Gender and Work in Urban China

Women workers of the unlucky generation

Liu Jieyu

Routledge Contemporary China Series

Gender and Work in Urban China

Although it is generally believed in China that socialism raised women's status and paid work liberated them from the shackles of patriarchy, the economic reforms of the last two decades of the twentieth century meant women workers were more vulnerable to losing their jobs than their male counterparts. Unlike previous studies, which have focused on the macro-structural features of this process, this book makes the voices of ordinary women workers heard and applies feminist perspectives on women and work to the Chinese situation.

Drawing upon extensive life history interviews, this book contests the view that mobilizing women into the workplace brought about their liberation. Instead, the gendered redundancy they experienced was the culmination of a lifetime's experiences of gender inequalities. Setting their life stories against a backdrop of great social–political upheaval in China, the book suggests that the women of this 'unlucky generation' have borne the brunt of sufferings caused by sacrifices they made for the development of socialist China. In particular, it highlights the role of the work unit (*danwei*) during the pre-reform period and how this constrained opportunities for these women, operating as an arbiter of their careers and personal lives and continuing the patriarchal function of pre-socialist institutions.

In blending sociological and feminist analysis with cultural sensitivity to the study of Chinese women workers, the interdisciplinary nature of *Gender and Work in Urban China* will interest scholars of Chinese society, gender, culture and politics.

Liu Jieyu is Lecturer of Sociology at the University of Glasgow.

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For my mother and all the women workers from the unlucky generation

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1 Introduction

My maternal grandmother was sold into her husband's family at the age of nine. After the foundation of socialist China in 1949, she was mobilized into the workforce, but her working life was frequently interrupted by calls to participate in family labour and finally ended with an early retirement to care for me when I was born. By contrast, my mother grew up in socialist China, did not have an arranged marriage, and worked full-time almost uninterrupted for more than 20 years. The difference in experience between my grandmother and my mother, plus over a decade of Chinese education, made me once believe that socialism had raised women from the inferior position they held in traditional societies and Chinese women had indeed held up half the sky. However, during the economic reform of the 1990s, my mother was forced to make an involuntary exit from the workplace. She was angry but accepted that 'all women at 45 had to go'. I was confused as to why women were singled out for redundancy since men and women were supposed to be equal. At university I encountered Western feminism and was intrigued by the ways in which feminists questioned everyday life from a gender perspective. I started reflecting upon my family's experience and the role of gender in Chinese society; it was the apparent paradox between the rhetoric and reality of gender relations which initiated my pursuit of a study in this area and is ultimately why I wrote this book.

My mother's generation of women is of particular interest because of the suffering they experienced prior to the economic restructuring of the 1990s; they had gone through the disastrous three-year famine (1959–1961) in their childhood, were relocated to the countryside in their teens as part of Mao's policy of 'learning from the peasants', and were controlled by the one-child policy in their childbearing years. On recalling this series of turbulent events beyond their control they had encountered during their lifetime, the women I talked to frequently referred to themselves as the 'unlucky generation'. As one put it,

> Our generation has run into everything in our life. When we should receive education, we didn't have the chance, only graduated from primary school. When we started work only at 15 or 16, we worked in

> three-shift rotations, destroying our health. When you tried to study something, the three-shift rotation prevented you from it. Later when you could devote yourself at 40, the factory went down and you were laid off. . . . Now you want to work, but nobody wants you. I feel our whole life is miserable enough.
>
> (Jing Xia,[1] aged 50)

Although their lives were 'dramatic and eventful', these 'ordinary' women have received little attention from society or the academic world. My aim is therefore to illuminate the lives of women from this unlucky generation, a generation growing up with the development of socialist China, a generation who was imbued with socialist gender rhetoric as well as competing realities.

Through collecting and analyzing the life histories of 33 redundant women workers in Nanjing, I explored the ways in which gender affected different stages of their life; their childhood, the Cultural Revolution, work and life in the socialist work unit and then redundancy, showing how their life choices were shaped by state policy and how they had been expected to make sacrifices for the development of China. The women I talked to belong to the same generation as some of the most famous Chinese women to have published autobiographies in the West such as Jung Chang, the author of *Wild Swans, Three Daughters of China* (1993) and Aiping Mu, the author of *Vermilion Gate* (2002). However, these writers came from élite backgrounds. They were originally from Beijing or Shanghai and had emigrated to the West. Although they suffered in the Cultural Revolution, nevertheless they had educational opportunities that subsequently enabled them to move to the West and reach their present status. In contrast, the provincial women I interviewed had missed out on an education, were allocated a job in a state work unit at the end of the Cultural Revolution and remained there until they were made redundant in the 1990s. These women could not write a biography for themselves; this book will tell their story.

This book is also a study of women's work. Located in feminist scholarship and focusing on women workers who have lost their jobs as a consequence of economic restructuring, it offers insights into the gendered consequences of the dramatic socio-economic changes occurring in contemporary China. In contrast with existing studies which tend to focus on the macro-structural features of redundancy, I adopt a qualitative approach to re-examine assumptions about gendered patterns of employment in China. And rather than analyzing gender discrimination as something new that occurred in economic restructuring, I explore the historical and institutional factors that have shaped the lives of women workers, and identify the link between women's previous working experiences and the gendered redundancy they encountered in the 1990s. In particular, I look at the role of the work unit (*danwei*) during the pre-reform period and how this shaped the life chances of women. I show how the work unit operated as an arbiter

in the career and personal lives of its employees and argue that its highly personalist and interventionist role continued the patriarchal function of pre-socialist institutions in shaping and constraining the life opportunities of women. The gendered redundancy women experienced was the culmination of a lifetime of gender inequalities.

This book is about social change, shifting employment patterns and the status of women in China. It presents urban women's lives over time in socialist China as well as the gendered consequences of economic reforms. These changes can be better understood in the context of China's social history.

Socio-cultural background

Throughout pre-modern Chinese history, its Emperors adopted Confucianism as the core principle for regulating society: everybody should know and behave in accordance with their position in society to achieve a harmonious and hierarchical order. Unfortunately, women were located at the bottom of that hierarchy. The idea of *Nanzunnübei* ('women are inferior to men') served as the code for women's conduct, exemplified by prescriptions such as the *Sancong* ('Three Obediences'), which dictated that women were subject to the authority of their father when young, their husband when married and their son when widowed (see Min 1997). This Confucian idea of social organization had been attacked by Chinese intellectuals since the early twentieth century. Nationalist reformers regarded the unequal status of women as one of the obstacles that prevented China from reaching modernity and promoted women's rights as an internal part of their nationalist project (Barlow 2004).

From its foundation in 1921, the Chinese Communist Party advocated the liberation of women; a few campaigns such as banning arranged marriages were carried out in its revolutionary bases (Davin 1976). When the Party came to power in 1949, it legitimized its approach towards women's liberation with legislation on issues such as marriage, labour and land in the attempt to introduce a new ideology of equality. The All-China Women's Federation, a government department with a seat at the national congress, was set up specifically to deal with women's issues (Croll 1983, Davin 1976). The Party firmly believed that women's emancipation would be realized through their full-time participation into paid work outside of the home. These actions genuinely improved women's status and quality of life. However, in keeping with Marxist theory, which locates women's problems within class struggle (Landes 1989), the state's attempt to uphold women's interests was subordinated to other prioritized efforts in building the socialist nation. For example, women were called upon to return home and be good housewives in the early 1960s when there was huge unemployment pressure (Andors 1983). The Women's Federation also struggled with its role of assistant to the Party's central work and with the role of protector of women's interests (Jin 2001). Then during the Cultural Revolution, class

issues took precedence and, despite the slogans such as 'women hold up half the sky' and 'what men can do, women can do', hardly any official attention was given to tackling women's issues (Honig 2002).

After Mao Zedong's death in 1976, China adopted an approach to socialist construction that was centred on economic modernization. In the countryside, collective farming was displaced by a return to family farming; markets were relaxed and restrictions on rural-urban migration reduced. In the cities, the economic restructuring of state enterprises became the centrepiece. The post-Mao economic reforms, which led to major social, political and economic changes, improved living standards immensely. However, the effects of these reforms were felt differently according to gender, age and location. In rural China, decollectivization in the 1980s meant that women's labour was once again controlled by the head of the household (Andors 1983, Davin 1989). Then, as men and young women left the countryside for better paid jobs in the cities, older and married women had to continue to run low-profit agricultural businesses whilst having limited access to the micro-financial loans initiated by the government (see Jacka 1997, Judd 1994). Many young migrant women worked in foreign-owned factories assembling electronic goods. Although migration broadened their life horizon and increased their income, they suffered from unpleasant working conditions and harassment (Gaetano and Jacka 2004, Pun 2005). In urban China, job discrimination against women in various sectors proliferated (Honig and Hershatter 1988). Employers were more reluctant to recruit women graduates. Young women were drawn into the 'youth occupations' such working as a waitress or airhostess which demands physical attractiveness (Wang Zheng 2000). Labourers in state enterprises lost social status and millions are increasingly prone to unemployment. Middle-aged and older women workers in particular are more likely to lose their jobs and borne the brunt of dislocation (Lee 2005, Perry and Selden 2000). This large-scale female redundancy in state enterprises is considered by feminist scholars in China as the 'crisis in women's employment' (see Jiang Yongping 2001). This book addresses this crisis, one that constitutes a particular social problem in China at the present time. In this context it offers an account of how and why the urban women workers who participated in my study lost out. It also considers the consequences of these changes for a new generation of Chinese women – the workers' daughters.

Economic restructuring and gendered redundancy

This crisis originated in the process of dismantling state enterprises. Before the reforms, state enterprises were the main source of livelihood for urban citizens in China. These enterprises, called *danwei* (work units), were more than economic entities: they guaranteed lifetime employment and were also residential and welfare communities providing workers with services such as housing and healthcare in addition to wages and retirement pensions.

After the reforms which promoted the multi-ownership of enterprise, the state-run production-oriented enterprises faced serious competition from non-state enterprises, whilst still bearing the burden of welfare provision. Their economic performance began to deteriorate rapidly in the late 1980s.

In 1986, the State Council introduced a contract labour system under which workers were no longer clarified as permanent members of the work unit. In the period of 'optimal labour reorganization' (1986–1988), '[m]any workers were asked to change jobs or even stay home with significantly reduced wages in order for their factories to lower production costs' (Ting Gong 2002:127). However, urban enterprises were still subsidized by the state so the scale of redundancy was relatively small. Profits of state-run enterprises continued to decline, and by 1992 two-thirds of them were operating in the red. In 1992, at its 14th Plenary Congress, the Communist Party formally decided to establish a socialist market economy, and by endorsing *xiagang* (lit. 'leaving the post'), aimed to enable state-run enterprises to compete more efficiently with non-state ones. Since its 15th Plenary Congress in 1997, the Party confirmed the decision to reform state-run enterprises by reducing employees. *Xiagang* has taken various forms, such as laying-off and buying-out; I prefer to translate it as 'redundancy' to include any situation in which workers lost their jobs for reasons beyond their control. As a result of the numerous terms used nationally and regionally, how many workers were made redundant has always been a controversial issue. Based upon data from *China Labour Statistical Yearbooks*, Giles *et al.* (2006) found that aggressive economic restructuring led to the layoffs of 45 million workers from 1995–2002. However, Solinger (2001) has questioned the reliability of Chinese statistics and suggested that the official figures are far too low.

The state government adopted various measures to counter the upsurge in joblessness. For example, the Reemployment Service Centre was part of the Reemployment Project launched in 1995 which included various active labour market policies trying to provide job-replacement and job-training with co-operative efforts from governments at different levels, and enterprises. Welfare provision in the work unit was dismantled; employees, enterprises and the state were all required to contribute to the social fund for pension and medical care. However, due to financial constraints, some enterprises could not afford to pay their share to the social fund. Noting the inefficiency of these programmes, some scholars called for an installation of a genuine social security system in China (Cook 2002, Solinger 2002, 2003).

Studies on the gendered effects of market reforms in other countries have shown that men and women tend to be positioned differently in the process (see Aslanbeigui *et al.* 1994, Pollert 2003, 2005). In the case of China, women workers in particular bore the cost of reform from the start. A survey by the national trade union in 11 provinces in 1987 found that women accounted for 64 per cent of the excess workers of 660 enterprises (Jacka 1990). A common means of making women redundant was to extend

their maternity leave. In this early round of redundancies many of these 'excess workers' were subsequently transferred to the auxiliary or service sectors of their *danwei*, but from 1992 women were heavily hit by the extended maternity leave and internal retirement policies. In 1993 a seven-province survey carried out by the national trade union found that women made up 60 per cent of redundant workers (Meng 1995). Recent studies have found that being a middle-aged female with a lower educational level, and working in the manufacturing sectors increased the chances of being made redundant (Appleton *et al.* 2002, Dong and Putterman 2002, Saunders and Shang 2001); and it is generally accepted that nearly 60 per cent of layoffs are women.

Alongside these discriminatory practices there were several rounds of intellectual debates over whether women should return home for good. Those in favour argued that women workers should either return home, work part-time or follow staged employment patterns.[2] Of those who supported this position, some claimed that Chinese women were liberated too early, leading to exceed productive capacity, and that the only way to regulate this was for women to return home; some held the view that women were naturally suited to looking after the family and the men should do paid work; while others called on women's patriotic ideals and asked them to sacrifice their jobs to relieve the unemployment problem (see Lin 1995, Sun 1994). To counter these arguments, the Women's Federation pushed the Party to reinstate women's employment rights in legal state documents whilst feminist academics drew on the Marxist premise of women's liberation through employment, arguing that putting women back into the home was a form of retrogression (see Jiang Yongping 2001).

Whilst many feminists fought for women's right to paid work they seldom questioned women's familial roles and presumed responsibilities. This has been exemplified in their stance on the rising discourse of femininity in post-Mao China. As a result of the rejection of the practice of erasing gender differences during the Cultural Revolution, as well as an emerging consumerism in the market economy, womanly virtues such as being a good housewife and mother were reconfigured as appropriate. The emphasis on this form of femininity was not regarded as a retrograde step; many Chinese feminists including Li Xiaojiang (one of the founding members of Women's Studies in China), considered it an expression of women's choice (Tan Shen 1994). By contrast, the Maoist image of strong, heroic women workers was ridiculed as a symbol of backward obstacles to China's modernization. Similarly, the blame for women's unemployment seems to fall upon women workers themselves. The Women's Federation's 'four self' campaign – self-esteem (*zizun*), self-confidence (*zixin*), self reliance (*zili*) and self-cultivation (*ziai*) – implied that the unemployment of women workers could in some way be attributed to the deficiencies of individual women. Some feminist scholars and economists also boiled gendered redundancy down to several variables such as having a lower educational level, lacking in skills and

heavy familial responsibilities. However, few questioned why it should be women rather than men who were encouraged to return home or how women workers came to lack educational qualifications and professional skills.

Theorizing women's work in an era of social change

Studies on women's redundancy in China focus more on a macro level pointing out its scale, characteristics and impact. Although measuring social change is important, I contend that evaluating and understanding how social change is lived through by the people involved is equally significant. Research on post-socialist societies in Eastern Europe has shown the fruitfulness of using a biographical approach in a period of social transformations (Humphrey *et al.* 2003). People's life stories provide an intriguing means of tracing social change and a useful way of understanding both the 'transition' period and the past contours of the society controlled by the Communist Party. In the case of China, policy-makers and scholars tend to emphasize economic reform on its own as it was designed as a rejection of everything Mao represented and as a break with the past. I question this disjuncture between the post-Mao reform and Maoist practices and find this biographical approach particularly useful in examining women's work and social change in China. It establishes the link between the past and present and weaves individual lives and wider social processes together, offering a rare insight into changes and continuities. This approach also exemplifies Mills' (1959) idea of the sociological imagination – linking history, biography and society. The redundancy literature has indicated that the generation which grew up during the turbulent years of the Cultural Revolution was the cohort hardest hit by the economic restructuring. However, there have been no studies that place redundancy in the context of workers' whole lives or, most importantly, how women experienced these social transformations. Feminist studies in post-socialist countries and countries in economic transition have shown that women are more likely to bear a disproportionate share of the costs (Rudd 2000, Pollert 2003). China's economic reform has been hailed as a success represented in high growth rates, but how did it affect older women workers? Did they suffer more? Was being made redundant the culmination of a lifetime of discrimination? Studying Chinese women's redundancy through their biographical narratives not only enables those silenced to speak, but also provides an insightful means to explore the complex and often paradoxical continuities in the construction of gender between diverse post-socialist presents and their corresponding socialist and pre-socialist pasts.

The interdisciplinary feminist literature on women's work is another important source when seeking explanations for Chinese women's redundancy. Western 'second wave' feminists initially focused upon social and economic structuring of the sexual division of labour in employment, such

as the role that the family and labour market played in women's disadvantage in employment and the ways in which capitalism or patriarchy contributed to gender inequality (Rees 1992, Walby 1986). In recent years, there has been a shift in focus from the macro-level exploration of the 'economic' positioning of men and women to the studies of micro-processes in the workplace. Many empirical studies in the West have provided detailed analysis of the gendered work in particular settings or industries, showing how cultural meanings and practices contributed to the gendering of the workplace and the maintenance of women's subordination (Adkins 1995; Bradley 1999). In particular, the role of the organization in shaping women's position at work is more highlighted. In Joan Acker's theory of gendered organization, she argued that organizational structure is not gender neutral (1990, 1992): on the one hand, the documents and contracts used to construct organizations are embedded in gender assumptions. On the other hand, organizations provide an important arena where images and practices of gender are invented and reproduced. It has now been well established that everyday life of organizations is gendered (Acker 1998; Savage and Witz 1992; Halford and Leonard 2001). In the Chinese case, some feminists based outside China (see Davin 1998, Wang Zheng 2000) have pointed out that women workers in the pre-reform period were situated at the lower end of the employment hierarchy. However, there has been no in-depth study offering a detailed analysis of the micro-processes of the *danwei* with respect to women's situation. How did women workers experience the daily work and life in the work unit? What was the role of *danwei* (work unit) in constructing women's position? These questions are particularly important as the *danwei* was the basic unit of social organization with predominant influence over everyday life in urban China. For the majority of urban residents, it was not only the source of lifetime employment and material benefits, it was also the institution through which the urban population was housed, organized and regulated (Bray 2005). It acted as a 'socialist family' controlling as well as protecting its members. However, women were traditionally disadvantaged in the Chinese family system as Confucian protocols specified; I wanted to explore how women workers fared in this institution, to what extent it modified or reformulated pre-revolutionary Confucian ideals, and how gender inequality was created and reproduced under its regime.

Western feminist literature on women's work, while useful, has limitations when applied to the Chinese case. The organizations under discussion in Western literature are based upon a public–private division; hence, the 'organization' is a work setting, distinct from home and family. By contrast, the *danwei* was founded upon the premise that it would provide employment as well as basic living maintenance; thus it was an all-encompassing institution where the public and private spheres were blurred. Paying attention to Chinese specificity, I synthesised various feminist explanations of women's work and constructed a theoretical model (see

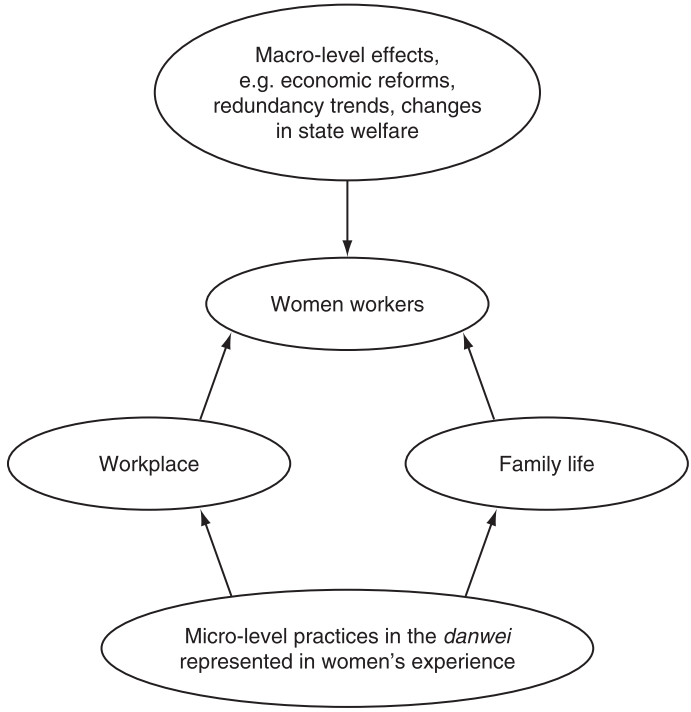

Figure 1 Feminist framework.

Figure 1): gender inequality in employment results from macro-economic processes (Hartmann 1979, Walby 1986) and non-economic elements within (Cockburn 1981) and outwith the labour market (Bradley 1999), and is maintained and strengthened by micro-level gendered operations in respective industries (Acker 1990, Adkins 1995, Halford *et al.* 1997). The existing research on China's economic reforms has widely discussed the macro-level background of women's employment, showing how the policy changes affected women's participation in work. However, what is lacking is the micro-level understanding of work and life recounted from women's own experiences. A systematic exploration of Chinese women's experiences will serve as an entry into the *danwei* and reveal the actual processes through which this socialist family operated and ways in these processes reproduced gender inequalities. I then show how their previous working and living experiences in the work unit shaped their present gendered experience of redundancy.

This research is located in feminist scholarship, placing gender at the centre of enquiry. From earlier accounts which simply added women into analysis and equated gender with sex, we have come to understand gender as one of the fundamental principles around which social life is ordered. Gender

is more than a fixed social category; it is a process historically and socially constructed, whose construction is constitutive of power relations (see Delphy 1993, Jackson and Scott 2002). It is also a verb, something we do in our everyday social interactions (West and Zimmerman 1987). With the lens of gender, I will examine these women workers 'everyday world as problematic' (Smith 1987), and show how gender structured their daily existence, how gender inequalities were created and reinforced throughout their life course, and finally how they came to bear the cost of China's social transformations.

Structure of the book

In Chapter 2, I introduce the women in my study and examine the process of conducting fieldwork in Nanjing, reflecting on the need to temper Western assumptions about qualitative research practices to take account of Chinese socio-cultural specificities. In Chapter 3, I investigate the women's earlier life experiences and show how their experiences of growing up in the Mao era, and particularly the Cultural Revolution, ensured that they were already disadvantaged when they began their working lives. After providing this historically located background, I switch my focus to the *danwei*, the work unit in which most urban women had been allocated jobs. Chapter 4 focuses on the *danwei* as a workplace and the women's experiences of their jobs, identifying the gendered assumptions and practices which prevailed throughout the work organization. Chapter 5 explores how the *danwei* organized life beyond the workplace itself and, in particular, the consequences for women of the interconnection of work and family life. Together, Chapters 3, 4 and 5 present a sociological and historical account of the institutions, events and life experiences which underpinned the gendered inequalities occurring in the economic restructuring. I show that the gendered social disadvantage women faced began long before redundancy in the reform era; it was an institutionalized aspect of their working and family lives in the work unit.

In Chapters 6 and 7, I focus on their experience of redundancy. An analysis of the micro-processes underlying redundancy demonstrates the significance of gender in the cutbacks and for the women's re-employment prospects. Although they were able to draw on their husband's social capital as well as their own gender-specific network, their prior social status was mostly reproduced in the search for re-employment: women who had been in the lower echelons in the workplace were vulnerable to downward mobility whereas the former cadres were able to access well-paid jobs and to maintain their social position. Thus far the spotlight has been upon the mothers' generation and the presentation of their eventful life experiences. In contrast, in Chapter 8, I turn to the women's daughters and their work and life aspirations. They had espoused empowerment and the emerging individualism, distancing themselves from their mother's past, and had internalized

contradictory values which reflect the intermingling of past and present, of tradition and modernity, and of the tensions and frictions arising from these oppositional ideologies. The book concludes by summarizing the contributions this study has made to the further understanding of both urban women's lives over time in socialist China and the gendered consequences of economic restructuring.

2 Researching Chinese women's lives

> Often condemned as apolitical, reflexivity, on the contrary can be seen as opening the way to a more radical consciousness of self in facing the political dimensions of fieldwork and constructing knowledge.
>
> (Callaway 1992:33)

I returned to China to conduct my fieldwork in March 2003 and stayed until May 2003. I collected life histories from redundant women workers in Nanjing to explore the social and historical factors that had shaped their lives. I also interviewed some of their daughters about the impact of their mother's changed circumstances on their own life and aspirations. My decision to include daughters came from reading Song's (1995) study of two generations of women in the Chinese restaurant business in London, in which she mentioned how daughters gained empowerment from their mothers' experiences. I recalled that none of my female friends was keen on repeating the life track their mothers had followed so I decided to incorporate the daughters' vantage point. The process of my fieldwork was complicated by cultural specificities such as how to approach interviewees, a lack of familiarity with qualitative research among the Chinese and the intrusion of the national matchmaking culture in relations with interviewees. My stay was cut short by the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) epidemic, which made my fieldwork an eventful experience.

Nanjing (lit. 'the capital of the south'), the city where my research was based, has a population of about 6 million. It holds a significant place in Chinese history, having formerly been the national capital of ten dynasties including that of the Nationalist government. It is a city of historical glory as well as a city of modern sadness; in that it had unfortunately witnessed the signing after the defeat to the British in the Opium War and, with its hinterland, suffered the inhumane Massacre and other atrocities after the Imperial Japanese Army seized the city in December 1937. After the Communist victory of 1949, the capital was moved to Beijing (lit. 'the capital of the north'). Having lost both its central status and significance in the country, it was made the capital of Jiangsu Province and focused more on its building as a regional economic centre. By the 1990s it had become one of the important

industrial bases in Eastern China with petrochemicals, electronics and car manufacturing as its mainstay industries and machine manufacturing, textiles and metallurgy as its local feature industries. Currently it produces about 1 per cent of the national gross industrial production of China. Unlike the dramatic, fast-moving international metropolises such as Beijing and Shanghai, it represents the more typical Chinese life as a provincial city.

China's large-scale redundancies since the 1990s occurred mostly in old industrial base areas and areas with relatively rapid market development (Dong 2003). Being near Shanghai, Nanjing has experienced this market development which has subjected old industries more directly to the dynamics of global economic demands. Jiangsu province, where Nanjing is located, has also been traditionally famous for its strong textile industries employing many women workers; nationwide, most redundant women workers have come from the textiles and machinery industries (Zhang 1999). My study thus has a wider relevance for the situation of redundant women workers.

Finding interviewees

Although the 'culture of fear' (Yang 1994) had become significantly relaxed by the time I conducted research, the cautiousness still persisted throughout my fieldwork. It was particularly complicated by the sensitivity of my topic as unemployment had become a 'hot (political) potato' for the Chinese government. Being Chinese, I am fully aware of the important role of personal connections in everyday practices, so initially I intended to ask local academics and the Women's Federation for help in finding potential interviewees. I telephoned two famous historians recommended by a visiting scholar at University of York. One was supposed to have connections with the Party but he laughed and said that he 'did not have any connection with *Women's* Federation' (his stress). The other also declined my request and sounded suspicious of my research. I decided to abandon this official route and resorted to my own informal network. This decision turned out to be very sensible as my final encounter with the Women's Federation showed that they were very cautious about what I was researching as a scholar based outside of China.

I asked friends and relatives to suggest possible contacts and thereafter used the snowballing method. My mother approached several of her friends; I asked female students introduced by my former lecturer to approach their mothers; and I asked some mothers after I had interviewed them to approach their daughters. Initially, I told a few friends that I was researching female redundancy and wanted to interview them about their life histories. However, both they and the women they had approached showed great caution and fear: those women were worried that in future the government would do something to them even though both I and sometimes the intermediaries emphasized my professional ethics. Thus, I slightly changed my explanation to my intermediaries saying that I was in fact studying the life

histories of women who had experienced losing their jobs. Emphasizing their life history rather than the redundancy event minimized the sensitivity of my research and made the intermediaries and interviewees relatively less cautious. I am aware of the ethics involved in this tactical change of wording; however it was an act to which I would not have resorted if I had been able to find an alternative way of finding interviewees. And, at least, it was a way not to put them in panic.

Using personal networks was successful in recruiting mothers, but this strategy met a challenge in the process of approaching daughters for interviews. When I asked daughters to approach their mothers, the majority of mothers agreed as a favour to their daughters. In fact, one student's mother directly asked me to praise her daughter in front of her teachers. Conversely, when I asked the mothers to approach the daughters, some could not persuade them to consent. The generational difference is, I suspect, a consequence of the one-child policy: most daughters had been the sole focus of their family's attention; this benefited their development but had also fostered self-centeredness. These children are often called 'Little Empresses'.

An unexpected complication was an effect of the SARS epidemic. Initially, SARS seemed to be irrelevant to my fellow citizens and my fieldwork went well. However, with the release of the real figures for patients in Beijing, suddenly the whole country began to panic. Discussions about SARS were broadcast on peak-time TV on all channels every night. From mid-April, Nanjing was preparing for a war against SARS and more and more people began to wear facemasks when they left their houses. Every time I went outside my parents asked me to put on a mask and to avoid crowds and packed buses, so I cycled to interviews whenever possible and tried to keep my fears under control. One interviewee asked me if I needed to wash my hands, which puzzled me, and I said 'no thanks'. I only realized what she meant when I watched the local evening TV news in which experts showed viewers how to wash their hands as a preventive measure. Thereafter I offered to wash my hands to reassure my interviewees that I would not endanger them. In May, the first SARS patient in Nanjing was discovered and all the people who had travelled on the same train, or bus or had been in the same public places were told to see their doctor. Many residential blocks were quarantined and the whole city was on high alert. I began to have much more difficulty finding interviewees: some potential contacts refused to see me because they were afraid of meeting a stranger. When I telephoned women whom I had already interviewed for some additional information some asked me when I had come back to China and where my plane had landed. They were greatly relieved when I assured them that I had arrived in Shanghai before the outbreak and that I had not been anywhere near Beijing. The universities were closed and students were not allowed to leave the campus, which prevented me from completing my interviews with some of the daughters and using the library. My supervisors were extremely worried and they decided that I must return to England lest my residential area

should be quarantined and my return indefinitely delayed. My former lecturer pulled strings and managed to get me onto the campus for one day so I was able to do six more interviews – fortunately these were shorter than those with their mothers. I had planned to interview 30 mother–daughter pairs, but I had only managed to complete interviews with 20 pairs before my stay was abruptly cut short.

In the end, I managed to interview 33 women in the mothers' generation: 27 were redundant women workers, five were women who had survived or witnessed the economic restructuring and one was a Women's Federation officer. Most of them were middle-aged (over 35 years of age) and married; and 20 were of the Cultural Revolution generation. Almost half had spent over 20 years in their work unit; the majority had worked in the manufacturing sector and had only served in one work unit in their entire working life. Over half of the 27 who had been made redundant lost their job in the work unit some five years previously and had been redundant for a long time (see their basic characteristics in Appendix A). The industries where they had worked roughly coincided with the industrial structure of the whole city. The 20 interviewees in the daughters' generation were aged from 12–27 years; six of them were in work, all the rest were still in education (see Chapter 8 and Appendices B and C).

Carrying out the interviews

Interviewing for academic purposes in China is quite new to most people. Generally, when an interview is mentioned, people would imagine being visited by reporters and then seeing their words being published in the media. Therefore, it is assumed that interviews happen to people when they have achieved something in a certain field. Similarly, most of my interviewees responded: 'I am not worthy of being interviewed'. Thus I emphasized that what I was doing was totally different from an interview in the popular sense; instead it was more like a casual chat. I also cited other women as examples by saying that a few who felt that they had nothing to say had ended up talking for more than two hours. I assured some interviewees who were very uncertain about what to say that some eccentric Western scholars were very interested in the life stories of ordinary Chinese women and asked them to do me a favour by allowing me to interview them.

On reflection, most of the interviews proceeded like a chat in an easy atmosphere. However, mistaking academic interviews for journalistic interviews did me a favour. As the women took it for granted that recording was a necessary procedure in the interview, no one refused my request to use a recorder. Yet they were also very aware of it[1] and were wary of talking about issues such as the Party and redundancy, especially those who were Party members or distant contacts. Guan Guohua, a Party member, first said that if I did not use the recorder, she could tell me more stories; after my persuasion, she told me about being wronged in a sexual scandal. I took

precautions to protect the interviewees by giving them a number rather than a name, and labelling tapes with numbers. When writing this book, I have used pseudonyms.

My informal networking strategy also had some very important consequences for the conduct and the content of the interviews. If the interviewee knew me personally or knew I was close to the intermediary she viewed me as reliable and was willing to talk openly and easily in a conversational way – my mother's friends and my schoolmates' mothers fell into this category. Where the relationships between me, the intermediary and the interviewee were less close or there were several links connecting us, the interviewee had no real feel for who I was or what I was going to do with her information. The interviewee was also less likely to view me as wholly trustworthy. The interviews with those women were stilted and difficult and so, too, were some with the daughters (see Table 2.1). However, this proposition is not entirely true for the mothers recruited through my university lecturer. A few of those mothers had a particular end in mind and thought that helping me would benefit their daughter's university career, so they were very voluble. Three of the stickiest interviews were with women who participated because I was associated with their friends or relatives and they could do them a favour by seeing me – Chinese call this 'looking at someone's face'. However, this created barriers to getting full and frank accounts: their responses were very brief and vague and their interviews were half the length of others and were like squeezing toothpaste – I asked a question, they gave an answer, and so on. It became clear, too, that the intermediaries had not given them an accurate account of my project.

In encounters with the mothers where I might be considered as a distant contact, I found a way to ease the situation. Reciprocity is an important principle in Chinese culture, so I decided to offer a gift to the students'

Table 2.1 Links between researcher, the intermediary and the interviewee

Researcher	*Intermediary*	*Intermediary*	*Interviewee*	*Degree of Trust*	*Example*
L	Parent	–	Parent's friend	High	Song Yuming
L	Friend	–	Friend's mother	High	Yang Ming
L	Friend	Friend's mother	Her or his mother's friend	Low	Chang Baohua
L	Lecturer	His student	Student's mother	Low to Medium	Jing Xia
L	Intermediary or intermediaries	Mother interviewee	Daughter	Low	Daughter Shui
L	–	–	Friend	High	Daughter Qin

mothers in anticipation of their co-operation and as a way of calming their doubts. Gifts of fruits are very popular in visits among relatives, so I dressed in ordinary clothes, carried two bags of fruit and greeted the women in a strong local accent, which made my coming more like visiting an aunt. Their surprise at my unexpected gesture was translated into hospitality, which made the interviews much smoother and more comfortable. Indeed, some wanted me to take back the fruit as they said the interview had only been 'a small thing'. My interviews with mothers lasted two hours on average with the longest being four hours, and most took place in their home. Whereas interviews with the daughters lasted 25 minutes on average, some were held in their mother's house and six in the university campus.

Some feminist researchers have argued that social attributes such as gender, class, age and race play a crucial part in the dynamics of interview relationships. Reinharz (1997:5) highlighted that her 'Research-based selves', 'Brought selves' and 'Situationally created selves' functioned interactively in her ethnographic study. I found that I needed to handle role-playing differently with the two generations of women. During the interviews with the mothers, I followed the traditional Chinese virtue of showing respect for one's elders without voicing any disagreement and played the role of a learning junior or daughter who was very modest and interested in listening to their stories. This strategy put them in a superior position despite my advantageous status in terms of education and social background. Most of the mothers, as the Chinese saying goes, were 'fond of teaching others', and so they were very comfortable in such a role. However, a modest attitude did not help to change the less co-operative stance of the daughters. If I asked for clarification, the mothers were more willing to give details whereas quite a few daughters showed impatience. In comparison with their mothers' warmheartedness, the daughters were likely to display indifference. For example, Jing Xia cycled to meet me because she thought it might rain soon while Daughter Jing did not even bother to look at me when she talked during her interview. In some cases, my schoolmates and a daughter of my mother's friends transformed the interview into a discussion by sometimes turning my questions back upon me. My dress also produced some unexpected responses. When I interviewed the mothers, I usually dressed very casually and plainly just like a student, in conformity with my junior role. However, those daughter interviewees who knew me before directly joked that with my plain appearance I did not look like a person coming back from abroad, and those university students showed surprise when they met me, and even displayed a superior attitude if their clothes were very fashionable and expensive. Generally speaking, I felt that I was seen by the daughters (women close to my age) as a competitor. I was struck by the individualism and competitiveness of the daughters, attributes which are highly promoted in the economic reforms. The more social advantages such as higher education, a good job and party membership that the daughters possessed, the more arrogant they were towards me.

I also had some unusual experiences. My first interview was with a Party member who recounted her life story into my tape recorder non-stop for 45 minutes, thereby precluding any questions. We were sitting in the corridor of a military hospital and attracted much attention from passers-by; and with soldiers stationed at the gate, this was a really frightening experience. One intermediary assumed that doing interviews was as easy as working on a production line and arranged for me to do four on one day, so by the time I got home at midnight I was totally worn out. Another unanticipated complication was being expected to act as a 'matchmaker' and being seen as a potential wife. One interviewee frequently asked me to introduce one of my friends to her daughter, assuming that my acquaintances were highly educated and had good prospects. She kept on trying to produce interviewees in the belief that in return I would find a nice man. I felt obliged to keep calling my friends to see if they knew anyone who would like a blind date. Finally I found a candidate but the arrangement was not successful, much to the mother's disappointment, which makes me feel guilty when I recall her warm-hearted help. Friends who helped me find interviewees expressed concern about my marital chances and offered me advice on courtship. A former schoolmate promised to introduce me to at least five contacts, but then he kept asking me out on dates despite my polite refusals. He did introduce me to one mother–daughter pair, but as we talked after the interviews I realized that by doing a favour to me they were actually trying to help him obtain me as his girlfriend. When subsequently I bluntly rejected his advances he broke off all contact.

Narrating lives

The way my interviewees organized their telling was interesting. Most retailed events in chronological order with thematic elaboration afterwards: they started talking about experiences such as being brought up, receiving education, stories of working life before turning to talk about their own family life and matters such as how they came to know their husband and how they educated their daughters.[2] Although their stories were not like the 'life patchwork quilt' found among German woman farmers by Inhetveen (1990), this does not mean that their narratives were structured systematically. Many jumped back and forth in time and shifted frequently between different events before clarifying the event. Furthermore, although each woman was telling her own life story, she would frequently use the personal pronoun 'we' rather than 'I', which is similar to the 'we-context' thinking of German women farmers (Inhetveen 1990). As the Personal Narratives Group (1989:100) stated, the form of a narrative is derived from a combination of cultural models, power relations and individual imagination. In the German case, Inhetveen interpreted the speakers' style as some possible results of a lack of practice in talking about themselves, their understanding of a 'normal biography', their distance from official world events and the

structure of rural women's lives. In the Chinese case, the narrative pattern might be related to the tradition that society and family take priority over the person; but it may also be a reflection of the Maoist period when collectivism was highly propagandised and a result of their specific generational experience.

