - vegetables for own consumption	Interviewee plants vegetables. Son plants cotton and grain.	Son and daughter are workers in township-run enterprises.	Interviewee does all domestic work. She raises a few ducks.
13	Interviewee (28) husband son (at school)	2 mu - grain for own consumption	Interviewee's uncle grows grain for them.	Interviewee runs a private enterprise sewing, and takes in students. Husband runs a private enterprise repairing bicycles.	Interviewee does the shopping and shares other domestic work with husband.
14	Interviewee (40) husband daughter 4 other children at school	no land		Interviewee and husband sell groceries. Oldest daughter works in county medicine factory.	Interviewee does all domestic work. She raises a few ducks.
15	Interviewee (33) husband 2 daughters (at school)	2 mu - cotton 2.5 mu - corn and wheat alternating 4 fen - vegetables for own consumption	Interviewee and husband each spend about 6 hrs/day in fields. Husband tends vegetables.		Interviewee does all domestic work. She raises 20 chickens and 3 pigs.
16	Interviewee (51) husband 2 children (at school)	2,7 mu - wheat and corn alternatives 0.5 mu - vegetables & cotton alternating.	Interviewee does the field work - 6 hrs/day and raises 10 chickens and 2 pigs - 1 hr/ day.	Husband works 6 hrs/day as cook in a bank.	Husband sometimes helps raise the 2 pigs and 10 chickens, and 2 daughters do their own washing. Otherwise, Interviewee does all.

Location & Family No.	Family Membership	Amount of Cultivated Land and Crops Grown	Division of Labour in Agriculture*	Division of Labour in Other Remunerated Work	Division of Labour in Domestic Work
17	Interviewee (31) husband 2 sons (at school)	5 mu - grain, cotton vegetables	Interviewee and husband work in fields. She does 6 hrs/ day.	Husband drives tractor part-time.	Husband helps raise 2 pigs & 3 sheep. Otherwise, inter- viewee does all domestic work.
Xindu County, Sichuan 18	Interviewee (23) mother father brother child (pre-school) husband's sister	1 mu 5 fen - rice, wheat rape 4 fen - vegetables	Father does field work - 1 hr/ day. During busy season they all help.	Interviewee is village government secretary. Mother, father and brother work in local township enterprises. Mother also sews flour bags at home as outwork for county government. Interviewee pays husband's sister to look after child. Husband works away in army.	Whoever is free tends the 2 pigs and 4 - 5 chickens, and does the cooking. Her mother does the cleaning. Interviewee and her mother wash large items such as quilts, otherwise everyone does their own washing. Inter- viewee washes her child's clothes. She and her father do the shopping.
19	Interviewee (35) husband child (at school)	2 mu 7 fen - rice, wheat rape 3 fen 2 li - vegetables for own consumption	All three do field work - 1/2 hr per day.	Interviewee is village accountant. Husband is carpenter.	Interviewee does most of the cooking, though husband also does some. She and husband go shopping toge- ther and both do washing. Interviewee, husband and child all do the cleaning.
20	Interviewee (47) husband, children & spouses 2 grandchildren (pre-school) Total: 11 people	4 mu - rice, wheat, rape and vegetables 4 fen - vegetables	Husband & children's spou- ses do fieldwork, before and after work in factory each day, and on Sunday. Interviewee raises 6 pigs and 10 chickens.	Husband is deputy head of village. All children and their spouses work in local glass factory.	Interviewee does all, inclu- ding looking after her grand- children. She raises 6 pigs and 10 chickens.

