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Understanding Small-Holding Households in a Changing Chinese Village

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PhD in Sociology

The University of Edinburgh

2014

Declaration

This signed statement confirms that the thesis, *Understanding Small-Holding Households in a Changing Chinese Village*, has been composed by me and is entirely my own work. No part of this thesis has been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

Signed

Tingting Wan

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Abstract

This thesis looks in detail at four small-holding households in a Chinese village that is experiencing the rapid industrialisation and urbanisation that has occurred in China over a number of decades. The research explores the dynamics of the households, which are at a point where traditional values and modes of living are challenged by the changing social, economic and cultural context. These small-holding village households are characterised by an interdependent set of family and household relationships and an intricate interplay between cultural expectations, resources dynamics, bonds of affect and economic and social activities. The research draws upon key literature concerned with household, family and economic life, to analyse the research data concerning these Chinese village households experiencing change.

The research has been conducted within a narrative inquiry framework, as an appropriate approach for understanding the processes of adaptation to changes at the levels of households and individual members: what people do, how they feel, how they interpret ‘the self’ in the context of social, economic and cultural change, and how they talk about all of this. Fieldwork was carried out over the period from 2011 to 2014 in the village of Shang (a pseudonym) in the Huangshan area, Anhui province. In-depth interviews, informal interviews and conversations with household members were combined with long-term participant observation in the village, encompassing various households and many social events. The analysis of the resulting data is provided around three key topics: ‘Divisions of Labour, Household Work and Changing Economic Life’, ‘Resources and the Household’, and ‘Household and Networks’.

People have a range of different ways of coping with changes, influenced by many factors including their roles and aspirations and bonds of love and caring; while at the household level, the different styles and layers of livelihood are influenced by and in turn influence the organisation of material and particularly non-material resources in the household. The stories that people tell about their experiences, feelings and understandings demonstrate that they are actively responding and adapting to change rather than being passive recipients or resistant to this. Both change and continuity are witnessed through focusing analysis at both individual and household levels. Combining ideas about the household as a resource system and a narrative inquiry approach provides detailed insights on Chinese village households in their changing social and economic context.

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Introduction

China has experienced dramatic changes in the period since the 1950s, with such changes having great impact on the lives of small-holding farmers and village households. A number of these households are the focus of my research, situated in Shang Village (a pseudonym, as are all names). The multiple generations of household members have long memories, spanning successive government policies. One of the most significant changes in the people's lives was the transition from the People's Communes of 1958 to the Household Responsibility System first introduced in 1978 (Twitchett and Fairbank, 1991). The villagers who remember all of this period are now in their sixties and seventies, and they tell many stories about life in these two very different working and living systems. In the People's Communes, farming households were treated as collective units in production teams. Household land, labour, farm animals, equipment and stored grain were owned and managed by the commune. Once even private kitchen items had to be contributed to the communal kitchen, with no private kitchens existing in the commune period from the end of the 1950s to the beginning of the 1980s. Peoples' work on communal land was evaluated and points awarded daily by a cadre, an official, in a production team. These points were used to determine the size of a reward at the end of a year, in the form of a share of annual production (some cash or some meat) based on the performance of the production team as a whole. Yang (2012: 156) has commented that the collectivisation system "expropriated household interests" and "replaced private ownership with a system of state ownership", sentiments with which few farmers in Shang would disagree.

China then experienced further dramatic changes due to two major policy reforms, the Household Responsibility System and the Economic Reform and Open Policy, both dating from 1978. The former had direct impact on rural households and the latter initially targeted towns and villages in the areas of South and East China, where commercialisation under the policy of Economic Reform was first implemented. The Household Responsibility System divided up the land of the people's communes into private plots on the basis of equal amounts per capita or per worker in the household; and collective cultivation was replaced by cultivation managed by the individual households working on their private land. In addition, farmers could also undertake business activities, such as selling vegetables and trading in farm animals. One of the most recent agricultural reforms in China and which directly impacts on the rural households has been the abolition of agricultural tax, in 2005. Some form of agricultural tax has existed in China for over 2500 years, as a tax on farm production and income. Not only has the government abolished this, but also a number of subsidies have been introduced for rural households, to encourage peoples' continuing involvement in farming activities. All these reforms and transitions have influenced the livelihoods of small-holding households and influenced the strategies (Crow, 1989; Warde, 1990; Wallace, 2002) individual farmers have adopted.

Due to rapid industrialisation from the late 1980s on and accompanying construction work in urban areas, there was a huge demand for low skilled and low paid workers. The financial rewards of even low skilled work still are much higher than that of farming. However, because of the Chinese Household Registration System (Hukou System), rural Chinese households were and still are restricted to an inferior level of

social support, with much better quality health care, education and employment opportunities available to urban households. The re-distribution of agricultural land stopped in the late 1980s, so that many of the younger generations of rural-born ‘farmers’ have no land. When they go to cities to seek employment, they cannot get jobs with welfare benefits (healthcare, housing and education), not only due to limited training and skills but also because of their rural identity. The children of rural workers are often not accepted as pupils by many schools in cities, so children are left in the villages with their grandparents when their parents do low-skilled work in cities, obviously with significant impact on rural household structure. In the process of Chinese urbanisation, the attraction of urban employment, the Hukou system, the demand for land, have combined to impact on the changing sense of identity that rural people and households have. Many have managed to acquire a formal urban identity on their Hukou booklets when their land has been expropriated by the government for urban construction; and others have bought houses in cities, which enables them to become urban citizens. However, my research on households in Shang Village shows that many people are still puzzled or perturbed by the sense that something irrevocable is happening to village life and rural identities.

Much of the published scholarly work on Chinese villages and rural families and households has been interested in comparing rural households and livelihoods in different historical periods and is mainly presented from the perspectives of change or continuity, with a further body of work investigating lineage and family organisation. These studies, discussed in detail in later chapters, are concerned with the viability of rural households as affected by the changes occurring from the land reforms of the 1950s up to the implementation of the Household Responsibility

System in the late 1970s. However, this work has mainly studied how Chinese rural life was affected by political reforms and restructuring in the course of establishing communism and polarisation in the 'New China' following 1949. There has been relatively little attention to the changes of livelihood for rural households brought about by the nation-wide implementation of the Household Responsibility System and the fast growth of industrialisation and urbanisation, and also the commercialisation brought about by new economic reforms and the more open policy since the 1980s.

The dramatic economic and social changes in China occurring since the late 1970s have had a significant impact on rural societies. The most notable effect, and the one that forms the backcloth for my own research, is that the traditional ways of living and gaining a livelihood in small-holding farmer households have been reshaped. Three aspects of this are particularly significant, regarding household structures, ways of household division and management, and modes of work. One of the major results of this is, as already noted, people from village farming communities have become more involved in industrial work in towns and cities, and villages have been left to older people and children. Although the pioneering research on Chinese rural societies referred to above has not engaged in any significant way with villages and households in the more recent rural China, this work has nonetheless inspired me to conduct my own research, investigating the recent changes and also the continuities experienced by small-holding households in trying to adapt to the social and economic changes of more recent years.

Originally my knowledge of Chinese small-holding households was gained from the long-term experience of repeatedly visiting my parents' friends in a village in

Southeast China. The village is composed by small-holding farmers in the South of Anhui province, where the Household Responsibility System was firstly introduced and the processes of industrialisation, urbanisation and commercialisation are more advanced than elsewhere in China. I have been visiting these family friends and their village since I was a young child and was struck by the changes I saw happening in the village and its households, particularly in recent years. This aroused my sociological interest in gaining a detailed understanding of how people experience and adapt to change in small-holding households in Shang Village. I started with the questions of why small-holding households become involved in industrial work in urban areas rather than maintaining these farming activities, and how they cope with recent changes. Once I had engaged with the relevant literatures on Chinese village and household studies as well as household studies in other cultures, my research interests developed to focus much more on the household itself, and also how household members experience, understand and adopt a range of responses as they adapt to the changes they are living as well as experiencing.

The research and analysis presented in this thesis makes a contribution to knowledge about Chinese rural village small-holding households in four particular ways:

Firstly, relatedly little is known about the detailed micro-level factors affecting household organization in present-day China, of how people understand their lives, those of other people, and their adaptations to change. The village in my study has been greatly influenced by industrialisation and urbanisation and this has not only changed people's styles of living but also reshaped the roles, activities and strategies of these households. My research engages in detail with this, by adopting a narrative inquiry methodological approach and exploring the micro aspects of how people talk

about their lives. In conceptualising how these changes impact, I draw on the work of Wallman (1984) on a small group of London households. Wallman points out the importance of non-material as well as material resources in households and that household divisions and strategies are affected by the practical organisation of scarce resources. This idea has synergies with Carter's (1984) thinking about households as cultural systems with rules and strategies. Thinking of household as systems of resources of different kinds has not been previously used in investigating households in rural China, and in particular the importance of non-material resources such as time, information and knowledge has not been recognised.

Secondly, my research shows in detail how the rural household as a 'system' adapts to changes in the local context and its prevailing constraints and opportunities, as a narrative inquiry concerning four Chinese small-holding households, with this methodology not previously adopted in researching Chinese villages and rural families and households. The unit of analysis in previous studies has been mainly the village and usually studied using survey and sometimes anthropological methods. The unit of analysis in my research is the household and also its individual members. Using a narrative inquiry methodology facilitates an in-depth understanding of the process of adaptation to social and economic changes by the household as a unit and also how individual household members are situated in this, by exploring how they see and understand the material details of how their lives have changed, how social relationships have changed, and how they feel about such changes in their lives. My detailed study of four households in Shang is concerned holistically with people and households and consequently explores the dynamics of the interplay between the

different components of household life as people adapt to the on-going changes they experience.

Thirdly, 'the household' is both a unit in its own right and composed by people who are differently situated within it, including by age and by gender. My research explores how the adaptation of village households to social and economic changes has impacted on and altered gender roles, including by both the women who leave and those who remain in the village making use of the changed circumstances and new opportunities. Wallman's broad approach provides a useful way of thinking about changing gender and other roles in households and I have directed my analytic attention to the configuration of domestic power in the management of both material and non-material resources, the importance of these resources to individual members, and the different choices people make in obtaining and managing resources at both individual and household levels.

Fourthly, issues surrounding identity have not been the concern of research on rural China. How people in small-holding households see themselves and a rural and farming way of life has clearly undergone change in terms of the practical choices people make. Many have migrated to urban areas, and a generation born in the 1990s have experienced no further agricultural land distribution and have no land. My research sees matters concerning identity as one of the organising resources at both individual and household levels, and as consisting among other things in the choices people make, their expressed feelings about things, and the stories they tell about such matters. The narrative methodology I have utilised in my thesis underpins my exploration of what has been termed as the 'narrative construction of identity', with people's continual production of identity occurring in their interactions with others

through time (Mills, 1970 [1959]; Elliott, 2005; Stanley, 2009), and including and importantly what they tell about this to other people, including to me as a researcher. My research on four small-holding households in one Chinese village of course does not represent the lives of people in all the rural households in China, but nonetheless it does provide a deep understanding of some rural households as they see and describe themselves in the process of adaptation to recent social, economic and cultural changes and it thereby illuminates aspects of the effect of change and adaptations to these in other village households elsewhere in China.

Chapter One, 'Chinese Village Households in a Narrative Inquiry Project', concerns the methodological approach of my research. It explores the situation of small-holding households in present-day China and how I conducted my narrative inquiry project regarding four households in a particular Chinese village. This chapter also explores how household lives are constructed and represented in the stories people tell and how 'the self' is understood in such an approach.

Chapter Two, 'Households, Resources and Economic Life', is concerned with the sociological and anthropological literature on households in both Chinese and other cultures. This chapter reviews literature on the impact of Chinese economic reforms and the Household Responsibility System on rural household production and consumption, household divisions of labour, and people's work and employment. Different ideas about conceptualising 'the household' are explored and some important characteristics of household life are discussed. In particular, ideas about the structure, shared activities and meaning of life in households within a 'resources' perspective is discussed in connection with Wallman's (1984) influential work. This proposes a framework for analysing households which I have drawn on in my study,

including her emphasis on both material resources (land, labour and capital) and non-material ones (information, time, identity and knowledge).

Chapter Three, 'The Four Households Introduced', provides some basic information about the four households in my study, including the key members in each household and people's main activities. Chapters Four, Five and Six following provide the analysis of my fieldwork data, presenting an analysis drawing on a range of in-depth both formal and informal interviews, more informal conversations and structured observations carried out from 2011 to 2013 with additional fieldwork in 2014. In Chapter Four, 'Divisions of Labour, Household Work and Changing Economic Life', people's stories and accounts are analysed around exploring the different activities divided between the 'household head' and the 'resource manager', how 'household divisions' occur, and choices and strategies concerning related resources management. Changes in the activities and roles of household members have related impact on their livelihoods, and also vice versa, and this dynamic of change is explored.

Chapter Five, on 'Resources and the Household', explores resources and choices, and households lifestyles and livelihoods. It analyses people's told experiences and interpretations of land, labour and capital as material resources at the basis of their life experiences. 'Information, time, identity and knowledge' as non-material resources are analysed through typical normal life events – 'dinner time' in the research households, and also how the younger generations in each household during the Chinese New Year 2013 talked about transitions in their lives and in particular the draw of richer resources in cities. All these things have implication for and impact on household boundaries as well as livelihoods. In Chapter Six, on

‘Households and Networks’, analysis is concerned with the household as the basis of a network shaping and facilitating people’s opportunities and choices, with social networks crucial to the households in coping with the variety of changes occurring. The analysis includes both the geographic and the affective aspects of networks in the households, and it also explores how networks operate as a form of social capital by studying crises in the research households.

Chapter 1 Chinese Village Households in a Narrative Inquiry Project

Households in a Changing Chinese Village: Introduction

The impact of ongoing industrialisation and urbanisation is marking the Chinese rural landscape with new features: muddy country lanes are transformed into neat concrete roads on which busy villagers commute to work in towns and cities; much once rich agricultural land is now occupied by industrial buildings or left for just a very few domestic animals; and only the elderly and children are easily visible in most villages.

Chinese farmers have been seen as an enduring, stable, intelligent and diligent people because they are united by the concept of ‘family’ (Jia), which has been always considered as the most essential unit in traditional rural life (Yang, 1965a). In the Chinese context, a number of generations have traditionally lived together in the same household. In the eyes of peasants, the meaning of the household is that it is not only a place for food, rest, protection and producing particular goods for its members, but also the home for the soul of people’s ancestors and for future generations (Freedman, 1958; Yang, 1965a). Members have always tried to manage the available resources in the household and engage with nature and agriculture so as to ensure prosperity and social mobility for future generations (Huang, 1998). However, in recent years China has seen a dramatic change in its rural society: members of these small-holder households have become less and less involved with farming activities and started to seek non-agricultural work opportunities in nearby towns and cities.

Many members of rural households in present-day China are in search of a way of life that seems very different from that of earlier generations.