In Western feminist literature, 'women's oral narratives and autobiographies often are characterized by frequent understatements, avoidance of first-person point of view, rare mention of personal accomplishment, and disguised statements of personal power' (Etter-Lewis 1991:48). Similarly, five women in my study asked me whether their boring stories would be useful or not. Ye Guanghua asked if she had wasted my time when I was about to leave. However, although these Chinese women doubted that they had been worthy of being interviewed, they did not often use understatements. Instead, they stressed their personal intelligence and, if any, their accomplishments. I speculate this feature might also have been linked to their expectation of a journalistic interview.

There is also a gap between interviewees' narratives and 'what happens' in their real lives. Xinran, a Chinese journalist who recorded several women's narratives, used a metaphor to illustrate the difficulty of asking Chinese women to talk about themselves – 'For Chinese women, the naked body is an object of shame, not beauty. They keep it covered. To ask them to let me interview them would be like asking them to take off their clothes' (Xinran 2002:9). Conversely, Tang mentioned that 'Chinese mothers who have adopted a different cultural value of not regarding one's life stories as most confidential, were open to give detailed stories about their lives' (Tang 2002:713). Both these views are valid within their own specific contexts. However, I found in my study that the women varied markedly in the extent to which they were prepared to reveal aspects of their lives.

Here I have found helpful the concepts from Cornwell (1984). In her ethnographic research on people's understanding of health and illness, Cornwell found that she received different versions of the same issue as her relationship to the participants changed. This led her to believe that what people say, and how they say it, differs according to the person with whom they are talking and the circumstances in which the conversation is set. She specially emphasized the distinction between public and private accounts: 'public accounts are sets of meanings in common social currency that reproduce and legitimate the assumptions people take for granted about the nature of social reality' (Cornwell 1984:15). In contrast, 'private accounts spring directly from personal experience and from the thoughts and feelings accompanying it' (Cornwell 1984:16). She suggested that 'people cope with situations which are entirely new to them and where they are uncertain of their own position in relation to others by putting on their "best face" (Laslett and Rapoport 1975)' (Cornwell 1984:15). Thus, the first interviews she had with her interviewees were mostly made up of public accounts while in subsequent interviews she found they were more likely to give private

accounts. Radley and Billig, however, have pointed to the danger of drawing a clear distinction between public and private accounts – 'stories may be told when giving the formal accounts, and justifications and legitimations are still in order during the private accounts' (Radley and Billig 1997:24).

Because of time constraints I could not do repeated interviews. Nevertheless I found that the regularity with which my interviewees gave me a public account depended, to an extent, on how they saw the relationship between themselves, the intermediary and myself; and to what degree they regarded me as trustworthy. I also noted that when they mentioned important social events such as the Cultural Revolution or implementation of the one-child policy, some would give the politically accepted version. In a sense, they had internalized these accounts rather than deliberately chosen to give a public account. I speculate that this might be because they were not exposed to an alternative interpretation of events. In particular, I found that former Party members were more likely to provide public accounts, probably because they would have been habituated to these by their frequent attendance at Party meetings and the need continually to subject their own past to critical reflection.

Radley and Billig suggested that the shared experience of womanhood (particularly with regard to men) between female interviewee and female interviewer could be a warrant for 'introducing or maintaining "private" accounts' (1997:26). Similarly, in line with this, Chinese people will normally tell each other what they really think if they classify the other as an insider, who shares something in common with them. I was sometimes considered to be an insider and sometimes an outsider. Being from the same city and female meant some perceived me as an insider, for example, Bi Hong frequently commented, 'you know as we Chinese women, how could we think of personal development in our forties?', implying the choices open to them were culturally constrained. However, sometimes seeing me as a fellow Chinese prevented interviewees from giving a more detailed explanation as they presumed we shared the same background knowledge. For instance, when Ding Jiahua told me how she got the chance of another job, she said 'you know that kind of stuff in China' to imply the use of powerful connections (*guanxi*). Here she presumed that both of us were aware of the predominant significance of *guanxi* as well as the fact that people normally refrain from speaking directly and openly about their own use of *guanxi*. Although I succeeded in getting her to explain a little more, it was an awkward moment. Thus, I lacked an advantage available to some foreigners who conduct fieldwork in China; they can capitalize on their status as an outsider and, pleading ignorance, can openly ask for explanations.

The boundary of including me as an insider was very fluid, too. Once again the extent to which interviewees perceived me as trustworthy acted as a criterion of whether I was considered as an insider or not. Chang Baohua, a distant contact, did not mention her specific experiences in the Cultural Revolution which had occurred as a consequence of her father's class origin.

By chance, the intermediary told me about this after the interview; indeed that had been why she had suggested Chang Baohua to me. In addition, although the women took me as a Chinese insider, my status as unmarried and young also prevented them from giving me detailed stories related to sex. Instead, they always used very implicit statements and sometimes I had to ask them to spell them out to seek confirmation. In contrast, during interviews with daughters, I was considered to be an outsider in the sense of having studied abroad. For example, when some university students mentioned new expressions, they would explain these because they claimed that I would not know of them because I came from abroad.

Because of the barrier resulting from the perception of insider/outsider as well as the sensitivity of certain topics, especially sexual matters, there are always things which people might feel reluctant to talk about. Here, I found the use of vignettes was particularly successful in overcoming these obstacles. Vignettes are 'short stories about hypothetical characters in specified circumstances, to whose situation the interviewee is invited to respond' (Finch 1987:105). Barter and Renold suggest that they

> generally fulfil three main purposes: 1. interpretation of actions and occurrences that allows situational context to be explored and influential variables to be elucidated; 2. clarification of individual judgements, often in relation to moral dilemmas; 3. discussion of sensitive experiences in comparison with the 'normality' of the vignette.
>
> (Barter and Renold 2002)

I used three scenarios to explore attitudes around sexual harassment and found that this method reduced the sensitivity and cautiousness prevalent in the Chinese context when people are asked to talk about themselves. The woman's predicament aroused the interviewees' interest and they talked very excitedly; even some who were not very good at giving a detailed life history were able to elaborate at length on the issues. Whenever they chose an option, they also gave their justifications; sometimes, they gave examples of situations which they had experienced or witnessed to augment their opinions. In so doing, they were also more likely to produce private stories rather than public accounts.

* * *

Using personal connections had been successful in carrying out fieldwork in China, but this tactic presents problems in respect of informed consent as commonly understood in Western sociological research and promulgated by codes of conduct and ethical guidelines (e.g. Association of Social Anthropologists 1999, British Sociological Association 2002). Feminist researchers like Kelly *et al.* (1994) have emphasized that interviewees should be informed of their rights during their participation such as the right to refuse to answer any questions with which they were uncomfortable, to end the

interview whenever they wanted, and to be informed how their data would be processed and used in future. At the beginning of every interview, I stated the above things, but I did not use an informed consent letter as I considered it would seem more risky and frightening to them if their names were to have been actually written down. As it turned out, however, my explanations seemed to have little impact. If the interviewee was cautious prior to my explanations, she was still the same afterwards. Those who had viewed me as trustworthy and reliable beforehand started talking before I had finished my statements. Thus, I found that what really mattered were the relationship between us or the relationships between the interviewee, the intermediary and myself as well as how the intermediary described my research project to the interviewee. The whole process reaffirmed the importance of personal connections in everyday life in China where so many social transactions are facilitated through introductions; but, by necessitating some modification of Western sociological practices it thereby rendered problematic some Western ethical requirements. Conversely, the more impersonal approach used in the West would not work in China, especially if mediated through the workplace or other official setting. I realized that had I approached interviewees via official channels such as the Women's Federation, they would have been unlikely to give me their personal stories. Instead, their wariness and uneasiness might have produced more 'official' accounts.

Western sociologists and feminist researchers have extensively discussed qualitative research methodology. However, such methods are subject to local adjustments when they are applied in a non-Western country. I do not deny the overall privileged power over the research as a researcher. Yet by reflecting upon the whole process of conducting research, I have explained the strategies and actions I had chosen and have drawn attention to some specific social-cultural practices. I argue that balancing Western ideas with local specificity is crucially important in such cross-cultural research. I hope this experience will add to the knowledge of doing social research as an 'insider' and bring light to some of the issues raised by doing qualitative research in China.

3 Growing up in the Mao era

Depictions of the Maoist period have always been controversial. In their memoirs, Chinese women writers in the West (for example see Chang 1993, Min 1994, Mu 2002) have told stories of political persecution and sexual repression to a Western audience. In stark contrast to these 'dark age' narratives, a group of Chinese female scholars who grew up in the Mao era but are now living in the United States have also presented their own memories of their childhood, recounting some experiences as being especially valuable to their individual growth (see Zhong *et al.* 2001). In academic discussions, Western feminists were first impressed by the state's attempt to boost women's status but then became critical of the gendered realities. However, Chinese feminists are more positive than their Western counterparts about Maoist efforts, attributing the inadequacy of women's liberation to the low level of China's productive capacity (see Li 1994).

Rather than falling into a choice of binary divisions (cf. Rofel 1999), I recognize difference and locality. Starting from mothers' own narratives, in this chapter I will examine the complexity of their early experiences and present a localized picture of gender relations during this period. By focusing on the Mao era, I will explore its paradoxical continuities with the present and identify how those earlier experiences put these women at a social disadvantage in their later life and during redundancy. A significant difference between my interviewees and the privileged Chinese writers of their past is the gap in their social backgrounds. Neither from a family of high state officials such as Chang (1993), Yang (1997) and Mu (2002) nor from a family of professionals such as He (2002) and Zhong *et al.* (2001), most of my interviewees came from a family where parents were ordinary workers. Therefore, in this chapter, we will listen to these 'subalterns' talking about their experience of growing up in the Mao era.

I have treated their memories as a way of knowing the past in order to examine how gender structured their earlier life experiences. '[S]tories are socially situated' (Jackson 1998:45) therefore, women's accounts, I believe, do represent the material conditions of their existence. On the other hand, I have treated their remembering as a narrative construction, drawing attention to the effects of both personal and societal forces in the production of

their memories. What did their experiences mean to them in their memory? How do their memories intersect with the official history and academic representations? Are there any silences in their remembering?

Pre-Cultural Revolution period (1949–1965)

Except for a few younger interviewees who were born in the 1960s, the majority of them referred in their stories to growing up in one of two periods: the period before the Cultural Revolution and the period of the Cultural Revolution. During the years between 1949–1965, most interviewees were of school age. Here I adopt Hung and Chiu's pattern of classification[1] and identify women born between 1948–1957 as the Cultural Revolution Generation, those born before 1948 as the pre-Cultural Revolution cohort and those after 1957 as the post-Cultural Revolution cohort.

The early socialist movement was officially marked by a series of campaigns and crusades such as involvement in the Korean War, land reforms, the first Five Year Plan of industrialization and the 'Great Leap Forward'. The details which the women remembered from their early childhood were often of personal matters and family life. The details were not always directly about the momentous events recounted in official histories, though many did draw attention to the effects of these on the domestic domain.

Mothers going out to work

For them, one of the key events in this period was the involvement of their mothers in work outside the home, which they variously referred to as 'to go out' and 'going out' or 'to walk out' and 'walking out' (or, conversely, 'to return home' or 'to come home').

> I went to the primary school in 1957. I remember it was about 1960 when resources became tight. You could only access everything through allocated coupons. My father liked drinking so he used up the coupons for meat to exchange for drink. We really lived a bitter life. Only my father worked and my mother stayed at home. Between 1958 and 1960, women were asked to walk out of the home, weren't they? My mum started doing some temporary work outside just for a little money. During those hard days, our family wanted to protect the main worker – my father. So basically we let him eat as much as he wanted. After he was full, we ate the rest.
>
> (Wang Dan, aged 55)

Like Wang Dan, other interviewees presented a family story which intersected with wider social events. One common aspect of their remembering was the way in which they talked about their mother's working outside the

home. The older women referred to this in the context of the state's mobilization of women into the labour force during the Great Leap Forward, whereas the post-Cultural Revolution cohort took it as a matter of course and did not connect that with any official policy. By the end of this national campaign, 90 per cent of the women were earning a wage of some kind (Croll 1983:3). However, a massive decline in productivity and a disastrous national famine ensued and, as a result of growing unemployment pressure in the early 1960s, women were encouraged to return to the home and to housework (see Andors 1983). But information about such fluctuations in women's employment was missing in these women's accounts of their mothers' work histories. Instead, they were preoccupied with the state rhetoric of women going out to work in the 1950s and emphasized the changing identities of their mothers from a typical *jiating funü* (housewife) to a worker. On the one hand, these women had, to some extent, internalized the 'grand gender narrative' of the state in socialist China,[2] which was manifested in the 'going out' activities of their mothers: what they recalled was a reflection of the 'social memory'[3] of this period. On the other hand, because of the state policy of women's liberation through going out to work, the women overall accepted the idea that paid work outside the family was necessary in a woman's life; this reflects a positive effect of the socialist discourse in shaping their gendered selves. For example, to be a housewife was certainly not a glorified revolutionary role in early socialism; the interviewees thus spoke of the term *jiating funü* in a distanced and disdainful tone (cf. Wang Zheng 2001). Women whose mother never went out to work always tried to mention other attributes such as 'being open-minded' or 'having some education' to minimize their mothers' devalued image as a housewife and to place them in a more positive light.

Although their mothers went out to work, they were not as liberated as official history would have us believe. In the workplace, these women's mothers only performed the lower paid jobs in the service, textile and caring industries. Inside the family, the traditional patriarchal pattern still persisted. Interviewees reported that their mothers, sometimes with help from themselves, were in charge of domestic affairs while fathers were mainly the breadwinners and decision-makers. Two interviewees even stated that that their fathers made their mothers give up work again, but as daughters they took their fathers' power within the family for granted. For example,

> My mum was working in a factory. Then she came home. You know why? Because I needed to go to school. I went to school at the age of 10.[4] Before I stayed at home, looking after my little sister. My dad asked my mum not to go to work, 'just stay in and look after the youngest child' to let me receive some education.
>
> (Qin Weixia, aged 50)

In this account, her father, like Wang Dan's, possessed the authority to decide what to do while her mother was only a subordinate. Although Qin Weixia benefited from such patriarchal power, the assumption that it was the women's priority to look after the family was unchanged. This patriarchal family environment reinforced women's dependence and inferior status and also handed down the gendered division of labour to their daughters. The addition of a working identity prevented a woman from assuming the despised status of a housewife; however, the duties performed by women workers at home were often nothing other than those of a housewife. But my interviewees did not hold such negative attitudes toward housework, constantly praising their mother's skill in managing the household and remarking how well they looked after their family. They also perceived themselves as inheriting such 'virtues' when in turn they became a wife and a mother. For instance, when Yuan Mei (aged 40) told me about the present division of housework in her own family, she related it to her parents' situation.

> I took on all the housework. I felt I also inherited that kind of hard-working virtue as a Chinese woman. I remember that throughout my childhood, my father never touched anything. Even when the broom fell down onto the floor, he would ignore it. My mother was in charge of everything.

In turn, women's close connection with domesticity served as a natural justification for women returning home during the economic restructuring of the 1990s. When these women were faced with redundancy 'choices', their final decision on whether to leave work or not was usually made after their husband's final say, echoing the decision-making process of their own parents.

Preferring boys to girls

Whilst praising their mother's domestic skills, most of the women recalled with bitterness the ideology of *zhong nan qing nü* ('preferring boys to girls') that was very prevalent in their parental family. In the early 1950s, the state encouraged women to have as many children as possible.[5] Thus, these women usually had four or five siblings wherein the boys were always the more treasured by their parents. In one extreme case, when she was very young, Hua Liyun's parents gave her away to her aunt who was unable to have a child. But later, during the movement to send the youth to the countryside, her parents took her back in the hope that she could fill the quota[6] for those sent to the countryside so that her younger brother could escape such a fate. Unfortunately their hope was not fulfilled. More commonly, women complained that it was the girls rather than their brothers who took on the responsibilities of housework. As Xiu Tianhong (aged 47) describes,

> When we were very small, we started doing housework unlike my daughter's generation, who are fortunate. At that time, parents went out to work for a living. My parents' health was not good either. So I started washing clothes, quilts and doing the cooking from the age of 9 or 10. I did everything myself.

She had one brother staying in a local city, but it was her and her elder sister who were in charge of their parental household. When her parents and grandmother got sick, they took turns to look after them.

Since the provision of childcare was still inadequate, daughters 'naturally' took over their mothers' caring role when the mothers were not available. Like Qin Weixia, many other women mentioned delaying their own education to look after their younger siblings. Zhao Wenhua (aged 51) went to school at the age of seven as her mother was staying at home, but she summarized the general situation at the time: 'At that time, other kids in our neighbourhood who were the same age as me couldn't go. You know why? First, everyone was poor. Second, kids needed looking after – the older cared for the younger'. Although she did not indicate whether or not that caring pattern was gendered, she did point out that 'At that time, it would be very rare for a girl to continue education. Normally only boys would continue unless parents were very open-minded'. The reason why 'only boys would continue' might also lie in the fact that their sisters sacrificed their own time in doing housework and any care work so that more time was allowed for boys to study. Qin Weixia (aged 50) expressed her complaints: she had four sisters but only one brother.

> At that time, family conditions did not allow us to have the luxury of study. I started work straight away [*from junior high school*]. Actually I was good at my studies, ranking above average. But every day when we came home, we hardly had time to read books. At the most, we just finished the homework because you had to do so much housework, preparing coal, queuing for food. No time for study. What's more, at that time, parents still had possessed the *zhong nan qing nü* (*preferring boys to girls*) ideology. Very feudal. In my family, there was only one boy. So my parents only cared about my brother's development to make sure he got a good education. The son was important, the daughters not so much.

The amount of housework she had to perform and the lack of attention from her parents jeopardized her own chance of a good education. In turn, the educational development of the only son in the family was achieved to the detriment of his sisters. The women themselves attributed the neglect of their education to traditional 'feudal' attitudes. However, in a labour market biased against girls, investment in a son's education is a rational decision. In addition, the incorporation of a wife into her husband's family and the

son's obligation to care of his parents would have made the education of a daughter-in-law of higher interest than that of a daughter.[7] It is important to note the interesting use of the term 'feudal' when they refer to this ideology of preferring boys to girls. 'Feudal' was part of the standard state vocabulary, used by Mao Zedong in the pre-Revolutionary period in his famous statement that 'these four "authorities", authority of the government, authority of the clan, authority of the gods, authority of the husband, represent all the thoughts and systems of the feudal patriarchal clan system' (Mao 1991 [1927]:31). In his original usage of the term, 'feudal' was employed to attack the governing landlord class in rural society. The term was later quoted widely in state propaganda to compare the newly-founded socialist society with the system it replaced, the aim being to destroy these four types of authority. My interviewees used the term in a slightly different way, namely to complain about the gendered inequality in the way in which their parents treated them, an 'instance of state terminology being pried loose from its initial meaning and redeployed (with or without official encouragement) to fit local needs' (Hershatter 2002:55).

As a result of the gendered division of labour and traditional preference for boys, these women started out at a major disadvantage when they entered the labour market, as a result of their limited access to education; and thus we can see that this period of early childhood signalled the start of their life of sacrifice, compared to elite women as well as men of their own class.[8] My interviewees' childhood memories differed markedly from those rosy pictures described by the elite women writers. The latter who usually had a family nanny until the Cultural Revolution;[9] some of their parents taught them philosophy and English whilst they were little. The contrast is represented vividly in Yang Rae's memoir (1997): 'earlier in the morning, a working-class girl had to collect coal briquettes for cooking and heating while privileged kids slept in centrally-heated apartments'. This difference in their earlier life experiences of women is significant as the present contrast in their respective status has already suggested.

Cultural Revolution (1966–1976)

The Cultural Revolution, which began in 1966 and ended with Mao Zedong's death in 1976, affected the lives of most Chinese people both at the time and afterwards. With respect to gender politics, slogans such as 'Times have changed now, men and women are the same' were promising. Yet the Cultural Revolution was a time 'when both feminism and femininity were rejected. Feminism, or any discussion of women's specific problems, was declared bourgeois; femininity, or any assertion of a specifically female identity, was denounced' (Honig 2002:255). Class instead took precedence. Class enemies[10] were attacked and re-educated; class origin became dominant in deciding a person's future, represented by the slogan: 'The son of a hero is always a great man; a reactionary father produces nothing but

a bastard' (Ge 2001:117, n8). The practice of unearthing one's class origin was gendered, as for women, 'both birth and marriage were counted as determinants of their class status' (Zhang 1995:4). Stories in memoirs have shown how the wives of some 'counterrevolutionary' husbands were subjected to physical and psychological abuse (see Chang 1993). Among my interviewees, it was their parents' historical background that was under scrutiny. Six women in my study had suffered from their father's family background. Two women avoided elaborating on this suffering; one woman had totally erased it from her life history, a fact which I only know of through an intermediary. The remaining three revealed resentment against this unexpected unfairness.[11] For example, Dai Chunhua (aged 54) said,

> During the Cultural Revolution, we were unjustly blamed. [*the interviewee was sobbing*] At the beginning, we were active in school, participating in various campaigns. After that event [*her father being classified as a 'capitalist'*], I really found it hard to accept. I became cold and indifferent towards everything. I didn't want to join anything. Because you weren't eligible. It also affected our future path. I was not that active any more. I always felt I had to make ten times the effort of the others when trying to get something, and still have no guarantee of success. That was a huge blow to me.

Her later life history also reaffirmed the deep effect of this accusation: her principal work ethic was simply to finish the job and perform her due duty without any additional intention or effort.

Zhao Wenhua (aged 51) sarcastically described her experience:

> The first time I was to be admitted into the Youth League, I handed in my materials. But after they were checked, I was told 'your father once served in the Nationalist Party, you cannot join'. The second time, although my materials were handed in again, I didn't want to join the League at all. But the secretary of the Youth League said, 'since you have put in for it, just wait and see'. By the second time, my brother had already joined the Party. So they said, 'since he could join the Party, you may also join the League'. After that, I swore not to join the Party.

When I asked her how her brother joined the Party, she replied,

> He went to Xinjiang to help in remote areas after graduating from university. He worked hard and gradually got promoted to be a cadre. So he had to be a Party member. People came here to check our father's background and concluded that my father fought in the anti-Japanese war rather than in the civil war when he served in the Nationalist Party. So my brother finally became a Party member.

Her account showed that the definition of one's class origin was arbitrary and patrilineal:[12] her brother was able to get away with the constraints of his father's background in his application for the Party membership, while she could not in her application for the League membership. Then, after her brother was relabelled, she was given another chance.

This unearthing of class origin often resulted in suffering and persecution. However, the irony of this special emphasis upon family origin was played out in the opposite practice of capitalizing on familial connections. My interviewees gave examples of occasions when parents had used family connections for their children's benefit. For women who were in school in the 1970s, there was a chance they could go on to enter further education; however, such a chance was dependent upon the school's recommendation.

HE JIABAO: When we graduated from junior middle school [*in 1972*], the school could recommend you to a teachers' college. But the quota was very small. At that time, people had to have a good family background. So even then, such a phenomenon [*capitalizing on familial connections*] had already shown its head.
Q: By 'good family', do you mean those from working-class families?
HE JIABAO: No. The children of military cadres.

(He Jiabao, aged 46)

Qin Weixia's (aged 50) parental family was in a district with a high concentration of high officials and university professionals. Therefore she was enrolled in a school where the children of important people also attended. However, her father was only a worker. She recalled when they graduated from junior high school in 1972, 'Everybody joined the army[13] except for us, about 10 students, who came from ordinary families. Those students [who joined the army] all came from cadres' families'.

Interestingly the main purpose of the Cultural Revolution was to attack and re-educate 'class enemies' in order to strengthen proletarian dictatorship. But these stories suggest that the hierarchy and stratification within the whole 'proletariat' still persisted; children with more powerful parents were more likely to have better opportunities both in education and in the workplace. Thus, these women from working-class families might have suffered less in the short term when compared to the dramatic experiences of the elite women authors, but they definitely underwent their own share of hardship in the long term.

For women who did not have powerful connections, husbands offered a second chance. Indeed, Dai Chunhua was transferred to the city with her fiancée's help; however, she kept her husband away from the sight of her friends.[14] Official examples were Mao Zedong's wife and several other women who were absorbed into the Party's Central Committee as a result of their powerful kinship connections (Zhang 1995:12). The implication of this kinship association for women is paradoxically similar to a

common understanding in pre-socialist China that a woman's worth and position in society depended on her male relatives such as her husband and father.

In the countryside

The experiences of my interviewees were diverse, dependent upon whether or not they were sent down to the countryside. The political aim of sending urban youth to the countryside was to re-educate 'intellectual youth' (*zhiqing*)[15] by making them perform physical work and learn from local peasants. Scholars have now pointed out the possibility that this nationwide movement was actually a way to alleviate the pressure of urban unemployment (Rofel 1999). Whatever the reasons, these urban youth not only lost their chance of an education, but they were also somewhat ironically blamed for not having enough of an education during the redundancy crisis.

In this movement, graduates of both junior and senior high schools from 1966–1968 were required to go to the countryside. These people were called in the post-Mao era *lao san jie* ('the old three classes of graduates'[16]). Youth who were born between 1948–1953 would fall into this category under normal conditions.[17] My women interviewees reported that not necessarily everyone would be relocated to the countryside. First, students who went to vocational schools were not affected by this movement. Second, there was a quota system which allowed one to two per cent of all the students in the class to stay behind and continue with their education. Theoretically, it was said that students who were younger in age, better in academic achievement and purer in family background were more likely to stay in the city. But, in practice, the decision might be arbitrary depending upon the student's relationship with the class teacher. Furthermore, family connections also played a part in this process: both Dai Chunhua and Zheng Lili mentioned that urban youth from wealthy families who were officially 'sent-down' to the countryside actually continued to stay in Nanjing city. During the process of being sent back to the city, the women commonly reported that some parents, but not their own, also used their powerful connections to bring their children back early, and then to send them into good work units (see also Yang 1997).

Six women from the 1948–1953 cohort were sent to the countryside. Guan Guohua, who was born in 1947, was also sent down because she went to school late. Qin Weixia, born in 1953, might have been sent if she had gone to school at the right age. The women also mentioned another period of the sending down movement from 1974 to 1976. The criterion for being sent down in that round was the location of older siblings: if the number of a youth's siblings who were working in the cities exceeded that of the siblings in the countryside, the youth would be sent down. Women from the 1954–1957 cohort who were sent down called themselves the 'younger sent-downs' in comparison with the 'older sent-downs'. Except for one 'older

sent-down' who joined the city team working in Inner Mongolia, all the other sent-downs were allocated within Jiangsu province, mostly in the countryside around Nanjing and spent their youth labouring in the countryside.

My interviewees emphasized how hard they had laboured in the countryside but seldom referred to whether they had done the same work as men. So, to investigate how issues concerning gender and work were framed during this period, I enquired further about the gender differences. They reported that women and men were allocated to separate production teams. As Tang Minmin (aged 46) put it, 'Girls were sent to a production team where everyone was female. Boys were sent to one where all were male. If both boys and girls worked together, it would not be convenient for the production team to operate'. Although she could not spell out the reason for such an arrangement, this did represent a form of gender segregation of work. In addition, their work was also different from that of men, a differentiation which was based on physical strength. Sun Yiping (aged 51) said, 'Men carried heavy soil with rice seedlings to the field. Then the job of transplanting all of the rice seedlings belonged to us'. Dai Chunhua reported a similar pattern in her village, but she felt that life there was relatively easy for men because they mainly carried the seedlings whilest women had to bend over standing in the rice field. Sometimes their legs got so stiff that they could not squat down in the toilets. Ironically, despite her complaints, she still claimed that the men's work was heavy labour. The assumption that women were naturally weaker than men persisted and became internalized as a truth, irrespective of the physical demands of the work they did.

In turn, this assumption was reflected in the assignment of work points[18] between men and women. When I asked Sun Yiping whether they earned the same work points as men did, she replied, 'Usually men got more points than we did. You know why? Because a woman's strength was not as powerful as man's. We did different work; men's carrying soil required greater strength'. She, too, took it for granted that because men were supposed to be stronger, they were automatically remunerated more. Zheng Lili recalled, 'In our place, men's labour was worth 10 points. The worst of them got 8.5 points. The best got 10 points. As for women's labour, the highest was 5.5 points'. Likewise, Hua Liyun did all kind of work such as cutting wheat, transplanting seedlings, digging and carrying soil except for carrying the excrement (men did that). However, when it came to the evaluation of work points, it appears their gender was the deciding factor.

HUA LIYUN: We couldn't be regarded as real labour. We were only worth half labour.

Q: Who were worth full labour?

HUA LIYUN: Those people in the countryside and men. They were the real labourers, worth full labour. We were all worth half labour.

(Hua Liyun, aged 46)

Their narratives reveal aspects of the gendering of work and of remuneration for labour, based on the sex and (presumed) strength of the worker. The experiences of these women who were once 'sent-down' youth indicate the contradictions of state attitudes toward female labour: though women were called upon to do 'whatever men could do', they were still believed to only be suitable for lighter jobs – despite the arbitrary nature of what was considered 'heavy labour' and what was considered 'light labour'.

What was conspicuously missing in their memories of countryside life were the stories of the 'Iron Girls' which were promulgated in the official media during the Cultural Revolution. 'The Iron Girls – strong, robust women capable of performing jobs more commonly done by men, such as repairing high-voltage electric wires – symbolized the Maoist slogan that "whatever men comrades can accomplish, women comrades can too" ' (Honig 2000:97). When I asked about them, no one had heard of these model workers when they were in the countryside. This absence, I suspect, was first linked to the geographical location of these women's hometowns, which was far from the political centre of Beijing and, second, related to differences in their family backgrounds. The children of professionals and officials would have had a greater exposure to politics, but for those originating from a working-class family the 'sent-down' movement was nothing more than a mass campaign. They were not full of revolutionary passion (like Yang 1997) nor did they try to tackle the unequal gender relations in rural China (see Honig 2002). Instead, these sent-downs went to the countryside either because of official coercion or of their own will to alleviate the family burden. But despite the hard labour they had engaged in and the gender segregation they had experienced, they described their work with pride to show how much suffering they had endured ('eating bitterness')[19] and how many difficulties they had overcome. All of them had no doubt that work was an inevitable part of their life. In this sense, the state campaign positively shaped their gendered identities by enforcing their identity as a worker; but, at the same time, despite the official rhetoric, they had experienced a gendered division of labour at work which rendered them inferior to men.

When recalling their days in the countryside, these once 'sent-down youth' weaved stories of misfortunes with happiness, relating how their housemates looked after each other, how they were well treated by local peasants and how they turned the experience into an adventure by hunting for food. Having had to endure the unpleasant reality, the lack of human warmth and economic inequality during the economic restructuring, these women were nostalgic about this period of their lives. As Liu Jingli (aged 52) put it, 'we did have a good time in those olden days. People's thoughts were pure and simple, unlike nowadays'. Such statements provide an exemplification of Yang's (2003) argument that the nostalgia exhibited by this generation serves as a form of cultural resistance against the changing conditions of Chinese modernity.

In the city

Amongst the cohort born before 1948, those who had not gone to university or vocational school should have already been in work before the 'sent-down' movement started. Two women who went to university and one who enrolled in vocational school were allocated a job in the early 1970s. Those born between 1948 and 1957 who had fortunately stayed in middle school were all allocated a job after they graduated. The younger ones born after 1958 spent their schooldays in the city. Although these women from different cohorts spent some time in school, their education was greatly interrupted by the frequent campaign of 'learning from workers and peasants' in which every term or sometimes every month they were sent to work in a factory or the countryside. There was a constant feeling among those who graduated from middle school in the 1970s that they had not achieved the same educational standard as those in the 'old three classes'. Those women who stayed or had spent some years in the city recalled the chaos and political violence they had witnessed. However, even though most of them stayed with their parents, unlike their 'sent-down' counterparts, they did not mention their parental family life as they did when recalling the first period of their life. The only time they referred to their family members was related to whether their parents liked the idea of their being sent down or not. This silencing of family life, to some extent, reflected a collective memory of the Cultural Revolution, which indicates the character of that era: the overwhelming predominance of political events over events in the private sphere in the whole society. Thus what they remembered in some sense was what the society as a whole remembered – a memory of society.[20]

In schools, the Red Guard movement was omnipresent. However, in the telling of their own life histories, no one admitted to having once been a member of the Red Guards. Although some of them mentioned they had joined the Little Red Guards,[21] none of them associated themselves with the label of 'Red Guard'. What they frequently emphasized was the chaos resulting from political attacks and the interruption of their education. When I enquired specifically about personal participation in this movement, some of the women gave me accounts of personal attacks against school staff they witnessed. But they still tended to position themselves as an outsider, follower or silent sympathizer: they tried to distance themselves from the perpetrators. Xiu Tianhong (aged 47) said,

> I couldn't remember which side I had joined. Maybe the rebel side, I am not sure. At that time, because I was little I couldn't figure out what was what. Even now I am still not clear exactly what viewpoint was held by each side. I remember when we joined, we just asked to join whatever side our head teacher had joined.

Likewise, Jia Yunxia (aged 59) described the attacks against teachers in university:

> When we were in university, we weren't regarded as the radical ones who beat the teachers. We were just followers. Later, during the process of attacking the department directors, we belonged to the protective side. Some belonged to the rebel side. But in retrospect, you can't blame them for their attacks. People could only behave like that in that particular historical period.

Jia Yunxia's justification for those perpetrators exemplifies the effect of Post-Mao official discourse. As Rofel put it, this officially favoured vision of the Cultural Revolution 'portrays the masses of people as naively, and therefore innocently, seduced by the machinations of a few' (Rofel 1999: 153–154). Similarly, women who were workers at that time adopted the same distancing strategy as those Red Guard students when they described the chaos in the factory: they were watchers or followers. For example, Jing Xia joined the militia in her local district; but she still said that she was not clear about what was going on when she was asked to carry out house raids. In the focus group,[22] when I asked who the Red Guards were, one woman replied 'everyone in middle school' and the others agreed. But they still did not elaborate on anything in which they had been personally involved.

This common avoidance of the label 'Red Guard' in women's memories of the Cultural Revolution is related to the post-Mao depiction of Red Guards as perpetrators of violent, unjustified attacks, and it shows how the women's memories of the past were reconstructed according to the present through a publicly available account. Their relationship to the Red Guards could be considered as a silent event in their collective memory in Pennebaker and Banasik's sense – 'an event can be considered so guilt worthy or shameful that most affected people refuse to talk about it' (Pennebaker and Banasik 1997:10). The lacunae in the life stories of my interviewees may reflect an attempt to eradicate or minimize their personal involvement in that political violence. Conversely, the open discussion in the focus group created a collective environment and enabled them to be more willing to talk about it, which indicated that such open remembering could minimize their individual involvement in that movement.

Apart from the problematic way they described this public shaming, the type of behaviour which was criticised was also subject to question. Femininity became contested during that period. Women who looked fashionable and feminine were targeted for their bourgeois attitude. He Jiabao recalled a teacher who had been humiliated by her students: 'She had been working in an orchestra before. At that time others criticized her for having bourgeois thoughts because she could play the piano and often dressed up very fashionably'. Yang Ming was accused of having such thoughts as well because

she wore a coat with bright colours. Honig (2002) pointed out that female Red Guards always dressed up like men. Hence, in that period, 'To be revolutionary, [feminist] critics suggest, one had to act like a man; to behave as a woman risked being labelled a "backward element" ' (Honig 2002:266). So the Cultural Revolution did more than simply elide the boundaries of gender difference; it actively required an outward exhibition of 'masculinization' (Brownell and Wasserstrom 2002:251).

Sex also became a target of public attack in the cities (Honig 2003). Many women described generally and briefly the inhumane attacks. But, after my insistent enquiry, three did tell me the detailed stories in which women were charged with sexual immorality. Jing Xia (aged 50) was one of the militia in the local district, participating in everyday patrols. I asked her to recall that period.

> At that time, people were attacked for bad class origin. To women, at that time, people would say, you had lifestyle problems [*a euphemism for sexual immorality*]. Such lifestyle problems would be a huge blow to you. When they had no reasons to attack you, they would say that you had lifestyle problems. I remembered during the Cultural Revolution, those women who were said to have lifestyle problems wore a string of worn shoes around their shoulders, parading through the streets, being taunted as 'broken shoes' [*a euphemism for a loose woman*].

Her memories showed women's vulnerabilities to such attacks and provide an example of how sexual immorality was 'invoked to legitimize broader political attacks, usually against individual women' (Honig 2003:148). Yang Ming witnessed an attack on a woman for her sexual morality and learnt that women should be more careful and cautious in these aspects. The gendered surveillance and control of women through their sexuality were reproduced in these practices, and were later continued in the operation of the *danwei* system.

Overall, these women, whether in the countryside or the city, spent their youth amidst such turbulence that the majority of them received little education. Generally, these people, whose youth was fiercely disturbed by the Cultural Revolution but were now heavily hit during the redundancy crisis have been labelled 'the lost generation' (*shiluo de yi dai*) in the literature (Hung and Chiu 2003, Rofel 1999). This phrase has been used in the literature discussing this generation; but the women in my study and other working-class people I talked to, not as eloquent or literarily trained as those writers, used the term 'unlucky generation' to describe the same group. They emphasized how their education was ruined because of the Cultural Revolution and, as a consequence, now they had experienced further suffering during economic restructuring.

The turning point

In September 1976, Chairman Mao died, which officially signalled the end of the Cultural Revolution. In the same year, the 'old three classes' went back to Nanjing *en masse*. The younger ones returned on a large scale in 1978. Both old and young 'sent-downs' were allocated a job in a work unit. In 1977, the college entrance examination had been resumed. However, most women from the Cultural Revolution cohort did not even bother to try, having already missed too much education, unlike those members of the elite who had been able to keep studying during the Cultural Revolution. The youngest cohort (born after 1958) had a disrupted school life throughout the Cultural Revolution and graduated from middle school in the early 1980s. They were not allocated a job by the state quota because of the great employment pressure at that time. Thus, this younger group of women either took the place of their parents, in most cases, of their mother, or were assigned a job in their parents' work units (cf. Tan Shen 1993). Overall these women's turbulent years were finished with the advent of their working life in the *danwei*.

4 The *danwei*
Gender at work

The *danwei*, or work unit, was the workplace where the majority of urban residents were employed, whether a factory, store, school, or government office. It was founded to carry out production tasks as well as to provide comprehensive material support to urban residents. Until the recent 1990s' reforms, it had been the most fundamental social organization in urban China. This distinctive organization has attracted much attention. We have insights available about its economic and political structures (see Bian 1994, Shaw 1996, Walder 1986), and recent studies questioning the *danwei*'s origins and future, how it arose and how it has been affected by or transformed in the reforms (see Bray 2005, Perry and Lu 1997). The existing literature, however, has overlooked the importance of gender, assuming men and women were affected by the *danwei* in the same way. On the other hand, the substantial research on Chinese women workers suggests that for them the revolution had been 'postponed'; they were still more likely to be located in low-paid jobs and to take on the bulk of domestic tasks (for example, see Bian *et al.* 2000, Honig and Hershatter 1988, Jiang 2004, Parish and Busse 2000, Wolf 1985); yet the role of this fundamental economic and social unit in shaping women's lives was missing. Putting women workers back into the institutional context, how did this distinctive organization of the *danwei* affect women's working and living? Did their experiences in the *danwei* contribute to their social disadvantages in the reform era?