Location & Family No.	Family Membership	Amount of Cultivated Land and Crops Grown	Division of Labour in Agriculture*	Division of Labour in Other Remunerated Work	Division of Labour in Domestic Work
21	Interviewee (60) son daughter-in-law (urban household registration) husband dead	1.3 mu - vegetables, rice, wheat , rape.	Interviewee does field work and 2 married-out daughters help.	Son and daughter-in-law run specialised household making sofas.	Interviewee does all domestic work. She also takes her granddaughter to and from kindergarten.
22	Interviewee (54) husband son daughter-in-law grandson	2.7 mu - rice, wheat, rape 3 fen - pig feed and vegetables	Son does most field work - 2 hrs/day. On Sunday interviewee, husband and daughter-in-law also help.	Husband is party secretary in local glass factory. Son and daughter-in-law also work in glass factory.	Husband helps with cleaning, the house and the 5 pigs and 100 chickens. Her son does the shopping on his way home from work. Interviewee does the rest.
23	Interviewee (50) husband 3 sons	3.25 mu - rice, wheat, vegetables 3 fen - pig feed and vegetables.	Youngest son (17) does field work - 7 hrs/day.	Husband is deputy head of village government agricultural company. Oldest son is in army. Middle son works in a factory.	Interviewee does all domestic work. She raises 6 pigs, 10 chickens, 4 - 5 ducks and 1 goose.
24	Interviewee (41) husband daughter 2 sons (at school)	3 mu - rice, wheat, rape. 3 fen - vegetables	Interviewee's younger brother tends vegetables. The others do the rest of the field work.	Husband runs a restaurant and also works as a doctor. Interviewee runs a weighing station and helps in restaurant. Daughter works in a factory.	Interviewee does the shopping and most of the washing and cleaning. They do not cook at home.

Location & Family No.	Family Membership	Amount of Cultivated Land and Crops Grown	Division of Labour in Agriculture*	Division of Labour in Other Remunerated Work	Division of Labour in Domestic Work
Jinnui County, Sichuan 25	Interviewee (45) husband 2 sons	1 mu	The land is given to neighbours to cultivate. The neighbours pay tax and fulfill government quotas and keep remaining profit.	Interviewee and husband run a hotel. One son is an electrician, one works for the railways.	Interviewee and husband do shopping for home and hotel. Cooking done by cooks hired for hotel. Interviewee does the rest.
26	Interviewee (36) husband daughter (at school)	4 fen - grain for own consumption, 3.2 fen - vegetables for own consumption 1 mu 5 fen - vegetables sold to the state.	Interviewee and husband work in the fields - 2 hrs at noon, after work until dark and all day Sunday. She is stronger and does most of the heavy work (he was a student for a long time). She carries water and fertiliser and spreads it. He digs, plants and pulls out weeds.	Interviewee works in small collective construction materials factory. Husband works in state factory.	Interviewee raises 5 chickens and does the shopping. She cooks breakfast and lunch. Child cooks evening meal. The whole family is involved in domestic work.
27	Interviewee (39) husband son (at school)	2 mu 7 fen - rice and wheat for own consumption. 3 fen - vegetables for own consumption.	Interviewee does most field work - 20 hrs/week, before and after work in the factory. They also hire 5 person days per year to help with field work.	Interviewee and husband work in a doufu factory (<i>lianheti</i>).	Interviewee does all domestic work. She raises 22 chickens.
28	Interviewee (37) husband daughter (at school)	1 mu - grapes for market. 3.5 fen - mushrooms for market 6 fen - grain for own consumption.	Interviewee and husband do field work. She does the day-to-day work. They hire a young man to tend the mushrooms.	Husband is village government cadre.	Interviewee does the cooking. Husband sometimes helps. Interviewee does the washing. The whole family does the cleaning. Interviewee and husband do the shopping.

Location & Family No.	Family Membership	Amount of Cultivated Land and Crops Grown	Division of Labour in Agriculture*	Division of Labour in Other Remunerated Work	Division of Labour in Domestic Work
29	Interviewee (43) husband (urban household registration) 2 sons (1 at school)	3 fen - vegetables. Chicken farm built on remaining land - 1 mu 2 fen.	Interviewee runs specialised household raising chickens. She and 2 hired workers do most of the work. 1 son helps.	Husband works in chemical factory in Chengdu.	Interviewee does all domestic work. She washes workers' clothes as well as her family's.
30	Interviewee (37) husband daughter (at school)	2 mu 2 fen - rice, wheat rape for own consumption. 4 fen - vegetables for own consumption.	Interviewee does the field work in the afternoons.	Husband works in township-run construction company. Interviewee runs a private sewing enterprise and gives outwork to 15 women.	Interviewee does the washing, cleaning and shopping. Mother-in-law does the cooking.
31	Interviewee (35) husband son (at school)	2 mu 5 fen - rice, wheat and vegetables. 3 fen - vegetables	Interviewee grows mushrooms and raises 10 chickens for own consumption. 4 - 5 person days/month hired. Husband helps with mushrooms when he comes home for lunch each day.	Husband works in factory.	Interviewee and husband both do domestic work.
32	Interviewee husband (urban household registration) 2 daughters 1 son (handicapped or ill).	2 mu 5 fen - grain for own consumption 5 fen - vegetables for own consumption.	Interviewee does most field work.	Interviewee runs a private enterprise machine-knitting jumpers. She hires 10 women. Husband works in state-run factory in Chengdu.	Interviewee's 70 year old mother raises a few chickens. 2 pigs tended by whoever has time. Most of the rest of the domestic work is done by the interviewee's two daughters.
33	Interviewee (38) husband son (at school)	1.76 mu - wheat, rice, rape for own consumption. 2.5 fen - vegetables for own consumption and pig feed.	During busy season husband is most important worker in fields, but otherwise she does all the work. - about 1 day/week.	Husband is accountant in village factory.	Interviewee does all domestic work. She raises 12 chickens and 3 pigs.