The Chinese economic reforms of the late 1970s started with the implementation of a 'Household Responsibility System' in the agricultural sector, which divided the land of the People's Communes into private plots. Under the Household Responsibility System, collective cultivation was replaced by cultivation by the individual household, and such households gained the contractual right to use formerly group-controlled resources like commune land, farm animals and most equipment. These things were divided among member households on the basis of equal amounts per capita or per worker (Khan, 1984), to enable them to:

“make independent choices on crops and farming methods, and to dispose privately of produce beyond a stipulated amount delivered to the state. Agricultural surpluses could henceforth either be consumed or sold to the state or on the free market. The resulting rapid gains in agricultural production were accompanied by increases in nonfarm employment.” (Netting, 1993: 233)

This system made it possible for people to buy food without having an urban registration status, helped to increase the food supply, and also enabled the increased availability of food in the free market in cities and the end of food rationing (Zhao, 1999). Khan (1984: 27) has commented that the Household Responsibility System was institutionally very similar to the system characterising Chinese small-holders production in the past and is essentially a system of guaranteed tenancy and peasant control of land at a fixed rent.

However, Chinese agriculture has been stuck at producing on a small-scale, and also it has been argued that many Chinese villages are impaired by the kind of industrialisation and urbanisation occurring from the 1980s on (Xiong, 2011). First,

most small-holders have changed their production practices but with incomplete market information and without pursuing technical improvements and considering the available resources. Overall, Chinese small-holders have decreased their subsistence concentration on cereals in favour of higher-value products since the Household Responsibility System was introduced. Between 1978, the last year of the old policy regime, and 1982, production of all grains increased by only 16 percent, while the production of pork, beef and mutton climbed 58 percent, cotton rose 66 percent, and oil-bearing crops jumped by 127 percent (Griffin, 1984: 304). Second, seeking their fortune and a better life in towns and cities started among the younger generations of the rural population during the late 1980s. They now face problems concerning their identity, residence, welfare and children's education. This is because the Chinese Household Registration System (the Hukou system) has established two types of state-sanctioned identities: 'rural householders' (nongye hukou) and 'non-rural householders' (fei nongye hukou), and these signify a wide range of practical differences in citizenship rights and opportunities. There was a tight restriction over rural to urban migration during the 1990s. Zhao (1999: 768) points out that "this strict urban-rural segregation was mainly instituted following the devastating famine that occurred between 1959 and 1961. The original purpose of the policy was to restrict the size of the urban population because, among other things, the government was responsible for feeding this population".

Wu and Treiman (2007) argue that the Hukou system fails to protect the rural-origin population from downward mobility and permits only the best educated people to obtain urban status. It has also been commented (by Banister 1987; Chan and Zhang 1999, Cheng and Selden 1994 among others) that under the Huokou system urban

areas are in effect administered by the state, with urban residents being the state's direct responsibility regarding the provision of employment, housing, food, services such as schools, medical facilities, water, transportation, police protection and other essentials and amenities of life. In this context, the government now is encouraging traditional farmers to hand over their small plots of land to large-scale agricultural enterprises in exchange for urban citizenship. Rural residents can move into nearby apartments and gradually their village will become a town. One result is that they do not need to move to big cities far away. This has been referred to as 'townisation', a derivative of industrialisation and urbanisation, which has been seen as a way to spread the advantages of urbanisation to the Chinese countryside. In this process people are encouraged by the government to leave the land but not the former village, and enter factories but not the cities (CNTV.com, 2013). Migration from the countryside to major cities and the transformation of villages into towns has a dramatic impact on farmers and their identities. In particular, the farmer identity is not clear-cut for the younger generation, people who were born in the late 1980s or 1990s in the countryside. They are no longer farmers because land redistribution had been stopped around the time they were born, so they have no land. But in the Hukou System, they are nevertheless registered as farmers. When they work as migrants in cities they are popularly called 'waichu dagong zhe', which means a migrant worker who usually does low skilled jobs without having a formal and long-term contract and also without the ensured social welfare services that come with this. But how do they see themselves and understand their own identities in present-day Chinese society? Can those who leave the land adapt to the major changes in culture and life styles that the towns and cities demand? Do they see themselves as farmers or do

they develop very different ways of understanding their lives, economic activities and employment?

The village I have carried out research in, Shang Village, is one of the vast number of villages in China experiencing such changes. Shang Village is about eight hundred people and two hundred households in size. It is located in Xiuning County, Huangshan City area, south of Anhui province, and is approximately twelve kilometres northwest of Tunxi, the capital of the Huangshan area. Shang Village is attracting many enterprises wanting to exploit its land and labour in order to develop industrial processes, business enterprises and local tourism. The traditional small-holder farmer households have lived in the village for generations, cultivating rice, oilseed rape, soy bean and sesame as the most important economic crops. The major sideline for most of the households has traditionally been backyard pork farming, especially keeping a local species, the Southern Anhui Black Pig. These small-holder households have also grown some staple vegetables for family and friends, or sold these at the markets in the nearby town or in the city of Tunxi. In recent years, however, the village has become more industrial and less agricultural; some land has been converted to use by dozens of small enterprises producing and processing industrial materials and also those for the service sector; and there are more and more villagers who are giving up agricultural production and instead working for the new industries but without formal contracts. How do the households of the village cope with this change? What do their different members do, how is this decided, and how do they understand this?

My decision to carry out a household-focused study within a changing Chinese village context was influenced by the characteristics of households in farming society: “people in a farming society do not cultivate solely as individuals, and the omnipresence of households as productive units derives from the gains of specialisation in various tasks, gains that exist because of age- and sex- specific differences in aptitude, strength, knowledge, and experience” (Binswanger and McIntire, 1987: 81). The household is a patrilineal primary group in the village, within which are married sons, their wives, grandchildren and other relatives. The basis of rural social life is the relationships existing between the members of a household and also inter-connected households (Yang, 1965b). And a centrally important characteristic of farming households concerns the way that their individual members think, organise and work in contributing to the household instead of just themselves individually. This led to my interest in exploring the household as a system, a unit, and its style of living in the changing local environment of rural China.

Small-holder households became the typical rural households and the main units of production in rural China when the Household Responsibility System was introduced at the end of the 1970s. Netting has proposed that it is the traditionally strong association between family size and wealth that has reinforced the small-holder household as a particularly important social group in Chinese rural society (Netting, 1993, 1982). Moreover, the small-holder household is also seen as characterised by its flexibility and responsiveness to the changing socio-economic environment, enabling its members to adapt to the subtle shifts in opportunities and constraints that confront them (Netting, 1979: 57). These are practical people who adopt a ‘best view’ perspective to adapt to the changing environment. A series of questions arise,

adapted from Wallman's study of eight households in London (Wallman, 1984: 3):

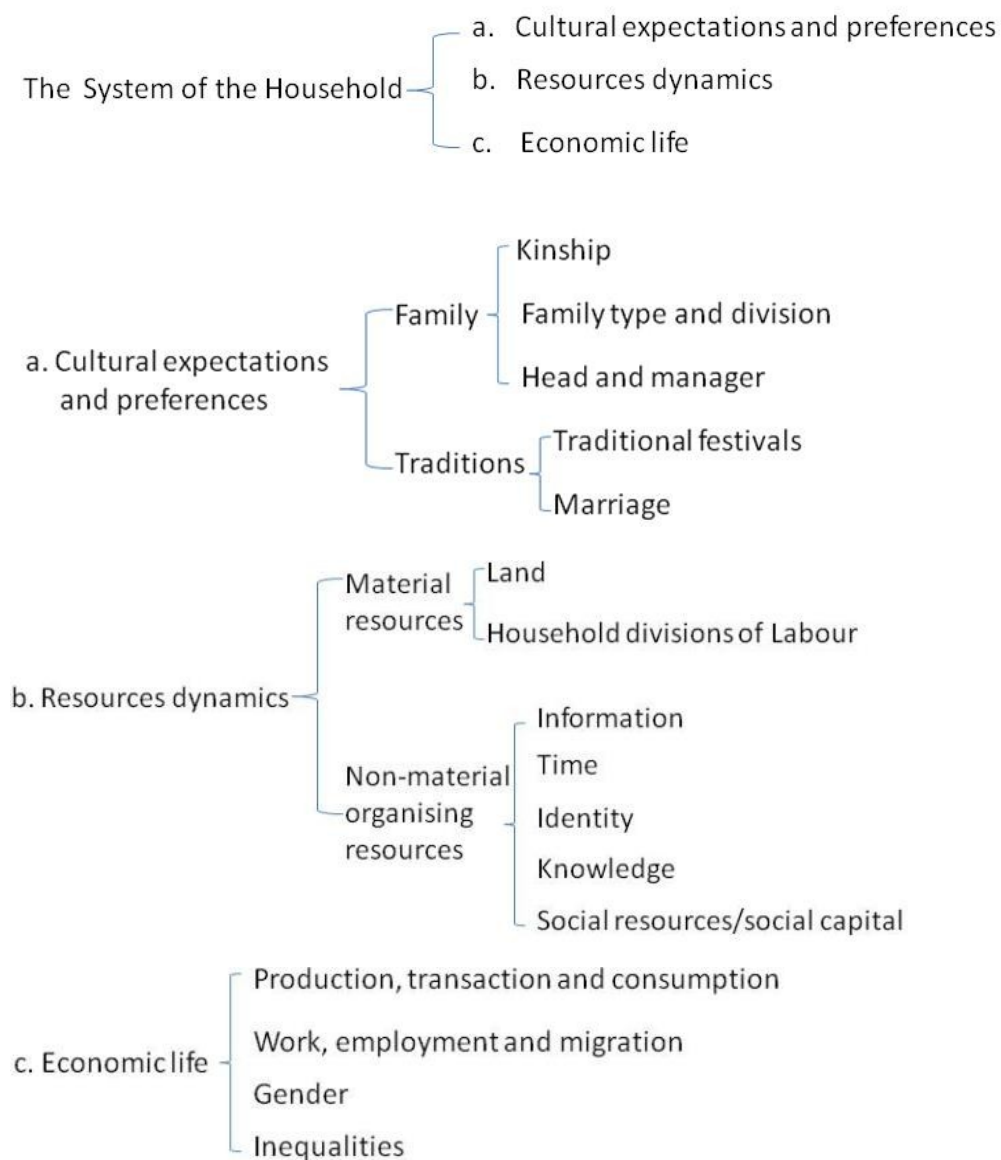
Who lives in the village? What economic and other resources do they depend on? Where do they work and what do they do? What do they know? Where do they shop and what do they buy? How do they manage time, labour and resources? What do members of households do and how do they understand their choices? What 'better' or 'worse' resources do they have compared with each other? Do all the households use or try to use the local environment in the same way? What particular household characteristics and practices might account for any significantly different household strategies in the same village? How does the household as a unit manage the available resources as impacted by the changing socio-economic environment of the village? I shall return to various of these questions at later points in the thesis.

There is little known about the micro-level factors affecting the organisation of households in present-day China. Chen (2009: 53) has pointed out, "it is generally believed that industrialisation and education undermine traditional values and instill modern ideology, thereby weakening the extended family and encouraging independent nuclear families. Nonetheless, such explanations, derived from the modernisation perspective, offer little guidance on how the process operates at the household or individual level". My research on some rural households in Shang Village explores the dynamics of these households, which are at a point where traditional values and modes of living have been challenged by the changing local socio-economic context, but where there are structures, identities and ways of living still marked by traditional forms. It shows how this process operates at the household or individual level and so fills the gap identified by Chen (2009).

How to Understand Households in Change

My approach to researching households in Shang Village has been influenced by key work in the sociology and anthropology of the household, family and Chinese rural society (including by Blecher 1983; Carter 1984; Chen 2009; Cohen 1970, 1992, 2005; Goody 1972; Huang 1998; Netting 1993; Netting, Wilk and Arnould 1984; Wallman 1984; Yanagisako 1979). The household is an interdependent unit or system of close family relationships with an intricate interplay between its components, including cultural expectations and preferences, resources dynamics, and its members' economic lives (see Figure 1. Conceptual Framework). The composition and circumstances of each household reflects the practical considerations it faces and its responses to the local context. The central analytical focus of my research concerns the processes by which the economic lives and livelihoods of households and their members are impacted by these components and how the household works to cope with the changing local environment.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework



From her research on eight households in London, Wallman (1984) proposes that the viability of households depends on their access to and management of resources derived from the capabilities of their members and from the local environment. The concept of household resources was developed in Wallman’s study, and she proposes that:

“Even households with similar objective characteristics living in the same urban neighbourhood may have markedly different styles of livelihood. This happens because the values of the separate resources that constitute and define the household system are not fixed, and because each of them is combined with or converted into others in different ways throughout the ordinary processes of livelihood.” (Wallman, 1984: 40-41)

In addition, Carter (1984) has defined the household as consisting of two essential elements, rules and strategies, in providing a set of household practices. In terms of the outcome of the interplay among the different parts of the workings of the household, Wallman (1984: 41) comments that “social process at any level is not free; it is constrained by other things happening in and around the local environment, and by the scope of the resources it offers. Most people cope well enough, in their own terms, to get by” and also that “some look as though they manage a great deal better than that...In any case there is more than one kind of successful performance” (Wallman, 1984: 6). The management of accessed and used resources for household livelihoods, in Bourdieu’s (1977: 8) words, is difficult and “only a virtuoso with a perfect command of his ‘art of living’ can play on all the resources inherent in the ambiguities and uncertainties of behaviour and situation in order to produce the actions appropriate to each case... the art of necessary improvisations which defines excellence”.

My access to the villagers of Shang Village and being able to research households there came about through personal connections. As an educated young person, my father had been sent to work and live in the village for three years in the early 1970s because of the well-known policy from the central government that educated youths (Zhishi Qingnian, those who had just finished their secondary schooling) had to work and live in the countryside. My father lived in the household of Mr and Mrs Huang. One of Mr and Mrs Huang’s sons has been the Director of the village (Cunzhang) for

ten years and the Party Secretary (Shuji) of the village for thirty years. He was still the Party Secretary of the village during my research and is still now after it has ended. Mr and Mrs Huang and their son Huang Shuji have been very good friends with my parents for about forty years. Often I go to Shang to visit them with my parents during traditional festivals. This has given me the chance to experience life in the Chinese countryside, get to know the village governors and meet villagers while walking about, going to their neighbourhoods, attending their celebrations and social events, seeing and talking about the successive changes there. This has provided me with a great deal of background knowledge and in-depth contact with many villagers, and also the ability to speak the local language, all crucial for successful research (Yang, 1965b).

After Huang Shuji and I discussed my proposed research and initial fieldwork plan in 2010, he helped me organise a meeting with village households who were potentially interested in becoming research participants. Finally, four households were chosen based on their willingness to participate in the research project: the Huangs, the Fangs, the Chengs and the Zhus. Besides the Huangs (Huang Shuji's family), the other three households are also ones where my father became friends with some of their members when he was working and living in the village. They have shown much interest in my research, generously shared their ideas and opinions with me, and allowed me to observe their everyday lives and activities. From 2011 to late 2014, I have carried out three long periods of research (over two months each time) in Shang and also supplemented this with many one or two day visits, spending a total of around twelve months there. This has involved interviewing; collecting original documents about the changes impacting on Chinese rural society; attending

and observing village meetings, family and social events (celebrations and crisis); and also writing fieldnotes throughout.

Qualitative data collection is described by Allan (1991) as an ‘inquiry from the inside’, a term he adapts from Evered and Louis (1981), because it requires researchers to have a fuller and more flexible involvement with their respondents than other approaches. Further, the inquiry process constructed by a narrative inquiry approach provides a powerful lens and useful analytical tools for closely examining changing rural life. Riessman (2008: 6) sees the term ‘narrative’ as one that “refers to texts at several levels that overlap: stories told by research participants (which are themselves interpretive), interpretive accounts developed by an investigator based on interviews and fieldwork observation (a story about stories), and even the narrative a reader constructs after engaging with the participant’s and investigator’s narratives”. This is the broad approach to narrative inquiry that has guided my own.