In the following two chapters, I will examine the economic and non-economic factors within and outwith the workplace to reveal the gender inequalities in the *danwei* system prior to the economic restructuring of the 1990s. This chapter will focus upon the *danwei* as a work setting and investigate women's working histories through the lens of gender. The next chapter will elaborate how the *danwei* organized life beyond the workplace itself and, in particular, uncover the consequences for women of the interconnection of work and family life. By gendering the *danwei*, I show that women were subjected to greater surveillance than men: the specific working practices and culture of the *danwei* system perpetuated gender inequality despite the socialist rhetoric of equality. By examining the actual processes through which the *danwei* operated, I show that the work unit was not

gender-neutral; gender was integral to its organization of work and the reproduction of inequality.

Gender segregation of work

Gender segregation has been manifested in many complex and multi-level ways in labour markets. Catherine Hakim (1979:1) suggested that 'occupational segregation by gender exists when men and women do different kinds of work, so that one can speak of two separate labour forces, one male and one female, which are not in competition with each other for the same jobs'. Segregation takes two forms: horizontal segregation where women and men take different types of work and vertical segregation where women are situated in the lower ranking occupations (Hakim 1979).

Horizontal segregation

In the Chinese workplace, horizontal segregation is manifested through the labels of 'heavy' and 'light' industry in relation to the division of work between men and women. According to the 1990 census, in light industries (leather-making and textiles) women comprized 70 per cent of workers, but less than 20 per cent in heavy industries (construction and metal processing) (Liu Dezhong and Niu Bianxiu 2000). All of my interviewees who had worked in light industries reported that there were far more women in their factories whereas those who had worked in heavy industries reported the opposite.

A similar analysis can be applied at the workplace level: women and men might share the same place of work yet be responsible for different jobs (Reskin 1993). In each work unit, the division between 'heavy' and 'light' had been extended as an internal criterion for the distribution of work between men and women. Wu Ping (aged 46, previously in a food manufacturing factory) said, 'all the heavy work was done by men – like carrying stuff, all the rest was done by us – such as packaging'. Xia Yanli (aged 40), who had worked in a light-making factory, reported, 'Most women were assemblers. Men often worked downstairs because it was really heavy work and required physical strength – such as punching'. This division of labour took the 'natural' difference between men and women for granted and suggested the underlying assumption that women's 'weak' physique was best suited to 'light' work. However, men's physical superiority over women was socially constructed: it was not gained by men innately but was appropriated by them in their lifetime through social practices such as the definition of tasks and the selective design of tools (Cockburn 1981, Wajcman 1991). In the Chinese case, without a clear definition of 'heavy' or 'light', the judgement of work allocation is arbitrary. Jing Xia (aged 50) who had worked in a knitting factory that produced multicoloured garments, expressed the following confusion:

JING XIA: Sometimes people say, 'the light industry is not light, the heavy industry isn't heavy, either'. Indeed, working in light industry was really hard. If you were a spinner, just imagine how far you walked there everyday! At that time, one person was in charge of 6 machines. We had to circulate around machines all the time.

Q: Were there any men working in your *danwei*?

JING XIA: Yes, men were responsible for repairing the machinery, heavy work.

Although Jing Xia began to question the division between 'light' and 'heavy', she still connected men's work with the term 'heavy'. However, later in the interview, when she recalled the experience of working three shifts as a spinner, Jing Xia felt it unfair that the maintenance men worked in a non-shift pattern and spent most of their time talking and walking around unless some machines required repairing, similar to the divisional pattern in Western context (Westwood 1984).

Men were also more likely to be allocated work associated with 'skills', in heavy industries like machinery factories, those few women who had worked on the shop floor took the jobs considered as less skilful. Xiong Yingli (aged 46) recalled, 'In work like grinding there were more men because such work required a higher level of skill. Then in work like planking there were more women because it was relatively easy'. In light industries where most women worked, men were more connected with technical knowledge. Xiu Tianhong (aged 47) had worked in the technical sector of a wool-knitting factory where men 'designed the pattern, that is, the flower or animal image on the clothes. We were responsible for knitting the clothes. They [men] were mainly drawing patterns because women were worse at drawing anyway'. In commercial sectors such as retailing, Wu Ping reported that few men worked as shop assistants, saying 'people said if men stood behind counters, they would become shorter [i.e. men's status would be reduced].[1] So there were hardly any men'. Occupational feminization is generally associated with a decline in that occupation's social status (Rees 1992). Here Chinese male shop assistants had to face the challenge to their masculine identity if they were doing 'women's work'. These examples bear out Western feminists' arguments: 'Skill definitions are saturated with sexual bias. The work of women is often deemed inferior simply because it is women who do it' (Philips and Taylor 1980:79).

In the 1980s, there was a trend initiated by the state to transfer Chinese women workers from production sections to auxiliary sections as part of the strategy to get rid of excess workers (see Davin 1998, Edwards 2000). As a result, some of my interviewees were moved to jobs in the auxiliary sections such as cleaning, working in the storeroom, the dining hall or the work unit clinic. Hua Liyun (aged 46), after two years of working in the workshop, was transferred to the auxiliary sector in 1982: 'I started in the clinic, handing out tissues, then looking after the storeroom for the dining hall, finally

back to the clinic working as a cashier. I never learned any skills. Anybody could do those jobs'. The paradox is that most women in shift work tried to get themselves transferred at that time because of the unbearable strain shift work placed on family needs, even though that move meant demotion. As a consequence, such an arrangement was taken as justification for accusing the women of lacking skills. However, my analysis of segregation in the *danwei* suggests that the artificial division between heavy and light work and the gendered association between physical embodiment and skills constructed an image of men as strong and manually able whilst women were considered as physically and technically incompetent.

Vertical segregation

Although under the Constitution women and men were entitled to an equal chance of promotion, in reality men were always prioritized for upward mobility (Zheng Xiaoying 1995). Everyone who worked in the *danwei* was assigned a status as a cadre or worker. Cadre (*ganbu*) is a general term for workplace superiors. Similar to the national pattern [see Research Institute of All China Women's Federation *et al.* 1998:434] my interviewees were mostly lowly placed in the *danwei* hierarchy and, as workers, were institutionally segregated from cadres. Cadres mainly came from three sources: ex-servicemen who had been above the rank of platoon leader in the military, graduates from vocational schools or colleges; and those who could be transferred into the status of cadres; the first two were statutory and the last was flexible (Tan 1993). Tan (1993) found that the number of women in the military had dramatically declined since the 1950s, so the cadres coming from the military were mostly men. My women interviewees confirmed that many of their male leaders were ex-officers in the military. Hence, it was the last two routes which offered the means by which women workers could try to become a cadre. Unfortunately women were also disadvantaged in receiving further education, so only five out of 33 mothers achieved the status of cadre on the basis of educational qualifications, and another four women were transferred from being workers to being a cadre. However, within the category of the 'cadre', there are several hierarchical levels and three of these four women were only transferred into cadres below section or workshop level ('junior cadre'). With the exceptions of the officer in the Women's Federation and a kindergarten teacher, all the women stated that cadres at or beyond the section and workshop level ('middle-level cadre')[2] in their units were mostly men; some directly commented that the highest position a woman could strive for was only that of a group supervisor. Those few women who ended up being middle-level cadres were said to take 'symbolic posts'[3] such as leaders of the trade union,[4] secretary to the Party committee or Youth League. As Ye Guanghua put it, 'there were few, very few women leaders. At that time, there was only one woman in the trade union. She was not in charge of production, only doing some service and auxiliary work'.

Additionally, these few women, if they were without any higher education qualifications, had to tolerate the gossip that they were dependent on others to climb the career ladder. Gossip included having an influential husband or engaging in sexual relationships with the leader.

Similar to Western organizations where men working in female-dominated industries are more likely to rise up through the ranks (Witz 1997), feminized textile industries also found that the few men who worked there were more likely to become middle-level cadres.

> There were very few men there, all women. So these men, if possessing a few more skills, would be transferred to work in the offices, like being directors or other leaders. It was very easy for them to become middle-level cadres because there were so many women. If one out of ten [*female spinners*] could become a leader, that would be terrific. All those promoted were men. Even if a woman was very skilful at spinning, there was no way [*for a leader*] to let you go.
>
> (Jing Xia, aged 50)

During economic restructuring, Zhao (2001) found that workers and cadres below section or workshop level constituted the absolute majority of redundant staff. Since women were at a disadvantage in being promoted into middle-level cadres, vertical segregation by gender had made women more vulnerable to redundancy than their male counterparts.

Admission into Party membership was carried out at the workplace. Being a Party member is 'a significant predictor of job change and upward mobility' (Bian 1994:122). Bian *et al.* analyzed a 1993 Tianjin household survey and presented the difference in Party membership between men and women. The survey showed whether during their first job or current job, the number of male party members was always more than that of female members (2000:118, Table 7.1). Hence, Party membership was another indicator of the gender segregation in the workplace. Though it sounded like a political term, women interviewees talked about Party membership as an economic resource in the *danwei*, similar to other awards and chances of promotion; but unfortunately most of the Party members in their *danwei* were men. A few women tried to become a member, though the efforts they put in did not necessarily bring about the expected results (see '*Biaoxian*', page 46). There was a change in the significance of Party membership in workplace development since the late 1980s (Bian 1994, Walder 1986). Before, it was considered a prerequisite or accelerator for career development; after the enforcement of large-scale market reforms, the accompanying depoliticization of the institutional culture had made Party membership lose its original influence and admission became much easier. Yuan Mei (aged 40) talked about her own process of becoming a Party member in 1997.

> I never had any interest in joining the Party. To be frank, my application

> was written by someone else. It only took half a year for me to be admitted. It would normally take a year. Those leaders said that if I wasn't admitted, nobody else was qualified to become a Party member.

Segregation in capitalist economies is a major source of wage inequality. By contrast, with China's socialist rhetoric of promoting gender equality, studies based on national representative data (1988–1994) found that overt wage discrimination for men and women performing similar work was limited whilst the main source of wage inequality was the concentration of women workers in low-paying sectors of China's economy (Maurer-Fazio *et al.* 1999). Similarly, most interviewees talked about the state principle of 'equal pay for equal work' (*tong gong tong chou*); but they were aware of the difference between wages in different sectors – light industries such as textiles paid much lower wages than heavy industries such as machinery. So sex and 'strength' once again became the criteria of work remuneration, as with their experience of receiving work points in the countryside. These two dimensions of segregation in the Chinese workplace put women workers at a greater social disadvantage, constraining their access to power and resources. I now highlight gendered effects of other *danwei* practices such as *biaoxian, guanxi*, and sexual control in order to understand the micro-processes through which gender inequalities were created.

Biaoxian

The discourse of *biaoxian* was prevalent in the rewards and punishments of the work unit. Literally, it means 'performance' and can be used as both noun and verb. It was 'a subjective quality of employees evaluated continuously by leaders and linked to their treatment within the enterprise' (Walder 1986:132) and it was 'central to virtually all the promotions for which workers are eligible and to the entire range of factory distribution and sociopolitical services' (Walder 1986:232). Broadly speaking, *biaoxian* implies 'actual work performance in addition to one's political thought, work attitude, virtue, morality, and other subjective qualities' (Walder 1986:133). Walder's study of Chinese *danwei* highlighted the comprehensive and subjective nature of the concept of *biaoxian*, but he did not mention the gender dimension.

Unlike Walder's informants who emigrated to Hong Kong in the late 1970s and early 80s,[5] most of my interviewees were industrial workers and entered the workplace in the late 1970s. This difference was marked in the shift of focus when they talked about *biaoxian*; the evaluation of political thoughts had significantly decreased since the introduction of reforms. Apart from two female middle-level cadres, women seldom mentioned the political aspect when they described their own or other's *biaoxian* in general. Instead they frequently linked *biaoxian* evaluation to two aspects: individual work performance and the management of relationships with

workers and leaders. They highlighted the hard work they had done to improve their *biaoxian* evaluation so that it would in turn enable their access to economic and political resources.

> At that time, workers competed to be operational experts. When we first came, we looked after four machines, but then, as a young person, I was very enthusiastic. I started watching over six machines, others only four. So it was good biaoxian.
>
> (Jing Xia, aged 50)

She had demonstrated her excellence in spinning and became one of the activists prepared for Party membership in 1977. However, a big quarrel with a workmate about switching on an electric fan which occurred just before the final decision was made jeopardized her prospect of joining the Party.

Song Yuming (aged 49) tried hard to excel:

> Even when I was pregnant with my daughter, I still dealt with potassium hydroxide and other chemical acid. If I hadn't been working with such stuff, my daughter would've been cleverer. At that time, with a big belly, I was carrying all kinds of acid around.

Whatever hard work she had undertaken, she did not have any chance of promotion: all she had ever achieved was the honorary title of 'advanced producer' for her hard work every year. Crucially, this was because she had failed to win favour from her leaders: they doubted her loyalty because whenever she was asked to say in private what was being done by workers in her group she declined to answer: 'I didn't like climbing up by stepping over others. In my whole life, I never had the chance of promotion. That was part of the reason. I am too sincere'. Another pertinent factor might be that she had also declined several introductions and proposals for courtships by her workshop supervisors and other leaders (see 'Matchmaking' in Chapter 5).

Zhou Ping (aged 59), a former director of the trade union in her factory, told her own success story:

> In university, my academic work was relatively good and I was also involved in various activities. In the military training session, I won the competition for excellent soldiers then participated in the campaign of 'helping one another and making progress together'. After distinguishing myself in the training, during the first term of second year, I was admitted into the Party.

After she graduated, Zhou Ping was allocated to an electronics factory to be the secretary of the factory Party committee. She was gradually promoted to being the director of the trade union. She was one of the only two female

factory-level leaders in the whole work unit which comprized about 1,500 staff.

> First, because I had been the secretary of the factory Party committee, the contact with leaders was very close. The leaders knew me very well, I guess. Another reason is that I joined the Party much earlier, when I was still at university. When I first came into the factory, there weren't many student Party members. Thirdly, throughout my whole life, I was always hard working and responsible. Whenever or wherever I was working, anytime, whether in the eyes of the leaders or the masses, I usually acquired a very good reputation. All the others had a very good impression of me.
>
> (Zhou Ping, aged 59)

Although most of the women glossed over what they did to boost their *biaoxian*, the element of performance is very prominent when they talked about others' *biaoxian*. Just as the performer described by Goffman (1959:216) who had to 'adapt his performance to the information conditions under which it must be staged', *danwei* workers had to act in front of their leaders if they wanted their *biaoxian* to be well perceived by the leaders. In some sense, they performed the 'emotional labour'[6] suggested by Hochschild and might have to conceal their real feelings and thoughts, engaged in 'surface acting' in which they could deceive leaders about what they really felt, but they did not deceive themselves (Hochschild 2003:33). Therefore, although *biaoxian* seemed to represent who you are, the art of showing good *biaoxian* involved performance management. The following accounts are some of the examples:

> At that time, only one person had a pay rise. She was a lathe operator. She was working very slowly unlike us. We hurried up in our work and left when we finished, but she was working there all the time, all day long. It gave others the impression that she was always working. So the leader thought she was a diligent worker.
>
> (Xiong Yingli, aged 46)

> At that time, if you wanted to join the Party, you had to fawn upon certain people. I don't like to fawn upon others. I never wanted to do such cringe worthy things. So I thought if I was accepted, I would go; if not, I didn't care.
>
> (Qin Weixia, aged 50)

> Look, it's no good if you are only good at work. You need not only the capacity to work but also the mouth (*e.g. verbal ability*), don't you? To be blunt, saying what the leaders want to hear, biaoxian, something like that.
>
> (Qian Mingxia, aged 47)

Some women reported later in the interview that when they left the *danwei* on redundancy, their temper at home became much better, which was also mentioned by some of the daughters. Although they did not make the link to *biaoxian*, this might suggest that the bad temper at home previously might be a result of the suppression of the emotions at work.[7]

Despite the vagueness and arbitrariness of *biaoxian*, one might be tempted to think of it as a gender-neutral concept. However, the efforts involved to perform good *biaoxian* are gender biased. The 'extra' willingness to be active in the *danwei* required for demonstration was in conflict with women's family duties. Jing Xia (aged 50) was not so active after she got married.

> After I got married and involved in family matters, I became cool about those things. In the end, when our Party secretary asked me, 'do you still want to join the Party?' I replied, no. Because when I was young at that time, it was said that after you join the Party, you might have the chance of getting promoted. But when I had a family, how could you want to become a cadre? You couldn't spare the energy.

Jing Xia was one of the women who became less passionate about Party membership or other promotion after they were married. The extra input needed for good *biaoxian* became an issue when family emergencies occurred.

> I could bear hardships and stand hard work. I took so much overtime work. At one time, my father-in-law was in hospital, I was too busy to visit him before he passed away. My mother-in-law couldn't understand and got cross with me.
>
> (Guan Guohua, aged 56)

Interviewees found it hard to meet the criteria to demonstrate good *biaoxian* as well as to fulfil their family duties; unlike Guan Guohua, most opted for the latter without bothering about *biaoxian*, though at the expense of their career development. I suggest that *biaoxian* was ideally created for a male worker with family responsibilities taken care of by his wife, a situation similar to that identified by Acker: 'The closest the disembodied worker doing the abstract job comes to a real worker is the male worker whose life centres on his full-time, life-long job, while his wife or another woman takes care of his personal needs and his children. . . . The concept of "a job" assumes a particular gendered organization of domestic life and social production' (Acker 1990:149).

There are some problems for women who did attempt to form good relationships with leaders, as most leaders are men. Most of them commented that it was much easier for male workers to associate with leaders by drinking and smoking together. Yuan Mei was pushed to drink potent alcohol when she was promoted as the only female leader in the factory. Moreover,

as *biaoxian* entails such a broad scope for surveillance, personal life is also under scrutiny and it has 'moralistic overtones' (Walder 1986:143). But the double standard of sexual control (see page 56) towards men and women was an additional disadvantage to women in making contact with leaders. When women talked about the few female leaders in their own work units, they said something like 'gossip has it that she slept with some leader'. He Jiabao even emphasized in the interview that the male leader with whom she had had a good relationship was in his fifties implying that a sexual affair was impossible. Thus, the control on women's sexuality also prevented them from advancing their *biaoxian* by forming good relations with leaders unlike their male colleagues. Some adopted a non-involvement strategy to avoid trouble. For example, Bi Hong (aged 40) said, 'I went to work neither coming late nor leaving early. That's it. I did what I should do well. That's enough. I didn't want to suck up to some [leaders] nor gossip about others'. Some expressed relief that they were released from the complicated management of relationships in the *danwei* after they became redundant.

Related to *biaoxian* was the *dang'an*, a file of 'Reports of informers, evaluations made by supervisors, serious criticisms, warnings, and other punishments' (Walder 1986:91). The dossier stayed with the worker throughout his or her life and would be regularly consulted when reviewing candidates for promotions or raises (Walder 1986). Shaw (1996) found that it was a means of social control in China. However, when I asked women about their dossier, ordinary workers commented they had little to do with it in their life: the only time their *dang'an* was consulted was when they internally retired to check how many years they had been working in order to settle their financial remuneration. Ding Jiahua, who was intrigued by the mystery of the dossier, persuaded the junior officer in the *dang'an* section to let her have a look as she was about to move to work in another work unit. But she was disappointed to find there were just a few forms she had filled in about her personal details, 'nothing really, because you've hardly done any extraordinary things'. The *dang'an* seemed more relevant to Party members and cadres as Xiu Tianhong (aged 47) illustrated. She once looked after workers' dossiers and explained how they were used: 'If someone's relative joined the Party, the relative's *danwei* would come to have a look to see if there were any problems with that person. Workers usually had nothing to do with the *dang'an*'. The women Party members in the study also reported that it was a regulation that the evaluation of their *biaoxian* should be put in their *dang'an*, which implied more control over them by comparison with ordinary women workers.

Various aspects of a worker's behaviour were under surveillance if she wanted to progress or access any resources in the *danwei*. Indeed, it is difficult to tell whether there is any aspect of a person's behaviour which is not relevant to his or her *biaoxian* evaluation by leaders. However, it is noticeable that managing a good relation with the leader is vital. Qian Mingyan formed a good relationship with an ex-leader but failed to get on well with

the next one so that it took her eight years to be admitted into the Party. He Jiabao sought help from her ex-leader and got transferred into a non-shift job during a staff reduction crisis in the factory. Thus, one of the consequences of having a good *biaoxian* is to provide one with more powerful connections (*guanxi*) as a means to gain resources or promotion in the *danwei* system.

Guanxi

Guanxi (lit. 'relationship or connection'), in a broad sense, refers to any informal relationship involving at least two parties. Anthropologists have studied it as a form of Chinese cultural practices (for example, see Kipnis 1997, Yang 1994);[8] it has also been discussed as a critical practice in business relationships (e.g. Tong and Yong 1998, Tsang 1998, Woo *et al.* 2001). Here I narrow down the examination to the institutional underpinnings of the role of *guanxi* within the *danwei* and how it affected women workers. *Guanxi* played an important role in getting promoted, securing a good job, work assignment and training opportunities (Bian 1994). In a bureaucratic system whereby all assignments and promotions were controlled by the state cadres, *guanxi* provided a mechanism for people to overcome structural barriers and to pursue their private interests within the factory. When my interviewees mentioned *guanxi*, they linked it with powerful connections or a powerful person. In that sense, it was both 'instrumental-personal ties' (Walder 1986:27) and the final target accessed through instrumental ties.

Since the state cadres (middle-level and above) had great personal power in interpreting the rules and distributing resources, cadres were the targets, those with whom people want to have *guanxi* (Bian 1994). But as vertical segregation by sex was prevalent in the work units, the imbalance of power and resources between men and women reinforced women's traditional subordinate roles and created hurdles for women's development in the work units. Thus it was mostly men with whom workers tried to cultivate connections if they wanted to realize any goal.

Bian suggested the final object of *guanxi* could be reached directly or indirectly through intermediaries (1994). Women interviewees mainly used the following three channels. First, women could capitalize on the connections of their natal family members, mostly through their father. Yuan Mei (aged 40), the daughter of a restaurant manager, said, 'When I was recruited into this factory, the director asked me what kind of jobs I wanted. It was a coincidence. This director just lived in the building in front of the one where my father lived'. Actually it was not a 'coincidence': she mentioned earlier in her account that her father used his connections to find her previous jobs as well as this employment opportunity for her. Although she constantly emphasized that her successful development was due to her good *biaoxian*, the contribution from her father's influence was undeniable. It opened up opportunities for her to access to chances and resources. Similarly Li Yuyin

mentioned that one of her former workmates was transferred from a manual job to the accountancy section in a hospital, a position arranged by the woman's influential father who worked in the government.

If a woman was born without a silver spoon in her mouth, her second chance for access to powerful connections was marriage. Many women reported a pattern that women usually married up (cf. Rofel 1999). As Jing Xia (aged 50) put it,

> At that time, many women on the shop floor wanted to marry some powerful man. As soon as you married him, he would have the say to transfer you away from the shop floor. You could also be the daughter-in-law of some leader. That's [*getting a transfer*] damn easy once a leader gave out the order.

Ding Jiahua's husband successfully helped her to get a job transfer despite the usual difficulty of changing *danwei* reported by many women workers.

> My husband drove the car for the factory director. His *guanxi* was powerful enough to realize my job transfer. At that time, it was very difficult to change workplace. Because he knew the leaders very well, I was able to work here.
>
> (Ding Jiahua, aged 44)

Although women benefited from this practice, this gendered cultural choice for marriage reflected the gender inequalities women had experienced in the workplace and wider society that they were located at the lower level of the power hierarchy. This practice further reinforced the traditional ideology of female dependency and subordination in the family. Hua Liyun (aged 46) took it for granted that the in-laws' family was responsible for finding a good unit for her.

HUA LIYUN: When I came to this factory, we still needed to find some people, opening the back door [*i.e. using guanxi*] to be admitted.
Q: Your parents?
HUA LIYUN: No. At that time, I was courting, so my [*future*] in-laws' family went and found some contacts.

As the practice of marrying up carried the implication of female dependency, paradoxically it caused annoyance to some wives who wanted to be considered as independent. Lu Guangpin (aged 37) complained about the inconvenience of working in the same factory as her husband.

Q: Why did you dislike working with him in the same factory?
LU GUANGPIN: Because at that time he was working in the office [*she was an operator on the shop floor*], so everyone else would just think that any

> of my achievements derived from him. In the factory, if you had any *guanxi*, you would go work in the analysis room. For women, that would be the best way to leave the shop floor. I never changed my job anyway. Why should I think I've gained anything from association with him?

In addition to drawing on kinship and affinal connections there was a third possibility. If women had established good relationships with their immediate superior as a result of their good *biaoxian*, that relationship could sometimes be translated into *guanxi*. For example, He Jiabao (aged 46) asked for help from her ex-leader in the layoff crisis to get transferred to non-shift work.

> To be frank, at that time, I thought to myself, whatever happened, I got on very well with my two previous sector directors, so if I went to discuss it with them, they would usually help me out. So I had this confidence.

However, this way of access to *guanxi* had some disadvantages. Walder found that 'Wage raises, bonuses, and promotions are usually committee decisions or must be approved at several different levels of the factory' (1986:185). The *guanxi* one sought to acquire was with the immediate supervisor and, as women's positions in the work hierarchy were very low, the power of their superiors was limited. For instance, although He Jiabao was transferred to work on a non-shift job, this was only in the storeroom. Furthermore, the *guanxi* resulting from relationships with the immediate leaders was subject to change and also likely to wane when the leader was transferred out of the *danwei*. The process of managing a relationship with the new leader had to begin all over again. For instance, Qian Mingyan said 'every king has his own ministers'. She totally mismanaged the relationship with her next leader and it took her eight years to be admitted into the Party. She also lost the chance of being promoted which had been intended by the ex-leader.

The few women who gained anything from their good relationship with the leaders also needed to have the capacity to tolerate the sexual scandals. Zhao Wenhua (aged 51) recalled, 'At that time in the *danwei*, I had good relation with my leader. Others talked blindly [i.e. gossip without evidence]. They spread it around: how "good" I was with the leader. But I didn't care'. Bi Hong (aged 40) told me a popular item of gossip in her factory.

> The woman who entered the factory at the same time as me now became the secretary to the Party Committee in the factory hospital. It is rumoured that she had a [*sexual*] relationship with our factory director, otherwise how could she? She was as ordinary as me, and looked just so-so. But she first slept with the workshop Party secretary so as to be

> transferred to work in the propaganda sector like reporting things about the shop floor workers. Then she was shagging around and finally slept with the factory director. This time, I was bought off with a lump sum, but she wasn't [*made redundant*]. Instead, she was promoted to be the secretary to the Party committee in the hospital.

Yang (1994) suggested that the practice of *guanxi* created a space for the enactment of sexual politics and the challenge of the gendered status order. But 'Whether or not women offer their attractiveness, charm, or bodies to get something in return, they must give up more of themselves than men who engage in material gift exchange are required to' (Yang 1994:84). The few women in their *danwei* who managed to become leaders were rumoured to have slept with male leaders and were described as 'able women, unlike ordinary women' by interviewees. All the women tried to distance themselves from such 'able women', even those who had been subjects of such rumours. Women managers in Leung's (2002) study also reported that women involved in *guanxi* easily earned a bad reputation for using sexual relations. Thus, the general surveillance of women's sexuality put a constraint on this way of obtaining *guanxi*. From the analysis of a survey, Bian (1994) found that women are less likely than men to develop their own social networks after entering the labour force. My findings are in accord with Yang's conclusion that 'women, especially working-class women, still tend to be more circumscribed than men in their daily lives to small circles of workmates on the job and family members, relatives, and neighbours at home' (Yang 1994:80). There is a difference between women workers and cadres. By asking the women with whom they mainly socialized during the Spring Festival, I found that the friends of women cadres were mostly leaders whilst workers were associated with workers, reaffirming Yang's (1994) observation that women cadres and intellectuals were more involved in *guanxi* than working-class women. The gap in the scope and power of social networks accessible between women workers and cadres still remained in their process of finding new employment after they were out of the *danwei*.

The Chinese *guanxi* is sometimes considered to be analogous to the Western concept of social capital (see Gold *et al.* 2002, Lin 2001).[9] Lin summarized the premise behind social capital in accordance with various renditions by different theorists of social capital (Bourdieu 1986, Coleman 1990, Putnam 1993): it is '*investment in social relations with expected returns in the marketplace*' (Lin 2001:19, original emphasis). (Lin 2001:19). Based on a 1998 survey in 18 Chinese cities, he found that women were more likely than men to use kin ties to gain access to social capital and that men held a substantial advantage over women in respect of social capital (Lin 2001:109). This male advantage was reflected in my interviewees' strategies: the women either had to resort to their male relatives in the family such as their father[10] and husband or had to play up to male expectations. *Guanxi* was a male network, a gendered social resource.

After accessing *guanxi*, what was it used for? Some studies found that *guanxi* was employed to obtain housing, a job and promotions (Bian 1994, Walder 1986). Apart from using *guanxi* in finding their first job, women interviewees mentioned some more specific applications. Unlike their male counterparts who used connections for upward mobility (Bian 1994), when women workers changed their jobs, many of them were still doing jobs at the same wage level as before and some were even transferred to menial or degrading jobs. Their ultimate reason was to avoid doing shift work and thus cope with the demands of both work and family duties more smoothly. Tang Minmin (aged 46), for example, transferred to a factory where her father-in-law was chief secretary of the Party committee: 'In 1986, I had no choice but to ask to be transferred to work here. It was purely because my daughter would go to school soon and no one else was available to look after her'. Wu Ping (aged 46) also recalled: 'My husband was very busy at work. He talked to the leader, "my wife works three shifts and our daughter is left unattended". So his leader helped transfer me to work in this sector'.

Guanxi and *biaoxian* were thus two important channels by which workers could get access to resources and opportunities in the *danwei*. Interviewees suggested that *guanxi* was more effective than *biaoxian*.[11] Good *biaoxian* included having a good relationship with one's immediate shop leaders, but those who did not have the former, but had a powerful *guanxi* could still circumvent the authority of work unit leaders. Good *biaoxian* alone did not necessarily bring about promotions and access to resources. For example, Guan Guohua had very good *biaoxian*. However, she lost a chance of being sent for further study for unknown reasons despite the devotion she put into her work. In the end she was admitted into the Party in the late 1990s, which seemed a reward for her hard work, but that had lost its previous prestigious implications. On the other hand, despite *guanxi*'s greater power, *guanxi* and *biaoxian* were not mutually exclusive. When a person had managed to create a good relationship with their leader, the first step would be a good *biaoxian* evaluation and that relationship in turn could be converted into *guanxi* at some point. Furthermore, because *biaoxian* was a formal criterion for supposed equity in the distribution of resources and opportunities whilst *guanxi* was officially illegitimate (Walder 1986), I suggest that *biaoxian* became a cover for workers' personal use of *guanxi*. When I asked how women got this chance or favour, they spoke loudly of their good *biaoxian*; when I probed into any *guanxi* they employed, their voices became lower and their answers became very vague and short. However, when they mentioned the use of *guanxi* by others, they would talk openly in a scornful tone. The imputation of *guanxi*, due to its negative overtones, became a means to downplay the achievements of other people.

In the discussion of *biaoxian* and *guanxi*, I have argued that people's double standards towards sexuality conspired with both practices in a way that disadvantaged women. I now go on to illustrate the sexual control in

the work unit and how it created hurdles for women's development and reinforced gender inequalities.

Sexual control

Western feminists have documented the way that sexual harassment has impacted upon women's employment in the workplace. Stanko (1988), for example, has identified concrete consequences of sexual harassment in the labour market such as women experiencing dismissal or demotion if they did not co-operate with sexual advances. As Adkins (1995:58) put it, 'Both women's experiences and the economic consequences of sexual harassment at the workplace suggest that sexual processes are a powerful force in the construction of women's position in the labour market'. The power difference between men and women in organizations promotes sexual harassment and perpetuates inequality (Rospenda *et al.* 1998:42). Tang (2001) is one of the few Chinese scholars who have examined the issue of sexual harassment in the Chinese workplace. She was positive about the situation in the state-owned enterprises because it was a Party regulation that sexual morality was upheld.[12] To date there has not been any empirical investigation of sexual harassment in the former *danwei*. The term 'sexual harassment' [*xing sao rao*] has only been introduced in China through the mass media in recent years, so I asked interviewees to comment on unwanted sexual behaviour instead. Because this topic was very sensitive, I designed a set of vignettes based on stories about a hypothetical character. It reduced the cautiousness prevalent in the Chinese context when people are asked to talk about themselves. As a result, interviewees produced abundant accounts on this issue, which revealed that the sexual harassment was not an uncommon occurrence and gave details of the common responses to it and consequences thereof.

Strategies toward sexual harassment

This vignette contained three scenarios which the woman had to discuss in turn. The first scenario was:

> Xiaohua was a young single mechanic on the shop floor. She was not only very skilful in her work but also very pretty. The supervisor of this shop floor tried to make use of all excuses to approach her and pressurized her to sleep with him.
>
> Stage 1. what should Xiaohua do?
>
> a) report to the *danwei* leader?
> b) turn to help outside the *danwei* (please specify)?

c) deal with the supervisor tactfully?
d) find a boyfriend?
e) find *guanxi* to be transferred to another *danwei*?
f) do something else (please specify)?

This scenario was designed to explore women's responses to harassment as well as to gain a picture of the occurrence of sexual harassment in the *danwei*. The most frequent choice was (e), to get a transfer.

> The only solution is to be transferred. The scope to deal with him is limited. If the leader sticks to you, you can't get rid of him. So you can only be transferred. Finding a boyfriend is not the best solution. I think being transferred is the best solution. That's right, isn't it? If you find a boyfriend, he will say, 'why didn't he stick to others, just because you are pretty? There are so many others on the shop floor, why didn't the leader choose others rather than you? You must have something indiscreet in your behaviour'.
>
> (Ye Guanghua, aged 56)

Although being transferred to work in another work unit was the most desirable outcome, Ye Guanghua recognized it was very difficult. Guan Guohua (aged 56) also described the impossibility of being transferred,

> Before when we started working in one *danwei*, we would be there for 20 or 30 years. It was very hard to change workplace without some kind of *guanxi*. It was not easy to get transferred. It would be best for her to change a *danwei*, but it's impossible.

The second frequent choice was (d), to find a boyfriend. As Qin Weixia put it,

> If the leader saw that she had a boyfriend, they had a good relationship and got married, normally he would not pester her any more. Like on rainy days, I take an umbrella so as not to get soaked. Now she has the umbrella. Men are women's umbrellas of protection.
>
> (Qin Weixia, aged 50)

Women who did not choose this solution gave the justification similar to that of Ye Guanghua, that is, the boyfriend would be suspicious of her own behaviour. The third popular choice was (c), dealing tactfully with the leader. The victim was advised to 'use her head' to defend herself. One tactic offered by women was the following:

> If he asked you to go to his office and wanted to do something to you, you couldn't win over him physically because you are a woman. But then how to deal with him? You can say something to him like, 'I'm going to meet up with someone else, she will wait for me at a quarter past three', because you noticed the clock had shown it was ten past three. So even if the leader wanted to do something, he couldn't.
>
> (Xiu Tianhong, aged 47)

Women who only chose this option emphasized that during the process of dealing with him tactfully, the victim should not have other impure thoughts such as making use of him to be transferred to a better job. Women who combined this choice with other options pointed out the difficulty and risk of the dealing process and thus considered it as a temporary arrangement until the victim found either a boyfriend or *guanxi*. Conversely, women who did not opt for this solution questioned either the possibility for a woman worker to deal with a male leader successfully or the impure ends of the victim herself. Xiong Yingli (aged 46) said, 'Dealing with him tactfully, to be frank, women of our time normally didn't have the capacity'. Lu Guangpin (aged 37) commented, 'Those who chose to deal with him are women adept at scheming. They might want to make use of him. In our workshop, we had such an example'.

Only two women chose (a), reporting to the leader. Dai Chunhua, a manual worker, said that the leader of the victim should be informed, but she did not expect that leader to do anything while emphasizing that 'you [i.e. the female victim] must be firm in such matter until he stops. The key is you. You thought after you reported to the leader, he [the leader] would do something to help. How can that be so simple?'. The other was a professional woman, Jia Yunxia, who had worked in a provincial-level trade company. She thought after making a report that the leader would deal with this matter seriously, which is similar to the response of a work unit cadre in Tang's (2001) study. Tang (2001) seemed to accept what the cadre told her and attributed it to the Party's standpoint towards sexual morality. Tang (2001) and her respondent presented a public account in line with the Party's rhetoric. The reason why Jia Yunxia gave me such an answer might be linked to the social background in which she grew up. She belonged to the generation prior to the Cultural Revolution and had received higher education in the Mao era. During the interview, her account carried from time to time echoes of the Mao era such as 'the Party taught us . . .' and 'socialist morality'.

No one chose option (b), asking for help from outside the *danwei*. The reasons fell into two categories: some women had no idea what agencies existed outside the *danwei*, which suggests the *danwei*'s predominant position in urban China. The other women thought that the situation described was harassment rather than rape, and thus wasn't qualified for legal regulation. Surprisingly, two women chose the last option, to do something else,

and advised the victim to accept the perpetrator's sexual advances. Both Chang Baohua (aged 54, who had worked in an electronics factory) and Shui Yi gave the real examples from their own factories.

> At that time, once you were allocated to a *danwei* you would settle down there working. If you screwed up the relationship with your leader, the rest of your life was screwed up as well. So basically she would be captured, like those in our *danwei* [*a clothes-making factoy*]. Otherwise, you couldn't survive in the *danwei*, especially when you had no connections. If your family member was a middle-level cadre or whatever, you could be transferred away. For ordinary people, it wasn't even worth thinking about. . . . What's more, shop floor work was hard for women. After she accepted his advances, she could leave there and get transferred.
>
> (Shui Yi, aged 40)

In Chang Baohua's factory, if a leader became fixated on a woman, the *danwei* also tried to create chances to let him succeed.

> That crop of ex-servicemen was allocated to our factory and selected several women from our schoolmates. The *danwei* deliberately put them at work together. Leaders did it deliberately, that is feishui bu wailiu [*'don't let waste water flow out'*] [13] – women are consumed internally and should not be allowed to flow outside.
>
> (Chang Baohua, aged 54)

These replies show how gender inequalities in structural power in the *danwei* lead to harassment. Women's lower status increased their vulnerability for experiencing sexual harassment from their male superiors. Because of the unique position of the *danwei* as a basic and inclusive social unit, there was little space for women who suffered from sexual harassment to escape. The *danwei* leader was not considered to be the problem solver as Tang's (2001) study would have us believed.