Location & Family No.	Family Membership	Amount of Cultivated Land and Crops Grown	Division of Labour in Agriculture*	Division of Labour in Other Remunerated Work	Division of Labour in Domestic Work
34	Interviewee (38) husband 2 daughters (at school)	3 mu - rice, wheat, rape for sale and for own consumption. 4 fen - vegetables for own consumption.	Interviewee and husband both work in fields every day. There is no division of labour, but he works 1 hr/day more.	Husband does some temporary work in local factory during the agricultural slack season.	Interviewee and husband both do the shopping. Interviewee does the rest. of the domestic work. She raises 1 chicken and 4 pigs.
Wenjiang County, Sichuan 35	Interviewee (38) husband mother-and father-in-law daughter son (at school)	4 mu 5 fen - grain for own consumption and to meet state requirement 5 fen - pig feed	Interviewee does the day-to-day field work, watering and weeding 1 hr/day. During busy season all work more than 10 hrs/day in the fields. Husband does the planting. They ask others to help with the harvesting. Interviewee runs specialised household raising chickens. Husband does the buying and selling for this business. Daughter also works in the specialised household.	Husband works in township hospital 4 hrs/day.	Interviewee does the shopping. Interviewee does the cooking, cleaning and washing for herself, husband and parents-in-law. Daughter does the cooking, cleaning, and washing for herself and her brother. 4 pigs kept - unclear who tends them.
36	Interviewee (73) son daughter-in-law granddaughter grandson (at school) husband dead	5 mu - rice, wheat, rape. 5 fen - pig feed and vegetables for own consumption.	Daughter-in-law does the field work. They are all involved in running a specialised household raising chickens.		Daughter-in-law does all domestic work. She raises 5 pigs.

Location & Family No.	Family Membership	Amount of Cultivated Land and Crops Grown	Division of Labour in Agriculture*	Division of Labour in Other Remunerated Work	Division of Labour in Domestic Work
37	Interviewee (55) husband daughter son (at school)	3 mu 5 fen - rice, wheat rape 3 fen - vegetables for own consumption	They all do field work on Sunday.	Husband is retired teacher with pension. They run a tailoring school. Interviewee and daughter teach and sew, husband manages business deals and advertisement.	Interviewee does the shopping. Daughter does the rest. She raises 4 pigs and 5 chickens.
38	Interviewee (50) husband daughter son (at school)	3 mu 5 fen - all used for flowers and bonsai, except a few fen for vegetables for own consumption.	Interviewee runs a specialised household growing flowers and bonsais. Husband, son and daughter help.	Husband is retired accountant.	All family members do domestic work.
39	Interviewee (38) husband 2 daughters (1 at school) son	7 mu - wheat, pig feed, rice. 2 fen - vegetables for pig feed and own consumption	During the slack season interviewee does the fieldwork - 2 hrs/day, hoeing, watering, putting on fertiliser. During busy season she is helped by her children.	Husband works away in construction and only returns once a year at Spring Festival. Son and one daughter make car parts at home, for a township run factory.	Interviewee does all domestic work. She raises 7 pigs and 12 chickens.
40	Interviewee (35) husband mother-in-law son (at school)	2 mu - wheat 1 mu rice and wheat alternating. 2 fen - pig feed.	Interviewee manages field work during slack season and all are involved during busy season. Interviewee and mother-in-law raise 30 pigs and 10 - 20 chickens.	Husband is village Party Secretary.	Mother-in-law does the cooking sometimes. Interviewee does the rest.
41	Interviewee (60) son & wife (urban household registr.) grandson husband dead	8 fen - rice, wheat, rape. 1 fen - vegetables	Daughter-in-law does field work and raises 18 pigs, 13 chickens.	Son works in county construction team.	Interviewee does the shopping and helps with the cooking. Daughter-in-law does the rest.