Connelly and Clandinin (2006) have highlighted that narrative inquiry is the study of experience narrated as story (narrative as data) and is linked to a methodological approach, narrative inquiry, which they see as “the study of experience as story... first and foremost a way of thinking about experience. Narrative inquiry as a methodology entails a view of the phenomenon. To use narrative inquiry methodology is to adopt a particular view of experience as phenomenon under study” (Connelly and Clandinin, 2006: 375). However, Stanley and Temple (2008) point to the confusions in terminology and argue for distinguishing between ‘narrative study’ and ‘narrative inquiry’:

“one important fault-line, for instance, concerns ‘narrative studies’ (signalling a focus on narrative as a particular kind of data or the content of this) as compared with ‘narrative inquiry’ (signalling narrative as a methodological

and analytical approach by the researcher), with at points conflicting epistemological underpinnings, clashing theoretical presuppositions, and discordant methodological precepts.” (Stanley and Temple, 2008: 276)

Following this, in the composing chapters of the thesis I refer to my approach as a narrative inquiry, and I refer to interviews and stories and the accounts provided in them rather than narratives, in this following both Riessman and Stanley and Temple.

Together with narrative inquiry as the methodological framework of my thesis, the in-depth interviews and ethnographic observations I have carried out have enabled rich information about the households and their place in the village to be collected. The direct observation of events is essential for my research purposes, and so interview data alone would not be sufficient for my purposes (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). Direct participant observations of many household occasions, including of family visits during traditional festivals, attending marriages, the celebrations for newborn babies and children’s achievement in school, and also family crises, has provided me with detailed information about the various resources and ways of organising of the households I have researched. This has promoted a depth of understanding not otherwise possible.

A Narrative Inquiry Approach: Stories, Lives and Households

Is narrative a story? Riessman (2008: 23) argues that “narratives come in many forms and sizes, ranging from brief, tightly bounded stories told in answer to a single question, to long narratives that build over the course of several interviews and traverse temporal and geographical space- biographical accounts that refer to entire lives or careers”. Narrative inquiry focuses on the social construction of the stories

that people tell in depicting their personal accounts of life in each household in the changing village. Although analysing stories provides profound insights into understanding how people construct, experience and interact within certain social structures including families (Plummer, 1995), it is in addition crucial that the researcher should take into account what purpose a story serves and why the research participant has chosen to present their account in this particular way when they tell a story (Earthy and Cronin, 2008: 424). Narrative is a type of inquiry, a methodology with a set of broad procedural ideas and concepts, and it involves an analytical process encouraging responsiveness to the dynamics of the research context, rather than treating a story as a privileged kind of data or a specific method or technique (Stanley, 2010b, 2008). In particular, Stanley provides a holistic definition of what narrative inquiry is. She views it:

“in terms of the analytical activities of the researcher in constructing a narrative frame by analysing stories that are linked together in life, involving the researcher’s interpretational work in perceiving tacit connections across social phenomena. Narrative here is an analytical frame enabling small-scale stories to be located in relation to a wider (temporal, spatial) context of bigger stories, by perceiving connections, to one degree or another, between stories; and this is analytically most appropriate when such stories ‘belong together’ in the research context itself. The result is a meta-narrative, the interpretational overview produced by the researcher.” (Stanley, 2008: 436)

In the human sciences, narratives are stories that organise events in a broadly sequential order which is both individually and socially meaningful and insightful (Elliott, 2005; Crites, 1971). Drawing on earlier symbolic interactionist and phenomenological thinking, Carr (1997) proposes that a distinction should be made between ‘first-order narratives’ and ‘second-order narratives’, which are termed by Somers and Gibson (1994) as ‘ontological narratives’ and as ‘representational

narratives' respectively. First-order narratives are the stories which individuals tell about their own experiences and personal identities are constructed by them in and through these stories. Elliott (2005: 12) comments that:

“personal first-order narratives [i.e. what I am terming stories] occur spontaneously in everyday life during the course of normal interaction. They would include the stories produced by a family around the dinner table in the evening, each member of the family recounting the significant events that had occurred during the day - at work or school perhaps. First-order narratives would also include personal testimonies produced in more formal settings.”

In contrast, second-order narratives are the accounts provided by researchers to illustrate a theme or a change in a person's experiences and are representational in character (Elliott, 2005).

Significantly, there are effects regarding social interaction, in particular because identities are constructed as well as told through story-telling and also constructed by people in such a way as to fit a particular culture and its ways of being and telling. This is a process of connecting biography and social structure through stories, and reveals the dynamics of human experience (Riessman, 2008; Mills, 1970 [1959]; Merrill and West, 2009). The three essential elements involved are temporality, meaning, and the construction of social facts. The feature of temporality places events chronologically in a meaningful sequence through developing plots – events in lives. That is, the plot in a story is a combination of temporal succession and the imputation of causality to events and persons. The meaning of a story depends on the social context in which it is produced. Importantly, Elliott (2005: 11) has underlined the link between temporality and meaning, suggesting that:

“the sequencing of events can lead to a particular reading of their meaning in relation to each other... This is not to say that those events will invariably be linked in all situations, but rather that in a particular context... the temporal

dimension of a narrative can be understood as fundamental to establishing the meaning of events due to the way that narratives impose beginnings, middles, and ends on what might more accurately be understood as continuous streams of happenings.”

The continuity of time from past to present to future is situated through events, and these events and their sequential arrangement constitute a story. Usually, a story is narrated chronologically with changes of situations and persons. Thus, the quality of chronology in story-telling relies on not only temporal succession but also causality. To address that in narrative inquiry, the causal link between events is also perceived as occurring through the chronological sequence of events. Chatman (1978: 46) points out that “events are linked to each other as cause to effect, effects in turn causing other effects, until the final effect. And even if two events seem not obviously interrelated, we infer that they may be, on some larger principle that we will discover later”. Elliott (2005: 8) further points out that:

“the imputation of a causal link between two specific events in narrative is clearly not the same as proposing a causal law such that the first event is both necessary and sufficient for the second event across a wide range of different contexts. In other words, while a causal explanation suggests that a particular event will invariably be followed by a necessary outcome, a narrative provides an account of how one event followed another under a specific set of circumstances.”

Thus in a narrative or some linked form of story-telling, causality is embedded in the chronological sequence of events in order to make this coherent and meaningful.

The three key elements of temporality, meaning and the making of social facts are actually mutually dependent. The meaning of a narrative depends on the continuity of time as connected by events and social contexts which form the where and how in which the narrating takes place.

The temporal dimension and meaning of a story are also affected by the other essential aspect, which is the making of social facts. This aspect focuses on the interaction between the narrator and the audience that is the social context in which a conversation or other talk takes place. Such social facts have considerable influence on the meaning of a story. This has been stressed by Atkinson (1997: 341) in pointing out that:

“we need to pay due attention to their construction in use: how actors improvise their personal narrative or their narratives of work accomplished. We need to attend to how socially shared resources of rhetoric and narrative are deployed to generate recognisable, plausible, and culturally well-formed accounts. We need, in other words, to treat them as ‘social facts’, like any other that is equally conventional, and apply the same canons of methodological scepticism as we would apply to any other acts and social forms.”

In this connection, the social role of stories is described by Riessman (2008: 8) as “how they are connected to the flow of power in the wider world... an important facet of narrative theory”.

To gain a better understanding of the links between temporality, meaning and social facts in story-telling, the importance of someone’s identity is highlighted, which can be succinctly understood as the ‘self’, a person who is a self-reflexive and a self-narrating entity. Stanley has commented on the temporal character of the existence of ‘the self’ in auto/biographical writings:

“Past and present are shown to exist in a complex relationship in which re-creation and recovery are impossible. ‘The past’ is a plausible creation, a mythology created out of scraps and traces and partial interpretations – those from the past as well as those of the historian-auto/biographer. However, this does not mean that the past and its mythologies aren’t ‘real’, for certainly what passes for everyday reality can similarly be understood as a chimaera, ghosts who may be powerful and intrusive but who, finally, do not give life and thought its meaning... the past is not ‘there’ to know; knowledge about it

is the product of particular minds creating a symbolic account supported by scraps of evidence...” (Stanley, 1992: 86)

Maines (1993: 23) helpfully adds to these ideas about temporality that “the self-abstracted person also is an organism that has acquired temporality of the self. This means that the person not only lives in temporal orders (clocks, schedules, etc.) but is one who can use time in the construction of action”. This also explains how temporality is embedded in social processes as told in stories. Time is not linear, because a person can reconstruct pasts and project futures, and Maines proposes that:

“time is an activity that turns back on itself through the intersecting processes of cognition (memory) and sociality (keeping collective pasts alive through language and documents). It thus seems additionally plausible to conceptualise persons as self-narrating organisms who in the process of becoming self-narrators, acquire temporality (and spatial abilities) and who therefore can abstract themselves into the past and future.” (Maines, 1993: 23)

The above discussion emphasises that people are active agents in the social process, and they use time and local context in constructing stories with meaning and factual status. Biography is the outcome of people’s creative activities in their local cultures and it is the local cultures, including the institutional milieu, that enable the creation of biographies which are organisationally embedded. This means that “biographical work reflects locally promoted ways of interpreting experience and identity so that what is constructed is distinctively crafted, yet assembled from the meaningful categories and vocabularies of settings” (Gubrium and Holstein, 1995a: 47). Additionally, Merrill and West (2009: 59) comment on self and society from the symbolic interactionist perspective on biographical research, that “by interacting with others, self and society are made through a process of negotiation and

interpretation. Meaning is symbolically created through language, developed in interaction with others”.

The ‘narrative constitution of identity’ is involved here, for instance Elliott like many others has proposed that “identity is not to be found inside a person (like a kernel within a nut shell) but rather it is relational and inheres in the interactions a person has with others”, and ‘the self’ or ‘the person’ is not a fixed quantity but is instead, “the continual production of identity within specific historical and discursive contexts” (Elliott, 2005: 124). The concept of identity therefore can be used to “refer to continuity or something that can be traced through time” and “the conception of the self arises by applying a narrative account of human time to personal identity” (Elliott, 2005: 124-125). The meeting of the ‘public’ and ‘private’ self is usefully commented on by Atkinson and Silverman (1997: 313), suggesting that, “viewing, hearing, or reading a confessional interview invites complicity with the penetration of the private self”. The importance of temporality in story-telling is reflected by the process in which individuals organise their experiences as having continuity through time but also recognising that telling stories about a life “involves the restructuring or reconfiguring of past events in the light of the present” (Elliott, 2005: 126).

Tilly (1984) reviews and criticises some theoretical ‘pernicious postulates’ in the social sciences regarding ‘big structures’ and ‘large processes’, and he also incisively proposes ‘huge comparisons’ (individualising, universalising, finding variation) in order to tackle methodologically the interlink between personal narrative and large scale social change. On this, Castaneda (2009: 1.24) points out that “Tilly studied the past in order to provide tools to understand the present and the future... He opposed methodological individualism and studies that locate responsibility in individual

isolated consciousness and pushed for a relational understanding”. Tilly’s interests and approach connects personal narratives with large-scale social processes, and in this:

“the behaviour and talk of individuals, collective organisation and action, and social processes at a large-scale, are interlinked... what is required is an approach which builds concrete and historical analyses that are concerned with real times, places and people; that recognise that time matters and that when things happen affects how they happen; that avoid ‘pernicious postulates’; that connect ‘real people’ and their conduct and talk with the collective and the large-scale; and that embrace generalisations and comparisons which link persons and social processes.” (Stanley, 2009: 1.2)

In addition, in discussing Thomas and Znaniecki’s *The Polish Peasant...*, Stanley has stressed the importance of ‘social becoming’ in the understanding of the self, explaining that:

“the conceptualisation of the self around ideas about ‘social becoming’ is revealed by the relational and sequential nature of writing, over time, in letters and correspondences... because the new ways in which people represent themselves and their lives in circumstances of social change and mass migration provide an index to the times and so make available in representational form what ‘self’ is and becomes under such conditions. Thomas and Znaniecki’s notion of self is not inner-reflecting, but rather a socially embedded, relational, situational and temporally-located self which reflects on the outer world of happenings and situations so as to re-engage with these. For them, it is less that people ‘construct a self’, in the sense of self-making, and more that a self is constructed and eventuates in situational, relational and responsive ways.” (Stanley, 2010c: 139)

The emphasis here is that the self is a social becoming, not an ‘inner’ self, but a self engaging with and representing the social context and the occurrence of change.

What constructs the self is the outer world and events and people in it, that is, the relationship between self and society. Thomas and Znaniecki’s approach is one in which:

“reductionist and static notions of self are eschewed: self is always in a state of becoming because receptive to (and thus in practice shaped by) social situations and relations; and what people learn is not ‘habit’ or fixed ways of behaving in society, but instead ‘rules for . . .’ how to interpret the emergent definition of the situation and respond to it.” (Stanley, 2010c: 142-143)

In his *Documents of Life 2*, Plummer (2001: 120-125) helpfully provides five kinds of research questions and seven phases of research and a paradigm for the analysis of methodological problems. I have adapted these in my research as signposts in the processes of data collection, data analysis and self-reflexivity in the research process. His paradigm for the analysis of methodological problems’ relates the five kinds of problems/research questions (substantive, social scientific, technical/practical, ethical/political, and personal) in the process of the research around its three phases (prior to the research, during the research, and after the research). Additionally, his ‘guidelines for life story questions’ are listed as including “birth and family of origin, cultural setting and traditions, social factors, education, love and work, historical events, retirement, inner life and spiritual awareness, major life themes, vision of the future, and closure” (Plummer, 2001: 124-125). These provide broad reference points in how I have approached understanding and analysing the stories I was told about the experiences of households and their members in the changing context of Shang Village.

As I commented earlier, personal connections facilitated my research process and its data collection. In Shang Village, the four households I focused on are the Huang, Fang, Cheng, and Zhu households. In the Huang household, one of Mr and Mrs Huang’s sons, Huang Shuji, the Director of the village (Cunzhang) for ten years and its Party Secretary (Shuji) for thirty years, considerably facilitated the initial stages of

my involvement. Also I stayed in the Huang house during my long visits to the village. The main research participants from these households are Huang Shuji, Huang Shuji's wife Juan, Huang Min; Mr and Mrs Fang; Mr Cheng and Mr Cheng's elder son Kun; Mr and Mrs Zhu. I also carried out several unstructured interviews with Huang Shuji's daughter Ju; Mr and Mrs Fang's friend Mrs Yuan and Liang's wife; Mr Cheng's younger son Gang and elder daughter Ping; Mr Zhu's mother, Mrs Zhu's sister Ying, and a vet, Mr Liu, who worked for the Zhus' pork farm. The interviewing language was Mandarin Chinese and some local dialects (Tunxi Dialect and Xiuning Dialect) with the older people who cannot speak 'standard' Chinese. Interviews with the main research participants from each household were recorded with a digital voice recorder. Unstructured interviews and semi-formal conversations with participants during observations of events were not recorded; however, notes were taken and revised afterwards, and also concerning every observation.

The beauty of qualitative interviewing is for me highlighted in McCracken's (1988: 9) discussion of the long interview. He proposes that:

“the long interview is one of the most powerful methods in the qualitative armoury. For certain descriptive and analytic purposes, no instrument of inquiry is more revealing. The method can take us into the mental world of the individual, to glimpse the categories and logic by which he or she sees the world. It can also take us into the life-world of the individual, to see the content and pattern of daily experience. The long interview gives us the opportunity to step into the mind of another person, to see and experience the world as they do themselves.”