Whilst trying to help this fictional woman under discussion, interviewees tended to be suspicious of the woman victim and even put blame on her. For example, some questioned if the victim had an inappropriate personal goal. A few even attributed the occurrence of sexual harassment to the victim's sluttish behaviour. For instance, Zhou Ping, who had once worked in the women's federation and was the director of her factory trade union before retirement, said,

> You should try your best to prevent such a kind of thing from happening. A woman should know self-respect, and never be loose. Some girls themselves were easy. After all, a woman should be careful and behave herself. Put it more directly, that is, flies don't bite eggs without a crack.
>
> (Zhou Ping, aged 59)

Such an attitude indicates that women themselves had internalized the gendered social expectation that women should be responsible for their sexual reputation whether they were real victims or not.

I also found that women interviewees tried to conceal any harassment in their solutions. Gao Yun (aged 46) asked the victim to 'find some *guanxi* discreetly to get transferred'. Yang Ming (aged 56) made it clear that 'Such things couldn't be explained clearly. At that time people would definitely say it's you who want to make use of him wherever you go. For a woman, it can't be explained clearly'. Many women said that if they were her, they would not have made their predicament known to outsiders. Although this covering attempt made it even more difficult to evaluate how prevalent sexual harassment was in the *danwei*, women constantly mentioned the sexual encounters between male leaders and female workers. However, they commented whether those were coerced harassment or mutually agreed behaviour which can only be subject to speculation. Women seemed to be responsible in face of harassment; as Yuen *et al.* described, in China 'the social norms regarding sex are only used to dictate women's sexual behavior' (Yuen *et al.* 2004:144).

The danwei's attitude towards sexual harassment

The second scenario was:

> Stage 2. Actually, she reported it to the factory leader. And then the supervisor received a public warning and made a promise that he would never do it again. But he was still in that position, which made Xiaohua worried about his revenge. What do you think should be done to that man?
>
> a) transfer him to another shop floor?
> b) demote him to a worker?
> c) expel him?
> d) do something else (please specify)?

This was designed to explore the way in which the *danwei* might deal with the perpetrator in the case of sexual harassment, and to find out whether it would be treated seriously as the Party rhetoric claimed or else. Thirty-three women's responses are presented in the Table 4.1.

By *negotiating* they meant that the leaders should call upon both parties to discuss what had gone on, who was to blame, and what action should be taken. By *cooling* they meant taking it that nothing had happened and they should wait awhile to let the event cool down. *Impossibility* meant that leaders would do nothing about it. *Depending* meant they first needed to find out who was in the wrong before discussing the matter openly with the leaders.

Table 4.1 Proposed action towards the perpetrator

Action	*Number*
Transfer	16
Demotion	2
Expel	1
Other	
Negotiating	5
Cooling	1
Impossibility	5
Depending	3

When they gave answers, interviewees frequently referred back to their own past experiences thus providing real-life stories about how sexual harassment was handled in their *danwei*. They showed that the perpetrator was less likely to receive serious punishment. Five women directly questioned the design of this vignette by quoting the experiences in their own work units: those leaders who took sexual advantage of women remained in their original position, wholly unaffected. Three of those who chose the option of transfer also expressed their suspicion that any punishment would be carried out. For example, Yang Ming said,

> If the leader had a good personal relationship with that man [*the perpetrator*], he wouldn't take it seriously. If he [*the perpetrator*] did make the mistake, that leader would say to him, 'okay, how about changing a place', but in this case, that means the mistake has been big enough [*such as a baby has been born*], other punishment is impossible. I think whether in the old society [*pre-socialist*] or the new society [*socialist*],[14] it was still like the old system of officials scratching each other's back (guan guan xiang hu).
>
> (Yang Ming, aged 56)

Paradoxically, sometimes the degree of punishment depended upon the personal relationship between the 'judge' leader and the perpetrator. Yang Ming continued, 'if the leader hated this man [the harasser], he would make use of this chance to get rid of him [i.e. demoting him]. But overall leaders protect each other, the victim as a worker suffered'.

The most likely consequence for the perpetrator was to be transferred to another place in the work unit. But interviewees added that even after a transfer, the perpetrator would retain the same rank. Zhou Ping chose cooling based upon her own experience in dealing with an investigation. The career of the man involved in that scandal was unaffected and later he still got promoted.

> In the investigation we listened to each party. We thought each had

> one's own justifications, so just like 'even the best judge finds it hard to solve domestic problems', how could we make it clear what was going on? Only two of them were present at that time, how could others know exactly? . . . so I think just leave it, don't treat it as an issue, that is cooling it down.
>
> (Zhou Ping, aged 59)

Similarly in Chang Baohua's factory, a male technician was said to have slept with many women; even after the women's husbands reported the affair to the factory leader, he still received a high salary and awards. So a male harasser's behaviour was condoned in the *danwei*; despite the Party regulation cited in Tang's study (2001), my data indicate that a man's career was less likely to be affected by sexual scandals.

Gendered impact on women

The third scenario in the vignette was:

> Stage 3. In fact, after three months, he was transferred to another place. However, Xiaohua's reputation was affected by this event. Gossip had it that Xiaohua tried to make a show of her beauty. She was really suffering from stress on the shop floor. What should Xiaohua do?
>
> a) ignore others' gossip?
> b) get *guanxi* to go to another *danwei*?
> c) do something else (please specify)?

This was designed to explore the impact of sexual scandal on women. The majority chose the *transfer* option, nine women chose the *ignore* option, the other three said the option of 'ignore' or 'transfer' depended upon the victim's psychological undertaking ability.

Whatever options the women chose, they universally recognized the power of sexual gossip over women. Chang Baohua said 'the power of people's words was enormous; sometimes a sentence could drown you. In fact, the truth might be the opposite. But that girl will lose her confidence in front of others and can't regain her respect from others'. Similarly Yang Ming commented,

> At that time, such hearsay spread very quickly. All of a sudden it would be known in the whole factory. They would say, 'she slept with someone. Look, that person has been transferred just because of her' so even if such a thing had not taken place they would turn it into a fact by

> persistent gossip. People say, rumours that are spread 1000 times will become truth. After it was spread by so many people, nobody knew whether it was true or false so she had to get transferred.
>
> (Yang Ming, aged 56)

Women were also aware of the difficulties of being transferred; they commented that the victim would have to put up with remaining at the work unit if she were unable to move. Some of the women who chose the option of 'ignore' were worried that 'Even when you went to the new work unit, that gossip would follow you. People with a big mouth are everywhere. As the saying goes, "bad things travel fast" '. So they advised the victim to stay, but she should behave herself in daily life to demonstrate that she was a good woman. Sun Yiping (aged 51) said, 'People would say "once you have such bad habit [sleeping around with men], you will never change". So she should use real actions, that is, she won't be flirty with men any more'. Similarly, Jia Yunxia (aged 59) commented,

> I choose 'ignore the gossip of others'. Because if she is a good girl, her qualities will be shown in her actions. She should let actions prove that she is a very decent woman. If she was said to be flirtatious with the shop floor leader, but she behaved very well in other things like in relationships with men. People would think it's the shop floor leader's fault.
>
> (Jia Yunxia, aged 59)

Many women also cited their own examples for the victim on how to behave in men-women relationships. The following is a set of silent rules.

> Before we lived in a courtyard, whenever a male workmate came to visit, my door was absolutely open whether it was cold or hot. You shouldn't allow others to have anything to gossip about. 'oh, someone came, she closed the door, who knows what's going on inside', so women should be aware of these aspects.
>
> (Jing Xia, aged 50)

> In men-women relationship, we should be careful about things such as talking and behaving. Men and women should maintain their distance, shouldn't stay together every day. And if you ask him for help, just saying 'would you please do me a favour, thanks', that's enough, nothing else need be said.
>
> (Qin Weixia, aged 50)

It was universally recognized that a woman should be aware of the little things in daily life from dressing, conversation, her actions, and thus she should be able to constrain herself. Yang Ming recalled, 'oh my dear, at that time, we women had to be careful everywhere'. He Jiabao (aged 46) said

'If a woman has a lively character and dresses unusually, she is more likely to cause gossip'. Most women commented from the outset that the victim in the vignette should prevent the whole thing from happening by behaving well.

In contrast, the man implicated in the sexual gossip were not affected in the same way. Qian Mingyan said, 'our tradition is just like that, no matter how many women men had slept with outside their marriage, they were free from moral criticism. For women that will be stirring all up. Everyone will scold her. Very horrible'. Similarly, as Qin Weixia (aged 50) put it,

QIN WEIXIA: People don't gossip about men, only women. At most, people would say, 'it's him that had the relationship with her'. But about that woman, people would gossip how bad she was.
Q: Why?
QIN WEIXIA: I don't know. Yes, it is strange. I don't know how that happens. Automatically, people start blaming women.

I show that the traditional double standard on men and women's sexuality still persisted. The *danwei* provided this arena where cultural images of sexuality were reproduced despite the socialist rhetoric of gender equality; indeed, the combination of cultural and institutional forces made victims of sexual harassment more vulnerable, with little option to escape. Feminist scholars identify sexual violence as a means of exercising male power with an effect to curtail women's activities; hence, it is a mechanism through which women are socially controlled (Kelly 1988). Under such sexual control, how could Chinese women workers manage their relationship with their superiors and build up their own *guanxi* networks? The golden rule for women to maintain a good reputation is to avoid close contact with men, which comes into tension with those practices of *biaoxian* and *guanxi*. Some manual workers I interviewed opted to be the 'ordinary ones', to be women who looked after their family properly and avoided encounter with certain people which might lead to gossip. Accordingly they remained ordinary workers until they became redundant. This sexual control thus contributed to gender segregation in the workplace and created dilemmas for women if they wanted to advance their careers; it also shows a particular manner of organizational imperatives to 'do gender' (West and Zimmerman 1987).

By gendering the *danwei*, I show that it was not a place where socialist women workers found freedom from the traditional shackles of gender; the specific working practices and culture of the *danwei* system perpetuated gender inequality. *Danwei* was not gender-neutral; instead, gender was a complex component of processes of control. Since the *danwei* regulated women's lives in many respects, this gendered control also persisted in their family life. I will explore this subject further in the next chapter.

5 Living in the *danwei*

The intersection between work and family life

The *danwei* was more than an economic organization and had encroached upon the framework of the society. It represented individuals to the state, intervened in family planning, organized political studies, carried out state policies and usually provided welfare services, housing and medical care (Bian 1994). As a self-contained and self-serving community, it was considered to be a continuation of thousands of years of family production in an agrarian economy (Wang Jian 1995). The core was a 'patriarchal clan system that centred on the three major principles of honouring the emperor, respecting the father, serving the family' (He 1987 quoted in Wang Fei-ling 1998:109).

Growing up in a *danwei*'s compound and having worked in a *danwei*, I remember that the *danwei* was rhetorically promoted as a socialist family where the leaders took care of its members and members were called upon to care for each other. The spatial arrangement of combining work setting and residential blocks within a *danwei* further strengthened this familial model. While being protected, members also depended upon their *danwei* and had hardly any opportunity to change their lot in life or to escape from unpleasant colleagues or hostile superiors. Women were already at a disadvantage in the traditional family: was there an additional gendered effect for them of this overlapping of work and family life? Western feminists have demonstrated that the patriarchal structuring of the family contributed to the gendered location of women in the labour market: the exploitation of women's work in the labour market 'is constructed within the terms of . . . her subordination to husband, her responsibility for child, other dependents and home' (Cockburn 1991:84). So in the Chinese case, how did family life in the *danwei* affect women's employment? I show that women were subjected to more burdens and greater surveillance in this socialist family. While Communism may well have improved women's economic situation, the close association between paid work and family life in the *danwei* system by no means guaranteed gender equality. Instead, it not only reinforced traditional gender roles but also maintained the gender hierarchy in the workplace.

Familialism in the *danwei*

I highlight four work unit practices to illustrate the familial culture in the *danwei* and its gendered implications: matchmaking (marrying-off the young); allocation of housing (reinforcing marriage); surveillance of family life (maintaining marriage) and family planning (controlling population).

Matchmaking

The Chinese hold that if you contribute to the union of two people you will help them and, by doing good, accrue virtue yourself. Thus, matchmaking was a popular activity in workplace culture; everyone, from leaders to ordinary workers, was busy marrying off the young.[1] On the official level, matchmaking was regarded as part of the operational duty of the *danwei* system. Honig and Hershatter (1988) recorded that in some factories Youth League cadres were active in organizing cultural activities for young people to meet. All but four of my interviewees were introduced to their husbands through workplace relationships or met their husbands in the *danwei*. Popular as it is, the matchmaking culture in the workplace could cause problems for workers. For example, accepting a candidate put forward by one 'matchmaker' workmate might offend another who had offered to effect an introduction to someone else. Similarly, if someone accepted an offer and started seeing a potential candidate, the outcome of the relationship (for example, if it resulted in marriage) would directly affect the relationship with the matchmaker. The ensuing problems might be acute if the matchmaker was a leader, as Yang Ming found to her cost.

Q: Did any leaders introduce someone to you?
YANG MING: There was one *danwei* leader trying to set me up with his friend. I didn't agree [*sigh*]. . . . He criticized me a lot at all political meetings. You know why, it was because his friend was formerly a serviceman [*i.e. of good political status*].
Q: So, he gave you a hard time?
YANG MING: [*Mimicking the leader*] So, you have petty bourgeois thoughts! You don't want a party member and a revolutionary army man! You just want a bookish intellectual!
Q: Did this affect their appraisal of you (biaoxian)?
YANG MING: Yes, it definitely affected it. For example, whenever it came to awards, I never got a chance.

(Yang Ming, aged 56)

Here a *danwei* leader acted like a traditional elder trying to set up an arranged marriage, but at the same time was using his power, which was derived from the workplace, to interfere in personal matters.

However, the closeness of work and family life did not mean the complete

replacement of one by the other. Women did use workplace regulations to challenge the imposition of familial arrangements, although their scope for resistance was limited. Sun Yiping not only rejected a candidate but also challenged her leader's right to use this against her:

> I turned down a candidate introduced by the director of the workshop. I was affected by that over a wage rise in 1979. They said something like, I was not decisive in courtship. . . . But I had the highest scores in both exams required for the wage rise. So I retorted, 'the aspect of courtship shouldn't be considered in this matter. I am decisive. I just don't want to see anyone' . . . Finally they gave in because I passed both exams.
>
> (Sun Yiping, aged 51)

Yang Ming had passively resisted the matchmaking pressures: 'I didn't want any promotion. So no matter what method you used,[2] you couldn't do something to me as long as I obeyed the regulations and rules in the workplace'. However, her refusal was at the cost of her career development. Later, after she married her 'bookish intellectual', her husband used his *guanxi* to get her transferred from a manual job into a non-manual position.

Women who were married to someone introduced to them through the workplace were sometimes affected by the intertwining of kinship and work relations, particularly when hierarchal family relations were superimposed upon the workplace hierarchy. For example, Ding Jiahua married the son of the woman whose apprentice she was.

Q: How did you meet your husband?

DING JIAHUA: Oh, [*laugh*], his mother was my shifu [*apprentice master*]. . . . At that time, there was a guy in my *danwei*. I thought he was very nice. But my mother [*who worked in the same danwei*] didn't agree because she had a misunderstanding with him. So I gave him up. . . . My husband's mother took advantage of the situation and said she would introduce someone to me. At that time, she didn't mention it was her son. Instead she asked another workmate to be the matchmaker.[3] So I met him. He was all right.

(Ding Jiahua, aged 44)

Ding Jiahua was expected to take her own mother's advice while her future husband's mother used her position to transform her apprentice into a daughter-in-law. Women therefore had to face double control from family relations which were traditionally unfavourable to women as well as from the workplace relationships.

Given the pressure to marry, what of those who fail to get married? The term 'old single girl' is commonly used for unmarried women over the age of about 25. Sun Yiping described a similar experience before she married at the age of 32.

Q: After 25, when you were not married in your *danwei* . . .

SUN YIPING: There was so much pressure. At that time, [*mimicking others*], 'you are such an old single girl. You are unmarriageable'. At that time, I looked very thin. Everyone all said, 'no matter who you marry, you can never give birth to children as your heart almost sticks to your back' [*implying she would be infertile*].[4]

(Sun Yiping, aged 51)

All the efforts I made to contact any 'old single girls' for interviews were denied by friends or intermediaries as they assumed that 'they must be weird in character. Who wants to talk about that [being single]!' In Chinese culture where people's privacy is rarely respected and marriage is so prevalent, older single women did experience a lot of pressure and discrimination. Some reluctantly got married to escape the social burden. Conversely, people seem to be more tolerant of single men. For instance, the famous folk expression, *cheng jia li ye* ('setting up a family and establishing a career') is supposed to summarize a person's life. But its application is gendered. Priority will be given to the first event with reference to a woman's life, but the second with reference to a man's. In the eyes of society, a single male in his early thirties has a career before him whereas a single female in her early thirties is abnormal.[5] The cultural tolerance ceiling for singledom is 35 for men, ten years older than that for their female counterparts. Generally speaking, *danwei* leaders interfere less with a single man's personal life though they will take an interest in the career development of potential 'high-fliers'. Yang Ming's 'bookish intellectual' was not persecuted, because 'he was a technician and had skills,' and his career was unaffected.

Allocation of housing

A second gendered practice which made marriage more materially significant for women than for men was the allocation of housing. Given the immense population pressure in China, housing was a scarce resource in the *danwei*. In theory, an urban resident who needs accommodation would be allocated an apartment by application to his or her work unit (Bian 1994). In practice, this was rarely the case. Yang (1989:29) quotes the 'List of Conditions for the Allocation of Housing' in a state-owned factory in Beijing that was used to determine the most deserving applicants. The rhetoric of the list is male biased: condition No.12 states: 'those who are male workers or staff at this factory' – i.e. implying men are in greater need of accommodation than women. Similarly, Bian says that 'to avoid duplicate applications [for housing], normally male employees are the only applicants' (Bian 1994:197). Thus, the 'socialist family' still kept the traditional practice of men providing the house in marriage – a woman is joining a man's 'family' which here is the work unit.

Q: How did you solve the housing problem?
A: At first, his *danwei* didn't have any flats available, so the leader in his *danwei* tried to negotiate with the leader in my *danwei* and asked mine to lend them a house for us. After his *danwei* finished the completion of housing construction, we were allocated a flat in his *danwei*.

(Wang Dan, aged 55)

As Table 5.1 shows, the majority of women had lived for most of their marital life in houses provided by their husbands.

Table 5.1 Housing situation of 33 women

Housing (on marriage)	*No*	*Housing (at the time of interview)*	*No*
Provided by their *danwei* (Couple work in the same unit)	6	Provided by their *danwei* (Couple work in the same unit)	6
Provided by husband's *danwei*	8	Provided by husband's *danwei*	9
Provided by husband's family*	15	Provided by husband's family	11
Provided by her own *danwei*	4	Provided by her own *danwei*	5
Provided by her own family	0	Provided by her own family	2

Note
* This included three couples who both worked in the same unit that was classified as textile industry.

Four women were housed in their own *danwei* on marriage; but two of them moved to their husband's *danwei* when he was allocated a house. Of the 23 women who moved into a house provided by their husband's *danwei* or his parents on marriage, only three were subsequently able to move: Qian Mingyan moved to a house in her own *danwei* from her husband's house due to an unexpected reason (see Surveillance of family life, page 71); Song Yuming played a trick to get a house in her own *danwei* by pretending to live in a rented house and saying there was no house from his family; He Jiabao got a house later on in their married life due to the increasing profit of her work unit. Two other women moved to a house provided by their own natal family after they got divorced. In particular, those who worked in textiles, the most feminized of all industries (see Rofel 1999), reported that there was no housing provision when they got married. One said in a grateful tone that in 1995 the municipal trade union started providing houses to couples both of whom were working in textile industries. Formerly, such couples would have lived with the man's parents.

This housing arrangement in the *danwei* further reinforced the traditional idea of female dependency in marriage and family life – all the women (and indeed all their daughters) took it for granted that it was the husband's duty to provide housing. Ding Jiahua was one of them.

Q: Why couldn't you apply for housing?
A: Because I am after all female, and not male. *Danwei* prioritised males so that they could find partners and get married. That's right, isn't it? We women after all have to be married off to others. Men should take the responsibility.

(Ding Jiahua, aged 44)

Mothers also transmitted this ideology to the next generation. They expected as a duty to support their daughters until they found a job; and they also took it as a matter of course that when their daughter got married, the son-in-law's side of the family would provide all of the wedding expenses and housing.

However, this housing arrangement made women more vulnerable if any marital problems arose. Tan Minmin (aged 46) was distressed by her husband's extra-marital affair for more than 15 years. However she did not divorce him, as she did not want to let her husband own the house in his *danwei* for which she had paid after the housing reforms made this possible. Shui Yi (aged 40) had to move into a house owned by her parents after she was divorced at the age of 33 as her ex-husband had provided the marital home.

This housing arrangement also created practical problems for women. Many women, especially those who moved into their husband's *danwei*'s compound, had to suffer from the long and exhausting commute in big cities like Nanjing. This commuting problem got worsened when they had a child because a *danwei* was supposed to be responsible for the childcare of their female employees. Therefore, a woman who lived in her husband's *danwei* had to take the child with her to her own *danwei*'s kindergarten or nursery. Yang Ming recalled,

> At that time, every morning I had to take him to my *danwei*'s kindergarten and in the evening, I took him back with me. On way back home, I had to buy something in the market for dinner. It was very difficult. I put him on the seat of my bicycle and pushed it in the busy market, it was especially awful on rainy days as I had no spare hands to hold an umbrella. When I got home, I was totally worn out.
>
> (Yang Ming, aged 56)

The arrangement of housing in the *danwei* made marriage materially necessary but made practical living more difficult for women workers. Single men were often offered dormitory accommodation[6] by their *danwei* if they applied; single women normally had no alternative but to stay at home with their parents,[7] which also helped them to comply with the cultural expectation that they move from their parental home to their husband's home without their sexual reputation being sullied. Recent changes in the housing market make private accommodation available, but the prices are far beyond these women's means.

Surveillance of family life

The *danwei* leaders were particularly concerned with maintaining unity among workers and residents. Accordingly, they took a close interest in the domestic lives of members. For example, there was a 'reconciliation committee' for maintaining harmony within individual families if they lived in *danwei* housing or between neighbours in the *danwe*i residential units. One of the main responsibilities of this committee was to solve family problems which came to their attention – sometimes these were reported by neighbours. For instance, if an aggrieved party asked the reconciliation committee for help then the committee would try to bring the erring party back into line. Those workers who lived in private housing (usually with the husband's parents) were subjected to similar measures by their neighbourhood committee.[8] However, neighbourhood committees were less powerful and sometimes a non-resident with a grievance against a family member would make a direct complaint to the offender's reconciliation committee. For example, after Qian Mingyan and her mother-in-law had had a major quarrel the latter went straight to the *danwei* committee. Fortunately for Qian Mingyan, the committee took her side and found her housing (a pertinent factor, however, might also have been that her father-in-law occupied a very important position in her *danwei*). Such arrangements thus allowed the work units to combine direct control in the workplace and watch over their workers' domestic life.

Ye Guanghua and Xiu Tianhong had been members of reconciliation committees. The way they described the committees' activities is very interesting. For example, they had handled cases when

> the couples had quarrels over men not knowing how to do the housework, or the husband not caring for the wife. For example, like the colleague in my office whose child was very bright, we just persuaded the wife [*to put up with her husband's behaviour*] by saying something like, 'no matter how bad your husband is, the cleverness of your child is also inherited from him as well as from you. If your husband wasn't clever, your child wouldn't be so bright. Just remember that your child's intelligence has his contribution as well'.
>
> (Ye Guanghua, aged 54)

Whatever justifications the committees provided to people with grievances, they tried to persuade women to comply with gendered social expectations and to make compromizes in order to maintain family harmony. For example, both women had responded in similar fashion when female workmates had complained that their husbands had had extramarital affairs. They said to the women: 'if your husband has someone outside the family, you must examine yourself carefully. If you try your best to be a good wife, generally speaking, he is less likely to turn to someone else'. Thus,

despite the socialist rhetoric of promoting the egalitarian family – i.e. husband and wife should not only care for and respect one another but also share even the most mundane of tasks, such as housework – the traditional ideology still flourished in lived reality and this was reinforced by members of the reconciliation committee. The moral yoke of social expectations on women had not been lifted.

Peer surveillance had been also a great burden for the women. Since accommodation was allocated by the work unit, neighbours were often their workmates, leaders or colleagues of their spouses. This meant that it was very easy to become the focus of attention if anything untoward happened in their family. He Jiabao told me one of such experience:

> When workmates live together, it is sometimes not very convenient. Even if you just have a little quarrel, everybody will know. That's right, isn't it? Once I had a row with my daughter. You know, when you quarrel, your voice will be raised automatically. These flats are not exactly what you would call 'soundproof'. The balcony of her [*a workmate's*] flat in the opposite building faces our flat. So when we raised our voices, she saw us quarrel . . . On the third day, the neighbour downstairs asked me, 'what was going on the other night?' I said, 'what?' . . . She pointed to the opposite building, saying 'she told us all about it as soon as she came to the factory, said that your daughter is good at answering back' . . . To tell you the truth, I was really unhappy at that time . . . Later I told my daughter. Then I said to her, 'don't quarrel with me any more. All my dignity is gone'. My daughter said, 'What?! It's none of their businesses'. I said, 'it is really embarrassing, don't quarrel next time'. She said 'okay, okay'.
>
> (He Jiabao, aged 46)

In order to reduce this surveillance from neighbours, some women adopted concealment strategies or avoided involvement in community life. Sun Yiping had 'simmering quarrels' [i.e. with lowered voices] with her husband. Bi Hong confined herself to 'saying only hello' to the neighbours when necessary.

If a woman's husband worked in a different *danwei* from her own, she moved into a residential community of her husband's colleagues and leaders. That might put her at a considerable disadvantage because her social life was more isolated than that of women who remained in their own *danwei* after marriage. Eight interviewees were incomer wives who continued to work in their own *danwei* after marriage. Thus, for married and widowed women their relatives, friends and workmates might all live some distance away, which made difficulties for them should they need help with marital or childcare problems.[9] Very few men were incomer husbands; and they, too, were similarly isolated from their gender group. On the other hand, some incomer wives viewed their lack of social ties in a positive light.

Because Xiong Yingli's neighbours were her husband's colleagues, she had an excuse to avoid contact with them.

Q: So your neighbours are your husband's colleagues?
A: Since he knows most of them, I can avoid contact with them. . . . For example, his workmate used up the ginger for cooking and wanted to borrow a piece from us. . . . I said to my husband, 'they are from your *danwei*, you go and deal with them'.

(Xiong Yingli, aged 46)

Biaoxian evaluation was important in the *danwei*, so the juxtaposition of work and family life meant that behaviour in the domestic domain was also a matter of official concern. As incomer wives worked in a different *danwei* from the one in which they lived they were subjected to less surveillance than other women but their self-imposed isolation might not protect them from local gossip. Tan Minmin's husband, for example, had an affair with a workmate who was living in the same *danwei* community. Although the husband was criticized for his philandering, he still received awards and promotion whilst the pressure of gossip fell upon his incomer wife:

> I usually didn't talk to anyone living here. I said to my mother-in-law, 'I hate living here to death'. Look, outside your flat are neighbours just like the nose near to the eyes. Everything in your family was known. I really hated living here. Everybody talked behind your back, saying 'you are such a useless woman that your husband has someone else outside'.
>
> (Tan Minmin, aged 46)

However, normally what incomer wives did at home was not likely to have an impact on their *biaoxian* at work. Because Tan Minmin's *danwei* was far from her husband's *danwei*, she was able to conceal his affair from her workmates, and thus to retain her self-respect in her own workplace.

These experiences suggest that different patterns of residence provided women with different problems and possibilities. A woman working in the same *danwei* as her husband ended up living in a more regulated world. Any error in the workplace might become the topic for gossip in the residential community, and vice versa. For women moving into their husbands' *danwei*, the separation of workplace and domestic domain made it much easier for them to adopt a strategy of non-involvement with their husband's workmates but subjected them to isolation. Women who lived in their own *danwei* with an incomer husband (which was very rare) might be in a position to exert power over their socially isolated husbands.

Women who moved into their husband's private housing were under increased surveillance by their in-laws, even though the street committee had less power than did the *danwei* reconciliation committee. They were subjected to direct controls by the senior generation. Hua Liyun's sister who

lived with her husband's parents 'dare[d] not eat first when her mother-in-law was present; she had to wait until her husband and son ate'. The relationship between in-laws and themselves were further worsened by the birth of a granddaughter. Thus, the traditional convention which placed the daughter-in-law at the bottom of the family hierarchy was more likely to prevail in this type of living arrangement.

Family planning

All the mothers were born in the period when China enjoyed high fertility, and they grew up with four, five or sometimes more siblings. However, most of them were only allowed to produce one child because of the family planning policy which started in 1979 and gave the state control over women's decisions on reproduction. Much Western research has shown that women are the objects of control. It is women's bodies that undergo all the processes imposed like close examination, forced abortion, use of obstetric health services (for example, Croll *et al.* 1985, Doherty *et al.* 2001, Hesketh and Wei 1997, Milwertz 1996).

However, in China, mass media and textbooks praise the one-child policy as furthering the development of the country. Under the Confucian familial order, the most important task for a woman was to produce children, especially a son to continue the family line. In the socialist period, women's reproductive duty became part of the agenda for socialist modernization and was under the strict regulation of each work unit. So *danwei* leaders acted as traditional elders who were in close watch over their female members' reproductive performance. Gao Yun spoke of the implementation of the policy in her textile factory:

> Our factory is very strict about it. If you get pregnant because of a problem with the woman's IUD, that is normal and you will get free medical abortion, seven days of rest and extra financial allowances. If it is not because of that, you get nothing. Our factory carried out the policy very efficiently because there are so many women in the factory. Leaders treat it very seriously.
>
> (Gao Yun, aged 46)

Practicing family planning became a public responsibility for the wellbeing of future generations, so personal sacrifice for a healthy nation was glorious and necessary. Jing Xia recalled proudly, 'we actively answered the call of the state and only gave birth to one child, which is my precious daughter'. Other women told similar stories but did not show such passion about their contribution to the nation; instead they took the policy as a matter of course, it was just one more duty they had to accept, one more sacrifice they had to make. Wang Dan said 'since the regulations have been set, you just follow them. It is impossible not to wear an IUD. How to say it, birth planning

policy, we just ran into it'.[10] Paradoxically, the state's gaze upon women's bodies in the workplace sometimes empowered women in the family setting. Like Qin Weixia, a few women felt lucky that the policy had been in effect so they could use it as a good excuse to turn down their in-laws' requests for another child:

> My mother-in-law said something like 'how about giving birth to another one?' Fortunately, the birth planning policy had been in effect. So I couldn't bear children any more. . . . I said to myself, how painful to bear a child. No more. Even if I was given all the money in a bank.
>
> (Qin Weixia, aged 50)

Despite the state's attempt to promote gender equality in the process of implementing birth planning, the traditional ideology of *zhong nan qing nü* ('preferring boys to girls') was still prevalent. In spite of work unit campaigns, mothers who gave birth to a girl still had to face a cold war with their husband's family. Women reported two major forms of discrimination: emotional abuse and non-support for childcare. Hua Liyun told me the sad story of the cold treatment of her daughter:

> If it were a boy, she [*husband's mother*] would have retired earlier to look after him. My status in the family would've been raised as well. I could've left everything to them. [*Her own mother, younger than her mother-in-law, finally retired earlier to help her out.*] When it came to the naming of the child, no one bothered to do that. Usually, it is a big event and the whole family will be busy consulting dictionaries or whatever about the choice of the names. My in-law family can be regarded as intellectual but no one cared. Finally, on a visit to the hospital, my mother-in-law saw the sign for quiet on the wall. So she said, 'okay, just call her Jing [*quiet*]'.
>
> (Hua Liyun, aged 46)

Similarly, He Jiabao recalled,

> After I gave birth to a girl at 9:30pm, I was asked to stay in the operation room for another two hours for health reasons. My mother-in-law had already gone. My husband waited for a while. But he saw that I still didn't come out so he left as well. So at 11:30pm, the doctor took me to the ward and asked me if I had something to eat. I said no because they didn't buy anything for me before they left. The doctor had to borrow some cakes from another patient for me. The next day, my mother-in-law came to visit but said nothing. Later when we went home, neighbours expressed congratulations to her. Guess what she replied, 'no big deal, giving birth is just giving birth'. And her face was expressionless. I was really unhappy. She never gave any support to our childcare. At

> that time, we lived in the Flower Road and she lived next to us. I needed to hand over my girl to my husband when he finished his shift before I started my afternoon shift. But there was no spare time between our shifts. So I had to take my girl to where my mother lived [*a long distance*] then he picked her up from there. She [*mother-in-law*] never us gave a hand.
>
> (He Jiabao, aged 46)

In principle, the state provided childcare facilities such as nurseries ('for children from 2 months old to age 3') and kindergartens ('preparatory pre-primary schools with a more educational orientation') (Stockman *et al.* 1995:86). However, most interviewees expressed the great tension of looking after infants before they were allowed to be admitted to kindergartens at the age of 3, which was exacerbated by the cold treatment from their in-laws. Only the officer in Women's Federation pulled strings to send her daughter to the kindergarten when she was only 18 months old.

The one-child policy made women's bodies a site where socialist patriarchy came into tension with traditional patriarchy: these women underwent more surveillance and experienced more pressures than did their male partners. '[M]en's participation in reproduction is almost completely effaced' (Rofel 1999:254). All my interviewees[11] met the calls of the country whether they liked it or not. Indeed, some of them mentioned that the one-child policy, like the Cultural Revolution, was another sacrifice that their unfortunate generation had made for the development of China.

Women's time: balancing the demands of work and family life

Through listening to women's working histories, I found that time is a concept that was frequently mentioned by them. It offered me an access into the complexities and subtleties of the ways in which gender affected their everyday lives. Western feminists have documented the gendered politics of time: the lack of recognition for different definitions of time other than measured time in the labour market (which can be converted into money) represents a manifestation of gender inequality (Carrasco and Mayordomo 2005). In her study of working women in Sweden, Davies argues that the period for work, 'clock time', rose out of male interests and that this had various effects upon women's lives where reproductive work held an important position (Davies 1990). Davies draws on Ås' classification of time categories while noting that he did not relate them to gender. For him, daily activities fell into 'the four kinds of time':

> *Necessary time* refers to the time needed to satisfy basic physiological needs such as sleep, meals, personal health and hygiene and sex. *Contracted time* refers to regular paid work. Time for travelling to work is included here. . . . *Committed time* encompasses housework, help, care

> and assistance of all kinds, particularly pertaining to children, shopping, etc. *Free time* is the time left when the other time activities are removed.
> (Ås 1978:134–5, quoted in Davies 1990: 43. Emphasis added.)

His *contracted time* includes the 'clock time' in Davies' discussion, or 'work time' in Chambers' analysis (Chambers 1986). The *necessary time, committed time* and *free time* in total equates with 'leisure time' in some British time studies. However, the concept of 'leisure time' is itself highly problematic when applied to women's activities (for example, see Deem 1986, Green *et al.* 1990). Women's subordinate status within a patriarchal society limited their access to, and enjoyment of, leisure (Shaw 1994). Chambers found that women's 'leisure is embedded in domestic duties' so their 'lives are structured principally by domestic time which fundamentally supports the institutional and leisure time-tables of men' (Chambers 1986:321–322). Here, in order to avoid confusion, I will initially divide women's time into work time ('contracted time') and non-work time ('non-contracted time') though, as I shall show the latter is mostly comprized of 'necessary' or 'committed time'.

In addition to the analysis of time categories, a body of literature on the quality of time has been developed in recent years (see Hochschild 1997, Reisch 2001, Warren 2003). Time wealth depends on a combination of factors, such as having the right amount of time at appropriate time periods, control over time and time compatible with the temporal rhythms of other family members (Reisch 2001). Warren (2003) shows that how time poverty is associated with gender and class in complex ways among the British working population. I draw on discussion on women and time in the West and examine my interviewees' daily experiences of negotiating different duties in different time spheres. I show how some *danwei* arrangements created time crises for women and then contributed to the maintenance of the gender hierarchy in the workplace.

Work time ('contracted time')

The mobilization of women into the workplace did not exempt them from their more traditional duties such as being a good wife and mother. Hence, they entered the workplace on unequal terms to their male counterparts and suffered more from the domination of 'male' clock time. According to a *danwei*'s function in relation to production, there were three types of work units: (1) industrial enterprises (*qiye danwei*) producing material commodities; (2) non-industrial institutions (*shiye danwei*) providing non-material services; and (3) administrative institutions (*xingzheng danwei*) (Bian 1994). The prevalent working patterns in these work units were:

1 'Normal hours' (*chang bai ban*) from 8.00am to 5.00pm with a lunch break, for six days a week. This was common to administrative jobs.

2 'Two-shift *rotation*' (*er ban dao*). This was common in the service sector, but there were some variations in the length and timing of shifts.
3 'Three-shift rotation' (*san ban dao*). This was the basic working pattern for industrial workers. The shifts were: daytime shift (8.00am to 4.00pm); middle shift (4.00pm to 12.00 midnight); night shift (12.00 midnight to 8.00am). Each shift ran for two days, and the three shifts rotated every eight days. Workers did not get formal meal breaks. The three-shift-rotation work was very demanding. For example, a woman would work the daytime shift on Monday and Tuesday, the middle shift on Wednesday and Thursday, and the night shift from Friday midnight until 8.00am on Sunday morning. She would then be off until Tuesday 8.00am when the new rotation began.

Since 1995 'normal hours' jobs have been changed from a six-day working week into a five-day working week; the six-day week of the 'three-shift rotation' jobs is unchanged but workers receive extra remuneration.

Most women workers were allocated to industrial work units and had jobs that required them to do three-shift work (see Table 5.2). Only 6 out of 33 interviewees had worked in the administrative *danwei* or in the non-productive sectors in the industrial *danwei* since they entered the workplace; the remainder had done shift work at some point in their working life. Twenty of these 27 women had worked in 'three shift rotation' jobs, often for many years. Like Davies' women, the three-shift operators were closely attached to the machines and were controlled by 'clock time' whilst male workers had more freedom over their movement and were not harnessed to a single machine in the same manner.

This predominance of women in shift work reflected vertical segregation by gender. Between work units, women were found to have a much lower proportion (24 per cent) in administrative institutions than men (76 per cent) (Nanjing Statistical Bureau 1994:33, Table 4–2). Within their work unit, Jing Xia, who had worked in a textile factory, recalled:

> Most male workers worked 'normal hours'. They worked as repairers and mechanics. Normally the machines were working all right, so they

Table 5.2 The work pattern of 33 women

Work patterns	*In their first job*	*In their last job*
Normal hours	6	20*
Two-shift rotation	7	7
Three-shift rotation	20	6

Note

* Fourteen of these women had managed to switch from 3-shift jobs before they were made redundant.