Location & Family No.	Family Membership	Amount of Cultivated Land and Crops Grown	Division of Labour in Agriculture*	Division of Labour in Other Remunerated Work	Division of Labour in Domestic Work
42	Interviewee (33) husband son (at kindergarten)	a few fen - rice, wheat.	Husband does fieldwork (interviewee is crippled).	Husband is a contract truck driver.	Either the interviewee or her husband do the shopping. She does the rest. She raises a few chickens and 2 ducks.
43	Interviewee (40) husband daughter son (at school)	3 mu - wheat, rice, rape. 4 fen - pig and chicken feed.	During the busy season all do field work. They run a specialised household raising chickens. No division of labour, but she and daughter do longest hours.		The interviewee's father does the shopping for the two families. She and her daughter do the rest. Daughter raises pigs 1 hr/day.
Guan County, Sichuan 44	Interviewee (66) husband son daughter-in-law 2 grandchildren (at school)	4 mu 7 fen - rice and vegetables	Husband, son and daughter-in-law work 8 hrs/day in fields. Interviewee works 2 hrs/day in fields. They also raise goldfish and grow grapes.		Interviewee looks after her grandchildren. Daughter-in-law does all the domestic work. She raises 10 chickens and a few pigs.
45	Interviewee (33) husband son (at school)	2 mu 1 fen - rice, wheat, vegetables.	Interviewee works 5 hrs/day in fields, husband works 6 hrs/day in fields. He carries water and fertiliser, she pours it onto the fields.		Whoever has time does the shopping. Interviewee does the rest. She raises 6 chickens, 2 ducks, and 2 pigs.

Location & Family No.	Family Membership	Amount of Cultivated Land and Crops Grown	Division of Labour in Agriculture*	Division of Labour in Other Remunerated Work	Division of Labour in Domestic Work
46	Interviewee (51) husband 4 children daughter-in-law grandchild	3 mu 5 fen 2.8 fen - rice and wheat	Interviewee works 6 hrs/day in field. Husband works 8 hrs/day in field. Women do weeding and harvesting. Men do ploughing using tractor. Men apply water and fertiliser.	Husband is a carpenter. 2 children work in factory.	Interviewee tends the pigs, does the washing and shopping for herself and her husband, and the cooking and cleaning for the whole family. Her husband helps with the cleaning.
47	Interviewee (48) husband 3 sons 3 daughters-in-law 2 grandchildren	5 mu 9 fen - grain and vegetables	Interviewee and daughters-in-law do field work. Sons help a bit during busy season. 2 daughters-in-law raise 170 pigs. One son and an elderly hired worker grow bonsai and flowers.	Two sons drive a tractor for other people. Husband runs a private enterprise. crushing rocks.	Interviewee does the sweeping. One daughter-in-law does the cooking. Another raises chickens. All the women in the family do the washing. Interviewee does the shopping.
48	Interviewee (39) husband mother- & father-in-law 3 sons	3 mu - grain and vegetables 3 fen	Interviewee does the field work - a few hrs each day.	Husband and sons are contract loading workers.	Mother-in-law washes her own and her husband's clothes and helps tend the 3 ducks, 5 - 6 chickens, 6 geese, and 7 pigs. Interviewee does the rest.
49	Interviewee (48) husband son daughter-in-law baby-grandchild nanny	1 mu 2 fen - rice, wheat rape	Interviewee does field work during slack season - 1 hr/day. During busy season the others help.	Interviewee is an accountant in a local enterprise 6 hrs/day. Husband, son and daughter-in-law work in a factory. Daughter-in-law works 6 hrs/day (she is nursing a baby). Husband and son work 8 hrs/day.	Interviewee does the shopping. She and daughter-in-law share the rest. The two take it in turns to look after interviewee's grandchild. They also hire a nanny for this.