Echoing this, Atkinson and Silverman (1997) too see the in-depth interview as a means of accessing the social world of people and they emphasise personal experience as the core of an interview and what it provides access to. Relatedly, the essentials of qualitative in-depth interviewing are commented on in Douglas's (1985)

discussion of interviewing as a creative interaction between interviewee and interviewer which produces data as stories of personal experience and the respondent's life history. And for Denzin (1989), this is accomplished by both the participant and the researcher creatively sharing experiences in a mutual search for greater understanding.

It is the biographical and the narrated or told self that is at the heart of narrative inquiry as a methodological stance, with the emphasis on an interview as a performance. Atkinson and Silverman present the interview as a prime technique in the affirmation of the self: "the interview with its implied invitations toward self-revelation is a pervasive device for the production of selves, biographies, and experiences" (Atkinson and Silverman, 1997: 314); and they point out that:

"under the auspices of the interview society the narrator is implicitly constructed as a witness of her or his own unique biography. The authenticity of the account is warranted by the fact that the narrator is both subject and object of the narration, and is thus assumed to have a uniquely privileged insight into a realm of private experience... The ceremonial of the interview is enacted to promote the revelation of the personal and the endorsement of personal identity." (Atkinson and Silverman, 1997: 315)

Savage and Burrows (2007) have proposed that sociology has become completely intertwined with interviewing. There are good reasons for this. As Elliott (2005: 17) has explained, "the interview is not just a means for collecting data, but itself a site for the production of data and can become a focus for inquiry in its own right". In relation to interviewing within a narrative framework, Riessman (2008: 23) remarks that "narrative interviewing has more in common with ethnographic practice than with mainstream social science interviewing practice, which typically relies on

discrete open questions and/or closed (fixed response) questions. The goal in narrative interviewing is to generate detailed accounts rather than brief answers or general statements”. I find this extremely helpful in making sense of my own research process.

In-depth interviewing is an effective means of documenting people’s life histories, experiences, opinions and stories; and the quality of the interaction between interviewer and interviewee is key to understanding the power of in-depth interviews (Gubrium and Holstein, 1995b; Riessman, 2008; Mishler, 1999) as a location for the production of data and an opportunity to explore the meaning of the research topic with respondents. The turns and shifts in narrative interviewing are worth noting because, as Riessman (2008: 24) suggests, “when shifts occur, it is useful to explore with the participant, associations and meanings that might connect several stories. If we want to learn about an experience in all its complexity, details count. These details include specific incidents and turning points, not simply general evaluations”.

The stories people tell are embedded in particular social contexts. The stories of members of the research households have been collected through interviewing various household members, in particular the people who usually are the head and resources keeper/manager of their household. In such interviews, they talked about their personal and collective stories about themselves and their household. Fieldnotes were taken during and after each interview. During the interviews, notes were taken of key themes and ideas as well as unclear information ready for further discussion, as well as particularly interesting remarks to be further probed. After the interview, notes were also taken of my researcher’s thoughts about the interview, analytic

memos were written, and new questions for the next round of interviewing were decided upon.

Fielding and Thomas (2008) comment on the multidimensional character of qualitative research, something I can echo with researching households in Shang Village. In addition to using in-depth interviews to stimulate and record stories, my fieldwork has also comprised many informal and semi-formal conversations and many ethnographic observations of important social and family events in the research households. For example, in the Huangs' family reunion lunch celebrating Chinese New Year 2013, the talk involving members of the family and their behaviours towards each other provided me with a lot of new information about their resources options, important choices, their feelings about this, and also how closely they connected with each other. And also my observations of Mr Zhu's father Lao Zhu and the final days of his life and then my attending Lao Zhu's funeral give me a grounded and detailed understanding of the emotional bonds between household members and what the key organising resources are in the Zhu household.

Important for ethnographic observation is being flexible and taking comprehensive fieldnotes. There are three main forms of fieldnotes: mental notes, jotted notes and full fieldnotes. In discussing these, Fielding (2008: 274) has also suggested "good reportage and observation are marked by accurate description of how many people were present, who in particular was present, the physical character of the setting, who said what to whom, who moved in what way, and a general characterisation of the order of events". During my observations of social and family events, primarily I made mental notes. Then after every observation I wrote down relevant details of the events: who and how many people were there, the setting, the procedure of an event,

people's behaviour and remarks, their relationships and how the occasion ended. These were the baseline topics that I made sure all my fieldnotes included.

Analysing and Writing about Stories

What is involved in writing about life stories, as emphasised by Plummer (2001: 171,185), is that writing does not “‘merely’ capture reality, it helps ‘construct’ it” and is bound up with “self, power and values”. The process of ‘writing up’ is self-conscious and reflective, rather than being a straightforward description of “reality out there” (Plummer, 2001: 198), with the basic elements he highlights being story, plot, characters, themes and story-lines, genres and structures, speech acts and the conversational unit, and tropes (Plummer, 2001: 187-190). The process and activities involved are complex and commented on by Stanley and Temple (2008: 279) in the following way:

“research includes considerably more than face-to-face inquiries and encounters and always involves complex translations, from one language to another, but also from one context to another, from talk to text, from account to analysis. These translations matter in epistemological and methodological as well as other ways, for they are crucial to what is (re)presented and how it is read.”

In my research, interview recordings were translated and transcribed from Chinese to English while I was listening to them. When an interview was fully transcribed, it was then checked against the recording for accuracy and also to highlight laughter and tone of voice, and in addition compared with fieldnotes to identify any additional important analytic points.

As helpfully suggested by Plummer (2001: 151), I developed the translated transcriptions in relation to core files, analytic files and a personal log. Core files are all the original data from my interviews and periods of fieldwork. In the analytic files, important analytical concepts and themes are highlighted and these are recorded in detail. Personal logs are files that I used in order to take notes in the field of important information and relevant topics for further inquiry, and also my fieldnotes and other documents concerning each observation. When analysing my research data, some of my notes in the personal log were added to the analytic files. As part of the analytic process, summaries of the interviews I carried out were also produced, as were overviewing summaries of the practices and strategies of each household. Summaries of the interviews identified key people to the household, and their personal stories and accounts helped me to establish how the household members identified themselves in the transition and change processes of rural China. I have also explored the household as a practical unit and also its operations at the level of individual members, as discussed in later chapters.

The analysis of the data I carried out has used a thematic analysis approach because of the theoretical orientation of my household study, which focuses “almost exclusively on the ‘told’ – informants’ reports of events and experiences, rather than aspects of ‘the telling’” (Riessman, 2008: 54). However, this also raises the influence of the narrator’s understanding of what is said and meant, as well as linking the household unit to the changing social and economic environment. Merrill and West (2009: 152) comment on writing in the research process as ‘a transitional space’ for “experiment with narratives of the other, and of the self, and for working on our identities as we project aspects of who we are into creative activity, mould them in

new ways and introject them in changed form”. The accounts I have assembled for each household are composed of personal stories and group/family stories of culture, resources, work and affective and emotional experiences. It also reflects my own engagements with these households during my research.

Before I started any data collection, the households studied were given some detailed information about the research, its purpose, procedures, confidentiality, the voluntary nature of people’s involvement, and the expected duration of the research. Since the participants are mainly farmers and the majority of them are not skilled at reading, all of these things were explained by me to people in each home. They were also informed that all formal interviews would be recorded by digital recorder and I as the researcher would be the only person having access to these recordings. The name of the village and the names of all the participants in the research as used in the thesis have been anonymised, by using only the sound of one of the characters in their name (if there are two characters in the given name) in Chinese Pinyin and a change in the spelling of the name in Chinese Pinyin if there is only one character in their given name. As I commented earlier, my family have been friends with the studied households, especially the Huangs, for a long time. This is why they trusted me and were willing to take part in the study. As a consequence I have been aware of the tensions between my professional role as a researcher and the personal commitments of friendship (Plummer, 2001: 210), and especially so when I experienced great emotional bonds with some people in crises in their households. In March 2013, I observed the organisation at Zhu’s household for the final days of Mr Zhu’s father Lao Zhu, when I was involved in some activities in their household, including accompanying Mr Zhu’s mother and having comforting talks with her, attending Lao

Zhu's funeral and a social meal after the funeral organised by Mr Zhu to express his thanks to those who provide their family with support and love during Lao Zhu's final days. As a researcher and also a family friend of Zhu's household, I was there seeking a balance between the research, people's need for conversation, my observations and my personal emotions regarding my family friends.

Stories and the narrative inquiry process deal with the meaning of people's life experiences as they tell about these, and they are closely connect with their sense of identity. Questions of ethics have a particular importance because of this. Ethical principles in narrative inquiry start with obtaining the participants' voluntary consent and the researcher's obligation to treat participants respectfully, but are certainly not confined to this. Three major ethical issues have been highlighted by Elliott (2005: 141-144) and these require great sensitivity in any research process. First, the effects of interviewing on the self-concept of both the interviewer and the interviewee can be profound and are always significant (Riessman, 1990; Collins, 1998). Second, the researcher has a responsibility to analyse stories in a way that is meaningful to participants because these are connected with their sense of ontological security. And third, in-depth interviews provide detailed personal stories and life experiences and are a kind of gift, and so questions about appropriate reciprocity arise. I have striven throughout to ensure good practice in relation to each of these important principles.

It has been argued that narrative methods improve internal validity, because "participants are empowered to provide more concrete and specific details about the topics discussed and to use their own vocabulary and conceptual framework to describe life experiences" (Elliott, 2005: 23; see also). Here Maines (1993: 26-27) has provided a helpful distinction between validity and reliability:

“the customary distinction between validity and reliability is that the former pertains to truth statements about the empirical world while the latter pertains to the degree of consistency in results produced by data gathering instruments. Validity thus addresses the question of the correspondence between sociological representations and those events represented, and reliability addresses the question of whether the method will produce the same results again. The relations between the two are asymmetric; measures may be consistently in error, and therefore high reliability can be achieved anywhere between the poles of absolute validity and absolute invalidity”.

Maines goes on to argue that observation and interpretation create difficulties for estimating validity, as compared with more positivist and logico-scientific approaches. This is because narrative inquiry is concerned with believable stories or accounts and it focuses on action, agency, and consciousness as represented in the story structure. In addition, a story is seen as valid or not in the social context it belongs in and the conventions that the members of those contexts use to construct validity as a criterion for evaluating truth claims.

Related to this, Riessman has cautioned that the trustworthiness is supported by theoretical coherence and not just the coherence in stories, discussing this around her example of analysing stories of trauma survivors:

“investigators wanting to make use of the concept of coherence to ‘validate’ their narrative projects will travel into an epistemological jungle... there is no easy correspondence between life and experience... the internal consistency of a life story may be illusory (if present at all). Instead of trying to find coherence and factuality in individuals’ stories, investigators might search for coexistent realities – selves and communities that are pulling together and pulling apart at the same time... Making sense analytically of both convergence and divergence would support trustworthiness.” (Riessman, 2008: 190-191)

Throughout the analysis in later chapters, I endeavour to ensure good ethical practice as outlined above, while balancing this with appropriate evaluation of the accounts

and stories told to me. I return to the broad question of ethics later around my attempt to do ‘joined up thinking’.

Joined Up Thinking

The idea of ‘joined up thinking’ about stories in a narrative inquiry framework has been explored by Stanley (2009). There are many questions that dealing with stories raise about the connections between storied lives and lived lives, past experiences and present practice, and spoken and written lives. A number of important questions arise:

“how should the storied ways in which lives are spoken and written be engaged with? In what ways and to what extent do storied lives and lived lives intermesh? Can the past be known or is memory a present-time practice only? Does working with texts only solve referentiality problems about lives? What can be done when the texts contain crucial absences and silences? Who has ‘a life’ and who legislates this? In what ways are the academic inter/disciplines implicated in creating absences and silences and is there a route out?” (Stanley, 2010b: 1)

Crucially, responding sensitively to these questions needs an ‘attentive responsiveness’ to what people are saying or writing by the researcher. And what this then highlights is the role of the researcher as one of active engagement in attentively making sense of, analysing, interpreting and understanding:

“the researcher is similarly an active interpretational presence at work in analysing people’s lives and representations of these; but foregrounding the self, the person, as a self-representing agent of their own lives even though there will be structural and other limits to this, is centrally and crucially important. How to maintain a judicious balance here - that is the question” (Stanley, 2010a: 122).

Another aspect of balance that interests me concerns the relationship between the ‘outer’ social world and people’s ideas about intensity and identity. In a discussion of Thomas and Znaniecki’s work, Stanley points out that they “define sociology as fundamentally ‘about’ researching and theorising social life as a whole, focusing on neither the personal (or subpersonal) level, nor structures, but their intermeshing” (Stanley, 2010c: 142).

The power of using a narrative inquiry approach among other things lies in the fact that people talk about specific matters, rather than treating big stories and the collective processes that produce social change as separate from this (Stanley, 2009). This too underlines the need for ‘joined up thinking’ about the social world in a narrative inquiry project, including my own.

“Stories... should not be treated as privileged and a priori not to be interrogated and analysed, and nor should they be reduced to researchers’ stories... insofar as there is a defensible researcher story to be told, this is the account of piecing together of the other composing competing past/present/future claims-making stories which are told of and in and about whatever the social setting is that we are investigating... and one of the most powerful attractions of narrative inquiry for sociologists is that it does indeed enable ‘joined up thinking’ about the social world, treating the interconnections between (to paraphrase C. Wright Mills) biography, temporalities and social structures as fundamental to its investigations” (Stanley, 2009: 1.8).

Society and social change are coterminous, as are structure and process, something which is shown by my narrative inquiry about Chinese village households, which explores household stories and people’s experiences of change in a framework existing in particular historical time, social structures, relations and processes of social change. Because of the complexity of variations produced by continuum effects and those of specific times and places, “theorising social change can never be

general theory, must always also recognise variations and departures” (Stanley, 2009: 1.5).

These essentials of ‘joined up thinking’ have profound implications for the construction of ‘the self’ and comparisons of strategies and practices in households in my research. The project I have engaged in has a particular interest in connecting household members’ personal experiences with the changing economical, social and cultural environment, and it does so by underlining the particularities of time, context, relationships, and particular social structures and processes.

Chapter Two now discusses the main theoretical concepts that have influenced my analysis. Chapter Three provides an introduction to the four households. Using my narrative analysis of the research data, Chapter Four explores the research household members’ roles and related divisions of labour and the changes in their economic lives. Chapter Five focuses on the household as a resources unit or system and the different resources options and choices that each household has. And the analysis in Chapter Six focuses on social networks and social capital in the households, to provide a detailed account of both the availability and organisation of social resources in them. I return to general matters concerning the village households and change in the Conclusion.

Chapter 2 Households, Resources and Economic Life

Introduction

In the academic literature, explorations of the concerns and activities of Chinese rural households have been taken in two rather different research directions. One is to focus on change (Siu, 1989; Freedman, 1966; Yang, 1965a; Huang, 1998) and the other is to focus on continuity (Han, 2001; Potter and Potter, 1990; Wolf, 1968b). Both have been mainly studied by comparing rural households and their livelihoods in major historical periods, investigating rural households in the local environment and so as affected by the transitions initiated by land and other reforms from the 1950s until the implementation of the Household Responsibility System from 1978 on. These studies of Chinese rural society and the viability of farming households have raised concerns with, firstly, the consequences of change due to growing industrialisation and urbanisation; secondly, change (historical, personal and situational) and continuity (boundaries and local identities); and thirdly, the relationship between family progress and the individual situation.