> just walked around and chatted with each other. Only few women did 'non-shift' work. I hated the 'three-shift rotation' to death.
>
> (Jing Xia, aged 50)

Most of the women expressed a loathing of these shifts not only because they upset bodily rhythms but also because they made it difficult for women to organize their non-work time. Shift workers are more likely to suffer from a poor quality of their non-work time (Warren 2003). He Jiabao pointed out the inconvenience of the night shift in relation to the lives of other family members.

> Sometimes, you had to go to work at 12 midnight. In the whole evening, you could do nothing. How about sleeping? No way. You couldn't, because other family members had normal activities. Especially in the freezing winter, you can't imagine the situation. Whenever I think about it, my brain starts swelling.
>
> (He Jiabao, aged 46)

The tension between work time and non-work time escalated when women found they no longer had the energy to fit in their family needs, that is their *committed time* activities around their *contracted time* ('work time'). For example, Guan Guohua found it impossible to satisfy the requirements of work and family and had to ask for leave to solve her time crisis.

> After the night shift, I got home. I couldn't get any sleep. The daughter was little. No one was available to look after her. Whenever my eyes closed, she started playing with your eyelids. So I couldn't get any sleep. I almost fell down in front of the looms after the third night shift. I had to ask for permission for several absences.
>
> (Guan Guohua, aged 56)

The 'three-shift rotation' also caused confusion between the different spheres of time, blurred the distinction between night and day and disguised the appropriation of women's time for family duties.

> After the night shift, that was terrible, I went home, but to be honest, you got no time for sleep. Otherwise, the baby would be left unattended. Because I was at home, how could I ask him [*her husband*] to take the baby to work?
>
> (He Jiabao, aged 46)

> I was working in three shifts all the time. So I had more time to do the housework cleaning, cooking, washing, etc. My husband was working 'normal hours' so he had little time. All the domestic chores including

> decorating the house all fell upon me. Why me? First, he didn't have the time. Second, he was unwilling to bother with them.
>
> (Wei Xinhua, aged 38)

In Wei Xinhua's account, the actual content of her time differed from that of her husband's, even though she used the same word 'time' for both and thought that she had more 'time' than he did. When she was at home during the day, even though she should have used some of that period for *necessary time* activities, she felt obliged to carry out *committed time* activities such as household management. On the other hand, her husband, who worked during the day, had the 'right' non-work time, i.e. the evening, and therefore he was considered not to have any spare time to do activities like housework; instead, he was engaged in his *free time* activities like watching television and *necessary time* activities like sleeping. His wife's non-work time was not situated at the right time of the day; hence, it was appropriated for the benefit of the family – women's time therefore became a household resource (cf. Seymour 1992).

He Jiabao, too, presumed that on days when she was at home she was also obliged to carry out *committed time* activities such as caring for her baby even though it might have been possible for her husband to have helped out in a crisis by taking the baby to work to allow her to sleep. Her position was made even more difficult because soon after she had given birth she was transferred to another three-shift job, one which she thought had the potential for career development and which she did not want to put in jeopardy. (Some 11 years later, she gave up the struggle when an opportunity arose to transfer to a 'normal hours' job as a storeroom attendant.)

Due to physical exhaustion and struggle between work and family demands, these 20 shift workers tried hard to be transferred to work involving 'normal hours'. Fourteen women finally managed this transfer without caring about the type of job they might have to do; eight asked for help from their husband's *guanxi* to get them work in a non-production sector where the work process was not dictated by the clock; four succeeded in getting transfers through their excellent *biaoxian* in front of their leaders; and two achieved this by providing evidence of serious health problems. The other six had to work in three-shift rotation jobs until they were made redundant. In most cases the new jobs were not very attractive: they involved either looking after a storeroom or working in the utilities sector including cleaning. At best, these women were transferred horizontally within the gender hierarchy in the workplace and sometimes their move was downwards. Some suffered a loss of income, although their basic wage was unchanged the bonus payments were lower than those for production jobs. Nevertheless, those who had transferred expressed pleasure at gaining more freedom at work through the opportunities for 'own time' afforded by their new position, and also because they were able more smoothly to negotiate the demands of work and family life.

Women who worked 'normal hours' had workdays which fitted better with the schedules of other family members and felt better able to blur the distinction between *contracted time* and *committed time* activities because they were not controlled by the demands of machines. For example, Sun Yiping was one of the women who slipped out of the workplace to carry out family duties.

> My father-in-law had a mental illness. . . . Sometimes he was incontinent. His son felt sick to see this dirty stuff. So it fell completely on me. . . . In that period, it was a really hard time. Every morning I went to work. But I slipped back home in the middle of work to see if he was fine. If he had a crap in bed, I had to change his clothes, wash him and clear the bed up.
>
> (Sun Yiping, aged 51)

Xiu Tianhong told me a similar story,

> My father-in-law had been paralysed and been lying in bed for seven and a half years. Because my husband was a teacher busy in school, all the business like taking him to the hospital and buying medicine fell on me . . . Sometimes I asked for one-hour leave during work to take the medicine back home.
>
> (Xiu Tianhong, aged 47)

Underlying such practices is the assumption that women were still responsible for family business even when they were working like their husbands. But the familial character of the *danwei* created an official justification by condoning such practices. For example, the official in the Women's Federation expressed her gratitude towards her *danwei*:

> When my daughter was very little, my husband didn't like her and no one was available to look after her. . . . Our director of the county-level women's federation hosted an important conference with all the directors from town-level women's federations with my baby in her arms. You know why? Because I needed to take the minutes. I was the secretary then. I couldn't free my hands to carry her.
>
> (Rong Xiuzhen, aged 51)

The *danwei's* supportive attitude towards women's familial activities during 'normal hours' strengthened this blurring of work and family life for women workers. However, this also reinforced the view that women were not proper workers because of their family 'distractions', which partly helped to explain why women were singled out when decisions were taken about selecting workers for redundancy.

Non-work time ('non-contracted time')

Some women, the lucky ones who had jobs with 'normal hours', were able to carry out family duties in their work time but all working members, men and women alike, had to perform work unit duties in their non-work time. For example, political study sessions were held after work or on Saturday afternoon. It was no problem for men to attend these because there were not the same expectations on them to perform family duties as there were for their wives. However, women were always short of time and reported that they had to take children with them to these meetings. Since the 1980s, the *danwei* set regulations like passing exams as prerequisites for wage rises; women thus had to give up some of their own time to study for these. Qin Weixia stayed up very late to prepare for such exams,

> For shop assistants like us, our pay was already low enough. So who wouldn't do such things? Even if it is like biting bones, I would try. At that time, I was staying up very late every single evening. In the daytime, who would give you time to prepare? You had to do it all on your own after work.
>
> (Qin Weixia, aged 50)

Here 'after work' does not mean after paid work; she had to finish shopping for dinner, cooking and other necessary housework before she could get on with her study. For women like Qian Mingyan, the problem of simultaneously raising young children became insoluble without the help of others, a difficulty magnified by her in-laws' reluctance to assist because they discriminated against their granddaughter simply on the basis of her gender.

Besides the time devoted for the workplace duties, women still could not freely use the rest of their time. The 1990 representative sample survey on women's status in China showed that women spent more time on domestic work (262.5 minutes) than men (130 minutes) a day (Research Institute of All China's Women's Federation *et al.* 1998:473, Table 9–1). Delphy and Leonard (2002) described the varieties of work done by wives dictated by their husbands' needs. Here because of the Chinese gendered and filial social expectations within the kinship system, women's remaining time was appropriated not only by the husband but also by the wider family.

> My Grandma got very ill in 1978. At that time, I wasn't married. As my mother was not very well either, my sister and I basically took turns to look after Gran. My sister looked after her during the night since she was working in normal shift. I looked after her during the day because I was taking the night shift. Even after I got married, I still helped in my mother's house because she was not feeling very well.
>
> (Xiu Tianhong, aged 47)

> When I was courting my husband, he was studying for the college entrance exam. That was in the summer. We were poor and couldn't afford an electric fan. So he was studying while I stood behind him waving the fan for him. And he needed to memorize vocabulary, so I dictated words to him.
>
> (Hua Liyun, aged 46)

> When my daughter was four years old, I started taking her to piano lessons. Whether it was rainy or windy, I carried her on my bicycle to the teacher's house.
>
> (Yuan Mei, aged 40)

Time is relational (Davies 1990); here women's usage of time was to attend the needs of other family members. Without personal time sovereignty, it is hard to say these women had a good quality of non-work time.

After working in the tight schedule of unpaid family work, there was little time left for women to have a social life. Wu Ping recalled,

> Q: After work, did you have any leisure?
> A: After work, at that time before marriage, we [*workmates*] sometimes went out shopping or whatever. After marriage, it seemed every family was so busy. Life after marriage is no fun at all. Busy from morning to the evening, until now.
>
> (Wu Ping, aged 46)

The traditional division of inside/outside for women also created a barrier to women's socialising after marriage.

> After work, I hardly ever went out socially. This is because we [*women*] are family-oriented after all. If you go out, your husband will scold you: 'ah, after work, you go out playing all the time' [*mimicking man's ironic tone*]. So I am used to that. After work, I just cooked, played with the kid, never went out.
>
> (Tan Minmin, aged 46)

Tan Minmin's husband had a long-term affair and always stayed with his lover after work. However, no matter how her husband treated her, she still restricted her social life by staying at home after work in order to comply with the traditional image of the 'virtuous wife'. My findings accord with the result from the 1990 national survey that Chinese women had very few social activities: over 60 per cent mentioned that they never had any leisure activities within last two months (Tao and Jiang 1993:193, Table 8–17).

Because they seldom had time to have a social life after work, many women resorted to the workplace for interacting with other women. Xiu Tianhong said, 'after work, we didn't have any social life. If we had anything

to consult about with each other or whatever, we could meet at work'. Socializing at work enabled women to develop their social networks, help one another, and exchange information on childcare and education: the friendships formed at work also lasted a lifetime and became a special form of support after they were made redundant. However, this process of talking and learning further strengthened traditional gender roles and the importance of the family in women's lives. By asking women what they chatted about at work, I found that family themes, especially children, had universal priority among both women workers and women cadres.

> The most frequent topic among workmates was children. Sometimes we talked about husbands but mostly about children because we all put great expectations on them. For example, how to apply for schools, or how the child was not studying hard . . . anything and everything about them.
>
> (He Jiabao, aged 46)

From the discussion so far, it is evident that the women were likely to run out of time fulfilling work and family duties, and had little time left for themselves. Thus, if women tried to do something on their own to improve their skills, they had to make a double effort because their family duties could not be waived for the sake of their self-development.

> At that time, I was studying for accountancy. In the meantime I was very busy at work, from morning to evening. And my child was always in the back of my mind. None of my in-laws helped me. At one time, I couldn't manage it all. I asked my mother to come to look after my daughter for two months. Every evening I studied until I slept at the desk.
>
> (Wei Xinhua, aged 38)

Similarly, He Jiabao studied for a computer exam, which unfortunately coincided with her daughter's exams; so every day she had 'cooked food and prepared fruit for the daughter, then studied until 3 or 4 o'clock in the morning'. As a result, her face 'looked like yellow paper that whole year'. In addition, the shortage of time and the physical exhaustion which these women experienced made it almost impossible for women to invest time to develop their own social connections. Xu and Tan (2002:4) suggested that women with children had no time to have dinners with their colleagues or bosses or to join any leisure activities with them, but those activities were the perfect opportunity for men to distinguish themselves in front of their bosses and expand their social networks. Some interviewees like Yang Ming compared the majority of women like themselves who were bound by familial demands with a few women who had successfully developed their own *guanxi*.

> Women must forget about family. Those who aren't concerned about family can cope with it [*developing guanxi*]. She can leave everything behind and accompany those men to eat, drink and play. But if she has a family, and is concerned about children and housework, she is not able to do both. The majority of women are still concerned about their family. But there are a few women who don't care and accompany men to eat, play, sing and dance.
>
> (Yang Ming, aged 56)

The difficulties in having control over their own time were exacerbated sometimes by physical distance between them and their relatives, sometimes by the withholding of social support from their own or husband's kin. A husband's family generally desired a grandson so most of the women who had failed to do their 'duty' in this respect had difficulty getting help from their in-laws. The majority of women interviewees had at least four or five siblings. Thus their mothers had several grandchildren who lived in different households, adding to the difficulties women had in gaining sufficient support from their own parents, although temporary support was sometimes provided by their mothers.

In comparison with women workers, women cadres were usually in a better position as their relatively higher pay enabled them to hire older women from the countryside or retired neighbours to help with childcare but they still had to do the housework themselves. Like the other women, though, they said that they could not expect their husbands, all of whom were Party members, to do more than help in a crisis despite the egalitarian ideology which said that men and women should do an equal share of housework.

The distinctive organization of the *danwei* blurred the division between work time and non-work time, which had a gendered implication for women workers. My interviewees' decisions about their use of time in relation to both paid work and domestic work had to take into consideration the needs of the other members of the (wider) family. Whether consciously or unconsciously, their husbands and other male relatives assumed that these family responsibilities were the women's responsibilities (cf. Carrasco and Mayordomo 2005). As a consequence, women's work performance was jeopardized in this gendered familial model upon which the *danwei* was based.

In this chapter, I have demonstrated that the overlapping spheres of work and family life made more women than men subject to a wider range of evaluations and social expectations. It is these women who bore the brunt of the dynamics of familial model in the *danwei* system. Walder (1986) described a *danwei* leader as a powerful 'patron' to which the 'client' population (ordinary members) must defer in order to get access to resources. Bray's (2005) recent pastoral analysis referred to a *danwei* leader as a pastor who guided and led the 'flock' (ordinary members). In this familial model, a

danwei leader acted like a family elder, interfering in decisions to marry, to have a house, or to have a baby and in the conduct of marital life; Confucian familial protocols, well theoretically rendered obsolete by socialism, had been redeployed in various forms in the daily practice of *danwei*'s control. Women were subjected to greater burdens and surveillance in this 'socialist family'. Their traditional familial obligations and their subordination to seniors in the home continued, and were further reinforced by their less important roles in the workplace.

I argue that the blurred distinction between production and reproduction had not been conducive to reducing gender inequality. On the contrary, the familial culture in the *danwei* contributed to the reinforcement of sex segregation in the workplace and maintenance of gender divisions within the wider society. Thus, while the organization of the *danwei* differed from the sharp separation between work and family life in the West, the interconnection of public and private spheres resulted in another form of segregation and subordination for women. Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 have examined the women's experiences in the *danwei* as a workplace as well as an encompassing organization. I have shown that the work they were allocated in the work unit was merely a job and offered little or no prospect of career advancement. The mobilization of women into the workplace did not bring about the liberation in the way socialist rhetoric claimed. The socialist work unit operated as an arbiter of women's careers and personal lives and continued the patriarchal function of pre-socialist institutions. As a result, women workers were put at a greater social disadvantage than their male counterparts, and lost out in the economic restructuring.

6 Returning home

Since the 1980s women had faced difficulties securing jobs, but as the economic reforms advanced into the 1990s the scale of redundancy became even worse. The incompetent performance and financial losses of state enterprises led to an aggressive restructuring that shattered the 'iron rice bowl'.[1] Millions of workers made an involuntary exodus from their former work units. In this chapter, I turn to women's experience of returning home. 'Returning home' (*huijia*) was used to refer to leaving their jobs. Here I draw attention to the micro practices which underpinned the outcome of economic restructuring. What were the constraints on women and what opportunities were available to them? How did women experience the loss of their jobs? Was gender integral to this process? How did women themselves respond to a change that had such a great effect upon their lives?

Contextualizing women workers

The redundancy measures have taken various forms, represented by numerous terms used nationally and regionally. Most of the redundancies were from industrial work units (*qiye danwei*).

1 *Neitui* ('in-house retirement' or 'internal retirement'). This applied to older workers who would have reached their legal retirement age[2] within five or ten years but were made redundant. Internal retirees retained a connection with their enterprise and received a proportion of their former wage [depending on the industry and financial situation of the enterprise] but no bonus or wage rise until they became eligible for a state pension.
2 *Xiagang*[3] ('laid-off'). This included: (i) *daigang* (lit. 'waiting for post') – those who were constantly being put back into and out of work; (ii) unpaid leave with various names such as *tingxin liuzhi* (lit. 'stopping pay but preserving positions'), and *liangbuzhao* (lit. 'neither party looks for the other') (Solinger 2001:680); and (iii) workers who entered a re-employment service centre[4] in 1998–2001, if they failed to find work within the period, they could be registered as 'unemployed', and entitled

to state unemployment benefits for two years. Those in categories (i) and (iii) were supposed to receive the basic livelihood allowance, but this varied according to the profitability of individual enterprises.

3 *Mai duan gong ling* ('buy-out'): workers were paid a lump sum (which varied by industries and enterprises), ceased to have any formal connection with their *danwei*, and had to settle their own pension arrangements. This is a recent practice and the 'bought-outs' and internal retirees were officially excluded from being qualified as *xiagang* ('laid-off') and thus omitted from official layoff statistics.

4 Extended maternity leave. This had been a measure specifically aimed for making women redundant in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

Twenty-seven interviewees had been made redundant (eighteen were internally retired[5], six laid off, and three bought out, (see Table 6.1)); two had also previously experienced a one-year period of extended maternity leave on three-quarters of their standard pay. Of the rest, one was selected to be laid-off at the age of 42 but managed to arrange to stay on, three had retired in due time, one (a former factory leader) had resigned to start her own company and one was a Women's Federation officer. Their remuneration varied considerably, depending on the type of *danwei* and industry, the financial state of the individual enterprise and mode of redundancy (see Table 6.1).

Non-industrial work units provided much better remuneration when they carried out a redundancy. Within industrial enterprises, payments given to internal retirees varied widely in different industries whereas the remuneration for those laid-off was fairly similar. Although the absolute sums received by internal retirees might seem satisfactory, their remuneration was well below the average income of Nanjing citizens: these women received a range of payment from ¥135 to ¥650, comprising about 10 per cent to 47 per cent of average income for the year of 2002 [¥1352] (Nanjing Statistical Bureau 2003:14, Table 4–10). In particular, the internally retired textile workers who had received a meagre remuneration found ten years later that this was only worth one tenth of the average income. Except for the discrepant example from the chemical industry,[6] those who were bought-out were treated fairly equally – women who worked in machine manufacturing and other light industries reported that those bought-out received from ¥400 to ¥650 per year of service. One common thing among redundant workers is that they were all stripped of the bonuses attached to their basic wage whilst the bonus forms a crucial part of income since the reforms; this became a key aspect of wage disparity for those made redundant even when they were kept on the payroll of a state enterprise. Scholars found that both earnings differentiation and gender segregation among industries have increased with marketization (Bishop *et al.* 2005, Shu 2005). Based on the recent data (1995–2003), Dong *et al.* (2005) suggest that the gender wage gap for both state and non-state firms combined rose from 15.6 to 23.0 per cent and women face greater degrees of wage discrimination in the post-restructuring

Table 6.1 Financial remuneration received by women according to types of work unit and industry, forms of redundancy and year of redundancy (Unit: yuan)

Type of Work Unit and Industry	*Internal Retirement (Year)* (Monthly wage)	*Laid-off (Year)* (Monthly wage)	*Buy-out (Year)* (Sum per year of service)	*Total*
Non-industrial units (*Shiye*)	2 @ 1200 (1996, 1997) 1 @ 1800 (2003)			3
Industrial units (*Qiye*)				
Textiles	1 @ 160 (1992) 1 @ 135 (1993) 1 @ 200 (1994)		1 @ 400 (1998)	4
Machine manufacturing	1 @ 200 (1992) 1 @ 600 (2002)	1 @ 350 (1996) 1 @ 190 (1999)		4
Other light industries	1 @ 300 (1993) 1 @ 400 (2001) 1 @ 2000 (2003)**	1 @ 0 (1995)* 1 @ 350 (1997)		5
Chemicals	1 @ 800 (1998) 1 @ 900 (2000)	1 @ 400 (2001)	2 @ 2500 (2001, 2002)	5
Electronics	1 @ 600 (1996) 1 @ 400 (1998) 1 @ 600 (1999)			3
Commerce	1 @ 400 (1997) 1 @ 650 (2000)	1 @ 190 (1998)		3
Total	**18**	**6**	**3**	**27**

Notes

* This woman was laid-off as '*liang bu zhao*' ('neither party looks for each other').

** This woman was given remuneration of ¥2000 because her factory was among the top ten industrial enterprises in Nanjing.

period; one of the consequences is that women receive less unemployment benefits and pension income than men.

In order to reduce any social disruption or instability, the state government had been cautious in implementing the redundancies, winning praise for its gradualist approach. In the early 1990s workers were required to sign contracts with their *danwei*, usually for 5 years, so that 'iron rice bowls' were smashed. Meanwhile, the official media and work units did a lot of education and propaganda to persuade workers to believe that the massive reduction of workers was painful but necessary for the survival of their former work units, thereby calling for sacrifices (see also Morris *et al.* 2001). Then the state tried various measures to provide alternative outlets for redundant workers. For example, the re-employment service centre was part of the Reemployment Project launched in 1995 in an attempt to provide

job-replacement and job-training (E. Gu 2000). In the late 1990s, 'three guarantees' were officially set up to counter urban poverty: (1) the basic livelihood allowance issued to workers who were qualified as 'laid-off'; (2) unemployment insurance to those deemed 'unemployed' including those whose firms have disappeared completely either by bankruptcy or merger; and (3) a minimum cost of living guarantee set by local government for urban residents whose income falls below that standard (Solinger 2002). The first guarantee was a transitional policy during 1998–2000 and is now being phased out. Laid-off workers instead became eligible for the other two guarantees. The 2004 White Paper on social security recognized the legal transfer of the welfare responsibility for supporting newly laid-off workers from the *danwei* to the state (Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, 2004). In Nanjing, the re-employment service centre was in place between 1998 and 2001, but only one woman benefited from a job introduced via the centre. The latter two guarantees were available for workers, but none of the women had applied for the benefits. They commented that they would not make a fuss by going through a complicated application which involves regular checking of their income by issuing officers' talking with their neighbours. These schemes were also found to be ineffective among laid-off workers in other urban cities (Lee 2005, Leung and Wong 1999, Solinger 2002, Wong and Ngok 2006). In 2001, the minimum living standard guarantee only reached 1.17 million people nationally (Zhang 2003 in Giles *et al.* 2006).

The women's financial situation was made worse by the costs of health care. Redundant workers were supposed to receive a partial reimbursement of medical expenses from their former *danwei*; but as many enterprises ran at a loss or were near closure, this was often unavailable. The medical security reform was introduced in Nanjing from 2001 in the hope of an improvement, but the number of enterprises included (46) was still small (Gu Zhannong 2000). Li Yuyin commented that a few of her former colleagues had committed suicide rather than go to hospital when they found out that they had a very serious illness. Hence, the most common wish among my interviewees was not to get ill.

Experience of redundancy

Structural stratification

Redundant workers were stratified depending upon the nature of their *danwei*, specific industries, finances of individual enterprises, and their prior working conditions. A three-year national investigation found that the vast majority (86.5 per cent) came from industrial enterprises, 13.2 per cent came from non-industrial units and 0.3 per cent came from administrative institutions (Zhang Qiujian 1999:89). In my study, I also found that those from the industrial enterprises were the hardest hit; those formerly in the non-

industrial units received the most lucrative benefits; and the employees in the administrative institutions were the least vulnerable to redundancy (see Table 6.1). In the city, the proportion of women in the non-industrial units (39.9 per cent) and administrative institutions (24.0 per cent) are much lower than their male counterparts (Nanjing Statistical Bureau 1994:33, Table 4–2); so this prior segregation had contributed to women's greater vulnerability to redundancy. Most interviewees had previously worked in industrial enterprises, and they felt aggrieved by the comparison with those who were from non-industrial units. In the focus group, Zhao Wenhua (aged 51) had worked in a non-industrial work unit whilst Xia Yanli (aged 40) worked in an industrial work unit.

Q: Were there any laid off workers in your *danwei*?

ZHAO WENHUA: No. None in our *danwei*. When we came back, we had put in a lot of efforts in order to leave the *danwei*.

XIA YANLI: Her *danwei* is in a very good profit because it is a shiye *danwei*.[7] In the city, do you know of a single shiye *danwei* that is below par? This is the reason why everybody says 'if you want work, look for shiye *danwei!*'.

Zhao Wenhua and Liu Jingli (aged 52) actually pulled strings to be allowed to retire internally because there was no pressure for redundancy in their work unit. They did so in order to start their own business.

Divisions existed among enterprises depending upon the industrial sector. The textile factories in Nanjing were among the first enterprises in the city to be heavily hit and most of the ones in which my interviewees had worked had been closed down. Textile workers also suffered the greatest financial loss; they were made redundant earlier as internal retirees, received the lowest remuneration and benefited least from the social protection schemes which were installed several years after they had lost their jobs. In the interview with the officer in the Women's Federation, I asked why there were more women workers than male workers who were laid off, she commented,

> This was because in the past few years there was a great downturn in the global textile industry. Many textile factories in the city were closed down. Then workers lost their jobs. Meanwhile the majority of workers in these factories were women. So there were more women workers than men who became laid-off. Nowadays there has been a pattern: in the factory, people who were made redundant mostly had worked in labour-intensive, non-skilled jobs, so they were easily kicked out. The majority of these people are women. Why do women suffer from this? This is because the state had adopted a protective[8] attitude towards women workers – letting all the women work rather than stay at home. In fact, during previous surveys about them, we found those women

> workers mostly had education at junior-middle-school level. What's more, all were spinners, they could only do spinning. So when the spinning production was stopped, others who had skills like designing could be transferred. But these spinners had no other skills so they had to lose their jobs.
>
> (Rong Xiuzhen, aged 52)

Yet the problem was far more complicated than she suggested. The key lies in the reason women were allocated to those labour-intensive and non-transferable-skill jobs: their prior working history has shown the ways in which female textile workers were confined to the running of machines in three-shift work while men could walk around as repairers and be allocated to design patterns. Moreover, women's stories unveil further complexities within this process. Jing Xia was internally retired at 40 in a colour-weaving factory. When I asked her about any such arrangements for men, she replied with surprise,

> No one mentioned anything for men. In the workshop, all the women over 40 were gone. No men left; all stayed, even including those who went to the factory in 1958. The factory re-allocated them to anywhere there was something for them to do.
>
> (Jing Xia, aged 50)

Her husband, in the same factory, was transferred to administrative work when the factory was closed down and turned into a restaurant. He worked there until the restaurant was bought by a Taiwanese businessman in 2003. Similar surprise was also expressed by Xiu Tianhong, 'because there were so few men there, they were just not taken into account'. The rest recalled that 50 was the set age at which men could be internally retired. However, because the group of men who were recruited into the factory at the same time as the women were still in their 40s, that regulation would not affect them at the time when all the women left. Gender and age were critical factors in selecting workers for redundancy rather than simply the skills and educational levels which were cited by the officer and are constantly mentioned in media reports.

Since 1992, machine manufacturing had undergone a crisis due to the economic restructuring. Four women formerly worked in the auxiliary sector of their heavy-industrial factories. Hua Liyun blamed herself for not having skills, in line with the understanding of the general public – 'People like me didn't have many skills when we were in the factory, we were just working in utilities sector. Why did layoffs mostly come from this group? You would be among the first in layoffs because you didn't have any skills, wouldn't you?'. However, she was not clear what caused their lack of skills. The conflicts between shift work and family responsibilities made women try hard to transfer to non-shift work; in most cases, they were downgraded

into low-paid and unskilled jobs. Hua Liyun was just one of these women, now defining herself as unskilled. Previous studies have shown that women workers in the auxiliary sectors are particularly vulnerable to redundancy and account for 70 per cent of the urban jobless (Keith 1997:47 in Edwards 2000:71).

In electronics and other light industries, large-scale redundancies started in the mid-1990s. After the state intensified the restructuring of state enterprises in 1997, more and more industries including chemicals and commerce began to retrench. Even the non-industrial units joined the move to redundancy in the late 1990s. One particular industrial sector, commerce, heavily feminized, had a unique procedure in carrying out redundancies. In 1992, this sector was praised by the Nanjing Women's Federation for having a large number of female workers but no redundancies. However, by the end of the 1990s, a redundancy scheme was introduced, but only older workers (mostly women) were targeted. Qin Weixia said angrily,

> Nowadays, they want younger faces. They thought we were too old. In fact, we are not old. But they said you were old. Yes, our faces did definitely appear older than those of younger girls. So they just said, 'we want to have a younger work force'.
>
> (Qin Weixia, aged 50)

Finally, the difference between workers and cadres continued. Six of the 27 women were cadres, but only one was a middle-level cadre and managed to enter the pension scheme as a retiree. Zhao Yandong found that 7 per cent of 621 laid-off workers in his survey of Wuhan had once been cadres and only 2 per cent of them were middle-level cadres (2001:22). As women faced difficulties in being promoted as middle-level cadres, that also increased their chances of being made redundant. So women workers, horizontally and vertically segregated from men, were more vulnerable to redundancy.

Age

Age plays a very vital role in selection for redundancy and eligibility for any specific form of redundancy. Shui Yi was born in 1963, just after the watershed of 1962 set by the Textiles Bureau in Nanjing. Therefore, in 1998 she either had to go to the reemployment service centre or to choose the buy out option, settling her pension on her own. Had she been born one year earlier, she could have remained 'laid-off' for several years until she reached the age of internal retirement; in that case, she would have received basic living expenses every month and most importantly, the pension would have been settled so her future to some extent would have been secured. However, those older women who qualified for internal retirement told another side of the story: they thought being young was an advantage, an asset in the labour market. As Wu Ping put it, 'those women in their 30s are still young. It is

much easier for them to find work. When we came home, where could we find bowls [jobs]? No way unless working as nannies for others'.

In comparison with men, age, a seemingly 'natural' and objective factor, does not work to women's favour. The internal retirement policy has been nicknamed the 'one-knife-cut' policy. This metaphor implied that the age criterion for eligibility is decisive, clear-cut and non-negotiable. However, some interviewees told me about another practice experienced by their husbands, i.e. *fan ping* (hiring-back). Qin Weixia's husband (aged 52) had been officially categorized as an internal retiree two years previously but was still working in his work unit without any interruption. When I asked why he still had to go through the procedure of internal retirement, she replied, 'Procedure is procedure; but staying on is staying on. It's a bar-like regulation: reaching that age, you must go. Then you will be hired again by them'. So although regulations set the age at which everyone was obliged to go, the employing unit could find a way to circumvent the principle. However, none of the redundant women workers had benefited from this practice. Since the women had left their units some five or ten years previously, none could know what would happen to their former male workmates when they reached the age of 50 or 55. But the wives of those who had been hired back expressed their concerns that their husband might be reduced to the status of internal retiree at any time as there was no contract to confirm for how long the 'hiring-back' period would be. So this practice left the men at the mercy of the employer and the vagaries of the economy.

According to the 'one-knife-cut' policy, there was a general gap of ten years in the cutting age between men and women (it was either 40 for women and 50 for men or 45 and 55 respectively), which reflected the assumption that women become less capable than men as their age increases. I designed a vignette to explore how my interviewees would explain why women were particularly selected for redundancy.

> Liu Yang was a factory technician, aged 40. Because of the Cultural Revolution, she only graduated from senior high school. Then she was allocated work in a factory. Through training, she became a technician. In the 1990s, the factory has been unprofitable and started laying people off. She was included as well. But the male workers who entered the factory the same year as her were not included. Could you explain why she was selected to return home?

The most common explanation women gave was the difference between men and women when both get older. Ye Guanghua said, 'Because men are stronger. When women reach 40, they are going downhill in every aspect. Men's capabilities last longer. For example, I am the same age as my

husband but I am obviously not as physically strong as him'. Similar views were expressed in the focus group,

LIU JINGLI: Men in their 40s are still clambering up the career ladder.
ZHAO WENHUA: Women in their 40s are on a downward spiral. Like us, we 40-year-olds are useless now. Those men are still eager for promotion, wanting to become leaders.
LIU JINGLI: People say men are supposed to achieve success in their 40s. Nothing has been said for women.
XIA YANLI: A 40-year-old woman will become an old granny soon.
ZHAO WENHUA: Downhill.
LIU JINGLI: It is normal.
ZHAO WENHUA: After 40, women are done, finished. No use at all.
XIA YANLI: People say men in their 40s are like blossom. Yes, they are indeed.
ZHAO WENHUA: Able women are after all very few. How come able men are not called *nan qiang ren* [*a strong man*]? Instead, able women are called *nü qiang ren* [*a strong woman*]. That's the reason.

In fact, Zhao Wenhua (aged 51) and Liu Jingli (aged 52) were running an Internet café, and were evidently very capable in their 50s. Xia Yanli, in her 40s, was currently working in the street committee as a social worker. However, all of them still internalized the general assumption irrespective of their own life experience. Their discussion shows that such a gendered difference was constructed and maintained through daily discourse.

The majority of women also quoted the state's official retirement age as being justified by the 'natural' difference between men and women. Qin Weixia was one such woman.

> Of course men and women are different. Look, the retirement age is different; men retire at 60, women at 50. So certainly women would be laid off first, because women are different in physique and intelligence from men, if both are aged 40. What the state says is right, isn't it? The difference in retirement age has shown that. No other explanation is needed.
>
> (Qin Weixia, aged 50)

Her statement demonstrates vividly how the gender ideology was reinforced and reproduced by the gendered state policy. In turn, the policy also provided a perfect authorized justification for selecting women for redundancy. Only two had doubts about the reliability of such age differentiation. Xiong Yingli (aged 46) was one of them, 'Definitely women would be gone first. Actually, it doesn't mean she is less capable than men. But they still choose women. Sometimes I feel that women, although 45 or 50, are still very capable at work. But the factory thinks differently'.

The ten-year gap in the internal retirement age increased women's risk of financial loss in comparison with men. If both internally retire at the regulated time, the income gap between female and male workers remains relatively the same as it would be when they formally retire. However, in reality, there were examples of re-hiring among men. In addition, because women workers left the work unit ten years earlier than men, it was difficult to envisage what the position facing these men would be in ten years time. The enterprise situation might improve so that workers would not have to be retired internally. It might also worseen but at least then male workers would have had a continuation of their working life which would be reflected in the calculation of their future pension. Moreover, the ten-year gap became problematic for women junior cadres. In official retirement, they are retired only five years earlier compared with male workers and cadres. However, in the process of redundancy, work unit leaders used men and women as two categories to define the one-knife-cut age. As a result, female cadres had to leave work ten years earlier than male workers and cadres, suffering an additional five-year financial loss in contrast with the normal arrangement. Xiong Yingli was one such victim. Hence, generally speaking, women were made redundant earlier and were subject to more financial loss than men in the long term.

This ten-year gender gap was consistent with the state's differentiation in retirement age, a result of the gendered understanding of men and women in relation to ageing. However, the tension about whether to postpone women's retirement age is also increasing. On the one hand, because the age gap in retirement is considered to disadvantage women by shortening women's working lives, some officers in the All-China Women's Federation and feminist scholars (see Qi 2001) have promoted the idea of setting women's retirement age at the same as men's or, at least, giving them five more working years. On the other hand, there have been reports in the media about the opposition from male workers and employers towards the proposal. In my study, these redundant women workers told me of their own concerns. To them, getting into the state pension system seemed to be the only thing that was secure and certain. In Ding Jiahua's words, she would be 'into the safe'. Those who still maintained a relationship with their previous work unit felt that a postponement meant extending the period of receiving little money. Xiong Yingli, a junior cadre, was internally retired at 45 like the ordinary women workers. She and her colleagues tried to negotiate with the factory in order to be retired formally at 50, on the grounds that their internal retirement age was set in accordance with the workers so their formal retirement should also be in accordance with ordinary women workers. She said, 'The retirement issue is very important to us. If at 50, we go into the social security system, we will have wage rises when the state carries it out'. Her friend even went on to argue with the factory leaders, but the response of the factory leader was not very promising,

> The leaders said, in the factory, of course they hope to let us formally retire at 50. But the problem is if the state decides to postpone the women's retirement age, every woman has to retire at 55, they would have no way . . . Nowadays the word is that it might well become 55. It's really annoying, isn't it? So in the next 10 years of internal retirement, we have to deal with the factory, asking them to add to our wage when they gain profit. If they don't agree, with such a wage until 55, how could we live? It is the factory's responsibility, because they made us go home. It's not that I want to go home, is it?
>
> (Xiong Yingli, aged 46)

Similarly for the bought-outs who had permanently been cut off from their work units, the formal retirement age was also crucial as it determined how much they would have to pay in contributions to the state pension scheme and over what period. Because the unit has already paid a few years of contributions to the system and the workers cannot retrieve those, the only option left to them in terms of settling pensions is to continue paying into the scheme. However, the amount of money they have to pay increases every year. For example, in Nanjing it was 4 yuan per month in 1992 but by 2003, it had become 155 yuan[9] per month. Yet how these bought-outs were to calculate the pension they would receive remained unclear to them. Bi Hong was angry about the possibility that she might have to postpone her retirement because she would then have hardly anything left of her lump sum if she had to pay more pension contributions for an extended period.

> Look, if our retirement age is postponed, it obviously will benefit those who are still at work. But to us, it means I have to pay another extra five years. We went to ask the Municipal Labour Bureau about our future arrangement. But nobody was sure and clear. So nowadays we just paid money muddle-headedly. Sometimes I just want to forget about it and don't want to pay because you don't know when you might die, maybe in your 40s. . . . But if you can live till your 50s, if you don't pay you will get nothing, and also it means that you will give up the money paid by the factory previously. So we have to continue paying blindfolded. Nobody knows how it goes.
>
> (Bi Hong, aged 40)

She had worked in the chemical industry and had been bought-out at 38. The lump sum she got, ¥84,000, was much more than that which a worker in the textile industry would get as a bought-out. Shui Yi received only an amount worth ¥7,000 at the age of 35. If we take the present contribution of 155 yuan as an average rate for the next ten years, what Bi Hong and Shui Yi have to pay is altogether ¥18,600. So Bi Hong will have about 500 yuan per month for all her living and any medical expenses while Shui Yi's lump sum will not even cover her pension contribution. Thus postponing the women's

retirement age might have been beneficial to women if redundancy had not been underway; however, under their present conditions, raising the retirement age will make them more vulnerable.