Location & Family No.	Family Membership	Amount of Cultivated Land and Crops Grown	Division of Labour in Agriculture*	Division of Labour in Other Remunerated Work	Division of Labour in Domestic Work
50	Interviewee (27) husband daughter (at school)	2.65 mu - rice, wheat, vegetables	Interviewee does field work - 2-3 hrs/day. 8 hrs in busy season. Husband helps with heavy work in busy season.	Husband drives a tractor for an income.	Interviewee does all, except that if it is raining and he cannot go out, her husband helps her. Interviewee raises 2 pigs and 8 chickens.
51	Interviewee (36) husband (urban household registration) daughter (at school)	1 mu 2 fen - rice, wheat rape 1 fen - vegetables for own consumption	Interviewee does the field work. During slack season this amounts to 1/2 hr/day for vegetables, 1 month/year for grain. During busy season she works 10 hrs/day for 15 days and 3 hrs/day for 15 days. Husband helps during busy season. Last year interviewee grew sugar cane, but it was too much trouble.	Interviewee works in factory 8 hrs/day and during slack season makes plastic grain bags at home. Husband works in township hospital 8 hrs/day.	Interviewee does the shopping and washing and raises 2 pigs. Her husband helps with other domestic work 1 hr/day.
Mianyang County, Sichuan 52	Interviewee (48) husband 2 sons (1 at school)	3.88 mu - grain and vegetables	2 hired workers do the field work and raise 37 pigs.	Interviewee runs a private enterprise in food processing. She is helped by one son and her husband who is a retired worker. They also hire 16 workers for this business.	Interviewee and husband do the shopping. She does some washing and sweeping. 2 hired workers do the rest.
53	Interviewee (38) husband (urban household registr.) 2 children (at school)	3 mu	Workers hired for the cake business help with field work when the electricity stops.	Interviewee runs a private enterprise making cakes, and hires 12 workers. Husband works in Public Security Bureau.	Interviewee is helped by a hired worker.

Location & Family No.	Family Membership	Amount of Cultivated Land and Crops Grown	Division of Labour in Agriculture*	Division of Labour in Other Remunerated Work	Division of Labour in Domestic Work
54	Interviewee (34) husband (urban household registr.) daughter (at school)	7.2 fen - vegetables	Interviewee does field work 2 hrs/day.	Husband is a factory worker. Interviewee dredges sand from river.	Interviewee does all domestic work.
55	Interviewee (52) husband daughter son	1.17 mu - vegetables		Husband is a tax collector. He is retired on a pension, but continues to do some employment. Daughter works in a factory. Son is a temporary worker.	Interviewee does most of the domestic work. Daughter and husband help.
56	Interviewee (37) husband (urban household registr.) 2 children	5 fen - vegetables	Interviewee does most of the field work - 2 hrs/week.	Interviewee runs a grocery shop and a recreation room. Husband works in a fertiliser shop.	Interviewee and husband share domestic work.
57	Interviewee (47) husband mother daughter	1 mu 4 fen - vegetables	Interviewee does most of the fieldwork - 1 hr/day. Husband and daughter do 1/2 hr/day each.	Interviewee and daughter run a tailoring school with 90 students. Husband works in a state factory.	Interviewee's mother does the cooking and raises 2 pigs. The rest of the family help with domestic work.
58	Interviewee (38) husband, mother mother-and father-in-law son (at school)	2.12 mu - vegetables.	Interviewee does 6 - 7 hrs/day field work, husband does 1 hr/day.	Mother- and father-in-law are retired cadres on pensions.	Interviewee does most of the domestic work. She raises 2 pigs.
59	Interviewee (26) husband son (at school)	1 mu 8 fen - vegetables.	Interviewee does the field work 8 hrs/day.	Husband works in a village-run factory and lives elsewhere.	Interviewee does all domestic work. She used to raise pigs, but stopped because she does not have time.

Location & Family No.	Family Membership	Amount of Cultivated Land and Crops Grown	Division of Labour in Agriculture*	Division of Labour in Other Remunerated Work	Division of Labour in Domestic Work
60	Interviewee (28) husband mother- & father-in-law daughter (pre-school)	1 mu 5 fen - vegetables	Interviewee and husband do 1/2 hr/day field work each.	Interviewee works in village-run fur factory. Husband is an accountant in a township-run enterprise.	All adult family members involved in domestic work. Parents-in-law raise 11 chickens. Husband does 2 hrs/day.