Cohen (1992: 357) proposes that household organisation is the sum of arrangements concerning the ownership of property, economic ties among family members, family management and family divisions. This is useful, but it needs to have identity matters and the affective dimension of emotional bonds between people added to it. The household is an interdependent set of relationships and activities system composed of cultural expectations and preferences, resources dynamics, economic life and (usually) family bonds and connections (see Figure 1, Conceptual Framework, in Chapter 1), and also feelings and emotional bonds. Discussion of cultural

expectations and preferences needs to include family and kinship, family head and manager, and family divisions, which are typical features of Chinese traditional families, but also how people actually put these into practice. In addition, family tradition impacts particularly on marriage practices, and on participation in traditional festivals. Resources dynamics also have a great influence on the organisation of the household and the activities and roles of its members. The gauging of resources is often based on material resources rather than also including non-material and affective ones, although clearly both are important. Material resources are represented primarily by land in farming households; while the non-material resources that are important in a changing local environment are information, time, identity, knowledge and the accessibility of social resources (social capital). Economic life, as another core aspect of households, includes the production, transaction and consumption aspects of the small-holding household, its household division of labour, its modes of work and the employment and migration of its members from rural to urban. And overall, of course the livelihood of the household is the outcome of the interplay among these factors and with differences for different households.

Research on rural households aims to increase understanding of the dynamics of household life in the changing socio-economic environment, within which traditional values and ways of living have been significantly challenged. The research literature sees the household as a 'system' and emphasises that its livelihood is shaped by the interplay over time of all the components of household life in coping with the changing local environment. In what follows, I review debates and key ideas in the research literature concerning household, family and residence with regard to what

should be the unit of analysis; resources and their management; social capital and household networks; and changing household divisions of labour.

Household, Family and Residence

Freedman (1966: viii-ix) believes that in Chinese society, lineage is “the paramount form of Chinese local grouping”. He points out that “what defines the whole class of local lineages, great and small, is that they are corporate groups of agnates (minus married daughters and plus sons’ wives) living in one settlement or a tight cluster of settlements” (Freedman, 1966: 20). He also explains the circumstances in which people can be linked to a local lineage who are not the direct members of it:

“First, as will be fairly common among poorer groups, some of the descendants of the ancestor who defines the local lineage will be resident in other local communities... Second, a local lineage may be grouped with other local lineages on the basis that ancestors of these lineages are all descended agnatically from a common ancestor, the whole unit in turn being focused on an ancestral hall or other piece of property.” (Freedman, 1966: 20-21)

In terms of the benefits of lineage membership in China, Cohen (2005: 155) points out that these could include “cash dividends paid shareholders in lineage corporations, distribution of pork and other food, and, perhaps most important, preferential access to land for rental”.

Chun et al. (1996: 430) comment that Freedman’s (1958, 1966) pioneering work on Chinese family and kinship perceived that “a different paradigm that saw diverse phenomena such as agnatic village organization, corporate estates in land, genealogical segmentation, social stratification, and a centralized polity as interdependent elements of an interdependent functional system” was needed.

However, there is a problem with Freedman's explanation of how the lineage system becomes a solid kin group: "Empirically speaking, Freedman assumes that kinsmen, by virtue of common descent (unambiguous and unchanging blood ties), should constitute the natural basis of a corporate estate. Conceptually speaking, however, he (Freedman) argues that common economic interest in land is actually what makes the lineage a solidary kin group" (Chun et al., 1996: 431-432).

What this raises is the importance of carrying out research on related institutions, such as the family, household, and village, for these are clearly linked in people's daily experiences:

"the sinological literature has been blessed with an abundance of historical research on Chinese kinship, in fact too much to be acknowledged here. However, most of this research has exploited the documentary record to explain the nature of and changes in local social organisation without seeing that the latter has constituted the locus of interplay between culture, ideology, and practice. This interplay is not limited to the formation and operation of the Chinese 'lineage'. I think it is possible to rethink the nature of other kin institutions, such as the Chinese family, household, and village, by questioning our understanding of the fundamental concepts upon which these institutions appear to be based and then examining how they function within concrete historical and ethnographic contexts of practice" (Chun et al., 1996: 440).

In what follows, the family is seen as not only an important kin institution but also an important cultural one that supports the household. Local and social traditions, such as traditional festivals and marriage practices, have impact on and are shaped by the cultural expectations and preferences of the household. Drawing on Wallman's study of a small number of London households, the idea of households as 'resource systems' helps to focus my review of the literature on households and families around the central argument that "viability depends on combinations of style and

circumstance - on the functioning of the household as a 'whole' resource system in a particular environment" (Wallman, 1984: 213).

My discussion of the literature starts from considering and problematising the distinction between family and household. The household and the family are often seen as two distinct units, as a residential unit and as a kinship unit respectively (Bender, 1967, 1971; Cohen, 1970, 2005; Fortes, 1958; Keesing, 1958; Bohannan, 1963; Hammel and Laslett, 1974; Linton, 1936). Family as a kinship unit reflects how people are related, while household concerns who lives and shares with whom, although both are culturally defined. However, families need not be localised, while households are localised task-oriented residence units. Hammel (1980: 251) states concisely that "households are the smallest grouping with the maximum corporate function". Why has the household become a focus of interest and study by social scientists over the last half century? The focus on the household emphasises the three dimensional aspects of household life, as composed by: their structure, their shared activities, and their existence as symbolic entities as distinct social units. Here, for instance, the analytical importance of the household has been underlined by Carter (1984) in referring to the cultural rules and strategies which underpin household formation and management.

Households as task-oriented social units are a collection of people working together to provide mutual benefits such as food, clothing, shelter, health care and socialisation. In proto-industrial economies and agrarian communities, households are both production and consumption units, whereas in industrial societies households are much more likely to be solely consumption units (Tilly and Scott, 1978; Medick, 1976). It has been pointed out that family and household are not

necessarily overlapping, because people who live together are not necessarily kin, and people who are kin can often live apart (Yanagisako, 1979; Wallman, 1984; Bender, 1967; Allan et al., 2001). Further, Arnould and Netting (1982: 572) add that “nonrelatives who live together, servants, and lodgers who cooperate in some common activities are household members, whereas non-resident kin are usually (but not always) affiliated principally with other households”.

The concept of the ‘domestic’ has been advanced as also useful, but it has been poorly explained in discussions of what the household is (Bender, 1967; Fortes, 1978, 1958; Hammel and Laslett, 1974; Bulmer, 1960; Goody, 1972; Smith, 1973). For Netting (1993: 58), the central point is that “wherever we go there appear to be recognisable domestic groupings of kin with a corporate character and an identity that is recognised in the use of terms like family, house, hearth, or those who eat from a common pot”. However, Yanagisako asserts that the core of the ‘domestic’ is found in two sets of activities, which are food production and consumption, and social reproduction (child-bearing and rearing) and also identified variations in domestic organisation around demographic, economic and stratification aspects. She also indicates the need to recognise gender inequalities in domestic organisation and adopt a more symbolic approach to the study of family and kinship.

In order to understand the livelihood of a household, it is necessary to know where in a typology of households it is, a rather functionalist approach but one which encourages comparisons between households (Bender, 1967). Based on the typology approach, Aijmer (1975) suggests breaking down this into sub-sets and comparing different task-oriented groups (eating, production, consumption and residence groups) across households, rather than comparing households in a more complicated way.

This approach has however been criticised for ignoring over-time changes in household composition, and most importantly for failing to examine the resource aspects of household structure (Guyer, 1980; Carter, 1984; Goody and Buckley, 1973; Hill, 1975). It is also important to highlight the processual aspects of the management of households, shifts in boundaries, how household processes are affected by changes in society at large, and what makes for economic viability (Laslett and Wall, 1972; Arnould and Netting, 1982; Goody, 1958; Gershuny, 1979). Goody (1958) points out the developmental process involved as households grow, blend and split over time in an ordinary domestic cycle; and Berkner (1972) suggests that the developmental cycle might take a single general form for each society, which makes residence patterns clear at a given time. For Sahlins (1974), the household ecological process is impacted most by the social setting, while for Gonzales (1970) and Murray (1979) external events foster or inhibit household changes. Work by Pahl, Paine, Wallman and others has emphasised the strategic factors impacting on options and economic decisions (Paine, 1974; Pahl, 1980; Wallman, 1984; Crow, 1989; Warde, 1990; Wallace, 2002). In particular Wallman (1984) has developed the idea of households as resource system, and this analytical framework incorporates the above three processes. This has influenced my own research on Chinese village households and its analysis of what makes possible the viability of the particular households I have been concerned with.

As a basic socio-economic unit, the household is considered the most common social group in human society and it is easy to take it for granted. However, the forms of household are so varied and there are no universal common functions or activities (Netting, 1993). Netting et al. (1984: xxi) argues that “selecting the household as a

common focus for social scientific research and analysis has both practical and theoretical justifications. Because almost everyone grew up in a household and continues to live in such a unit, there is a pervasive recognition of the reality and relevance of this group". Most people in most societies at most times live in households; these households are usually based on kin relationships through marriage and descent; and households are simultaneously a combination of dwelling unit with economic cooperation (such as distribution and consumption) and social reproduction (child bearing, rearing and early childhood socialisation). Industrialisation and urbanisation provide stimuli for change in household structure, divisions of labour and the activities of household members. In the 1880s, Engels proposed that the formation of the nuclear family was the product of the development of property rights, capitalism and the rise of monogamous marriage, with the nuclear family for the first time in history becoming the economic unit of society. Capitalism brought class conflict and the separation of labour from the control of means of production, with the family system mirroring these in relations between husband and wife (Engels, 2010 [1884]).

A more economic approach to conceiving households is to address particular problems occurring because of scarce resources in the physical environment and limitations on human time, around the hypothesis that in households individuals act together to make rational choices about the costs and benefits associated with various alternatives (Sawhill, 1977). The resulting intra-societal and inter-societal variations have encouraged cross-cultural and historical comparisons. While size, gender, relationships, socialisation, and economic cooperation are among the interesting aspects of household that have been studied, change has been a predominant factor,

because “when descent groups break down, as ethnic groups and cities coalesce, the household neither disintegrates nor completely transforms itself” (Netting et al., 1984: xxiii). However, change and continuity usually go together, for “household organisation responds sensitively to changes in the environment while preserving certain formal similarities for long periods” (Netting et al., 1984: xx).

Residence is the crucial feature that makes household distinct from family. Fortes (1958: 3) argues that residence is shaped by economic, affective, and jural relations. For Murdock (1949: 202), the major interface in many societies between material production and kinship involves post-marital residence rules; and regarding this, he points out that “it is in respect to residence that changes in economy, technology, property, government, or religion first alter the structural relationships of related individuals to each other, giving an impetus to subsequent modifications in forms of family, in consanguineal and compromise kin groups, and in kinship terminology”. The various forms of family and kinship organisation are impacted by residence practices and it is crucial to understand both the rules and the options for individual decision-makers in a society (Goodenough, 1956). Co-residence is the salient point in the discussion of residence and is associated with the boundaries around groups of people concerning joint ownership, the pooling of income, shared production and consumption, which in turn requires a broader and more processual definition of the household (Netting et al., 1984). However, Hammel (1984) points out the complexities of the co-residence criterion, while Yanagisako (1984) considers how use of a co-residence criterion might lead to misunderstanding the boundaries and activities of the household.

The household as a unit of analysis, household structure, the activities of members and the meanings of all this are also focal points, bringing into play the economic, affective and symbolic views of household life. The economic and activities aspect focuses on householding as productive, consumptive and reproductive activities that are directed by the satisfaction of people's needs (Wiber, 1985); The symbolic view of the household underlines the symbols, values and meanings involved (Rapp, 1979; Stone, 1977). According to Goody (1976), household structure or form is a result of property-holding and inheritance systems especially in agrarian societies; whereas in industrial society the nuclear family supports more fluid social and geographical mobility and family members becoming involved in specialised occupations in a more fluid labour market. The shrinking size of households in industrial society has been seen by Cohen (1981) as a result of the development of technology, with it requiring fewer cooperating members of a household to secure food and look after children.

Household size can be seen as most influenced by demographic differences and modes of production, although Goody (1972) has proposed that social rules are more important in governing inheritance and household fission. Nonetheless, it is clear that the concept of household is connected with the idea that people live in domestic groups and symbolically-resonant concepts like family and home significantly influence decisions and actions in households (Netting et al., 1984; Yanagisako, 1984). In fact, the close connections between family and household in many societies help explain the two distinct units:

“it is through their commitment to the concept of family that people are recruited to the material relations of households. Because people accept the meaningfulness of family, they enter into relations of production,

reproduction, and consumption with one another. They marry, beget children, work to support dependents, accumulate, transmit, and inherit cultural and material resources. In all these activities the concept of family both reflects and makes the realities of household formation and sustenance.” (Rapp, 1979: 177)

In a farming community, no other social unit is as salient and significant as the household and its connections with family (Netting, 1993). Rural household organisation includes members, property (land and tools), animal husbandry, reputation, cultural traditions and ancestors (Yang, 1965b). In traditional China, family is jurally defined as a corporate kin group wherein men as the inheritors of property are its core; while household is a collection of kin and sometimes non-kin who share a common residence (Tambiah, 1973). In exploring the provision of food, shelter and division of labour in households in economically self-sufficient rural societies, Lowie has also raised the importance of marriage and thus of family (Lowie, 1920). The households in my research are small-holding ones. Small-holdings as defined by Netting (1993: 2) are:

“rural cultivators practicing intensive, permanent, diversified agriculture on relatively small farms in areas of dense population. Small-holdings have ownership or other well-defined tenure rights in land that are long-term and often heritable. They are also members of communities with common property and accompanying institutions for sharing, monitoring, and protecting such resources. Small-holding household is the major corporate social unit for mobilising agricultural labour, managing productive resources, and organising consumption.”

The activities of small-holding households include producing a significant part of their subsistence needs, selling some agriculture goods in the market, working in cottage industries and participating in other off-farm kinds of employment.

The uniqueness of the organisation of small-holding households has been described by Netting (1993: 2) as “choices of allocating time and effort, tools, land and capital to specific uses, in the context of changing climate, resources availability, and markets must be made daily, and these economic decisions are intelligible in rational, utilitarian terms”. In terms of the shape and composition of households, there are great differences both intra- and inter-culturally, so that focusing on small-holding households is a way of focusing on the common domestic aspects of households concerning duties, rights, the involvement of different household members. As a result, the core activities of the domestic group become clear and the density and significance of cooperative activities are highlighted. The small-holding household is simultaneously a corporate entity, a social group and a farm enterprise. Also the small-holding as a farm-household system is important in other respects:

“the household grouping reproduces both its own work force and the skills and ecological knowledge so important to careful husbandry. The long-term, reciprocal relationships of members are in part constituted by enduring economic relationship, which can be seen as implicit contracts or covenants. The important contributions of children and the superiority of household labour to hired workers reflect the diversity of tasks and the requirement for skilled, responsible, unsupervised task performance in intensive cultivation... The close relationship of social unit and farm is demonstrated by the regular links between the average size and composition of households and the size of the small-holding. Despite great cross-cultural variation in marriage practices, preferred household types, and inheritance rules, there appears to be a remarkable congruence between the social organisation of family households and the practice of small-holding farming.” (Netting, 1993: 101)

The distinctiveness of small-holding households involves managing the scarcity of resources and the complex cooperative production patterns of such households. In addition, the kinship identities of household members are also involved, with many important exchange transactions taking place according to generally understood contracts, thereby influencing family-household affiliations.