Guanxi: *constraint or opportunity?*

The redundancy rules such as the 'one-knife-cut' policy seemed inflexible but there was always leeway; likewise, a person with powerful *guanxi* could reduce the likelihood of becoming redundant. In reply to the vignette about why women were particularly selected to return home, about one-third of my interviewees (n = 10/33) mentioned that having connections with important leaders mattered vitally in decisions on who should go. Song Yuming answered,

> Because of age, or because men have better relationships with the leader. It's very simple. People got laid off then they could go back to work in the *danwei* again. You know why? He sought *guanxi* definitely. He has connections with leaders so he can come back. If you don't have any *guanxi*, even if you have a post, you will be asked to leave.
>
> (Song Yuming, aged 49)

However, women were found to be more disadvantaged in developing their own *guanxi* in the workplace because of the constraints from gender segregation and gendered sexual control. Wei Xinhua explained why men got on well with leaders: 'Men have a common habit, smoking and drinking. So when gathering together, men would feel more comfortable'. The struggle between work and family demands also acted as another barrier which prevented women from investing time in developing connections.

Despite these constraints, when a few women gained access to *guanxi*, either by themselves or through their husbands, they were able to use it as an individual strategy in the crisis of redundancy. Some interviewees suffered from others' *guanxi* but some enjoyed the benefits from the use of it. Ye Guanghua (aged 56), formerly a junior cadre in an enterprise which had to retire internally a quota of cadres, initially had the possibility of staying on rather than retiring internally at 52; but the wife of a factory-level leader retained her place, so Ye Guanghua had to return home instead. Bi Hong (aged 40) was jealous of her workmate's use of *guanxi*: her workmate managed to use her husband's *guanxi* to get a sickness certificate stating that she was mentally ill so that she could qualify for internal retirement at the age of 37 instead of being bought-out. Conversely, in 1992, Xiu Tianhong (aged 47) managed to get transferred from a wool factory which was about to be closed down to a chemical factory through her powerful sister's help, thereby, extending her working life until 2000 when she was internally retired from her new job. Gong Lihua (aged 51), a former middle-level cadre, used her contact with leaders in the Municipal Light Industry Bureau

to get early retirement at the age of 49 before her badly-performing factory was closed down.

'Choices'

Redundancy was externally imposed upon these women workers during the economic restructuring. Yet they were not passive victims. They were negotiating in their own ways and trying hard to maximize their interests. Wang Dan was worried that because she was working in the storeroom, her wage and bonuses might be deducted and added to the pay of the electricians and frontline workers in the process of economic restructuring. So in 1993 she opted for internal retirement with a wage of 300 yuan, 70 per cent of her previous wage. Tang Minmin was insistent upon choosing internal retirement instead of buying out her working years at the age of 42. At that time all her relatives tried to persuade her to choose the buy-out option because they thought if she retired formally at 45,[10] she would only have to pay three more years of contribution to the pension scheme and she would still have a lot of money due to the lump sum she would get. She gave me her reason,

> At that time, leaders read the documents, something like after we were bought off, those who had working histories with chemicals can still be qualified for early retirement. So supposing I were bought out, it looked like that would be favourable to me because I could retire formally in three years. Then I considered what if in three years time, they didn't keep their promise. I still had to keep paying pension contribution. Although it was a great deal of money, it'd still be spent very quickly.
>
> (Tang Minmin, aged 46)

Even though she did manage to retire formally at 45, she still considered that she had made the best choice for herself.

In 1998, Shui Yi decided to buy out her working years rather than enter the re-employment service centre run by the textile bureau. Solinger called laid-off workers who entered the centre 'the most fortunate among the furloughed' as the centre would distribute living allowances, contribute to pensions and help them obtain a new job (2003:70). However, many women interviewees presented a different story: their workmates who entered the centre still had to look for jobs by themselves. Shui Yi explained her worries: this centre had only been running for three years; if workers had failed to take jobs allocated or to find work during this period, they would be cut off from their previous unit permanently without any financial arrangement; even if they were allocated work in another unit, if that had low profit margins, they would have the same risk of being cut off from their *danwei* without any reimbursement (cf. Cai 2006).

SHUI YI: There was a reemployment service centre. They would allocate jobs

to you. If you didn't take it, you would be automatically cut off from the *danwei* without any financial reimbursement.

Q: After entering the centre, how about the financial arrangements?

SHUI YI: After you enter it, your former factory will pay a certain amount of money to the centre. So you will get living expenses from the centre. It is the same money [*as that given to a bought-out*]. If any other factory accepts you, the money will be transferred to them. Otherwise, why would they want you? Now the centre had already been closed down.

Q: Did any of your workmates choose to go to the Centre?

SHUI YI: Hardly any. Because the allocation of work wasn't like that before: after allocating you into a unit you will be there until retirement. Now, look, some workmate was allocated to another clothes factory. But after two years, that factory was closed down again.

(Shui Yi, aged 40)

These women had taken many factors into consideration and tried hard to choose the best among the available options. Because of the increasing uncertainty and risk during this social transformation, even in the enterprises making a good profit, workers opted for redundancy if the remuneration was satisfactory. He Jiabao, had worked previously in a factory, whose profit was among the top ten in the city. Under the wider environment of 'reducing staff to increase efficiency', the factory also started to adopt internal retirement. The conditions were very good: the wage which internal retirees got remained the same as before and they also received wage rises until formal retirement. In the first year of internal retirement, they could still get 100 per cent bonus, in the second year their bonus was 95 per cent, in the third year their bonus was 90 per cent, in the fourth year it was 40 per cent and in the fifth year it was 30 per cent. This policy was so favourable that many workers wanted it and the original one-knife-cut age was changed from 47 to 45 (women), and 57 to 55 (men). He Jiabao felt lucky to benefit.

> About over one hundred workers wanted to go because people didn't know how long this factory leader would be in that position. This year this policy is still in effect, so people who leave the factory will benefit from this policy for a long time. But if next year this policy stops, workers have to work very hard, right till the very end.
>
> (He Jiabao, aged 46)

The desire to seize the chance afforded by that favourable policy reflected workers' anxiety about their present situation and an unforeseeable future: holding on to any benefits they could grasp was the best way for them to defer any insecurity in the future.

A few other women mentioned that their decision to take redundancy was partly as a result of their familial concerns. As was the case for their Western

counterparts (see Crompton and Lyonette 2005), their decisions in relation to paid work and caring work were shaped by structural constraints. Xiu Tianhong's daughter was in her final year of high school, waiting for the college entrance examination. Therefore she decided to opt for internal retirement at 44, one year earlier than the one-knife-cut division, so that she could look after her daughter full-time. Ding Jiahua recalled a similar story,

> At that time, my *danwei* had already been in bad profit and started to reduce staff. He [*her husband*] was running the taxi then. For a period, he worked hard, very busy. So I just said to him, 'I will come back, look after you and support your work'.
>
> (Ding Jiahua, aged 44)

Likewise, in reply to the vignette, some women mentioned that women's familial responsibilities contributed to their being selected for redundancy. As Zhou Ping put it, 'Normally women in their 40s have kids still in school. So they still have very heavy family burden. Ahead she has the old, behind she has the little ones'.

The 'choices' they made suggest that the space left for women workers to make a choice was very limited. Most choices reflected the decision-makers' lack of power and anxiety in pursuit of security. But there are five women who chose to leave the unit of their own accord. Wei Xinhua opted for being laid off so that she could use her accountancy skills and wider circles of social connections to earn more money. Yuan Mei, a former sales manager in a factory, resigned to open her own company through the contact with her previous customers. Song Yuming, with a rich husband, chose to retire internally at 42 so that she could open a restaurant and have a real career. Liu Jingli and Zhao Wenhua, from non-industrial units, retired internally in order to set up a business by themselves. But what all five women have in common is they either had financial capital or access to a wide range of social connections, unlike most of the ordinary women workers. Their position was thus closer to that of the male workers and people who had higher education and professional skills who have been found in other studies to be more likely to choose to leave their former work units in order to try their hand in the market economy (Mok *et al.* 2002).

Perception of redundancy

First, I compare the attitudes of husbands and wives towards their spouses' employment crisis and then I focus on women's own perceptions. Interestingly, when making choices in the face of redundancy, all of the women had consulted their husband, even those like Tang Minmin and Shui Yi who had very bad relationships with their husbands. The majority took into account their husband's opinions in making the final decision. Apart from one husband who objected to the idea of his wife's leaving the factory because he

thought it was a stable job whilst the wife wanted to start a career for herself, the rest of the husbands fell into the following two categories. Those husbands who had stable jobs thought their wife's redundancy was not a big deal. Jing Xia's husband was one of them. She put it, 'He asked me to come back. He said, "come home, it's good, saving the hustle of going to work every day". We were in the same factory. He went through the procedure for me. He didn't let me go to work'. Those men whose own financial situation was not very satisfactory also took it calmly and considered their wife's coming home as a societal trend, whether they wanted to accept it or not. Wang Dan (aged 55) described it thus: 'I considered it carefully, my husband also said, "come home, look at the present situation, this is the tendency" '.

In contrast, when women perceived any crisis their husband faced or might face in employment, they took it very seriously. Only six women had such worries partly because most of the husbands had steady work. Tang Minmin, who had a long-term cold war with her philandering husband, still tried her best to contribute her wisdom to solve his redundancy crisis.

> I said to him, when the leader asked you to go, you must reply, 'How do you have the right to fire me?' I said, if I were you, I would just stay, [*mimicking the conversation with his leader*] 'I am not working for you. Remember that the factory is not opened by you. If it is opened by you, I would go. But this is opened by the Communist Party, what right do you have to ask me to leave?' I said to him, 'aren't you normally very tough? Why not argue with them on this matter'. So he also found a lot of connections. Through his friends, he even found the newspaper agency to gain support. Finally he went back to work after a month of redundancy.
>
> (Tang Minmin, aged 46)

Her husband was a technician in the factory, but was sometimes found to be absent from work. Tang Minmin was aware of the gossip that he slipped out of the workplace to meet his lover. However, she still accepted that she had a duty to help her husband. Similarly, Ye Guanghua was not very happy about the 'hiring-back' practice even though it meant that her husband was still working. She thought that since there was no contract stating for how long he would be hired, he had actually been tricked into internal retirement. She had tried unsuccessfully to persuade her husband to use his father's status as a military martyr[11] to bargain with the *danwei* leaders as she had found that there was a rule that relatives of martyrs could not be made redundant.

The contrast between their own status and that of their husbands, and the comparison between each spouse's attitude towards each other's employment crisis reflect the assumption that women are seen as needing their jobs less than male workers because they are believed to be mainly responsible for the domestic domain. This assumption also recurred in women's replies to the vignette. Six women linked the decision of letting women go home

with the traditional division of labour between men and women. For example, Ding Jiahua commented,

> The reason is connected with our country's tradition: 'men dominate the outside while women dominate the inside'. If men are laid off, they will lose face. So let them stay and ask women to go home, women can do the housework and look after children.
>
> (Ding Jiahua, aged 44)

In fact, she had financially supported her family for the eight years since she had been made redundant because her husband's taxi business had failed. He also preferred to stay at home rather than take a demeaning job. Although she was the breadwinner, she still believed in the traditional division of labour and explained her situation as 'a special case'. These explanations demonstrate that the gendered roles of men and women justified her belief in inherent difference even though in reality she could do what a man was expected to do. As Johnson puts it, 'whether we're identified as female or male has real and powerful effects on perceptions, feeling, and behaviour' (Johnson 1997:67). He Jiabao gave a similar answer,

> When women reach their 40s, if they don't go home, how could you ask men in their 40s to go home? According to Chinese tradition, men are the supporting pillar in the family. When he comes back, the whole family is paralysed. If a woman goes home, she is still supported by her husband.
>
> (He Jiabao, aged 46)

The gendered division of labour justified the gender discrimination that women should return home during economic restructuring; and the wider society was more prepared to condone the practice of female redundancy. Across the various industries, there was a policy which prohibited the redundancy of a worker whose spouse had already been laid-off by the enterprise (cf. Morris *et al.* 2001). So if one had to go, it was the wife who would have to make the sacrifice.

Apart from the general acceptance of female redundancy, how did women from different age groups perceive this big event in their life? Here I have followed Hung and Chiu (2003) and divided 27 redundant workers into birth cohorts. Cohort 1 consisted of three women born between 1944–1947; Cohort 2, the Cultural Revolution generation, 18 women born between 1948–1957; and Cohort 3, six women born between 1958–1966. Women from Cohort 2 had experienced disastrous famine, the Cultural Revolution, compulsory family planning and then they 'ran into' unemployment in their forties, which made their life very eventful. Hung and Chiu (2003:211) found that 'xiagang workers from this lost generation were acutely aware of how their misfortunes were linked to their cohort-specific experiences'.

I found, too, that the Cohort 2 women always linked their present redundancy to their own generation's experiences. The dominant understanding was that redundancy was just another unlucky event in their specific life experiences. For example, Zheng Lili (aged 51), sighed

> Our generation was really wasted by that era. Look, when we were growing up, it was three years of 'natural famine'.[12] When we wanted to study, it was the Cultural Revolution and we were sent down to the countryside. Then finally, we came back to the city, were allocated to a *danwei*. Then we felt a little bit better because at least we were in a *danwei*, pretty secure. At that time, they didn't talk about stuff like educational qualifications. If you could do your job well, that's enough. But nowadays people talk about qualifications. Even if you had the ability to do your job, you need qualifications to prove it. Our generation is totally wasted.

Despite the grievances and unfairness they expressed, this cohort took the redundancy event as a matter of course in their life just because they felt 'our whole generation is unlucky'. They commonly reported sentiments similar to Hung and Chiu's interviewees who said that they were 'just in time to run into all these (gan shang le)', and were a generation 'full of misfortunes' (2003:232).

The oldest cohort, as they were near formal retirement and had not suffered in the same way from the Cultural Revolution as Cohort 2, interpreted their redundancy experience more at a societal level. They accepted it as a change of era; redundancy was an inevitable concomitant of the economic reforms. For instance, although Ye Guanghua was very unhappy about being redundant, she described it as 'a social trend that is beyond control of ordinary people'. Women in the youngest cohort, by contrast, interpreted this event more on an individual level, pointing their anger towards their specific factories. For example, Bi Hong, aged 40, said, 'Like us, we were bought out. The society wouldn't pay attention to you. You have to face the life by yourself. Who would take pity on you? The factory already kicked you out. You had to go find a way on your own'. Likewise, Lu Guangpin, aged 37, recalled, 'at that time, when I left the factory, I just felt like an abandoned baby. I've devoted my youth to them. However, when they thought I was not useful any more, they just asked me to bugger off. Giving me some money, just like doing a trade. I really couldn't bear it. It hurt my feelings'.

Despite the differences among the three cohorts in perceptions of their redundancy experience, there is a common 'agreement' across them: they all pointed out that the dysfunctional management of former factory leaders should be blamed for the bad profit of the enterprises. Ye Guanghua (aged 56), formerly worked in an electronics factory, described why she thought her factory was running downhill,

> The biggest loss our factory had had happened during the early stage of economic restructuring. That is, our factory director was inexperienced. But anyway there is no need to complain now. At that time, our factory set up a joint venture with a Japanese company. They took all our famous products and factory house away and started to produce on their behalf without taking any workers from our part. So many workers were jammed together with no famous products to produce. Then surviving became a problem. When they realized the issue, it was too late for regrets because the contract had been signed. These Japanese were very cunning: they just took our factory leaders to Japan for a relaxing holiday, treating them with many favourable conditions. But in the end, we workers suffered from the consequences.

Wu Ping (aged 46), from Cohort 2, who had previously worked as a shop assistant, replied ironically when I asked her where men were relocated to as they became older,

> Older men were almost all transferred to work in the offices. Some as assistant manager, some as deputy director. Usually one general director had many deputy directors. How come we had no bowls [*jobs*], just because there was so much surplus labour among them!

Similarly, Shui Yi (aged 40), a former textile worker in Cohort 3, told me,

> The biggest reason why our factory was closed down was our leaders loaned money to import a set of machines for making clothes. This set of equipment was bought from Japan in US dollars. So we tried hard to repay our loans. On one side, the selling of our products was not so good; on the other side, we still had to pay back our loan every month. So the factory finally closed down.

However, all the factory-level leaders did not have the same fate as ordinary workers. Even in the case of closing down, they could be transferred to other factories or government sectors by the government (cf. Cai 2006). Thus, while making sense of their redundancy in their own terms, all these women were all aware of the inequalities and unfairness in the market reforms, which they could do little about but accept. What happened to them afterwards, how did women cope with the next stage of their life after losing their jobs? These subjects will be explored in further Chapter 7.

7 Life has to go on

In this chapter, I explore another stage in women's lives – the period after they lost their jobs in the work unit. Previous research has documented the various ways in which becoming redundant has affected workers, such as economic plight and psychological depression (see Cai 2006, Xia 2001). The coverage of state-initiated support was very limited and with most redundant workers having to rely on assistance from other household members (Giles *et al.* 2006). In the search for new jobs, personal connections have been found to be the most important channel (Li *et al.* 2001, Zhao 2002). Overall, the shock of becoming unemployed has been particularly hard for older workers and women (Giles *et al.* 2006, Mok *et al.* 2002). Here I follow my interviewees' life path. What was the life like outside the cocoon of the *danwei*? How did they cope with this transition in life? Were the existing gendered constraints on daily existence within the domestic domain weakened or intensified when the women 'returned home'?

Life after the *danwei*

The *danwei* used to serve as a welfare unit and looked after its members from birth to death, like a socialist family. But now the relationship between the redundant women workers and their *danwei* was very different. Although they had been allowed to retain their *danwei* accommodation,[1] they were deprived of other benefits such as bonuses, healthcare, and the issue of goods during festivals and participating in any *danwei* activities. The situation was particularly unpleasant for the bought-out women: they were officially completely cut off from their *danwei*. Bi Hong (aged 40) put it, 'We have no connection with our former *danwei*, they treated us like throwing away rotten meat'. Other women only kept a limited administrative connection with their *danwei* such as completing forms for settling their official retirement. When they compared their past contribution to the work unit with their current treatment from their *danwei*, they were furious.[2] One internal retiree who had become a small restaurant owner, contrasted her experiences with the way she treated her own workers.

> Our *danwei* is bad enough. To us, those who return home, the *danwei* had no response at all. We'd been working very hard for our whole life there. Working overtime so many times, we almost worked several hundred extra shifts. . . . My previous hard work was pointless. They treated us much worse than I do my employees. When my employees go home for festivals, I buy some gifts for them to take home.
>
> (Song Yuming, aged 49)

However, the recognition that women workers hungered for was expressed by the middle-level cadres – unlike the ordinary workers and the junior cadres they were still called back to participate in some activities even though they had formally retired. Zhou Ping, who was the former director of the factory trade union, said,

> If the factory organizes some activities like a one-day trip for excellent party members or cadres or sometimes political studies if any important meeting is being held in the state government. . . . Sometimes at the beginning of the year, they need to make plans for future development. They need to listen to senior comrades, don't they?
>
> (Zhou Ping, aged 59)

She enjoyed the 'belongingness' and respect even after she stopped working, whereas the other workers recounted their unhappiness about having been 'abandoned' or 'ignored'. The prior stratification between workers and cadres seemed to be reproduced and reinforced by redundancy.

Whilst the *danwei* withdrew from the welfare system, the state's new social security system was still patchy. The number of people covered by 'Three guarantees' was still small (Solinger 2002). A few favourable policies such as free retraining, a simplified application procedure and tax reductions for self-employed workers were in place for officially qualified laid-off workers but their effectiveness largely depended on the financial resources of local government (Cai 2006). Only one of my interviewees had gone to the re-employment service centre and was issued with an official certificate of layoff. She found her new job working as a hospital carer through reading newspaper advertisements. But her certificate was of use as the job prioritized women who had a certificate of layoff. However, internal retirees and bought-outs were excluded from these favourable policies. Xiong Yingli, an internal retiree, had to pay all the fees for her own re-employment training.

> Like us, if we go to any class, we aren't counted as unemployed or layoffs, we are internal retirees. Wherever you go for work, there is no favourable policy for you. In some places, if you are laid-off, your tuition fee for lessons will be waived, but we are not eligible. You can't bring any certificate [*to identify your status*]. So under such conditions,

> both the factory and the society have nothing to do with you. We have no way out.
>
> (Xiong Yingli, aged 46)

Whilst redundant women workers were cut off from the formal support system, the informal support system was intensifying in the transition to a market economy. My interviewees had received emotional support and assistance in searching for jobs from their wider family. Being given financial support was less common, partly because of the increasing impact of redundancies. The following are some examples of help provided by kin and affines. Dai Chunhua (aged 54) and her brothers and sisters, all of whom had also been made redundant, gave each other emotional support; Jing Xia (aged 50) followed her brother-in-law's advice to buy a knitting machine so that she could combine caring for her daughter with earning money; Ye Guanghua worked selling insurance on commission, a job to which she was introduced to by her sister. Meanwhile, the interviewees themselves contributed their labour to the sustaining of family networks; some of them became an unpaid domestic carer for the wider family.

Their family ties were strengthened, what happened to other non-kinship ties? I found that the effect of redundancy upon women's social contacts depended upon whether they returned to full-time work and their residential arrangement. Women who were re-employed in full-time work, if they lived outside their own *danwei*, tended to lose touch with old colleagues. However, they acquired a new circle of friends in their new workplace as they did before – socializing with non-family members at their workplace rather than in non-working hours. Ding Jiahua worked full-time in a department store and lived in her husband's *danwei*.

Q: After you came back, how is your contact with your former colleagues?
DING JIAHUA: I have contact only with good friends. We contact each other by telephone for example, calling at spring festivals. . . . The main reason that I don't socialize with them is because I'm too family-oriented. Were it not for the family, I'd like to socialize with friends. Also now I make new friends at work and I socialize with them then. After work, I can't socialize because I don't have time.

(Ding Jiahua, aged 44)

Distance was a problem for Hua Liyun who worked full-time as a social worker and lived in a house provided by her husband's parents.

> We, several sisters [*good friends*], gather together in the spring festival. Sometimes, we just telephone to greet each other or sometimes if someone moves house or something happens in her family, we will visit. Just among very good friends in the factory [*former work unit*] . . . It is not easy for us to gather together; we all live very far apart. . . . It is not easy

for socializing, at most telephone greeting in spring festival or anything happens in her family, we will go.

(Hua Liyun, aged 46)

Similarly, for full-timers who lived in their former *danwei* residential area, their neighbours were former colleagues, but they had less frequent contact with them. Like Ding Jiahua, they socialized with women in their new workplace and were too busy with family duties to associate after work with their former friends.

Non-full-time workers, if they lived in the residential areas of their own *danwei*, did socialize with former colleagues if, like themselves, those women were also staying at home or only working part-time. Qian Mingyan (aged 47) and her former colleagues went mountain-walking in the mornings: 'Before after work, we were too busy and had no chance to socialize with each other. Now I returned home, after I finish chores for the family, I go out with other internal retirees, for example, to climb the mountain'.

Women who were 'incomer wives' in their husband's *danwei* or were living with his family also managed to socialize with their former workmates as long as they did not live too far away. Qin Weixia reported,

Q: How is your contact with former colleagues?

QIN WEIXIA: We keep in contact all the time. We often play together. The other day they came to visit my house.

Q: What do you do when you are together?

QIN WEIXIA: We like chatting. We are concerned about our children: 'How old is your child? If s/he has any friend? [boyfriend or girlfriend]' We care about each other, chatting about things in each family. Then we comfort each other: like our generation, we should take it easy. It is already troubling enough with the elder generation ahead and the younger generation behind to look after. So we should pay attention to our health. We advise each other about such things as, 'go out for a walk and don't always stay in the home, it is not good for your health if you shut yourself in the house'.

(Qin Weixia, aged 50)

Qin Weixia and her jobless friends offered each other mutual and emotional support, and helped one another go through the turning point of leaving full-time work. However, the forms of socializing were limited to activities that did not cost money. Wu Ping explained this explicitly, 'Such a group of people like us, it has been already very tight. Look, who can afford to go out [e.g. to a restaurant or a karaoke bar].'

Through their common experience of redundancy, some incomer wives had started to make friends with other women in their husband's *danwei* community. Xiong Yingli had avoided dealing with neighbours (her husband's colleagues) when she was still working. But after being forced

to retire internally, she spent afternoons playing cards with her neighbours who had returned home. Tang Minmin had lived a very isolated life in her husband's *danwei* housing because her husband had a long-term extra-marital affair and all the pressure of the gossip fell upon her. After she became redundant she made some friends with other redundant women workers in her local community. In fact, she was introduced to me for interview by Li Yuyin.

> Before I hardly spoke to anybody here. Because I felt, although others didn't point out in front of you, anyone would talk behind your back [*gossip about you*]. . . . Later when I returned home, I started to make contact with them, like Li Yuyin. I started talking with them. When I was at work, I never got involved with them. . . . Because she [*Li Yuyin*] was always chatting with another woman downstairs who was also laid off. They all laugh and chat in front of their houses. . . . Since I already came back, I felt I don't have to be rigid with myself like before. . . . So I joined them, doing the knitting. She [*Li Yuyin*] brings her granddaughter, we chat together or go shopping.
>
> (Tang Minmin, aged 46)

Having something in common erased the barrier between them in her mind and helped her assimilate into the local community and to lead a more cheerful life than before. In addition to the mutual companionship, many women also shared information about work opportunities or even started a small business together. Xiong Yingli (aged 46) was asked to join in the supermarket where one of her former colleagues was working. Bi Hong (aged 40) set up a stall with her previous workmate to act as agents for housing exchange.

Being made redundant deprived the women of the welfare services of the *danwei*. Fortunately, they were the beneficiaries of support from their families, though most of that was limited to non-material forms. They also received emotional support from other women who had been made redundant, some of whom were friends from their former workplace and others, mainly neighbours in their husband's *danwei* with whom they had become acquainted as a result of their common experience of redundancy. Such companionship did not alter their circumstances but it helped ease the loss deriving from unemployment. However, the social space open to them was restricted and the gap between redundant women workers and other women tended to widen. For most of the interviewees, rejoining the work force was the priority.

Finding work

Most of the women became redundant when their children were still in middle school or at university. The youngest cohort, aged between 37 and

45 at the time of interview, was faced with caring for ageing parents whilst also having to bring up young children. Ding Jiahua, who was laid off at 36 recalled,

> In the eight years since I was laid off, it has been really a hard time. Why? Because it can be said that our generation 'has the elder ahead and the younger behind', the burden and pressure are really huge. I must find work.
>
> (Ding Jiahua, aged 44)

Wei Xinhua, aged 38, used a metaphor to describe the pressure of supporting children's education, 'We are climbing the slope of children. We are in great need of money'. Even for women aged over 45, although a few lost jobs when their children were at university, the pressure to find work was still urgent because it is the Chinese custom that parents support children until they find work. Zheng Lili, an internal retiree since the age of 45, started selling homemade doughnuts on the street to support her daughter studying at university. The burden became heavier for women who had a son since it is expected that the bridegroom's side will provide all the wedding expenses and housing.

> Although my son said he didn't want us to worry about him, the house [*for her son*] hasn't been bought. I only have a pension about six hundred yuan, my husband is working for others, just seven or eight hundred. He [*her son*] also doesn't earn much. We have to save money for him. . . . I want to go out to earn some money.
>
> (Wang Dan, aged 55)

Social capital

Social capital, 'the accessible resources embedded in the social structure or social networks that will bring benefits to their owners (Bourdieu 1986; Coleman 1990; Lin 1999)' (Zhao 2002:555) is vital to the process of finding work among redundant workers (Li *et al.* 2001, Zhao 2002). A survey of laid-off workers from four cities in 1997 found that social capital had positive effects upon the chances of getting re-employed (Li *et al.* 2000:96–97). Here, I draw upon concepts from Zhao's (2001, 2002) survey-based study of the social capital of 621 laid-off workers in Wuhan and confine my discussion to social capital at a micro level. He found that generally 'laid-off workers have a smaller amount of possessed social capital than the population in general' (Zhao 2002:567) and that laid-off workers in Wuhan mainly used informal methods and got substantial help [influence] from their contacts to find re-employment. However, he paid little attention to the gender dimension. He also focused upon individual social capital; but I found that women might draw upon their husband's social capital, and unlike Zhao's informants, seldom had a direct connection with the person who had played

the most important role in finding jobs. This Western concept of 'social capital' has sometimes been equated to Chinese *guanxi* (see Gold *et al.* 2002, Lin 2001). Whilst *guanxi* has broader implications, it is commonly believed to carry a connotation of power and influence if used for instrumental purposes, as I showed in Chapter 4, but the members of the social networks of my interviewees were not necessarily rich or powerful. I shall refer here to 'social capital' to enable me to draw comparisons between them and those of the workers in Zhao's study.

'Possessed social capital'

Zhao explored the effects of 'possessed social capital' (i.e. 'accessible resources embedded in the workers' personal social networks') and 'the social capital actually used in re-employment' (2002:556). To measure possessed social capital, I asked questions similar to Zhao's ('how many relatives, friends and acquaintances they "paid a new year's call" [*bainian*] in the spring festival' and what were those people's jobs or *danwei*) of 29 interviewees (all except the Women's Federation officer and women in the focus group). I assessed their network size (number of members), network density (proportion of relatives among members), and embedded network resources (such as occupations of members). Their networks (average number: 11; range 5–15) were smaller than the average network size (n = 21) in Zhao's sample (2002:562), and that of citizens in general (n = 31) (Bian and Li 2001 in Zhao 2002:563). Most contacts were relatives and friends, and their network density (73 per cent) was much higher than that of Zhao's informants (49.44 per cent) or of citizens in general (28.36 per cent) (Zhao 2002:563). Four women had powerful relatives, but most women's relatives were manual workers, some of whom were also redundant. Their friends were former colleagues and/or neighbours from their own former *danwei* or that of their husband plus a few from school days, and were mostly manual workers. The women possessed poor social capital by comparison with the respondents in similar studies (e.g. Li *et al.* 2000, Zhao 2002), which also reflects their limited involvement in *guanxi* activities when they were in the *danwei*. The two women middle-level cadres possessed greater social capital, since most of their contacts were professional people and leaders of work units. Although their network size and network density differed little from those of the other women, I suggest it was their embedded network resources which produced their better jobs.

'Social capital actually used in re-employment'

By asking respondents about the methods they used to find jobs, what kind of resources they gained from their personal network, and characteristics of the contact whom they considered 'played the most important role', I examined how they actually used social capital in finding their new jobs.

Only one found her first job through a formal method by reading newspaper advertisements; six went for self-employment, of whom four became street vendors; and two did some piecework at home. Apart from Gao Yun (still at work) and He Jiabao and Gong Lihua (having a rest), the other 17 found their first job by informal methods. The characteristics of the most important contact involved in introducing the first job in relation to the types of work are shown in Table 7.1.

One-third of the women had obtained lowly-paid jobs with the help of former workmates (themselves all redundant). However, the two middle-level cadres found decent jobs through the introduction of their previous work contact, two through relatives in their wider family, one through her former schoolmate and one through a neighbour. Five obtained relatively good jobs through people in their husbands' network, with whom they hardly had any relationship. This distinction between a woman's own social capital and the one actually used in her job-seeking activities is significant because women workers tend to marry up to cadres or professionals who possess richer and wider social capital. Women can draw on their husband's social capital; their husbands may also independently use their social contacts to find work for their wives.

Eight women had contacts who were only manual workers with no post or rank. My data indicates that the higher the rank of the contact, the better the jobs that could be obtained; hence, the power of contacts directly affected the quality of accessible jobs. Jobs introduced by non-manual staff were more likely to be full-time and relatively stable; those introduced by manual-worker contacts were mostly cleaning, baby-sitting, cooking meals for families or companies. This also supports Jin Yihong's (2000) suggestion that laid-off women workers comprized a substantial group within the

Table 7.1 The characteristics of the core contact in first job search of 17 women interviewees who used informal methods

Contact	*Status of contact*	*Sex of contact*	*Type of job found*	*Number of women*
Husband's friend or colleague	Managerial/ professional	Male	Various full-time jobs (shop assistant, accountant, etc.)	5
Former workmate	Manual	Female	Cleaning, cooking, caring, selling (part-time)	6
Former work contact	Professional administrative	Male	Accountant (full-time) Consultant (full-time)	2
Relative	Professional; manual	Female Male	Selling insurance (part-time) Cooking (part-time)	2
Schoolmate	Professional	Male	Accountancy (full-time)	1
Neighbour	Manual	Female	Cleaning (part-time)	1

irregular labour market; most women in her national study were doing vending, laundry services, or baby-sitting.

More importantly, women's own social networks were mostly made up of women, consonant with gender segregation in the workplace (for similar cases in Russia, see Tartakovskaya and Ashwin 2004). However, the gender-specific network did them no favours. Their lower position in the labour market affected the jobs to which they could introduce their contacts. As Table 7.1 shows, jobs introduced by women workers were like the irregular kinds of work mentioned by Jin (2000). The prior lower social status of the women workers was reproduced in the process of finding work through gender-specific networks. Conversely, prior status advantage was maintained through their networks which consist of people with similar lifestyles and socio-economic backgrounds. The two women cadres obtained much better work than the rest. Zhou Ping, the director of her former factory's trade union, was asked by the municipal trade union leader whom she already knew to work for them as a full-time consultant after she retired. Jia Yunxia, a senior accountant in her former company, was working full-time for a private trade company to which she had been introduced by her neighbour, a director of an accountancy agency. Although they did not actively seek those positions, the high quality of their 'possessed social capital' was an influential factor. Such occupations also offered the potentiality of gaining additional high quality social capital from which they might benefit in the future. But women with poor social capital were trapped in a vicious circle of low-paid, unskilled part-time work providing only further poor social capital. Former cadres were able to maintain their social position; the workers were vulnerable to downward mobility.

Constraints

Gendered networking is not the only mechanism reproducing sex segregation in the labour market (Tartakovskaya and Ashwin 2004); my interviewees described other hindrances to finding work. Familial demands created hurdles because being redundant reinforced women's domestic roles. Wu Ping described her day:

> Every morning, I prepare breakfast for them [*her husband and daughter*]. Then they go to work after eating, so I start cleaning the house. Sometimes I don't finish it until 11 o'clock. Then I rush to do the shopping for food,[3] then preparing it.
>
> (Wu Ping, aged 46)

She had become a full-time family servant: her use of time centred round the needs of other family members. When I asked if she had taken jobs such as cleaning for other families, she expressed the boredom of doing housework, 'I've had enough of domestic chores within the family. How could

I go out to do them again? After all, my family is living just above subsistence level'.

The women not only had to look after their own family, they were also regarded as an unpaid reserve labour force by the wider family circle, which justified demands being made of them by their own and their husband's kin, even to the extent of obliging them to give up a hard-won job. He Jiabao spent the first month of her redundancy looking after her sick mother. Li Yuyin acted as a full-time carer to her granddaughters, and had hardly had any leisure in the four years since she got laid off at the age of 50.

> What a coincidence! Look, when I just got laid off at home, my elder daughter started her wedding preparations in 1999. After she got married, I found a carer's job in the hospital. Soon afterwards, she had a child. So I came back to look after the granddaughter since she was busy at work. What can you do?. . . . Then my younger daughter got married in 2000. Soon she gave birth. I had to look after that baby, too. . . . So since I stopped work in my *danwei*, I had almost no rest. I've been looking after their kids. I couldn't afford time for rest.
>
> (Li Yuyin, aged 54)

Our interview was held when the baby was having an afternoon nap, and during it she was busy knitting a sweater for her granddaughter. After Qin Weixia was retired internally at the age of 47 she started selling homemade accessories near a university campus. She enjoyed this because her products were praised by many students. However, her husband's sister's illness put paid to her enterprise.

QIN WEIXIA: That business was really going very well. If were not for my sick sister-in-law, I would've been carrying it on. Because my sister-in-law was found to have cancer, she needed someone to look after her. No one else was available. . . .

Q: How about others in the family?

QIN WEIXIA: Nobody was available. Her parents are gone. Her two sisters are at work.

Q: After she passed away, did you think of going out again?

QIN WEIXIA: Yes, of course, but it is impossible at present. He [*her nephew*] is in the final year of high school facing university entrance exams. I will help him until he goes to university.

Q: How about his father?

QIN WEIXIA: He is really busy at work. So I said to myself: let me eat some bitterness [*i.e. sacrificing her own interests*] and help him go to the university.

(Qin Weixia, aged 50)

So only if they become 'redundant' a second time from their familial work can women in their position control their time and do something they want to do. Being made redundant pushed women into full-time domesticity (see also Dong *et al.* 2005). By contrast, being redundant did not trap men into domesticity. Gao Yun (aged 46) survived a layoff crisis aged 42 because she had a good relationship with her leader. Her husband left work to start his own business but ended up staying at home. However, she still took charge of everything: 'anything in the family, as long as it is called housework, falls upon me'. Ding Jiahua's husband had a similar situation and had been unemployed for five years, but did nothing to help her, even though she had become re-employed.

The wider discourse cast redundant women workers as having poor skills and ability, blaming them for losing their jobs. I found echoes of official commentary in Zhou Ping's comments – perhaps not surprisingly, as she was a middle-level cadre and had once worked in the women's committee (the Women's Federation's offshoot in factories) of her work unit.

> Layoff, it's the survival of the fittest, isn't it? Keep the better, get rid of the worse. So we called upon all the women workers to meet this challenge and compete for work. They need to specialize in one sector as well as be able to do many other things. If you can only do one thing, when your post is gone you can't do other things either. So you must learn skills so that you will not lose your job.
>
> (Zhou Ping, aged 59)

Women workers also accepted this blame and devalued themselves; in turns, they were confined to searching for low-paid manual jobs. In order to explore their views of the job options open to them, I used the following vignette:

> Liu Hua (aged 42) has been laid-off from the factory for 3 years and is doing a cleaning job at the moment. But her daughter is about to go to university, so she wants to find other jobs in the hope of more money.

A common response was as follows,

> As an industrial worker, she doesn't have any speciality. If she has a speciality, for example, she has learned accountancy or knows how to use a computer, she can find a highly paid job. But she was just a worker. Workers after all don't have any skills. She has to carry on searching for manual work to do. Like cleaning for other families, etc.
>
> (Li Yuyin, aged 54)

Women's age also seemed to limit the types of work that they could go for. Commenting on the vignette, Hua Liyun, who worked as a social worker in a community committee,[4] said:

> Because her age is 42, to be honest, she can only go for cleaning jobs. Even if, for example, we introduce for her to be a shop assistant, she is too old to be wanted. If she really has any specialty or real skills she can find work by herself. Otherwise she can only do cleaning.
>
> (Hua Liyun, aged 46)

However, women around the age of 40 sometimes found their way around discriminatory practices. Ding Jiahua was laid off at 36. Later she worked as a product promoter in a department store. As a result of a crisis they sacked all the promoters over 40. Fortunately through a friend's introduction, she was interviewed for the post of saleswoman for another product.

> Because the new boss needed to have a look at me, he let me try out for one or two days. At that time, I was already reaching 42. But I couldn't let them know how old I was. I dressed myself up and combed my hair into high plaits. I looked smart and energetic. Then they couldn't tell and thought I was only in my 30s. So they accepted me.
>
> (Ding Jiahua, aged 44)

The expansion of service sectors in the economic restructuring was once praised for absorbing a large proportion of women workers. However, such jobs increasingly require the deployment of 'feminine' charms and skills, and thus young and attractive women are predominant in the booming 'youth occupations' (Hanser 2005).