* Times given refer to agricultural slack season, unless otherwise stated.

Source: Interviews with rural women, August - December 1989.

APPENDIX 2: EMPLOYMENT IN SAMPLE TOWNSHIP ENTERPRISES IN RURAL BEIJING, SHANDONG AND SICHUAN

Location	Enterprise	Ownership	Products	Start of Operation	Number of Workers	% of Female Workers	Workers' Age	Workers' Education	Average Wage (Yuan/Month)
Huairou County, Beijing	1	Township	Agricultural Machinery	1958	180	27.8	Average: 30 Oldest: 52 Youngest: 18	a. & b. 0 c. 115 d. 9F 49M e. 1F 6M	150 (including bonuses)
	2	Township	Clothing	1980	610	78.7	Average: 21 Oldest: 50 Youngest: 18	a. & b. 0 c. 80% d. 15% e. 5%	160 (including bonuses)
Ling County, Shandong	3	Village	Cotton Ginning		220	52			138
	4	Village	Cotton Textiles	1979	167	61.7			100
	5	Village	Cotton Spinning		200	90			120
	6	Township (Processes for county factory)	Carpets	1982	150 in Factory 350 at Home or in Village Workshops	96-98	in Factory: Youngest: 16 Oldest: 21		
	7	County	Carpets		420	80	Average: 27 Oldest: 50 Youngest: 16	c. minimum requirement	
	8	Township	Cloth Shoes	1981	125	67.2	Oldest: <20 Youngest: 15	c. majority	100 (including bonuses)

Location	Enterprise	Ownership	Products	Start of Operation	Number of Workers	% of Female Workers	Workers' Age	Workers' Education	Average Wage (Yuan/Month)
Ling County Shandong (contd.)	9	Township (Contract with provincial company)	Artificial Silk	1987	82	73	Average: 20 Youngest: 16	c. Average	100
Xindu County, Sichuan	10	Village	Clothing	1983	340	90	Average: 25 Oldest: 40 Youngest: 18	c. minimum requirement	150
	11	Township	Metal Door & Window Frames	1984	120	25	Average: 24 Oldest: 62 (2 skilled workers) Unskilled: Oldest: 36 Youngest: 18	c. minimum requirement d. majority	
Jinniu District, Sichuan	12	Township	Fibre Glass Cooling Towers	1979	316	33.9	Average: 30 Oldest: 56 Youngest: 18	a. & b. 0 c. 37.5 % d. 60% e. 2.5%	145 (including bonuses)
	13	Village	Chemical Products, Electro-Plating	1978	90	70	Average: 30 Oldest: 46 Youngest: 18	c. Average d. Requirement for workers hired after 1988	150 (not including bonuses)
Wenjiang County, Sichuan	14	Township	Car Parts	1978	226	46.9	Average (F): 22 Oldest (F): 34 Youngest (F): 17 Average (M): 25.5 Oldest (M): 52 Youngest (M): 18	a. & b. 0 c. 146 (minimum requirement) d. 30 F, 50 M	123.33 (including bonuses)

Location	Enterprise	Ownership	Products	Start of Operation	Number of Workers	% of Female Workers	Workers' Age	Workers' Education	Average Wage (Yuan/Month)
Wenjiang County, Sichuan (contd.)	15	Township (Subsidiary of state-run factory in Chengdu)	Nylon Thread	1987	80	80	Average: 21 Youngest: 17 Oldest (F): 36 (Head) Oldest (M): 42 (In Management)	c. Average	160 (including bonuses)
Guan County, Sichuan	16	Township	Chemicals	1979	127	26	Average: 38 Youngest: 17	a. 0 b. 101 c. & d. 26 d. 5 F	116.66
	17	Cooperative (Sub-Production Team Unit)	Children's Clothing	1987	126	97.6	Average: 25 Oldest: 45 (Skilled Worker) Youngest: 17 (Apprentice)	a. & b. 0 c. minimum requirement e. 2	156.7 (including bonuses)

- a. illiterate
- b. primary school graduate
- c. junior secondary school graduate
- d. senior secondary school graduate
- e. secondary or tertiary vocational school graduate

Source: Interviews with managers of township enterprises, September - December 1989

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