Research on households in different societies and cultures (Guyer, 1981; Hammel, 1988, 1984; Wilk, 1984; Wallman, 1984) has addressed the issue of how best to study households. Guyer (1981: 96) points out the frustrations of unmanageable particularities of social life and that investigating variations and changes requires shifting from the comparative study of groups to focusing on decision-making and specific relationships. Similarly both Hammel and Wilk emphasise the need to be more concerned with the behaviours and norms of people's interaction in households (Hammel, 1988, 1984; Netting et al., 1984; Wilk, 1984). Wallman's (1984) study of London households showed the beauty of such a focused approach and combined a case study with a situational analysis of a set of analytic concerns (Mitchell, 1983). By contrast, Van Velsen (1967) proposes that social process abstracted from particular events should be the object of analysis, rather than the 'culture' or 'society' that events occur in, although to me Wallman's approach has more analytical credibility.

The analytical framework of the household needs to include symbolic aspects too (Yanagisako, 1984; Netting et al., 1984). Carter (1984) proposes that households are cultural systems of rules and strategies, with cultural principles impacting on household formation and management. The cultural aspects of households have also been pointed up by Yanagisako in studying changes in urban Japanese-American households and she proposes:

“a cultural analysis of the system of symbols and meanings by which people construe these units and the configuration of activities, emotions, and dilemmas they attach to them. Because households - like all social facts - are shaped by symbolic process, a symbolic analysis must be undertaken not merely as a colourful embellishment to a functionalist theory of changing household form and function but as a central component in analysis of that change.” (Yanagisako, 1984: 330)

When considering the ‘residence/co-residence’ aspect of households, cultural meaning is crucial in labelling or not sets of people living together as households (Sanjek, 1982; Yanagisako, 1979, 1984). The cultural analysis approach views households as units of cultural meanings and provides a more profound basis for understanding the changing structures and activities of households that these groups of people engage in. Analytically, this helps make the complexity of these activities become understandable patterns of social action, for the meanings people attach to living together in households are complex, dynamic, various and sometimes inconsistent.

Household structure refers to household size, composition, development and the patterns of its social arrangements. Carter stresses that the notion of ‘household system’ contrasts with that of ‘household structure’. The former consists of two elements: rules and strategies (Carter, 1984: 47). Household rules cover a wide range of things including formation and recruitment, while household strategies concern the optimal use of available personnel and resources to achieve individual and group goals and tasks (Cohen, 1976; Carter, 1984; Wallman, 1984; Crow, 1989; Wallace, 2002). The interdependent relations of rules and strategies in the household systems are posited by Carter, that:

“household partition may alter the conditions of economic management by producing new units with different producer/consumer and land/labour ratios as well as different amounts of resources and personnel. The quality of economic management, in turn, influences the resources that are available for marriage, inheritance, and so on. Completed family size and the sex ratio of surviving offspring are influenced by the expenditure of household resources on medical care and food, including breast milk, for male and female children as well as by strategies of family formation per se.” (Carter, 1984: 48)

The most intriguing aspect to consider concerns the contradictions between an approach focused on structures and activities, and one focused on cultural aspects (Netting et al., 1984). On the latter, Linares (1984) points out that household forms are affected by cultural gender roles. Both Carter (1984) and Yanagisako (1979) propose that symbolic roles and criteria are represented by systems of rights and duties that shape the cultural boundaries of households. The political symbols of households are also emphasised by Lofgren (1984) as signs of political struggles. In addition, the strong culturally defined aspects of households means that they may not be cross-culturally comparable (Hammel and Laslett, 1974). Nevertheless, for Carter (1984: 55) at least, “the distinction between the household and the familial dimensions of domestic groups is of quite general, if not universal, cross-cultural utility and that coherent household institutions (such as headship, seniority, equal sharing and viability) with significant demographic and economic functions are widely distributed in human sociocultural systems”. Ultimately, I find the ‘household systems’ idea provides a convincing argument about the relationships among some key analytical aspects of households, by proposing that the link between the structure and the economic activities of households is founded on the cultural aspects of households and how people inter-relate, and that cultural expectations place constraints on the solutions which can be adopted to solve problems (Carter, 1984; Netting et al., 1984). These ideas broaden the view of households and make their analytical complexities easier to perceive.

The Household and Resources

Discussion of the resources in the household starts with the relevant literature concerning social resources, such as kinship and work on the relationship between industrialisation and kin networks, including lineage (Jiazu), one of the most typical features of traditional China (Cohen, 1990; Freedman, 1958, 1966; Chun et al., 1996; Yang, 1965a). Kinship is the most common and important relationship for rural households. Economically, a kin-based household reduces the transaction costs and uncertainties in hiring outsiders (Netting, 1993). Bourdieu has discussed kinship in relation to its purposes, referring to the usefulness of kinsfolk, both official and practical in traditional societies (Bourdieu, 1977). However, household relationships are not ordered by the specific rules of kinship but rather by principles of affect, gender and seniority. An interesting example is the Maharashtra community studied by Carter, which illustrates that the rights and duties entailed by kinship are distinct from those entailed by household membership:

“a man whose children all are married may retire from the household headship, turning the office over to one of his sons. In these circumstances a man ceases to exercise the rights and duties of household head but continues to exercise those appropriate to a father, such as performing the annual ancestral sacrifices.” (Carter, 1984: 45-46)

In some societies, household members are distinguished not as much by kinship as by gender and seniority. Although the ties of kinship influence the actions of household members, the role of father or husband is not the same as being household head. And although particular kinship relations affect the rights, duties, management

and formation of households, more than this they reflect the economic activities and organisation of households. Carter's view of kinship and household is founded on the cultural rules and strategies of households, and it shares Yanagisako's (1979) emphasis on symbolic approaches to family and kinship. Yanagisako additionally points out that kinship structures decline with the impact of industrialisation and modernisation. Cohen adds to this a discussion of the relationship between lineage solidarity and kinship domains in his study in a village in north China:

“In kinship terms, all families are equal actors within the lineage as well as within the larger society, and this kind of relationship can be dramatised by lineage feasts supported by lineage holdings or by direct contributions from the participants, or through various means of rotating responsibilities. While in north China the assertion of associational solidarity commonly involved lineages where there was little social and economic differentiation among member families, such solidarity might also receive considerable ritual and ideological emphasis even in the very powerful and class-stratified lineages of southeastern China. Associational solidarity within a lineage did not involve denial of genealogical relationships, but rather adjusted these relationships so that they reinforced an ideology of common descent..” (Cohen, 1990: 528)

It has been argued that the extended family is still the most prevalent family type in modern China, although many scholars believed the loss of family private property in the collectivisation period from the 1950s to the end of the 1970s has been a more critical factor than governmental policies in causing its relative decline (Wolf, 1968a; Huang, 1992; Myron, 1992; Cohen, 1990). Lang (1946) defines two types of extended families. One is the stem family, involving parents, their unmarried children, and one married son with wife or wives and children; and the other is the joint family, including parents, their unmarried children, their married sons (more than one), and sons' wives and children. Chen (2009) states that the stem family, a form of extended family, has been the dominant pattern in Chinese families, and it is

common for parents to live together with one of their adult sons. The typical characteristic of the extended family in China is that all its members share common property and a budget, and their work is interdependent. Further, Chen (2009: 54) comments that “extended families dominated in Chinese society in the past and family and kinship ties were guided by a strong patriarchal, patrilineal, and patrilocal tradition. Sons were permanent members of the family line, while daughters left their natal family behind at the time of marriage”. Huang (1992: 27) explores in detail the conditions of Chinese rural households and comments that:

“even though the Chinese peasants are still far from wealthy, they enjoy relatively secure living conditions undreamed of a mere two or three generations ago. Moreover, the improvement of preventive and therapeutic medicine has dramatically extended life expectancy in rural areas, and the resulting increases in longevity make it more likely than ever before that three generation families will develop. Finally, the restriction of geographic mobility for China's peasantry has also made it more likely that several generations of the same family will live in close proximity.”

Traditionally, the need for every member to contribute to agricultural production has served as the motivation which keeps members staying in the same household as an economic unit which pools labour and financial capital. However, the Chinese economic reforms that started in 1978 have reshaped both urban and rural life, especially family structure in rural China. For Whyte (1992), economic development, the open market, education reforms, and increasing opportunities for non-farm employment, have undermined extended families and encouraged a preference for nuclear families. The household economy and the village context have a huge impact on family structures. In rural China, it has been customary that a family divides into several households when its sons become adult or get married. The division that follows usually involves the equal distribution of family holdings among brothers

around a written agreement, with Huang (1992: 30) pointing out that “the most important period in a family division is the division of family property”.

When sons marry, not only is there an increased demand for housing, but also difficulties in the practical management of the household can become a major impetus for family division. However, Chen (2009: 54) comments that:

“A traditional Chinese family (jia) is a basic production and economic unit. All members of an extended family share a common budget and common property and their work is interdependent. Behind the apparent unity and solidarity of the family lie social relationships that have the potential to become conflictual and that may eventually cause the family to break into smaller units, that is, into conjugal/nuclear families... family division seemed likely to be affected not only by the availability of resources but also by power dynamics in the household, because each family member would have a different vested interest in keeping the family unified or divided. It seemed likely also that effects on the process of family division of a particular type of work activity would differ between family members undertaking it (especially when they differed by sex and generation).”

Huang (1992) adds to this that wealthier families were less likely to divide, because the need of the efforts of all household members for intensive agricultural production or their family business would keep its members together as an economic unit. However, for others family division is an inevitable process in the system of household:

“Far more commonly distributed throughout Han Chinese society were the customary procedures for family division through which agreement among the parties was obtained, such as the calling in of witnesses or mediators and the working out of a division settlement. These were fully accepted in local society because family division at some point was almost inevitable, between father and son, married brothers, or, in a very few cases, among patrilineal cousins. At the same time, however, division was not in accord with traditional ideals of family continuity and harmony... family division is also a positive response - at least for those family members demanding it - when circumstances are different. Thus variation in the timing of family division reflects the fact that each family has to make the best of its own situation.” (Cohen, 1992: 359)

Cohen (1992: 362) further comments on internal divisions around the roles of ‘financial manager’, ‘redistributor’ and ‘family head’:

“I noted how the roles of ‘financial manager’ and ‘redistributor’ are to be distinguished from that of ‘family head’. While the family head, as senior male, represents the family to the outside world, the financial manager is generally in charge of family economic affairs and the redistributor is custodian of the family purse in arrangements where income and expenditure are pooled.”

The family head in Chinese is ‘jiazhang’ and the family manager is ‘dangjia’, and usually jiazhang is the senior male who is also shown on the official documentation, the Household (Huoku) registration, as the Household Head. However, Cohen (1992: 363) points out that it is the differentiation of the two roles that provides the family with “the cultural basis of the coexistence and reconciliation of ultimate aspirations and practical management”.

In rural households in the past, a man usually had superior decision-making powers compared with his wife. Regarding his study of rural Maharashtra, for instance, Carter (1984: 46-47) writes that male owners (household founders or heads) are senior to female owners in being responsible for the management of productive resources and relations with the wider community. Each category of owners is internally graded. In a household, male owners and their female agnates were ranked by generation and age, and the wives of male owners ranked according to the seniority of their husbands and not age. The wife of the household head or his mother was regarded as the senior woman, and she would be in charge of child-care and resources for marriage. However, access to marriage and the household headship was

controlled by male owners. Moreover, in terms of domestic power, Bourdieu (1977:

63) remarks that:

“a holder of domestic power has long prepared for his succession by the manipulation of individual aspirations, directing each of the brothers towards the ‘speciality’ which suited him in the division of domestic labour, competition for internal power is almost inevitable... In general, authority over the delegation of work, the control of expenditure and the management of the patrimony, or over the family’s external relations resides in fact in a single person, who thus appropriates the symbolic profits which accrue from going to market, presence at clan assemblies or the most exceptional gatherings of tribal notables, etc.- not to mention the fact that these duties have the effect of exempting the person who assumes them from the exigencies of the daily work routine.”

However, the holder of domestic power is not necessarily the competent manager of household resources, and also many things have changed over the last thirty or more years. In viewing the household as a system of resources, it becomes clear the resource keeper is in many respects more central than the formal or legal head of a household, who is “not necessarily the manager of all its resources or the decisive focus of its livelihood”, and relatedly “particular members of the household system tend to be allocated or to take over the management of particular household resources” (Wallman, 1984: 21-22). The kin keeper or kin mobiliser keeps track of family members and brings family members together for some purposes, but as Wallman (1984: 22) comments, “the person who knows about and has access to, say, information, need not be the one who puts it to work for the household. The allocation of the responsibility for these tasks is partly a matter of household structure, partly a matter of personality or individual preference”. This allocation of responsibility as a family manager in Chinese culture converges with the role of resource keeper. With changes in the economic situation and more and more women

receiving education, women household managers are now very common in rural China.

In her study of a farming family in Taiwan, Wolf (1968b: 24) sees the traditional farmhouse and its separate setting as symbolic in reflecting household structure and domestic organisation. Cohen (1992: 357-359) too proposes that it is the traditional elements that continue to define the farming family as a corporate unit, although there are many areas of family life where important changes have occurred. Later chapters will problematise this by showing how far-reaching the changes occurring are.

Glazer (1980: 254) discusses the relationship between marriage and women's position in both capitalist and socialist societies, remarking that:

“Marriage as a mediating device for women's position in the class system occurs in both capitalist and socialist societies, even though women's position in the occupational structure varies between these societies... The marriage contract may have a lesser impact as a mediating agent in socialist than in capitalist societies, given socialist women's opportunities in the workplace. Also, some aspects of everyday life that are the responsibility of the family in capitalist societies are the responsibility of the state in socialist societies (e.g., education, medical care, housing, and the like) so that women's responsibilities and burdens may differ between the two systems.”

Nee (2005: 55) views marriage as “a dominant system of interrelated informal and formal elements- customs, shared beliefs, conventions, norms, and rules which actors orient their actions to when they pursue their interests”. Yodanis (2010: 175) too sees marriage as a social institution more than a private and personal relationship and proposes that it “has always shown the stamp of the particular culture, and is undergoing changes that are reflected in new practices, rules, and beliefs”. It has been the common Chinese tradition that post-marital residence is mainly virilocal (at

the groom's place); income pooling characterises the family economy; and virilocality means the transference of a woman's family membership to her husband's family. However, the opposite traditional form of uxori-local marriage (at the bride's place) had been necessary in rural China especially. And usually this has meant that a man takes his father-in-law's surname, so that his father gives up some or all of his own descent line. This occurs because of economic needs, usually for practical management purposes regarding intensive agricultural work, economic purposes and reproduction needs (Cohen, 1992; Netting, 1993; Wolf, 1968a; Cohen, 2005).

After the implementation of the Household Responsibility System, many of the arrangements concerning the household continued. Cohen (1992: 368) comments that:

“There was also continuity with traditional arrangements throughout the period of communist rule with respect to rights to succession to the family estate: brothers (but not sisters) had rights to portions of equal value. ‘Succession’ is a more appropriate term than ‘inheritance’ because a man was entitled to his portion of the family estate merely by the fact of his birth, so that the shares due to boys even only a few months old would enter into the calculations prior to the distribution of family holdings. The continuing rights of men were reinforced by the fact that marriages remained largely virilocal and some uxori-local.”