Finally, women's intermediate status also created difficulties in finding and keeping work. Because redundant workers (other than the bought-outs) were still technically affiliated to their own *danwei*, they were neither officially unemployed nor completely out of the *danwei*'s control. The half-connected and half-cut relationship between them and their former work units could cause complications. Although being recalled to work in the *danwei* was very rare, when it happened, it also jeopardized their current job.

> After a period, I was recalled to go back to work in the factory again.[5] I didn't know what was going on. Maybe they saw me get on well outside. These people [*in the factory*] felt jealous and uncomfortable. I said to them, 'if you lay us off, just once and for all, let us survive outside. Now that we are doing okay outside and you ask me back so that present job is lost'. Then when I was kicked out again I had to search for jobs from the start, didn't I? All these leaders are bastards.
>
> (Hua Liyun, aged 46)

With so many constraints, women who were less qualified and/or had poorer social capital were ready to take whatever jobs came up. In this respect, women were considered to be more likely to find jobs than redundant male workers (Cai 2006) even though this 'advantage' only confined women to low-paid, demeaning jobs and reproduced gendered segregation in the labour market. In my study, for the women's husbands who became redundant, dignity seemed to be a more prominent issue in the process of finding work. When Gao Yun's husband was laid off he looked for some ideal work.

> He looked for jobs but still didn't find any appropriate jobs because he was used to doing business and earning big money. So if he is asked to work for others, and paid fixed amount of money, he doesn't want it.
>
> (Gao Yun, aged 46)

When Ding Jiahua's husband failed in his taxi business, other re-employment opportunities were available to him because he had a wide social network as a result of having been a driver in his *danwei*.[6] However, he was so pernickety in choosing jobs that he ended up staying at home for five years in total.

> His friends introduced some to him. Sometimes he didn't want to go on long business trip or sometimes he was unwilling to take any hard jobs. Also he felt embarrassed to be a guard. He loves his face [*dignity*] very much. He was introduced to work as a security guard in Provincial Education Department. He just worked there for ten days and then quit. He said, 'standing there just like a dog'. He was such a person. He can't get a high status job and he doesn't want to take a lowly job either.
>
> (Ding Jiahua, aged 44)

Men's attempts to get decent jobs seemed to be thwarted by the fierce competition in the labour market. As they were traditionally considered to 'dominate the outside' (i.e. being the breadwinner), being redundant was emotionally tougher for men (cf. Li *et al.* 2001). Ding Jiahua had to be careful not to hurt her husband's feelings whilst having to take on all the financial burden and housework – 'it is really a hard time'. This gendered assumption that work was more important to men served to justify the leaders' decision to make women redundant in the work units.

Working conditions

No matter how many constraints there were, what social capital they might draw upon, most women had found some form of work, albeit mostly lowly-paid and non-full-time jobs which exposed them to unpleasant and unregulated conditions. No one who worked in the private sector had a

formal contract. Pay for a part-time worker was not legally regulated: women who worked varied hours a day received the same amount of money at the end of month. Wang Dan described her experience,

> It was introduced by our relative [*an industrial worker*]. He [*the employer*] said something like; you would be paid 4 or 5 hundred yuan by working there. In 1994, it was very good to earn 500 yuan. Both [*she and her employer*] decided the payment was 500 yuan. But after I worked for them for one month, I was paid nothing. It was a private company. The employer said his money hadn't arrived so there was no money. I decided not to carry on. I still didn't get the money even now. There was no contract or anything, only a spoken agreement. So I said to myself, there will be still the same even if I work for them for longer.
>
> (Wang Dan, aged 55)

They were also subject to emotional abuse by their employers. Wu Ping, who once worked in a department store selling food,[7] recalled,

> I was once working but I didn't want to do it any more. By working outside I'd been bullied enough. It was really suffering. Honestly you didn't do that but he insisted that you did that. Once I was promoting on the street. He said that I didn't come. I said 'yes I came'. He said, 'when I came to check, why weren't you there?' I said, 'because I went to the toilet'. Later in the group meeting, he blamed me like mad. I said to myself, the fact is that I came; if I didn't come, it would be acceptable if you blamed me like that.
>
> (Wu Ping, aged 46)

Tang Minmin worked in a family in which the child 'played two-face': when the parents were present she showed contempt for her but when she and Tang Minmin were alone she behaved well.

> The kid had two faces: when her mother was out and I was working there, she behaved very well. I could work in my way. Whenever her mother came back, she suddenly became very rude to you. Because such family is very rich, the husband is working for a textiles trade company, even the child is arrogant.
>
> (Tang Minmin, aged 46)

Women who became self-employed were no better off than private sector workers. Shui Yi first spent her savings on opening a snack shop but lost 2,000 yuan within six months so she had to give it up. A few others also tried self-employment as street vendors. According to the state policy for encouraging re-employment, laid-off workers were entitled to free or

discounted tax. However, none of the self-employed women (internal retirees, layoffs and bought-outs) had benefited from that. On the contrary, they were often harassed by the City Environment Checking Committee (CECC). Lu Guangpin (aged 37) began by selling flowers but gave it up within a month: 'Those people [from CECC] are just like dogs. In the evening there was no way for you to sell in front of supermarkets. Those people came to catch you, threw your things away and smashed them'. Hua Liyun, currently a social worker, provided corroboration of this:

> If you sell instant meals on the street, you must dare to take risks because those people [*CECC*] might confiscate your stuff. You must be bold and feisty. You must be feisty because when they come, you must be able to bamboozle and deal with them. Or they won't allow you to put your stall for a moment. . . . Sometimes we also help them by pleading on their behalf: they are already laid off, living a hard life or something like that. So then they [*CECC*] give things confiscated back. But it is still exhausting after these troubles. You pull your stall out in the early morning but have to push it back before they [*CECC*] come out to check.
>
> (Hua Liyun, aged 46)

Despite the undesirable work conditions, redundant women workers had to make compromizes to keep their jobs. As Dai Chunhua explained,

> Since you are a temporary worker, whoever will sign a contract with you? If you are willing to take it, it is okay. If not, just quit it and go home. You are just a temporary worker, whoever will take you seriously? . . . Also there are so many people out there looking for jobs, aren't there? In the *danwei*, I could argue with them. But now you don't have a say. You must give up everything [*face, airs, etc.*] Otherwise, you just stay at home eating porridge.
>
> (Dai Chunhua, aged 54)

The current unpleasant working conditions appeared to engender nostalgia for the former *danwei*.

> If my factory were still in good profit, I would've been willing to stay there. Because we are the masters,[8] we dare speak louder. I can say whatever I want. But now it is impossible as a temporary worker. You have to listen to others because others are the bosses. For example, now they hire you as a social worker. If they say you are good, you are an able person. What are the criteria? For example, if I am not able at all but I send plenty of gifts to them, they will say you are good. Everything is up to anything said by the boss.
>
> (Hua Liyun, aged 46)

Although the previous work and life in the *danwei* gave them limited scope for life advancement before the economic restructuring, women workers were highly unlikely to lose their jobs unless they committed a serious breach of work regulations. In contrast, in their new situation they were in danger of being thrown out any time. In their search for re-employment they were also faced with increasing competition for the few jobs available with the growing numbers of migrant workers from the countryside (Dong 2003, Dong *et al.* 2005). It is no surprise that these workers missed the 'good old days'.

Women who found 'decent' work also needed to face challenges and pressure. Lu Guangpin experienced many difficulties as an insurance seller on commission. At first, she was refused so many times because she tried to sell insurance by calling on strangers that at one time she almost gave up. Once she began to make sales her customers introduced her to other people, partly because she also established a 'friendly' relationship with them.[9] But she worked under great pressure:

> This industry is a very cruel industry: no matter how brilliant you were yesterday, that does not represent tomorrow. Every month you need sales records. Later when I recalled during some period, I got ill so easily. Is it possible that I will be done [*dead*] because of the huge pressure of selling insurance? Sometimes I really have this kind of feeling.
>
> (Lu Guangpin, aged 37)

On the other hand, she expressed her sense of release from the complicated personal relationships in the *danwei*.

> Look, the pressure here is huge. It is very cruel. But the good point is there are no complicated personal relationships with colleagues and leaders. How to say, if you do well, others will admire you. But in the *danwei*, if you were excellent, you would have bad luck. Others were all jealous of you, weren't they?
>
> (Lu Guangpin, aged 37)

Other women in non-manual positions also made positive comments. Yang Ming, for example, worked as an accountant in a university department. In her new position, she only needed to concentrate on her work, unlike the working situation in the *danwei* where other aspects of their lives were subject to control and surveillance.

> I feel much better than I was in my *danwei*. For a tiny thing, people would compete and fight for it, full of jealousy. If you had anything known by others, gossip would blow it everywhere like the rain and the wind. Now when I am working here, the campus is beautiful. When I finish my task, I don't have to think of other things.
>
> (Yang Ming, aged 56)

Some felt that in their new occupations they were able to benefit from demonstrating how capable they were.

> In the *danwei*, it was not your ability that mattered. It was the personal connections that counted. What's more, everything was done by us ordinary workers but you got no credit. All the credit went to the leaders.
>
> (Lu Guangpin, aged 37)

> In the factory, I lost so many chances. When I was working in the workshop, leaders and workshop supervisor would not let me leave [*for a better position*]. So I was wasted there, got no chance to prove my ability. At that time when they started reducing staff, I made use of this chance to come back and start my own career. In the factory I devoted too much but gained nothing. So if I want a career development, I must have my own business.
>
> (Song Yuming, aged 49)

Redundancy therefore could create an opportunity for women's personal development (cf. Wang 2000). However, the extent to which they became empowered depended on a combination of factors such as financial resources, possession of social capital and professional skills. Those few who were empowered by new opportunities were far outnumbered by those disempowered through redundancy. For most, the experience of redundancy was another unpleasant sacrifice they had made for the development of the nation. As Li Yuyin (aged 54) put it,

> The life of our generation was really tough. When we were school-children, everything was messed up by the Cultural Revolution. We learnt nothing at all. Then when we were allocated a job at the work unit, how were we to know that that the factory would run down in twenty years time? Our generation is so unlucky! Now we became lay-offs, every month only 186 yuan as living allowances. When I found work, my daughters had children and so I had to leave to look after their babies. Well, our generation have eaten plenty of bitterness.

8 Mothers' pasts, daughters' presents and futures

Having explored mothers' life experiences, I now turn to the daughters' generation. The majority of the daughters in my study were born after the one-child policy came into effect in 1979. In contrast with their mothers, who had to look after siblings and share housework in their childhood, these daughters as only children were the focus of the family attention and enjoyed great privileges in relation to education. How did their needs become the centre of the family's activities and what were the consequences for these two generations of women? How did the daughters understand their mothers' redundancy? How had their mothers' changed circumstances impacted upon their own life and future aspirations?

The child-centred family

Becoming 'the pearl on her palm' (zhang shang ming zhu, *'the apple of her eye'*)

The traditional Chinese family was parent-centred (Levy 1949, Logan *et al.* 1998). As Logan *et al.* put it, this implies that 'parental needs and preferences were more important than child needs, fulfilling the cultural mandate of deference to parents' (Logan *et al.* 1998:856). This pattern was found to have persisted amongst middle-aged adult children in the 1990s (Bian *et al.* 1998). The mothers' generation in my study were also on a lifetime contract of deferring to the needs and demands of their parents and senior kin. However, whether this parent-centred pattern will continue is under question since the first offspring of the one-child policy are reaching adulthood (Bian *et al.* 1998).

The one-child policy was strictly applied in work units. However, the unintended consequence of this policy lies in that there are no gender differences in educational development between single-girl and single-boy families in urban China (Tsui and Rich 2002:74). Since the daughters were the 'only hope' (Fong 2004), some women who had suffered emotional abuse and a lack of support from their in-laws when they had not given birth to a son,

were additionally motivated to encourage their daughters to achieve. Hua Liyun (aged 46) said:

> In my husband's family, he is the only son with another three sisters. Although my in-laws said something like that it doesn't matter if I give birth to a girl, how could they not care about that? A son is a son after all. I wished it were a boy, but it was a girl. And I could do nothing about it. So I really want her to be very strong so that others can't complain about anything even though she is a daughter. From the start I hoped she would be very able.

Mothers' specific generational experiences also helped to boost their educational investment in their daughters. They were the 'unlucky generation' who had been through many ups and downs, making one sacrifice after another in the service of China's development. Such eventful lives made them treat the only child they were allowed to have as their hope, to realize vicariously their unfulfilled dreams. Since the majority of women had missed out on education in their life and suffered from the consequences, they put great emphasis on their daughters' education. Xiu Tianhong said,

> I said to my daughter: 'whenever you have chances for further education, carry on as far as you can'. Because when we graduated from senior high school, we lost the chance of going to university. We couldn't do anything about it but had to leave school.
>
> (Xiu Tianhong, aged 47)

Similarly, Wei Xinhua commented,

> Our hope now is for her to be successful. But if she can't reach that level, we have no way. But we will try our best, whatever she wants to learn, I will provide. This is because at the time when I wanted to continue studying, I couldn't do it. Now if she wants to, I will spare no effort.
>
> (Wei Xinhua, aged 38)

As a result, mothers made every attempt to provide the best education possible. He Jiabao (aged 46) swapped their studio flat for a small room so as to let her daughter go to a good, nearby primary school. Guan Guohua (aged 56) sold their house and moved into a rented house[1] in order to support her daughter's postgraduate education abroad. Generally, as Dai Chunhua (aged 54) said with pride, 'our generation did very well in providing educational support to kids'.

In addition to investing in education, the mothers provided their daughters with all their care and protection. Wei Xinhua mentioned that her daughter was 'the pearl on her palm' (the apple of her eye), and she had even bought an old-age insurance policy[2] for her 13-year-old daughter. All the

daughters reported that they seldom or never had to do any housework. The media had coined the nicknames such as 'little emperor' or 'little empress' to refer to this spoiled only-child generation. Daughter Qian was one such little empress.

> I can't do the housework very well. I don't touch any domestic work at all. My parents don't allow me to either. They are very protective of me. For example, if I boil water, my parents are afraid that I might be poisoned by a gas leak. Even now whenever I am alone at home, they unplug every electrical appliance before they leave the house.
>
> (Daughter Qian, aged 21)

Such all-round care was also extended to the third generation: most women showed their readiness to care for their grandchildren. They tried their best to stop history from repeating itself in their daughter's generation because when they were young they were insufficiently supported by their own parents. For example, Li Yuyin felt it incumbent on her to help her two daughters with childcare because she had suffered from not having been given enough support by her own mother during an emergency. At that time, her own mother was looking after her brothers' children, i.e. her nieces and nephews, so Li Yuyin, considered as 'water splashed out',[3] and not as important as her brothers, was sacrificed.

Daughters' development versus mothers' sacrifice

Growing up in such a child-centred atmosphere, daughters had a much better development than did their mothers. However, the parental contribution to this child-centred project was not evenly shared: mothers took the main responsibility of looking after daughters while the father's help was often minimal. There were four families where the father took little or even no interest in his daughter. The husband's role was complete non-involvement. Ding Jiahua told me,

> My daughter went to middle school, from middle school to university, he never got involved in it. He just said, since it was daughter's business, her mother should be in charge; then tell him about it afterwards. It's enough if he knows about it.
>
> (Ding Jiahua, aged 44)

Daughter He's father started to treat her well after her mother had successfully sent her to university. I speculate that he wanted to have a share of the glory arising from his wife's twenty years of hard work.

In some families where the husbands both accepted and liked the daughters, the pattern was for the mother to look after the daughter in all aspects of life and the father to help with educational matters. For example, Ye

Guanghua (aged 56) did various things for her daughter such as making clothes, balancing her diet to provide the best nutrition possible, choosing a good school and educating her on how to study hard and so on. Her husband mainly paid attention to his daughter's studying habits such as how to hold a pen and ensuring she worked in a good light. These mothers usually attributed this division of labour to their husband having less spare time and took it for granted that looking after daughters well was their own responsibility. The mothers' efforts were sometimes at the expense of their own work interests, too. For instance, mothers who did shift work tried their best to transfer into non-shift work, which sometimes affected their earnings and status. One of the major aims of such a transfer was to make it easier for them to take care of their daughters. Zheng Lili was once a cook in a restaurant but, in order to adjust her shift so she could look after the daughter when her husband was at work, she asked to be transferred to do washing up.

> Doing washing up was tiring. Who wants to do that? I told my daughter later: 'For you, I am even willing to wash dishes'. It sounds ridiculous to ask a cook to wash dishes. If you do the dishwashing in a restaurant, you are looked down upon by others.
>
> (Zheng Lili, aged 51)

In the later redundancy crisis a few took the opportunity of internal retirement so that they could look after daughters better. Xiu Tianhong retired internally at the age of 44.

> I was working in a plant so far away from home. Going and returning, I was 11 hours out of the home. At that time, my daughter was in the second year of senior high school. I weighed the gains and losses and decided to return home. Because I was working in a wool factory before, if I could do some knitting at home, the financial loss could be covered. I also could look after the daughter very well.
>
> (Xiu Tianhong, aged 47)

The mothers' activities were centred around their daughters' needs: they prioritized their daughters but, by so doing, sometimes put their own work advancement in jeopardy.

A few of the women who had marital problems, took their daughter's interests into account and sacrificed their chance of attaining happiness in personal relationships. Tang Minmin's husband had a long-term extramarital affair. She had tolerated the emotional sufferings for many years rather than resort to divorce. She gave me the following reasons.

> If you divorced, you lost the house [*which belonged to her husband's danwei*]. Another reason is you have a child. How pitiful the child

> would be. People would talk behind its back: 'This child has no dad'. To be frank, we take kids into account to maintain a complete family. I don't want a half family so that people gossip about her as she grows up. How much pressure would be on the child.
>
> (Tang Minmin, aged 46)

Sun Yiping was widowed when her daughter was 15. But her daughter (aged 19 at the time of the interview)[4] still refused to let any man visit her and also monitored her mother's behaviour.

> My daughter said to me: 'No one can replace my dad'. She doesn't let me find any other man. Once one of my male friends called me and we chatted for about an hour. My daughter got so cross, scolding me: 'who are you chatting with? Look! How happy you were when you were chatting!' At that time, I could only swallow my tears. To be honest, in my forties, I definitely felt lonely both physically and emotionally. My daughter kept scolding me, I was really upset, but I said to her: 'I promise you I will not look for anyone else. I will definitely support you until you succeed'.
>
> (Sun Yiping, aged 51)

Child-centeredness was all-pervading in the social and cultural milieu in which these daughters grew up. The daughters' generation benefited from the collective input from their mothers' generation and had much better educational qualifications than their mothers through the sacrifices their mothers had made on their behalf (see Appendix B). On the other hand, the mothers' generation had their own parents to whom they had to defer; because women's role as the traditional family carer had hardly been lifted for their generation, these mothers were kept busy attending to the needs of both the old and the young, as well as those of their husband.

Mothers returning home

Mothers talked about redundancy as 'returning home', implying a move from the public sphere of work to the private sphere of domesticity. Daughters thus gained a full-time mother and few concerned themselves with their mother's feelings about being made redundant. When I asked the daughters if they had any family discussions about the possibility that their mother would lose her job, they generally responded that 'there was nothing to discuss'. Any further explanations fell into two categories. A few thought the redundancy was compulsory, and whether they discussed it or not, the result of being redundant would still be the same. The rest took it for granted because it would mean that their mothers could look after the family better. This was further affirmed when I asked daughters about the changes they had noticed when their mothers returned home. The most frequent

response was that they felt positive about their mother's returning home because she had devoted herself to caring for the family. Many expressed their satisfaction in having regular meals. As Daughter Xiu said, 'Life changed greatly. For example, before I just had lunch casually, but after she came home, she cooked a lot of tasty food for me'. Daughter Qin commented,

> My mum now looks after my cousin, me and my dad. I don't think she is less busy than before. But now she is totally doing domestic work, unlike before when housework was only part of her daily activity. Now she has become a full-time housewife. I feel this arrangement is very good because my dad and I are both very busy. I have no time whatsoever for housework. So I think I work hard to earn money, then contribute a little to the family expenses. My mum serves the family heart and soul. It's very good – at least me, my cousin and my dad are all well looked after. But my mum might be unwilling because she feels that she is still young and has now become an old housewife. She is always grumbling, but now even worse than before.
>
> (Daughter Qin, aged 24)

I asked the daughters about the general situation of redundancy and why women were so heavily hit. All, whether they were in high school, university or at work, accepted that redundancy was an inevitable consequence of China's inexorable transition to a market economy and that the old generation had to be sacrificed because they had few qualifications and skills. As Daughter Guan put it, 'Suffering and pain always attend reforms. So that generation is the sacrifice'. Daughter Ye provided a typical response.

> In the planned economy, everyone had a bowl [*job*]. Once you entered a factory, you would be there until retirement. But now it's a market economy, the previous arrangement would've been impossible. What's more, from the perspective of the population, there is great pressure on employment. If you put yourself in the government's position, redundancy is an inevitable move.
>
> (Daughter Ye, aged 24)

Some daughters suggested that social security reform should be put in place alongside with redundancy measures. Some spoke highly of the redundancy saying: it stimulated humans' instinct to find their own way out, it enabled redundant women workers to fill in the pool as domestic workers providing a service to young professional people and it left space for a younger work force. These understandings were in line with the official justifications for redundancy that persisted in the media, which they had completely accepted. The younger generation seemed to be positive about

the market reforms, even though their own mothers were disadvantaged by them. As Daughter Zheng put it, 'I can totally understand it [redundancy]. I don't hate their work unit. After all, it's not my problem'. When daughters talked about their mothers' experience and redundancy in general, they still followed the usual Chinese habit of putting society above the individual. But, as I will show below, when they talked about their personal development, they prioritized themselves and expressed their unwillingness to make sacrifices.

I also showed the daughters the same vignette which I discussed with their mothers about the factory technician who lost her job in a factory (see '*Age*' in Chapter 6). Like their mothers' explanations, the daughters' answers revealed essentialist assumptions in their assertions that men and women were different. Daughter Qian's explanation was a typical response:

DAUGHTER QIAN: I feel, first of all, women and men are obviously different. Look, the ratio between men and women among state officials is really huge. If you think of the reason, this is because a woman actually cannot undertake the pressure of being a high official, it's more complicated than you might expect. For men, I think not only in social interaction but also personal charm, they may be truly more able than women.

Q: what did you mean by social interaction?

DAUGHTER QIAN: In social interaction, whatever the situation, he can't be taken advantage of. Women, I feel, should be protected and cared for. Moreover, physically I think men decline more slowly than women. In addition, normally women are family-oriented. Now she is in her 40s, I think she will be more home-oriented.

(Daughter Qian, aged 21)

Despite daughters' acceptance of the traditional discourse of gender division, there was a difference between the two generations. Three mothers did link female redundancy with discriminatory practices in the labour market; but they still attributed this to biological difference and took such inequality for granted.

LI YUYIN: Men relatively have better skills than women especially in such jobs like technician.

Q: even if they have same-level skills?

LI YUYIN: Same level? [*pause*] It looks like they look down upon women workers [*laugh*]. It is because women workers have too many things to do. For example, when women get married and give birth, they are inevitably affected. Your capability in competition is automatically reduced. You can't compete with male workers. Similarly when the factory recruits people, it is also willing to recruit men rather than women. In general, women's status in the society is one rank lower than men.

> You can't do anything about it. Because it is women's normal routine to do those things at a certain age.
>
> (Li Yuyin, aged 54)

However, the daughters showed an increasing awareness of sex inequality. More than half of them mentioned sex discrimination as one possible explanation of female redundancy. Daughter Guan commented,

> Nowadays in the society sex discrimination still exists. You can see from many recruitment ads: only men wanted. It shows our society is not civilized enough and requires gradual development. In future, it should be better. Although she is said to be a technician, we need to look at what kind of technician she is; if the work requires strength, redundancy is reasonable because men are stronger. If it has nothing to do with strength, that might be due to the tradition in China; people always think the man is the breadwinner, so men are given more chances. It's still feudal, isn't it? So in this society, no matter where you come from, women have to make more effort and cope with fewer opportunities if they want success.
>
> (Daughter Guan, aged 27)

Although she spelt out examples of sex discrimination, she still accepted the physical superiority of men over women. She recognized the inequality between men and women but attributed it to tradition and custom, showing unawareness of the gender system which worked against women.[5]

While women of both generations took the biological difference as a justification for female redundancy, daughters' voices also revealed the complexities. For example, Daughter Guan told me that she would go abroad soon and outlined a brilliant blueprint for her future (though at the cost of her parents' house), showing the younger generation's questioning of traditions and desire for personal development. How does this generation reconcile such confusions? What is the impact of their mothers' life experience? What personal aspirations do they have for their own lives?

Daughters' presents and futures, and mothers' pasts

Personal aspirations

The daughters recognized the hopes placed on them by their mothers (cf. Jaschok 1995, Fong 2004). Many of them clearly mapped out their future development and some had even already embarked on it. There was a general longing for personal success in their voices. Daughter Ding was a first-year undergraduate, majoring in English.

> I am now preparing for exams. I feel an English major alone is definitely

> not enough. I am studying other stuff. I have several ideas. I want to sit for the tourist guide certificate. With English, I want to be a guide for foreigners. Meanwhile, I can travel to many places. Second, I want to sit for accountancy exams. Because I found out that it is still greatly lacking in our country. So my major is English, combining both should bring a bright future.
>
> (Daughter Ding, aged 19)

She had downloaded the accountancy exam papers and had started searching for training courses. Daughter Guan was another example of an ambitious daughter. She had been doing clerical work for two years in a Taiwanese-owned trade company.

> People doing such kind of work have to gain sense of fulfilment by dealing with mundane tasks. But I'm an extrovert. I like people-oriented work. So to me, dealing with papers and data is no fun at all. If you choose a job out of keeping your character, I think you can never be successful. So I gave it up.
>
> (Daughter Guan, aged 27)

She intended to go abroad to study marketing in the near future and planned to work in a managerial position in a large company within five years. But at the same time, she was also aware of the constraints on girls such as discriminatory practices in the labour market – to gain success 'women have to make more effort'.

The daughters' desire for success reflects the values of competition and efficiency which have been highly promoted in the changeover to the market economy. Their plans for the future are also anchored in the attempt to break with their mothers' past. They expressed the desire to avoid repeating their mothers' lives. Daughter Qin elaborated,

> If I were in my mother's position, as time passed by, everything of me would be taken away. I would have nothing left to be discovered, recognized, and appreciated by others. I feel such a life is very tragic. So I feel it doesn't mean you must have the highest qualification, but you should have a specialty, something you do better than others to make you irreplaceable by others. That is very important. Moreover, you must use your head and take a long-term view. For example, before entering a company, consider how well the company is doing, how far you can develop in the company. I feel the saddest thing about that generation is many of them perhaps didn't know that. They just went through their life muddle-headedly. Like my mother, she was a very ordinary person in her *danwei*. So when redundancy came, it would definitely kick out most ordinary workers. If she was being kept on, the work unit wouldn't feel it was a great deal; if she was being got rid of, the work

> unit wouldn't feel it was a great loss. But if she had been in an important position or very professional, no one could've replaced her.
>
> (Daughter Qin, aged 24)

Just as the public media blame redundant workers for being easily dispensable, she showed no understanding of why her mother was just an ordinary worker and how she had failed to make progress during her stay in the work unit for more than 25 years. However, her account showed her own emphasis on personal development. She clearly stated that she would never want to live a life such as that of her mother.

Daughters' personal plans suggested they had established a new meaning of work in comparison with their mothers' working track. To the mothers, although they crossed the boundaries of inside/outside, the work they actually did in a work unit was just a job, a means to earning money. The majority of women experienced it as a job with little future advancement. Conversely, their daughters perceived work in terms of career building and personal development. It was more than payment; it signalled the personal pursuit of success. The younger generation seemed to have wider horizons than their mothers.

Jaschok, in a study of two generations of women consumers in Henan province, found that daughters had learned the lesson from their mothers' lives which was 'not to continue the pattern of self-sacrifice' (Jaschok 1995:122). Similarly, in my study, the daughters constantly emphasized that they would never put the same amount of time and effort into cultivating children as their mothers had done. Daughter Li (aged 26), married with a child, said, 'My mother's idea is, "look, now you have children, you should prioritize children in every aspect, you should eat bitterness[6]" . . . But my idea is, even when I have children, I still want my own life'. Here it is worth noting that she relied on her mother to look after her child. So although she disliked the idea of self-sacrifice, she was nevertheless prepared to benefit from her mother's sacrifice.

Power, the root of the term empowerment, 'can be understood as operating in a number of different ways' such as 'power over', 'power to', 'power with' and 'power within' (Oxaal and Baden 1997:1). In this sense, the daughters were experiencing 'power to', a form of empowerment, that is, 'to having decision-making authority, power to solve problems and can be creative and enabling' (Oxaal and Baden 1997:1). These daughters were no longer satisfied with the dull life, the constrained stability their mothers had been through. Instead, they longed for individual development as Daughter Xiu described. 'I think I can never be in one position for all my life. Every young person has such feelings, very ambitious'. In contrast, my data has shown if their mothers felt empowered at all, it was basically in the domain of 'power within': 'This power refers to self confidence, self awareness and assertiveness' (Williams *et al.* 1994 in Oxaal and Baden 1997:1). I suggest that the daughters were gaining empowerment from their mothers'

life experiences through having a model to distance themselves from, and directly through the input their mothers had made.

The daughters' single-minded pursuit of their careers and resistance to self-sacrifice are reflective of the emergence of individualism among the younger generation (cf. Weber 2002). These young women showed their desire for a 'life of one's own' and a break with their mothers' experience of 'living for others', which younger women in German society had also experienced in the early 1980s (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2001:54). These social changes reflected in the daughters' accounts seemed to hold out the promise of a challenge to Chinese patriarchy. However, whether the daughters' future ambitions will be fulfilled is open to question.

Dreams and reality

By asking daughters if they had ever regretted being born a girl, I explored the structural and ideological constraints they have witnessed and experienced. More than half said, 'yes, indeed I regret it' and gave me reasons such as emotional discrimination from their grandparents; gendered social expectations on girls which had discouraged them from fully pursuing personal desires; the existence of sexual harassment and violence which had constrained the spaces they and other women could access and move in; and the discriminatory practices in the labour market which disadvantaged women in career development. Thus the wider social constraints on women are pervasive in post-Mao China, which to some extent might put their future ambitions in jeopardy.

Those daughters who did not regret being female still accepted that women would be expected to have lower social expectations than men and that women's role in the society was less important than that of men. As Daughter Jia (aged 26) put it, 'girls have less social pressure. Also in the future, in family life, you don't have to be the breadwinner; you can take less responsibility than men in supporting the family'. Ironically, these daughters had also expressed their clear plans for the future. This coexistence of ambivalent values is further reflected in their discussion of family life. Overall the daughters, regardless of whether or not they were happy to be a female, emphasized their own independence while still expecting a (future) husband to be the main supporter of the family. Daughter Ding described her ideal spouse:

> He must be able to support the family. Although I'm not a person who likes dependence, I also think that he, as a man, should be acting as a pillar for the family, from China's traditional perspective. At least, a spiritual pillar aside from material support.
>
> (Daughter Ding, aged 19)

Jaschok interpreted the 'awakening desires [of young women] to change

and adapt' more as 'a modernization of established patterns than as an experimentation with alternative life-styles' (Jaschok 1995:126). I, too, found that the daughters seemed to hold dual values, which were infused by past and present, tradition and modernity; the contradictions in their values were representative of the tensions and frictions arising from these oppositional ideologies. Thus, the newly-arising individualism among the younger generation is still under negotiation with the traditional ideologies. As a result, urban youth experience an on-going struggle of 'reconcil[ing] individualistic and collectivist orientations' (Weber 2002:366). Women, in particular, in Jaschok's words, experienced a complex theme of modernity: 'of Westernization and *kaifang* (openness in moral conduct) and its tension with customary constraints on women's public conduct and traditional domesticated personhood' (Jaschok 1995:116). The daughter interviewees articulated those puzzles and complexities they had faced in the confrontation and coexistence of modernity and tradition. Such confusion was more strongly felt among those who were born in the late 1970s and early 1980s than those born after the mid-80s, although such a difference is perhaps contributed to the age factor rather than a societal one. Some older daughters attributed this difference to the fact that slightly older ones had been brought up and taught in a relatively traditional framework and the opening up of China to a wider world on a larger scale did not occur until the 1990s. Daughter Qian commented,

> Look, for us born in the 80s, I was born in 1982, we are ready to accept new things. But I feel our generation is really in a dilemma because our era is neither very new nor very old. For example, we were imbued with ideas from my mother's generation, those of the 60s and 70s. At the same time, you have to face the 90s' ideas and now we are in the 21st century. I think you should accept both. So I really find it confusing. Look, in fact, I also know that some of my mother's generation's ideas sound right because they are more experienced. What they said must have counted in some way. But me, I always have some kind of resistance and am unwilling to accept her ideas. I feel her way of thinking is very traditional from our point of view, that is, not ambitious.
>
> (Daughter Qian, aged 21)

Her tension arose from her hope of mobility whilst her mother thought stability would be best for her daughter: she longed for life outside her hometown, even outside China rather than staying in her hometown forever whilst her mother wished to keep her near home. Similarly, Daughter Song stated the dilemma about whether to do or not to do.

> Most of us still inherited our parents' viewpoints, but in our heart, we are very confused. We want a breakthrough but we also question if it will bring about the total acceptance of Western ideas like those in

> Japan's Meiji era[7]. . . . Even when we accept those ideas, we still keep wondering whether we can put them into action or not. We think a lot but are not courageous in action.
>
> (Daughter Song, aged 24)

By analyzing *Shanghai Baby* by Weihui,[8] a semi-auto biographical novel of a young woman's self-negotiation in modern China, Weber suggested a pattern among young people of combining 'willingness to push the parameters of "acceptable" behaviour and the accompanying guilt (and retribution) when they do' (Weber 2002:347). Given Shanghai's rapid economic development and its greater exposure to the West, women there might be more pioneering. But the view expressed by the author of *Shanghai Baby* that 'The young Chinese women are socially and sexually liberated' (quoted in Herskovitz 2001 in Weber 2002:350) still sounds overly optimistic to me. In my study adult daughters expressed hesitation about actions which would come into conflict with traditional gender divisions: they either 'want to do but dare not to do' (Daughter Song, aged 24) or 'accept the idea but won't do it' (Daughter Ding, aged 19). Despite the daughters' increasing ambitions, breaking the bounds of traditions is subject to negotiation and struggle. As Daughter Ding put it,

> In terms of life attitudes, I feel their [*mother's*] generation could be regarded as conservative but I am also conservative. But to some extent I feel I am more open-minded than they are towards new ideas. For many new things, I understand them but I won't adopt them. What's more, my future life won't be like hers, carrying on working until the end. I like challenges. For example, if I was in this company, I could change my job if I didn't feel I have enough development.
>
> (Daughter Ding, aged 19)

The present empowerment this confused and ambivalent generation has gained from their mothers' past is under constant negotiation in the context of conflicts and tensions arising both from their mothers' past and their own present.

9 Conclusion

I embarked on this research in the hope of learning more about the lives of women like my mother, a redundant woman worker in urban China. My mother's generation lived through great social-political upheaval as China moved from the egalitarian collectivism promoted in the Mao-era to a market economy with widespread unemployment and increasing inequality. In this book I have discussed the dramatic past of these women, highlighting their social disadvantages within contemporary China, and explored how and why they came to lose out during the economic restructuring, despite the claim that gender equality had been achieved in socialist China. Although my journey of enquiry was complicated by the culture of caution, interviewees' unfamiliarity with qualitative research and the SARS epidemic, I gained access to ordinary women's accounts of their eventful, but previously unrecorded, lives.

The Cultural Revolution Generation

The Cultural Revolution Generation was the first cohort born under socialism; and so it grew up as socialist China developed. These people had their lives shaped by changing state policies: the 1960–62 famine as a result of the disastrous Great Leap Forward, the Cultural Revolution in the 1960s and '70s, the one-child policy introduced in the 1980s, and the economic restructuring which began in the 1990s. China's revolutionary socialism left an unusually deep imprint on the life course of this generation (see Hung and Chiu 2003, Yang 2003). Despite these social upheavals, and unlike most of my interviewees, some people from this generation nevertheless have achieved important political and economic positions in Post-Mao society (for example, see Bonnin 2006, Jiang and Ashley 2004). Gender and class played a crucial role in the stratifying process.

My interviewees were born into working-class families, so from a young age they were recruited into family labour – unlike those famous Chinese women writers (see Mu 2002, Yang 1997) whose families employed a maid to help in the housework. Traditional thinking meant that boys' education was given precedence, since resources were limited; girls had

their prospects sacrificed in favour of their brothers regardless of ability. Then, when they were in the school, there came the Cultural Revolution. These young women, some of whom might have briefly enjoyed the authority of being a Red Guard, were sent down to the countryside where they were forced into hard agricultural labour. Their education was totally disrupted and they paid a heavy price in the long term. The aim of the Cultural Revolution was to attack and re-educate 'class enemies' in order to strengthen the proletarian dictatorship; the ironic reality was that children from families with powerful connections were able to get better opportunities. For example, they were sent to the army where they received education and had a better opportunity of getting into university. At the end of the Cultural Revolution when the national entrance exam resumed, most working-class women were not in a position to apply for the exam, having already missed too much education, unlike children from the families of officials and professionals who had earlier educational advantages within their families and were able to keep studying during the Cultural Revolution. The result was that working-class women were allocated a job in a *danwei*.

As these women approached childbearing age the one-child policy was introduced, and their bodies were put under close surveillance by *danwei* officers. If their one child turned out to be a girl, they were subjected to emotional abuse by their in-laws, whilst the man's participation in this national reproductive project was erased. Because of gender segregation in the *danwei*, women's access to power and resources were restricted and most women remained manual workers until the 1990s economic restructuring when they were singled out for redundancy, in contrast to their male counterparts who were more likely to become middle-level cadres.

Over the course of these national projects, state propaganda called for citizens to make sacrifices for the development of China. However, the virtue of sacrifice is historically gendered. Pre-modern Chinese history saw the pervasiveness of the rhetoric of female sacrifice, exemplified in the praise of virtuous wives and chaste widows (see Carlitz 1994). In early twentieth-century China, nationalist reformers considered the promotion of a long tradition of self-sacrifice among females as one of the strengths in Chinese tradition; a self-sacrificing woman became the symbol of national essence in the nationalist project (Duara 1998). In socialist China, the Communist revolutionary project was secured through a model of a sexless and sacrificing woman (Meng 1993). Growing up in a patriarchal family and in a 'socialist' society where traditional discourse of women had been redeployed, my interviewees had few options but to comply with this normative model of self-sacrifice. They attended to the needs of their parents, husband, children and the nation and bore the brunt of the suffering accompanying China's social development.