The most important traditional festivals for rural households are Chinese New Year and Qingming Festival. Chinese New Year is a celebration arranged according to the Chinese lunar calendar and involves most family members; Qingming Festival is a traditional ceremony concerned with commemoration of ancestors. Cohen's (1990) study in north China sees the celebration of these festivals as providing the best representations of lineage organisation, comprised by a social structure, symbolism

and ritual. In exploring this, he emphasises the importance of linkages between a lineage's corporate resources and its social cohesion, pointing out that celebrations of these festivals demonstrates the quantity and quality of social resources and capital that a household has.

Such cultural preferences also reflect the choices made between 'ultimate aspirations' and 'practical management' in the context of a specific local economic and social context. Cohen comments on this distinction that: "the first might be characterised 'ultimate aspirations', comprising ideals commonly held in traditional times, such as those regarding proper marriage, large family size and continuity through the generations. The second is those concerning 'practical management', tied far more closely to actual economic arrangements and family reproduction." (Cohen, 1992: 362). These traditional beliefs give rise to social practices and the 'actual arrangements' Cohen comments on. Discussing various examples of family division and forms of non-standard marriage, he argues that these practices are positive and customary responses to particular local circumstances, but at the same time may be negative with respect to national ideals of family life.

According to Giddens (1979), resources (authoritative and allocative) act as the source of power in social interactions. Two broad types of resources exist: human (cultural schemas) and non-human resources; and cultural schemas are "not empowered or regenerated by resources would eventually be abandoned and forgotten, just as resources without cultural schemas to direct their use would eventually dissipate and decay.... [and] agents are empowered by structures, both by the knowledge of cultural schemas that enable them to mobilize resources and by the

access to resources that enables them to enact schemas” (Sewell, 1992: 27). People, then, have agency because of their access to these types of resources.

A variant on this has been developed by Bebbington (1999: 2021-2022) for analysing rural livelihoods. In this, five types of capital assets are seen as essential and identified: produced, human, natural, social and cultural capital. These are linked to contexts in which people’s livelihoods shift from being specifically based on natural resources, to being based on a range of assets including income sources and the labour market. He associates livelihood with people’s access to these types of capital asset, which provide them with the capability to be and to act, rather than being simply resources. His emphasis is on understanding the ways of combining and transforming these assets so as to meet people’s material and experiential needs, and how they expand their asset base by engaging with other actors through relationships in deploying and enhancing their capabilities. This both makes living more meaningful and it also changes the dominant rules and relationships concerning how resources are controlled, distributed and transformed in society. This framework also recognises that such assets are not only for material survival but also provide the basis of people’s power to act and to produce, to challenge and change conventions concerning the use and transformation of resources.

In Murphy’s (2002) study of migrant workers and changing rural China, resources are viewed as material resources as cash and commodities, and abstract resources as contacts, information and prestige. Importantly, she argues that the interaction among resources, values and goals are continually stimulated by social actors such as individual and households. These ideas and their interconnections in household life will be further discussed with the conceptualisation of ‘household as resources

system' in my research, which is developed from Wallman's (1984) study of households.

As a cornerstone for my research, the analytic frame of households as resource systems proposed by Wallman (1984) incorporates the three-dimensional view of households discussed above and pinpoints the critical importance for a comprehensive analysis of households of investigating not only material and structural resources such as land, labour and capital, but also non-material and organising resources such as time, information and identity. She remarks that "the point of defining households as resource systems is to recognise that the value, the use, or the operation of each resource element is affected by the value, etc. of each of the others, and that the whole system is more dynamic than any catalogue of its constituent parts" (Wallman, 1984: 50). This approach also views households as "being differently bounded in respect of different resources; and as differing from each other in respect of the resources available to them, the resources they choose to deploy, and the kinds of value they vest or invest in them for particular purposes in local or cultural contexts of various kinds" (Wallman, 1984: 21).

The appropriateness of this framework to my research is underlined by considering the specific local setting, that is, households in Shang Village. In non-industrial settings, land, labour and capital are scarce, and society as whole is concerned with overall shortages. However, in industrial society, there is no overall shortage, but instead "the supplies of individuals and individually households are limited more importantly by impediments to distribution and access than by any poverty of the industrial system itself" (Wallman, 1984: 30). Therefore, time, information and identity resources are important aspects of making a real difference in non-industrial

settings. A concern with these organising resources was indeed strongly voiced by people in the households in Shang Village, where traditional production and its means of livelihood is increasingly affected by industrialisation, urbanisation and agricultural modernisation.

In thinking of households as 'resource systems', what kind of things are to be included in the concept of resource? Wallman (1984: 28) explains that "it is fundamentally an economic concept, a resource tends to be visualised as material item. But the usage is based on a misunderstanding of economic notions and, more important, conceals too many of the realities of livelihood". In Wallman's research on households in the inner city of London, time, information and identity - the three non-material resources - were added to the classic land-labour-capital trio of resources in this highly industrialised urban setting. Land, labour and capital resources are material and structural, while time, information and identity are organising resources, and Wallman (1984: 29-30) emphasises that:

"it is these resources that decide what is done with or within the objective structure and that limit 'the conditions of possibility' (Bourdieu, 1977). In so doing they account for who does better within the constraints of a single environment: who finds the opportunities, who solves the problems, and who takes best advantage of the options available."

Continuing the theme of how the concept of resource can be unpacked, Wallman (1984: 24) proposes the importance of boundaries and values, highlighting that "the boundaries of household are doubly fluid. They change empirically throughout the domestic cycle, and analytically according to which resource is in focus. The value of any of the household's resources is not fixed". This concerns what kind of activity,

for what purpose, and from whose point of view. She also stresses that “a resource is exchanged or negotiated in more than one domain of the household system, we can see that effect, if not the purpose, of converting it from one to another is to alter its value in some way” (Wallman, 1984: 24). That is, not everyone classifies or evaluates the same resources in the same way, and any one person may not do so consistently.

The classic land-labour-capital components of resources are of course still crucial to rural households. The economic balance between household numbers and land size was particularly important in early agricultural societies, where prosperous households were usually associated with large farms and the big size of households (Netting, 1993: 87). However, the opportunities, constraints and changing livelihoods that small-holding households face in the contemporary world are highly influenced by organising resources that households can access and use. Land, labour and capital are the key structural resources in Wallman’s approach to households, while social and cultural capital are the key non-material organising resources. Social capital involves resources embedded in a social structure which are accessed and/or mobilized in purposive actions. Regarding cultural resources, Bourdieu defines three kinds of cultural capital: embodied disposition, knowledge from education, and the possession of esteemed cultural goods (Bourdieu, 1986; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977). In addition, the understanding and deployment of cultural capital occurs within or across social fields, and is not set in stone or universally accepted (Webb et al., 2002: 22).

In my research on farming households in Shang village, the conception of resources I used has been adapted from Wallman’s ideas about households, because this

analytical framework is sensitive to the contextualisation of households in a specific local environment, something crucial for understanding actions and capability. As a consequence, information, time, identity and knowledge as well as land, labour and capital are taken to be important concepts for analysing how farming households adapt to the changing context. Knowledge is related to information and broadly Bourdieu's theories of knowledge, cultural capital and education are also helpful (Bourdieu, 1977; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). Knowledge is in fact as important as the other organising resources for Chinese farming households, including in exerting an influence on household divisions of labour, and options and choices regarding styles of livelihood.

After two decades of mass collectivisation, the Chinese government reinstated household land rights. Cohen emphasises the importance of this recognition of 'family' after decollectivisation in his comparative study of villages in China:

“There was a marked expansion in the area of family ownership following decollectivisation. In the Hebei and Sichuan villages the importance of the family was clearly recognised during the distribution of team land to members, for the per capita allocation of plots was arranged so that contiguous plots were assigned to members of the same family, creating larger holdings for the family as a whole. Circumstances were different in the Shanghai village, where most land had been taken up by urban sprawl by the time of decollectivisation and what remained was kept intact for vegetable production as one of the several team-run cooperative enterprises.” (Cohen, 1992: 368)

In an open market, farmers could produce, consume and sell what they harvested from the land; and by doing so, in hard times most were saved from starvation. As a result, as China developed, the farming household became an important economic actor on millions of family farms. Land, previously cultivated by the old collective production teams, was redistributed on the basis of per capita and in doing so

distinctions were made between the able-bodied, children and the elderly (Cohen, 1992: 360). This was not only the way that the land was redistributed when the Household Responsibility System was started, but it demonstrated the importance of land as a crucial means of production and a key resource for farmers and is the family's traditional economic basis.

In terms of the property rights of Chinese rural households and their situation during the collectivisation period, state property included land and other collective holdings and enterprises, and non-state property consisted of family property except for private funds retained by women. Cohen discusses how 'family organisation' relates to property right and that:

“rights to individual property are clearly subordinate to those of the family as a whole... The period of collectivisation was characterised by state control of land and all other non-residential property, so that the scope of family property holdings was reduced to individually-assigned but family-run private plots, and to housing, furniture, some tools, and so on. The product of the labour of its members was also owned by the family as a whole. Family members' work point earnings were pooled by team accountants and provided as lump payments in cash or grain to the family as a whole, represented by the family head. This form of accounting and payment showed the collective recognised that the family was an economic unit and as such had collective rights to the earnings of family members.” (Cohen, 1992: 367)

Decollectivisation in China resulted in the increase of family-controlled assets, which in turn has reinforced the family as a corporate unit (Cohen, 2005: 83). However, in recent years, land expropriation and land transference have raised a major concern regarding urbanisation and townisation. Land expropriation has been one of the externalities of development primarily responsible for the proliferation of rural conflicts in China in the past decade and, as Guo points out in a passage worth quoting at length, this reveals a critical and dislocated relationship between urbanisation and village life:

“In recent years, county urbanization has significantly improved the infrastructure of the city (high rise blocks and motorways) but has hardly contributed to any change in the villages. Apart from a number of newly built village administration offices, there were few signs of improvement from public funds.... To appease the resentment towards land expropriation in general, a portion of land compensation was used by the village administration to defray farmers' agricultural tax and contributions to collective funds. In some cases, old-age pensions were arranged for the villagers whose land had been expropriated, although the ordinary villagers had little idea of how the schemes would work out for them in the end. Land expropriation permitted the households affected to transfer their rural registration into urban status, but no employment was offered... The continuous land expropriation, the lack of alternative employment opportunities and the meagre compensation all seemed to have encroached upon the economic security of the villagers. To many, land was not only a means of livelihood but also a form of security. Even those with alternative employment who need not live on farming were reluctant to give up their land contracts.” (Guo, 2001: 430)

For households, knowledge and information are vital resources, especially regarding work and employment in both urban and rural areas. The value of information is particularly high because it affects the use and usefulness of a range of material and structural resources:

“members of a household have no access to formal or informal employment unless someone has told them where it is available, how to get it, and how to do the work. No household can make use of welfare statutory services or public housing unless it knows its rights, what benefits are offered, how to apply for them, and how to deal with the officials in charge. The control of information therefore, controls livelihood as effectively as formal job reservation controls access to employment.” (Wallman, 1984: 30)

Information also governs access to other resources, and resources options are affected by informal and personal networks. However, the constraint effects of information are implicit because the most valuable information is channelled in bounded networks and value accrues in hiding information from others. For instance, a piece of information is not useful or valuable in itself but becomes valuable for

household A when household B does not have it and household B knows it is possessed by household A.

In farming households, the significant role of information is also demonstrated by the high cost of acquiring information about reliable and knowledgeable farm workers, with kin-based networks able to provide such knowledge. Of course, a hired worker could be kept under supervision, but the time of an overseer is also costly, especially when a variety of field activities in widely separated areas are taking place simultaneously (Netting, 1993). Here, the concern for time, another organising resource, is raised because of the constraints on available information.

An emphasis on time as a resource represents a departure from the traditional approach focusing on economic behaviour, which sees the value of time as a matter of absolute scarcity. By contrast, in the household resource system approach, the management and value of time depends on what else is happening. Wallman uses washing dishes as an example here, explaining that “it makes a difference to the value of time spent, say, washing dishes, if there is someone drying them. There is more difference still if he/she is working on a social relationship with the person washing up at the same time” (Wallman, 1984: 34-35). Additionally, the time dimension has direct impact on the division of labour because labour is among other things an expenditure of time and energy on different kinds of work.

Subjectively, time is experienced at different levels: hourly time, time as something consciously organised and allocated, the passage of time over the years, and generational time. Differently situated people have different perspectives on past, present and future time resources; and different aspects of livelihood become matters

of concern at different stages. The passing of time is marked by the movement of members of households from one life-stage to another and by accompanying changes in themselves and in their relationships with others, such as parents and children. In summing up such ideas, the amount and value of time 'spent' on a given activity changes, and does so according to whose time it is and where and when it is expended.

Time is also relevant to considering work and residence. Time is critically important to paid work as highlighted by the crisis of unemployment, which impacts on households in different ways. Such differences are not only "a matter of relative abilities to get money on the side" (Pahl, 1980), but also concern differential abilities through time "to manipulate the social service bureaucracies appropriately or at least effectively" (Wadel, 1979). Wallman here emphasises that:

"the proper management of non-monetary resources is a necessary part of getting and performing a job; the loss of a job is commonly experienced as the loss of identity, status, and the structure of time... In every case the meaning or crisis of unemployment is mediated by or suffered by families or households as systems, not by individuals in isolation." (Wallman, 1984: , p34)

Moreover, from the perspective of residence, time matters because "the time it takes to become part of those networks entails the exclusion of newcomers by virtue of their newness" (Wallman, 1984: 33).

Time allocation reflects patterns and changes in personal, cultural, and local resources options (Gershuny, 1979; Gershuny and Pahl, 1979). The essential aspects of time management can be seen regarding two different time dimensions in relation to households: the working life cycle, investigated by work histories, and the week, investigated by time budgets. This helps in understanding the household divisions of

labour and the time spent on many activities, including relations with other people and things. On this, Netting (1993: 248) comments that “timing could result in greater or smaller profits, given equal skills in pig raising, and peasant households, attentive to price fluctuations in local markets, could respond flexibly to economic conditions in a way larger entities could not”.

In exploring time allocation in households, Nelson (1980: 173) highlights the ‘duration’, ‘order’ and ‘importance’ of events in household activities and related time measures, and also emphasises the importance of context:

“Duration, order, and importance of events are suggested repeatedly as aspects worthy of study in relation to time. Duration and order of events can be measured objectively using a consistent clock measure. The importance of events is still not directly measurable. The problem of the inadequacy of any one approach to the study of the meaning of household activities in a time framework is still evident. Because of the salience of time in human lives and the variations in cultural interpretations of time, it does not seem feasible to use it as a measure until we understand the meanings attributed to it in a particular context – in this case to household labour in a specific cultural setting.”

But of course ‘context’ is not an empty space, but is peopled, and this raises how these people understand themselves in the context they are in. That social identity can be a powerful resource is illustrated by an example given by Wallman (1984: 29), that:

“when someone lends me money because I belong to the same church or come from the same village, the face value of my ethnic origin is economic. But he/she lent me the money because he/she identified with me, and I had the confidence to ask for it because I identified the bond between us. In this context ethnic origin for both of us is also an identity resource”.