The danwei

The *danwei* was the fundamental unit of social organization in urban China. However, existing research on both female redundancy and contemporary Chinese women's lives overlooked the role of the *danwei* in shaping women's lives in Chinese society. Drawing upon a feminist model (see Figure 1), I examined the micro processes involved in the running of the *danwei*. Similar to the gendering of organization in the West where 'gendered inequalities, gendered images, and gendered interactions arise in the course of ongoing flow of activities that constitute "an organization" ' (Acker 1998:196), the socialist *danwei* provided the place where gendered norms and values were taken for granted, reinforced by ideology and reproduced in day-to-day practices. But the distinctive familial organization of the *danwei* played a special role in constraining women's domestic lives and their life chances. In the West there is normally a sharp separation between work and family life (though there are exceptions to this, such as the armed forces). In the former communist countries of Eastern Europe, where women also combined work and family duties and the state controlled production and other public arenas, family life was considered by women as a refuge from the ubiquitous state presence and a site of resistance (Einhorn 1993, Rudd 2000). The *danwei*, however, promoted the interconnection of the public and private spheres, which has resulted in another form of segregation and subordination for women.

The Chinese *danwei* kept a pervasive watch upon every aspect of women's lives; the familial control at work as well as at the residential community meant that homes were rarely a retreat from the state. By examining some of the practices in the *danwei* such as matchmaking and surveillance of family life, I found that women were affected much more than men by the conjunction of the domains of work and family. Matchmaking stories showed that family and work relations could be superimposed upon each other, which resulted in greater surveillance of women. A *danwei* leader acted like a family elder, interfering in decisions to marry, to have a house, to have a baby and in the conduct of marital life; Confucian familial protocols, well theoretically rendered obsolete by socialism, had been redeployed in various forms in daily practice of *danwei*'s control.

The familial model not only reinforced traditional gender roles on a daily basis but also maintained the gender hierarchy in the workplace. The struggle between work and family duties prevented women from joining social activities and thus prevented them from developing their *guanxi*. The ideal subject of good *biaoxian* was a male worker all of whose domestic needs were taken care of by his wife; the 'extra' willingness to be active in the *danwei* required for demonstration of good *biaoxian* conflicted with the obligation women had to fulfil their domestic role. Women workers were more likely to find *guanxi* through kin ties and, unlike their husbands, to use it for domestic concerns. Moreover, the double standard of sexual control

imposed on women was still prevalent in the socialist work unit, and this prevented them from managing *biaoxian* and developing *guanxi* with their male leaders. The work they were allocated in the *danwei* was only a job and offered little or no prospect of career advancement. The mobilization of women into the workplace thus did not bring about the liberation in the way socialist rhetoric claimed.

The *danwei* was not a place where socialist women workers found freedom from the traditional shackles of gender; the specific working practices and culture of the *danwei* system perpetuated gender inequality. I found that the *danwei* was not a gender-neutral organization; instead, gender was a complex component of the processes of control within it. The *danwei*'s highly interventionist role constrained women's life opportunities. As a result, the gender inequalities which women workers had experienced eventually contributed to the discrimination they had encountered during the economic restructuring.

The economic reforms

Feminist studies on post-socialist societies suggest that women bear a disproportionate share of the costs in economic transition. Gender stratification occurred in East Germany where women's labour power was devalued and they were increasingly excluded from work (Rudd 2000). Pollert (2003:350) also found in five central Eastern European countries that the recession caused by the transition and the ensuing growth of unemployment, poverty and inequality was 'both a class and a gendered process'. Likewise, the cost of China's economic reforms fell heavily upon women, but my study also identifies the effects of age, social hierarchy and location and draws special attention to the experiences of older and less-educated women workers in urban China. In the past, despite the state's rhetoric of gender equality and major efforts to implement it, in reality, women still experienced inequalities. Since the 1990s, by contrast, when the market reforms began to take place on a large scale, women have been thrown out into the marketplace, and they now no longer have even the state rhetoric to protect their interests. Women workers, horizontally and vertically segregated from men, were more vulnerable to redundancy. In particular, women textile workers, who constituted a major part of redundant women workers, were the first to be hit and the least well-remunerated among all the workers.

Gender and age played a crucial role in the micro-processes of becoming redundant. For example, the assumption that women become less capable than men as their age increases was widely expressed by women themselves. Although the 'one-knife cut' policy seemed decisive, some women's husbands escaped the full consequences of being made redundant through the practice of 'hiring back'. In the face of compulsory redundancy, women did make their own choices but these were constrained: most of them only had the option of which form of redundancy to take rather than escaping from

redundancy. Their decisions took into account familial considerations and their own anxiety about an unforeseeable future, which was a reflection of their lack of power in society. Their disadvantaged and neglected status was further confirmed by the attitudes of their husbands and daughters towards their situation. Husbands took it for granted that a wife's redundancy was acceptable since, in their view, women's proper place is in the home; daughters saw it as an advantage since they benefited from their mother's full-time commitment to caring for the family.

Being made redundant deprived the women of the welfare provisions available through the work unit whilst the state social security system was still patchy. Fortunately, these women were the beneficiaries of support from their families, although this was mostly limited to non-material forms. They also received emotional support from other women who had been made redundant, some of whom were friends from their former workplace and others, mainly neighbours, with whom they had become acquainted as a result of their common experience of redundancy. Such companionship did not alter their circumstances but it helped them to ease the loss deriving from unemployment. However, the social space open to them was restricted and the gap between redundant women workers and other groups of women tended to widen. This gap was clearly demonstrated in the analysis of the process and outcome of the women's search for re-employment. Redundant women workers tended to possess lower social capital than the workers in Zhao's (2002) study and citizens in general (Bian and Li 2001). Moreover, their prior social status was reproduced in the process of finding work through their gender-specific networks. Those in higher positions were able to access well-paid jobs and to maintain their social position whilst those already in a lower position were vulnerable to downward mobility. Most of them were confined to jobs such as cleaning, caring or vending with unpleasant working conditions, something that has also been found in national studies (for example, Jin 2000). Those who had married up were able to draw on their husband's connections to compensate for the lower quality of their own social capital but those few who were empowered by new opportunities were far outnumbered by those disempowered through redundancy. For most, the experience of redundancy was another sacrifice they had made for the development of the nation.

During the reform era, the Maoist image of strong, heroic women workers was ridiculed as a symbol of backward obstacles to China's modernization. Likewise, the blame for women's unemployment seemed to fall upon women workers themselves. However, their life histories suggest that the gendered redundancy my interviewees experienced was the culmination of a lifetime of gender inequalities. I found this biographical approach particularly helpful in theorizing women's work in a changing society like China. Through examining life histories, I identified how the state and wider society affected each individual's life and showed how micro processes were situated in the wider macro background (see Figure 1). Gendered redundancy

was one of the generational specific events for these women workers from the Cultural Revolution Generation. By linking their past to the present, I explored the changes and continuities of gender relations in urban China. Over the past century's ups and downs and political change, the sex differentiation between men and women has remained rooted in the Chinese psyche, not only represented in the writing of the history of Chinese feminism in the twentieth century (see Barlow 2004) but also reflected in these women's life existence. Whilst women were brought into the paid work by state socialism, important assumptions about women's domestic nature remained unchallenged. In their married lives these women simply reproduced the division of labour they had experienced in their natal family. Within the work setting, whether in the countryside during the Cultural Revolution or in the urban work unit, women were considered 'naturally' weak and deemed to be best suited to 'light' work whilst 'heavy' work was more appropriate for men. This gendered differentiation in turn cast women as less capable than men in paid work, so it was taken by both sexes as 'natural' that women should be selected to 'return home' when economic restructuring required job cuts in the state enterprises.

This common understanding of sex differentiation between men and women also contributed to the lack of widespread gender awareness. Chinese socialism certainly improved women's position but did not bring about their full emancipation. Whilst working-class women from the first generation born under socialism had taken on a working identity, the atmosphere of gender equality was effectively a false one created by state propaganda and rhetoric. In the *danwei* where workers were in a mode of 'organized dependency' (Walder 1986), women workers also kept the system in place by complying with its oppression, and transmitting and extending the internalized gendered values at work and in the home. For this reason, Chinese feminists at first saw the economic reforms of the 1990s as an opportunity to raise women's consciousness and to realize their individual social worth (Li 1994). As the economic restructuring advanced, workers (including women) were found to be increasingly prepared to defend their class values towards enterprise management, 'exhibiting a continuing attachment to the egalitarian values which in the past were assumed to have been foisted on them' (Morris *et al.* 2001:713). However, the challenge to gender discrimination in the economic reforms still largely remained with individual female entrepreneurs, women academics and cadres (see Wang 2000). The older and less-educated working-class women in my study were much less conscious of the emancipatory potential of the changes which were envisaged by feminist scholars. Indeed, in reply to a question as to why women were particularly selected for redundancy, both mothers and daughters attributed it to the 'natural' difference between men and women.

Whilst state feminism worked with the complicity of the mothers' generation, the daughters' generation seemed to hold out hope of changes in gender dynamics. Being single children, they grew up in a child-centred

environment, receiving the best education their parents could invest. They pursued empowerment by attempting to break with their mother's past; unlike their mothers who endured a lifetime of sacrifice, this younger generation expressed a strong longing for personal success and was resistant to self-sacrifice. This breakthrough is historically significant since a sacrificial spirit has long been a gendered virtue. However, this younger generation has internalized ambivalent and confusing ideas. In comparison with their mothers who accepted the woman's role and had to put their husband first, the daughters held dual values: they felt the need to strive for themselves but also to get the best possible husband and to push him forward. Thus, the contradictions in their values were a reflection of the intermingling of past and present, of tradition and modernity, and of the tensions and frictions arising from these oppositional ideologies.

One of the striking and unexpected aspects of the interviews with the daughters was that most of them aspired to become 'white-collar beauties' – highly-educated women graduates who are expected to deploy their 'feminine' charms in work encounters. These young women are experiencing new forms of gender segregation in the labour market and new forms of gendered practices in the workplace. As China is undergoing rapid economic changes, the experience of this generation signals a shift in gender relations – but whether this is for the better or worse is still to be determined. Recent studies show that important features of the *danwei* have been re-employed in various forms in the market reforms (Bray 2005, Francis 1996) and that *guanxi* plays an important role in business transactions (see Wong and Chan 1999, Wood *et al.* 2002). This again raises the question of how these young professional women will be affected by the legacies from former *danwei* system or its various mutations operating in marketized enterprises.[1]

The data collected in search for the past of my mother's generation has enabled me to analyze the gendered effects of economic restructuring and further the understanding of urban women's lives over time in socialist China. The vivid narratives recounted in their life histories have brought out the voices of working-class women from the 'unlucky generation' and show the points at which their lives were influenced and shaped by state policy. They have endured a lifetime of sacrifices in the service of China's social and economic development but, because of their internalized sacrificial spirit, when difficulties occurred they just 'ate one more bitterness' and got on with life. I hope this book will be taken as a tribute to them and a recognition of their sacrifices and their resilience.

Appendix A: Characteristics of 33 women in the Mothers' generation

Variable	*Number*	*Variable*	*Number*
Age		*Length of time in the last work unit*	
37–42	6	10 years and under	5
43–48	9	11–20 years	12
49–54	12	21–25 years	10
55–60	6	More than 25 years	6
Marital status		*Number of work units served*	
Married	28	1 unit	25
Widowed	2	2 units	7
Divorced	3	3 or more units	1
Job prior to redundancy		*Job of husbands*	
Official	1	Official	1
Professional*	4	Professional	18
Junior Cadre	5	Junior Cadre	8
Manual	23	Manual	6
Characteristics of the last work unit		*Housing (at the time of marriage)*	
Manufacturing	25	Provided by their *danwei* (couple work in the same unit)	6
Commerce, Service	7	Provided by husband's *danwei*	8
Government sectors	1	Provided by her own *danwei*	4
		Provided by husband's family	15**
Number of children		*Sex of children*	
1	31	Female	26
2	2	Male	7

* Professional/Middle-level cadre

** Three of these couples worked in the same *danwei* in the textile industry. Because it is feminized, the unit did not provide housing for its workers. (See Chapter 5, Living in the *danwei*: The intersection between work and family life.)

Appendix B: Comparison in education and job (aspiration) between Mothers and Daughters

	Mothers			*Daughters*		
Surname	*Age*	*Education*	*Last occupation*	*Age*	*Education*	*Present job/ambitions*
Gong	51	Senior high school	Professional	25	M.Sc. To be earned	Medical doctor
Song	49	Junior high school	Worker	24	B.A.	High school teacher*
Gao	46	Senior high school	Worker	18	At school	Going abroad
Li	54	Junior high school	Junior cadre	26	Vocational school	Company clerk*
Guan	56	Senior high school	Worker	27	B.A	Management
Wei	38	Junior high school	Worker	13	At school	Translator
Ye	56	Vocational school	Junior cadre	24	B.A.	Company clerk*
Sun	51	Junior high school	Worker	19	At college	Administrator
Shui	40	Junior high school	Worker	16	At college	Lawyer or public servant
Hua	46	Senior high school	Worker	21	At college	Business woman
Qian	47	Senior high school	Kindergarten teacher	21	At university	Administrator
Qin	50	Junior high school	Shop assistant	24	Vocational school	Business woman*
Ding	44	Senior high school	Worker	19	At university	Accountant or tour guide
Zheng	51	Junior high school	Cook	24	B.Sc.	University lecturer*
Yuan	40	Senior high school	Factory-level cadre	12	At school	Going to university
Xiu	47	Senior high school	Junior cadre	18	At university	Interpreter
He	46	Senior high shcool	Worker	21	At university	Administrator
Xiong	46	Senior high school	Junior cadre	22	At university	Administrator
Jia	59	University	Professional	26	College	Accountant*
Jing	50	Junior high school	Worker	22	At university	Manager

* The asterisk indicates the jobs of those daughters in employment. The rest are the aspirations of those still in education.

Appendix C: Biographical sketches of the interviewees

Mothers

Bi Hong, born in 1963, was aged 40. She graduated from junior high school in 1979. She took the place of her mother working in the utility sector in a chemical factory and worked there until she was bought out in 2001. She once set up a stall with her former workmate acting as housing agents. At the time of the interview she was on call for work in a private company set up by her nephew.

Chang Baohua, born in 1949, was 54 years old. She went to a vocational school in 1965 and was allocated work in 1968 as an operator in an electronics factory. She worked there until she was made redundant as an internal retiree and was currently doing various jobs such as cooking for others' family and babysitting.

Dai Chunhua, born in 1949, was 54 years old. Her father got attacked during the Cultural Revolution. She had suffered emotionally since that event. She was sent down to the countryside in 1968, returned to the city in 1976, and was allocated to work in a cotton-making factory. She worked there as a spinner until she was internally retired in 1994 and then worked as a temporary shop assistant until her daughter got a job.

Ding Jiahua, born in 1959, was aged 44. She was recruited into her mother's work unit (a chemical factory) in 1978. She worked there as an operator until, in 1990, her husband was able to transfer her to work in a light manufacturing factory in the utility sector. She was laid off in 1995. She kept a relationship with her work unit as *liangbuzhao* ('neither party looks for each other') for three years. In 1998, she qualified to become an internal retiree. She had been working hard as a shop assistant and a product promoter for some eight years. Meanwhile her husband quit his job in 1992 to set up a taxi business; however that came to an end in 1995 and he had been unemployed since then. Therefore she had to support her family.

Gao Yun, born in 1957, was 46 years old. She was sent down to the countryside as a young *zhiqing* (intellectual youth) in 1976. She was finally allocated

work as a spinner in a textile factory in 1978 in the city. After two years she got transferred to look after the storeroom. At the age of 42, she was asked to return home but managed to persuade her leader to let her continue working in the storeroom.

Gong Lihua, born in 1952, was 51 years old. She was not sent down to the countryside when she graduated from the junior high school due to her good *biaoxian*; instead she went to the senior high school for further education. She graduated in 1971 and was allocated to work in a food manufacturing factory as an accountant. She joined the Party in the factory. In 1990 she managed to be transferred to work in another factory near her home so that she could cook lunch for her daughter. She worked there as a chief accountant until her factory ran into trouble in late 1990s. She pulled strings to get early retirement at the age of 49.

Guan Guohua, born in 1947, was 56 years old. She was sent down to the countryside in 1968. Because of her bad health, she was able to come back to the city in 1974, working as a spinner. She worked very hard and finally joined the Party in 1990. However, that membership did not bring her any promotion as the factory collapsed quickly in the 1990s. She was early retired in 1992 and had been working as a shop assistant and as a social worker in the community committee.

He Jiabao, born in 1957, was aged 46. She was allocated work in 1978 as an operator in a light manufacturing factory. During a 1993 redundancy crisis, she managed to find her former superior and he arranged to transfer her to a job looking after the storeroom. In 2003, she was internally retired. She wanted to take an initial break before thinking about finding another job.

Hua Liyun, born in 1957, was aged 46. She was sent down to the countryside in 1975 and was allocated work back in the city in 1979. She had been working as an operator at the workshop for two years before her husband managed to transfer her to work in the utility sector. She worked there until was laid off in 1996. She had tried various jobs such as making deliveries, cooking and caring jobs. At the time of the interview she was working as a social worker in a community committee.

Jia Yunxia, born in 1944, was aged 59. She went to university in 1965 and was allocated work in a bank in 1970. She then got transferred to a trade company set up by the government in 1974, working there as a senior accountant until formally retired in 1999. She was asked to work by her former workmate who set up his own company.

Jing Xia, born in 1953, was aged 50. She graduated from junior high school and was allocated a job as a spinner in a textile factory. She worked there until she became internally retired at the age of 40. In the subsequent ten years, she had combined homework and caring for her daughter. Since her daughter went to university, she has been working as a shop assistant.

Li Yuyin, born in 1949, was 54 years old. She graduated from junior high school in 1968 but was not sent down to the countryside because of her status as the relative of a martyr [her brother died during his service]. She was allocated work in a manufacturing factory in 1970 as an operator. She was transferred to work as an accountant, but her service there was cut due to her childbirth and she then worked in the factory hospital as a cashier. In 1999 she was laid off but she managed to find work as a hospital carer. However, that job was soon ended with the birth of her granddaughters and she had become their full-time carer.

Liu Jingli, born in 1951, was aged 52. She was sent down to the countryside in 1968 and was allocated work in a *shiye* work unit in 1976. She opted to become internally retired in 1996 so that she could set up her own businesses such as opening an Internet café and a guest house.

Lu Guangpin, born in 1966, was 37 years old. She was recruited into a chemical factory in 1986 as an operator and worked there until she was bought out in 2002. She once tried to sell flowers in the street but there were too many difficulties involved and she was selling insurance on commission at the time of the interview.

Qian Mingyan, born in 1956, was aged 47. She was sent down to the countryside in 1974 and allocated work as a kindergarten teacher in 1978. She worked there until she became internally retired in 2003, and since then she had taken jobs such as babysitting and cooking.

Qin Weixia, born in 1953, was 50 years old. She graduated from junior high school in 1972 and was allocated work as a shop assistant in a department store in 1973. She worked there until 2000 when she became an internal retiree. She had tried to sell self-made accessories but this came to an end because she had to look after her sister-in-law and nephew.

Rong Xiuzhen, born in 1952, was aged 51. She started work as a teacher in 1967, and then was given the opportunity to have further college education in 1973. After graduation in 1976 she worked in various branches of the Women's Federation.

Shui Yi, born in 1963, was 40 years old. She was recruited into her father's work unit as a spinner. She worked there until 1995 when she was laid off. In 1998 she chose to be bought out rather than being transferring into the reemployment service centre. She had once set up a food stall, and taken jobs such as cooking and cleaning.

Song Yuming, born in 1954, was 49 years old. She graduated from junior high school in 1970 and was allocated as a worker in an electronics factory. She worked hard to become a Party member but could not gain the leader's favour. Her passion faded after she got married. She opted for internal retirement at the age of 42 so that she could open her own restaurant to

prove her ability. With the strong financial support from her in-law family, she was running the restaurant at the time of the interview.

Sun Yiping, born in 1952, was 51 years old. She was sent down to the countryside in 1968 and was allocated work in the local county chemical factory in 1970 as an operator. She finally got the chance of going back to the city on the excuse that she needed to look after her old mother. She worked in a manufacturing factory as an operator until 1997. Because of her working histories in the chemical industry, she was retired early at the age of 45. She had been working as a shop assistant, and in cooking and caring jobs since her retirement.

Tang Minmin, born in 1957, was 46 years old. She was sent down to the countryside in 1974 and was allocated to a job back in the city in 1978 as an operator in a pen-making factory. In order to look after her daughter well, she asked her in-laws to transfer her to work in a chemical factory near her family. She worked there as an operator until she was internally retired in 1998. Since then she had been working in various jobs such as cooking, cleaning and caring.

Wang Dan, born in 1948, was 55 years old. She joined the city youth team to go to Inner Mongolia in 1968. She was a shepherd there until she was recruited into a local chemical factory as a worker in 1972. Because she missed her home and also suffered from discriminatory practices directed towards outsiders by the factory leaders, she and her husband tried hard to get a transfer back to the city. Thanks to her brother-in-law's *guanxi*, she was allocated work in a light industry factory in 1988. Unfortunately the factory became unprofitable in the 1990s and she became internally retired in 1993. Since then she had once worked as a cook for others but did not continue as she was not paid. Owing to the difficulty of finding work, she had since stayed at home looking after the family full-time for ten years.

Wei Xinhua, born in 1965, was 38 years old. She graduated from junior high school and was introduced into a job as an embroiderer by her father in 1981. After two years she got the opportunity of training in accountancy and had worked since then as an accountant in the local factory. In 1988 she got married and moved with her husband from the suburbs to the city, working as an operator in a chemical factory. In 2001 she became laid-off; however because of her skills and wider networks with her friends in accountancy, she got a full-time job as an accountant.

Wu Ping, born in 1957, was aged 46. She was sent down to the countryside in 1976 and on return to the city worked as an operator in a food factory. In 1992, in order to look after her family better, her husband managed to transfer her to work in a department store as a shop assistant. She was laid off in 1998. She worked as a shop assistant and, several times, as a product

promoter. Due to bullying in the work environment, she gave up the attempt and became a full-time family carer.

Xia Yanli, born in 1960, was aged 43. She was recruited into her father's work unit (a street-run factory) in 1980. She worked there as an operator until 1997. She was laid off but was introduced to the street committee as a social worker by her former superior.

Xiong Yingli, born in 1957, was aged 46. She was allocated work in 1977 after graduation in senior high school. She worked as an operator until she was able to arrange a transfer to the utility sector in 1990. She was internally retired in 2002. She had taken jobs such as a shop assistant and was about to start work in a pharmacy at the time of the interview.

Xiu Tianhong, born in 1956, was 47 years old. She graduated from the senior high school and was allocated work in a wool-making factory in 1977, and worked there as a weaver until 1992. Because her factory was running down, she managed to use her sister's connections to be transferred to work in the utility sector in a chemical factory. In 2000, she became internally retired. Since then she had done some homework such as knitting for others and looked after the family.

Yang Ming, born in 1947, was 56 years old. She graduated from junior high school in 1964 and was allocated work in a heavy manufacturing factory. She was working as an operator until her 'bookish intellectual' husband pulled strings to get her a transfer to the position of accountant in a workshop in 1980. She worked there until she was internally retired in 1992. She once worked for a private shop as an accountant for two years. Due to her husband's *guanxi*, she found accountancy work in a university and was still working there at the time of the interview.

Ye Guanghua, born in 1947, was 56 years old. She was enrolled in a vocational school in 1965 and allocated work in 1969. She was working there as a technician until her internal retirement in 1999. She had been introduced by her sister to sell insurance on commission.

Yuan Mei, born in 1963, was aged 40. She was recruited into a manufacturing factory due to her father's introduction in 1984. Three years later, she also got the chance to be sent to the university by the factory for a further education. After graduation, she worked in the sales sector of the factory and had been promoted to deputy director of the factory in charge of sales in the mid-1990s. She opted to resign from the factory in order to set up her own business selling products from her former factory to the customers with whom she had been acquainted in the past.

Zhao Wenhua, born in 1952, was aged 51. She was sent down to the countryside in 1968, where she later met Liu Jingli. They were both sent back to

the same work unit in the same year. She also opted to become internally retired in 1997 so that she could join Liu Jingli's business.

Zheng Lili, born in 1952, was aged 51. She was sent down to the countryside in 1968 and was allocated back to the city in 1976. She was working as a cook until she was internally retired in 1997 and then sold food in the street until her daughter found work.

Zhou Ping, born in 1944, was aged 59. She went to the university and was allocated work as a secretary to the Party in an electronics factory. She had been promoted to the director of the trade union in the 1990s and worked until 1999. After she had formally retired, she was asked by the municipal trade union to work for them.

Daughters

Daughter Ding, born in 1984, was aged 19. She had just started her university education and wanted to become an accountant or a tour guide for overseas visitors.

Daughter Gao, born in 1985, was 18 years old. She was still in high school, preparing for her college entrance exam and hoped to go abroad in the future.

Daughter Gong, born in 1978, was 25 years old. She was taking a Master's degree in Medicine at the time of the interview and was intending to pursue a Ph.D. in Medicine.

Daughter Guan, born in 1976, was 27 years old. She graduated from the university and worked in a Taiwanese-owned company as a clerk was planning to go to England for further education.

Daughter He, born in 1982, was aged 21. She was still at university and wanted to eventually take on administrative jobs in big companies.

Daughter Hua, born in 1982, was aged 21. She was a college student and wanted to become a business woman.

Daughter Jia, born in 1977, was aged 26. She had graduated from college, and had taken a job as an accountant.

Daughter Jing, born in 1982, was aged 21. She was at university and wanted to do managerial work in big companies.

Daughter Li, born in 1977, was 26 years old. She graduated from vocational school and worked as a clerk in a company. She was married and had given birth to a daughter in 2001.

Daughter Qian, born in 1982, was aged 21. She was still at university and wanted to work in foreign-owned companies or administrative work units.

Daughter Qin, born in 1979, was aged 24. She graduated from vocational school and had worked as an accountant. At the time of the interview she was working as a sales representative in a privately owned company.

Daughter Shui, born in 1987, was aged 16. She was still in vocational school but was thinking of going to college. Eventually, she wanted to become a lawyer or civil servant.

Daughter Song, born in 1979, was 24 years old. She was university educated and had become a teacher in high school.

Daughter Sun, born in 1984, was aged 19. She was a college student and wanted to work in administration.

Daughter Wei, born in 1990, was 13 years old. She was still in junior high school and wanted to be a translator in future.

Daughter Xiong, born in 1981, was aged 22. She was still at university and wanted to undertake administrative jobs in big companies.

Daughter Xiu, born in 1985, was aged 18. She had just started university and, eventually, wanted to become an interpreter.

Daughter Ye, born in 1979, was aged 24. After graduation from university, she worked as a clerk in a trade company.

Daughter Yuan, born in 1991, was aged 12. She was still at junior high school and wanted to go to university.

Daughter Zheng, born in 1979, was aged 24. She had graduated from university and was now a university lecturer.

Notes

1 Introduction

1 In Chinese custom, the surname is put in front of the given name (i.e. the opposite to Western custom); and women do not change their surname after marriage, but children take their father's surname. In this book, the mother interviewees have been assigned a pseudo personal name. The daughter interviewees share their mother's surname with the prefix of 'Daughter' to make the pairs more easily recognizable.
2 In the staged employment pattern, women of childbearing age were advised to stop paid work and return home to look after their children until they had grown up (see Liu Bohong 1992).

2 Researching Chinese women's lives

1 Some scholars did not use a tape-recorder during interviews with redundant workers in Beijing as the issue is sensitive, for example Hung and Chiu (2003).
2 There are a few books which document Chinese oral histories (see Wang Zheng 1999, Zhang and Sang 1987).

3 Growing up in the Mao era

1 Hung and Chiu (2003) classified those born between 1948–1957 in general as those who were affected by the 'sent-down movement' as 'People born in 1948 would have been in senior high school in 1966 when the Cultural Revolution started, and being sent down to the countryside was almost mandatory for them. Those born in 1957, however, would have graduated from senior high school in 1976, the year that the Cultural Revolution officially ended' (Hung and Chiu 2003:232, n 5).
2 In Edwards' words (2000:59), this narrative is 'Before 1949 women were oppressed by Confucianism and lived in misery. After 1949, under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), women have been liberated from the shackles of tradition'.
3 Social memory is conceived as 'the influence that certain social factors have on the individual memory or the memory in society' (Paez *et al.* 1997:148).
4 The official age for attending the primary school was seven.
5 The natural growth rate of population from 1954–1957 reached over 30 per cent (Wang Yaling 1991:70).
6 Hua Liyun belonged to the younger 'sent-downs' (see page 33, '*In the countryside*'). The quota system was related to the ratio within a family between the

children who had been sent down to the countryside and those who remained in the city.

7 My thanks to Delia Davin for suggesting this point.

8 Xu (2002) confirms that Chinese women were very disadvantaged compared with men when it came to receiving education and that the difference has only begun to even out in recent decades.

9 In my study, one woman whose parents were professionals recalled that they had a family nanny. However, as she moved to live with her grandmother at a very young age, she could not benefit from that.

10 The 'class enemies' included the 'five sinister elements' ['landlord', 'rich farmer', 'counterrevolutionary', 'bad element' (thieves and 'hooligans') and the 'rightist'] plus some Party officials sacrificed in political struggles and intelligentsia (Zhang 1995:3 and note 5).

11 My interviewees reported only experiences of how their father's class background had affected them, but the background of mothers was also important. Having a rightist mother or a mother with landlord family origins could be a considerable handicap. In the Cultural Revolution when historical backgrounds were subjected to even more thorough investigation, the importance of maternal background in relation to paternal background might even have increased.

12 This case is interesting for the gendered discrepancy it reveals in the allocation of class origin, but whether it is an example of a more general phenomenon needs further investigation.

13 At that time, joining the army was considered a chance of further development for education (see also Mu 2002).

14 My mother was one of the friends she made in the countryside; the implication I got from talking with my mother is that Dai Chunhua was at first unwilling to marry him, but eventually relented because her options for leaving the countryside were so few.

15 *Zhiqing* is an abbreviation of *zhishi qingnian*, whose literal meaning is 'intellectual youth'.

16 'Graduates' here refers to the annual cohort of graduates.

17 In order to take account of the two phases of sending down youth reported by my interviewees I have subdivided the 1948–1957 cohort into two sub-groups, those born between 1948–1953 and those born between 1954–1957.

18 This practice was used during the collective agriculture period: the workers' labour input was first calculated in points and then remunerated in money.

19 The Chinese expression they used is 'eating bitterness'. It refers to 'take on sufferings' but its specific implication varies with the context.

20 'Collective memory asks how social groups remember, forget, or reappropriate the knowledge of the social past; or, as Jodelet (1991) stated, collective memory is the memory of society' (Paez *et al.* 1997:148). Cattell and Climo (2002) suggest some writers use these two terms interchangeably.

21 This title was created for pupils in elementary schools during this political period. Wei (2001:190) recalled this 'was the title awarded to an honor student'. This label had no implication of violence unlike 'Red Guards'.

22 I organized a focus group in order to gather ideas and topics for my life history interviews.

4 The *danwei*: Gender at work

1 This expression also implies that women's work carries less prestige.

2 Interviewees also used the word *lingdao* (lit. leaders) to refer to those middle-level cadres or above.

3 Women interviewees implied such positions although ranked high carried little real power in a *danwei*.
4 The trade union was part of the management in the *danwei*, mainly in charge of its welfare functions.
5 According to Walder, his respondents were 'considerably better educated than industrial employees in general, and they have had far greater exposure to the world outside China than most other citizens. . . . [T]he group as a whole was remarkable for the rarity of overt political hostility toward the regime they had left' (1986:266–268, Appendix A).
6 Emotional labour refers to 'the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display; emotional labour is sold for a wage and therefore has *exchange value*' (Hochschild 2003:7, note, original emphasis).
7 I also speculate it might be a result of the double burden women had to bear when they were in paid work.
8 Yang gave a comprehensive study of the art of *guanxi* in China and listed three characteristics of it – intimacy, trustworthiness and reciprocity (Yang 1994).
9 Bian (1994) interpreted *guanxi* as 'social network' and showed how it functioned in the attainment of jobs and the exercise of mobility.
10 Parental influences were found to come mainly from fathers (Bian 1994).
11 Walder's (1986) informants made a similar observation.
12 She only interviewed leaders from state-owned enterprises.
13 In this metaphor, waste water [usually sewerage] is considered valuable in China as fertilizer for crops so what she meant is that good-looking girls were likened to the profits of the factory.
14 Her expression reflects the effect of state propaganda in which socialist China aimed to bring 'new' life to Chinese people who had suffered a lot in the pre-socialist societies.

5 Living in the *danwei*: The intersection between work and family life

1 Matchmaking was one of my mother's hobbies and she often brought single people to our house for introductions (see Liu 2004).
2 The 'you' here actually refers to her leader although she did not use direct speech.
3 It is the Chinese tradition that parents are not expected to be the matchmakers for their own children.
4 Actually she became pregnant within a year of marriage.
5 The lower tolerance of single women can be explained by the fact that statistically they are odd – there are far fewer single women than men so that theoretically the women could get married whereas some men cannot expect to be, and therefore they are 'left over'. My thanks for Delia Davin for suggesting this point.
6 Dormitory meant a bed in a room shared between two to eight people.
7 In the *danwei* before the privatisation of housing began in the late 1990s, if a worker died, his spouse and children could continue living in the family home as long as they paid the relatively low rent.
8 Neighbourhood committees are 'connected to the party and administrative leadership of the work unit, street office of the municipal government, local police, and people's court' (Shaw 1996:55).
9 People rarely worked in the same unit as their parents because of the state labour allocation policy, though there were exceptions in the early 1980s when jobs were scarce: jobless children were recruited into their parent's *danwei*. Although this practice was officially supposed to have ended in the late 1980s, Delia Davin (personal communication, 2004) has suggested that it was still in effect in very large self-sufficient *danwei* in China in the 1990s.

10 By 'running into' they meant that the policy came into effect whilst they were in their childbearing years.
11 Three women from the oldest cohort had experienced the tension between work and family life and had made fertility choices to reduce the size of their family before the one-child policy came in.

6 Returning home

1 'Iron rice bowl' is a metaphor for the lifetime employment enjoyed by Chinese workers in the pre-reform era.
2 The state retirement age for women is 50 for workers and 55 for cadres, but 60 for both male workers and cadres.
3 In this chapter I use *xiagang* (layoff) in a narrow sense rather than its broad implication as a referent to the general situation of redundancy.
4 These centres acted as the trustee for laid-off workers. The first opened in Shanghai in 1995. The scheme was extended to other cities in 1998 but many firms could not finance their centres and many workers were unwilling to enter them (E. Gu 2000), and in 2001 the nationwide operation ended. In Nanjing, there was a 'Double Ten' policy – workers who had worked continuously for ten years and had less than ten years to formal retirement could remain as laid-off and then upgrade into internal retirement when they reached the set age (Nanjing Government 1999). Otherwise, they would have had to enter the centre or choose to become 'bought-outs'. (One interviewee met the requirements but others commented that because it was a one-off policy they did not 'catch' this benefit.)
5 Two were given early retirement enabling them to enter the state pension scheme; one benefited from the one-off policy towards textile workers; the other was a middle-level cadre who managed to get early retirement.
6 As a result of the state's reformation of chemical enterprises in Nanjing, chemical workers were much better remunerated in comparison with other industrial workers.
7 The finances of *shiye danwei* were mainly controlled by the government, so these work units had no worries about losing profit. Xia Yanli refers to 'in a very good profit' in that sense.
8 This refers to the mobilization of women into the workplace by the state. But her choice of word implied that women were the weaker sex.
9 That was about one-ninth of the average monthly income (1352 yuan) in 2002, but it was more than half of the minimum livelihood allowances set by the Nanjing government (248 yuan).
10 By state regulation, workers who had histories of working in a chemical environment for more than eight years qualified for formal retirement five years earlier than the age set for ordinary workers.
11 This term refers to the honorific label the state has given to those who died for public causes on their active service.
12 She was referring to the disastrous famine of 1960–1962. 'Natural famine' is a literal translation of the standard phrase, *zi ran zai hai*, which is generally used when people refer to that event, even though it is now well-known that the famine was actually the consequence of the economic policies of the Great Leap Forward (see Teiwes with Sun 1999).

7 Life has to go on

1 Some of their families had bought their flat at a very subsidized price from their *danwei* during the privatization of housing in the 1990s. As Li Yuyin (aged 54)

put it, 'if the *danwei* also ripped the housing of its laid-off members, that will force all the people to rebel'.
2 Similar examples of resentment from women workers have been found in other studies (see Morris *et al.* 2001, Zhang Yanxia 2001).
3 It is customary to buy meat and vegetables for meals every day.
4 This committee, formerly the 'neighbourhood committee', has increased in communal significance because the *danwei* have had their social control reduced as a result of laying off workers.
5 This is different from the practice of hiring-back as offered to men (see Chapter 6). The work she was recalled to do was a temporary arrangement when the factory urgently needed help.
6 In the work unit, driving was a powerful position because it involved driving for the leaders.
7 Although that was a department store, individual counters had been sold to private owners.
8 In socialist state rhetoric, workers are the masters of the factory.
9 She was investing in her relationship with the customers in the hope of cash in the future. For example, she would remember customers' birthdays and send presents. When customers became ill, she would show her concern.

8 Mothers' pasts, daughters' presents and futures

1 The house was bought at a subsidized price from their *danwei* after the housing reforms in late 1990s made private purchase possible. They sold it at a market price which was about four times higher than the original price.
2 After she has paid the insurance company a certain amount of money for nine years, the policy will mature when her daughter is 55.
3 In traditional Chinese culture, a daughter was given away on marriage and became a member of her husband's family.
4 In our conversation later, the daughter admitted that she was 'feudal' in her attitude. Her use of the term 'feudal' reflects the effect of the state discourse on women's liberation which considered the prohibition on widow re-marriage one of the 'feudal' practices in pre-socialist societies.
5 All the daughters used the term 'sex' rather than 'gender' when they described inequality. The concept of 'gender' was not translated and introduced in China until very recently (Lin Chun 1997). Its use is still basically confined to Chinese feminist scholarship.
6 In this context the metaphor means that she should not relax and enjoy leisure as she had done before.
7 In Chinese history textbooks, the Meiji era (late nineteenth century) was described as a period when Japan was transformed into a capitalist society and accepted everything, both good and bad, from the West.
8 This book was originally banned in China, with authorities burning 40,000 copies because of its sexually charged content.

9 Conclusion

1 My next project will include an investigation of this shift in gender relations and the legacies of the *danwei* system in the new marketised enterprises.

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