People do not identify themselves only by reference to external features such as appearance, behaviour and group association. Identity in industrial society is

influenced among other factors by ethnicity, work (occupation and employment) and localism, with great variations in whether employment or locality is more important. Also, localism concerns the geographic locus of kinship, ethnic or other associative ties, or concerning residence, or a combination of these, and these factors too affect access to information that is based in a local area or located within certain kinds of ties or that is obtained through certain sorts of relationships. Local identity gives a sense of place, unity and distinctiveness, and collective or communal identity is perhaps particularly important when a community engages with the outside world.

But what is knowledge? The classic Marxist view sees commodities as embodiments of the knowledge and skills possessed by human labour and used in producing them, and also as conveying knowledge about their usage (Bidet, 2007). Knowledge is not coterminous with information, although of course they are related. Information is knowledge in motion between persons, and a clear distinction is drawn by Paine (1970: 186) in stating that “knowledge itself is an inert capita fund in a culture, but when subjected to certain manipulations, it flows as information through the relationships between members of the culture”. Knowledge as disposition refers to “something we can acquire, retain and lose. Like a habit, it is not something that takes time to do, nor something we can be interrupted in” (White, 1982: 113). Knowledge as disposition is one of the forms of cultural capital, which Bourdieu links to the concept of ‘habitus’, which he explains as:

“systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles of the generation and structuring of practices and representations which can be objectively ‘regulated’ and ‘regular’ without in any way being the product of obedience to rules, objectively adapted to their goals without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary to

attain them and, being all this, collectively orchestrated without being the product of the orchestrating action of a conductor.” (Bourdieu, 1977: 72)

Bourdieu has relatedly argued that knowledge from education is another vital component of cultural capital and is closely connected with power, seeing the systems of power in modern societies as underpinned by the educational system and education as concerned with knowledge construction and cultural transmission (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977; Reed-Danahay, 2005; Pelissier, 1991; Levinson et al., 1996). A useful distinction can be made here between cultural reproduction and social reproduction. Cultural reproduction is the “transmission from one generation to the other of the cultural inherited from the past”; while social reproduction is reproduction of relationships between groups or classes as “reproduction of the structure of the relations of force between classes” (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977: 10-11). In the contemporary situation, the importance of knowledge from education is stressed by the concept of ‘theoretical knowledge’ in information society developed by Webster (2006). For Webster, ‘theoretical knowledge’ is a key player in contemporary society: “in marked contrast to earlier epochs when practical and situated knowledge were predominant... this knowledge is formalised in texts and transmitted especially through the educational process which, through specialisation, means that most people are ignorant of the theoretical knowledge outside their own expertise” (Webster, 2006: 29). This proposition echoes Perkin’s (1989) argument that human capital is created by education and the predominant role of education is stressed by the rise of a professionalised society.

Knowledge in small-holding activities includes practical skills, ecological information and the management of the household economy. In small-holding households, the capacities of agricultural production depend “not only on amount of

labour but on individual skills and conscientious application of the experienced individual worker, coercion and micromanagement by a boss can be counterproductive” (Netting, 1993: 75). Ecological information is transmitted through the observation, imitation and instruction that accompanies more general processes of socialisation and enculturation in the family (Netting, 1993: 63). The management of the household economy is a major part of the education of young men in Chinese rural societies. Concerning Yangbei village, Nee (1986: 191) comments that the teaching of household economy management, including useful tips on household sideline production and marketing, was “not taught in school but passed on from father to sons and acquired through listening in on the gossip of older, more experienced farmers”. These practical and informal ways of learning show how education becomes part of cultural reproduction, discussed above.

The importance of knowledge as an organising resource for farming households has been considered from two aspects: knowledge gained from culture, and knowledge gained from education. On the one hand, knowledge from culture is mainly about ecological information, farm production and marketing, passed on over generations and learnt from experience through practices and formal (news on TV or radio) and informal (gossip or chat) information channels. This kind of knowledge is essential to small-holding households, with Netting (1993: 63,69) commenting that:

“knowledge and experience in the use of the land results in higher production and greater returns than would accrue to the same land cultivated by a stranger applying strictly standardised techniques... the small-holding, and the accumulated knowledge, skills, and labour investment that it embodied, served as an anchor, grounding the household in scarce resources that were difficult or expensive to replace. The best guarantee of household stability and reproduction was the intensively tilled farm that sustained it.”

An unequal distribution of knowledge in farming households is often the result of gender as well as age inequalities, which I discuss later. In a study of son preference in rural China, Murphy et al. (2011) point out the positive impact of higher education on people's access to new information and changing gender norms. In addition, knowledge from education plays a significant role in modern agricultural societies. Its powerful effects occur in not only providing more scientific farming methods, but also in enabling farmers to become more competent in engaging in the market economy and in understanding more accurately information about relevant laws and policies and opportunities for improving their well-being. However, increased schooling may then result in 'deskilling' in traditional ecological information and decline in agricultural production.

Social Resources, Social Capital and Household Networks

Social resources theory converges on social capital theory (Lin, 1999b), and its analytical focus is on social networks. Social resources theory suggests that access to and the use of social resources are shaped both by positions in the hierarchical structure and by the use of weak ties (Granovetter, 1973; Granovetter, 1985; Lin, 1999b; Lin et al., 2001a). Burt (1997, 2004) sees social capital as opportunities arising from different types of networks by using financial and human capital, while Granovetter (1985; 1973) has developed ideas about the 'embeddedness' of personal relations and networks of relationships in generating and enforcing norms and establishing expectations and trust. 'Embeddedness' is consequently not only a tool of analysis of social relations within an economic system, but also a social structure with history and continuity. For both Burt and Granovetter, the absence of ties or the

existence of weak ties can be good for the emergence of new social capital, arguing that weaker ties help generate new information and resources, while dense networks tend to convey redundant information.

The importance of networks is shown when examining the processes of social and cultural change, for “relationships are not units, they are processes whose meaning and value changes in response to other things going on at the time” (Wallman, 1984: 68). The ‘effective network’, however, “may not be connected in its totality, but highly connected in its parts” (Epstein, 1969: 110). The people that a particular person interacts most intensely and regularly with are also likely to come to know one another, so there is a potential of further connectedness across part of the total network. Epstein consequently proposes the usefulness of the ‘effective network’ concept because it directs analytic attention to clusters of people fairly closely knitted together. She goes on to comment that “the network as a whole, therefore, provides a covert or informal structure composed of inter-personal links which spread out and ramify in all directions, criss-crossing not only the whole of the local community, but knitting together people in different towns and in town and country” (Epstein, 1969: 111). This can be illustrated in connection with gossip. Within an effective network this shows the existence of norms, as people’s behaviour is evaluated or criticised. Indeed, continuous gossip can lead “not merely to the reaffirmation of established norms, but also to the clarifications and formulation of new ones” (Epstein, 1969: 113).

In exploring the social networks of London households, Wallman comments that the society-as-network metaphor allows the ethnographer to consider who knows whom, who goes where, and what kinds of cross-linkages there are in a given social field

“even when it is not possible to sit in the middle of that field and watch it all happening” (Wallman, 1984: 59). She looks in particular at the geographic and affective distance of people to others. A geographic distance map shows how spatially close or distance people in the household are, whereas an affective distance map depicts their emotional connectedness and how close they are in terms of feelings. Judd (2002) stresses the importance of Chinese women’s own networks with their parents family (*niangjia*), and these type of networks have provided beneficial emotional supports to the women and also husbands’ households.

Both kinds of network maps have distinctive features in the household context. A network map based on geographic distance draws an arbitrary line around a social field and maps the linkages happening inside it. A network map based on affective distance conceptualises an ego-centred social field and involves following one person through the universe of their contacts: “the first... is like describing the activity in a fish tank; the second, is like tagging one fish and watching to see where it swims and who it swims with” (Wallman, 1984: 60). The geographic map tells nothing about what people do together, what each thinks of the other, or what kind of relationship they share, and the affective network map is analytically more useful here. There are some cautionary points to raise here. Firstly, when someone has a large number of contacts, this may be because they are not powerful enough to help themselves. Secondly, the balance between the quantity and quality of contacts could reflect household style or ethnic culture as much as resource options, and anyway, for some households few is better, while for others more is best. Thirdly, the overall situation of the household makes a difference to the value of the people its members know; and individuals who are resources for some purposes can be liabilities for

others, and also circumstances change. The affective distance network map provides a helpful way “into understanding how a variety of individual households conceptualise the people they know, how they experience the inner city, and how they manage the business of livelihood in an inner-city setting” (Wallman, 1984: 69). It also has much relevance in a village context, as shown in later chapters.

Social capital, succinctly, is “the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition” (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 119). Bourdieu defines social capital as a resource of individuals and families which is inherent in their network of relationships and an aggregate of actual and potential resource possessed by this. It is also capable of being transformed into economic and cultural capital. He views social capital as an instrumental outcome of a person’s participation in groups and their sociability with the purpose of accessing and creating social resource. Social networks, then, are not a natural given but constructed through investments in relationships. For Bourdieu, access to social capital results in gaining access to economic and cultural resources, considered as the outcomes of the investment in social capital; and investment of economic and cultural resources is also essential for gaining social capital (Wacquant, 2000). Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) discuss social capital of a kind that consists of durable networks of relationships through which individuals can mobilise power and resources. It has both structural and agency effects, and the volume of capital (economic, cultural and symbolic) is possessed by individual in a network and the volume of social capital reflects the size of a network. Bourdieu (1986) also points out that the dominant class group reproduces its social capital through both the size

of the group and its networks, and also the volume of capital possessed by its members, in effect assuming that all members have strong and reciprocal relations.

Social capital is embedded in the structure of actors' relationship, while economic capital is represented by bank accounts, and human capital consists of skills and knowledge in people's heads (Portes, 1998). There are also negative aspects of social capital, such as strong ties barring non-group access, disincentives to novelty in a situation of closure, tighter social control and more conformity, and discrimination against outsiders. In a discussion about social capital and diversity and social cohesion in the context of modern immigration, Portes and Vickstrom (2011) also address three methodological issues, regarding the rather catch-all way that social capital is defined, pinning down its relationship with network activities, and how to control for variables that are spurious.

Bebbington (1999) comments that social capital has crucial importance because through it people are able to widen their access to resources and to other network actors. He also points out that household livelihood is partly dependent on households' social capital, and this "offers a more integrated framework for thinking about access to resources. Indeed, seen this way, the distinction between access and resources breaks down, because access becomes perhaps the most critical resource of all if people are to build sustainable, poverty alleviating rural livelihoods" (Bebbington, 1999: 2022). Baker (1990) relatedly defines social capital as resources that are created by changes in the relationships among network actors, which form specific social structures and which are used to pursue network and individual interests. Connectedly, social capital is derived from embedded resources in social networks (Lin and Dumin, 1986; Lin et al., 2001b; Lin, 1982).

Three key elements of social capital (resources embedded in a social structure, access to, and mobilisation of these resources by individuals in purposive action) have been highlighted in building a shared set of ideas about social capital (see for instance Lin, 1982; Lin, 1999a; Lin and Dumin, 1986; Lin, 1999b; Lin et al., 2001b). Social capital here is seen to interact between structure and action and involves focusing on inequality of accessing resources at the original position; capitalising processes, and outcomes (expected returns). This is helpful in providing a good analytical basis for studying household networks and the embedded resources in those, which play a significant role for small-holding households in accessing and using resources and facilitating their instrumental and expressive economic and other activities.

Although households may have structurally similar options, they are also likely to have different styles of organising and managing 'local' resources, including as related to style of livelihood and local circumstances. Wallman's (1984) eight households, for instance, are similar in many respects, but they differ in terms of the kind and quantity of organising resources they have, and in the way they use or convert these resources into a livelihood. The viability of households is then importantly shaped by the local environment and the options it offers. However, this is not a form of social determinism regarding how households take up options and how they deploy their resources across the various domains of livelihood: "more seems to be better on both counts: it is 'better' not to be narrowly dependent on specific resources, and not to be narrowly involved in only one sphere of activity" (Wallman, 1984: 218).

Changing Economic Life and Household Divisions of Labour

In discussing the relationship between household and economy, Morris (1990) explains that in modern capitalist society the typical household is composed by people related through kinship and marriage, and she terms the result as a 'nuclear family household' made up of a married or cohabiting couple and their offspring. The traditional highly gendered division of labour between the sexes is still often retained, with the woman seen as primarily responsible for "securing the means of household survival; its daily and generational reproduction" (Morris, 1990: 3). It has been pointed out by Dixon (1978: 179) that households are "logical units of analysis insofar as members share common economic and social needs and interests and are integrated into a decision-making structure that not only shapes personal desires but mediates between desires and behavioural outcome". Further, in rural societies especially it is important to recognise and identify the economic activities that women engage in, both inside and outside the household, including because in this context "tasks normally allocated to women in the sexual division of labour may be particularly suitable for upgrading into small industries as a means of circumventing conflict over jobs with men"; and time-budget studies can be to provide a better understanding of household divisions of labour (Dixon, 1978: 186-187).

In China, decollectivisation brought new economic freedoms: outside work was permitted, as was the establishment of private enterprises, subject to licensing and approval. In rural China, the production teams from the commune era were abolished and the small-holding household farming has become more and more efficient. There are more and more farmers leaving the villages, however, taking on a wide variety of

work ranging from paid labour to various kinds of self-employment (Cohen, 1992: 368). The discussion following looks at some major aspects of the economic activities of small-holding household members: their production, transaction and consumption in the rural context; work, employment and migration, mainly in towns and cities; and gender and inequalities.

Thorner (1987: 64) portrays the unit of production as the most fundamental aspect of peasant/farmer households:

“We define a peasant family household as a socio-economic unit which grows crops primarily by the physical efforts of the members of the family. The principal activity of the peasant households is the cultivation of their own lands, strips or allotments. The households may also engage in other activities: for example, in handicrafts, processing, or even petty trade. Some members of the family may work, perhaps be forced to work, outside the household from time to time.”

Cohen pushes this last point further in proposing that:

“in many cases the farm does not represent the only source of family income, and not uncommonly may provide less than half of it. Indeed, the family itself is the enterprise; it may run a farm, expand into other activities, or in some instances may devote its energies exclusively to commercial or other non-agricultural endeavours.” (Cohen, 1992: 361)

The small-holding household is not only the primary institution for mobilising and administering labour on farms; it also ensures its own reproduction and long-term viability by organising consumption. On this, Netting points out that:

“in small-holding households though individuals can and assuredly do make economic decisions about market exchanges, stored food, and labour expenditures, they generally do so without bookkeeping and exact calculations. They have little way of estimating changes in social behaviour at the group level; indeed, there may be a vested interest in asserting a somewhat spurious cultural continuity and the strength of tradition.” (Netting, 1993: 5)

Chinese economic reforms have brought about more and more local private enterprises in villages, including grain processing shops, small grocery stores, cotton producing and processing factories and so on. Cohen (1992: 368) comments that “all these new economic enterprises developed with the family as the unit of ownership and represented adjustments to new circumstances by family units that had never lost their traditional standing as property-holding economic entities”. However, the differences between household production and market production are differences of degree rather than of kind and households and firms share common goals and respond in similar ways to economic constraints (Folbre, 1986a, 1986b). At the same time, the household economy has a great reach over other aspects of people’s lives, for: “economic self-interest seems to penetrate even the most intimate domains of family life. This does not imply that household decisions can be explained in purely economic terms. It merely suggests that the boundary between self-interest and altruism does not necessarily coincide with the threshold of the home” (Folbre, 1986a: 33). However, cooperation has also become a trend and is essential to the provision of social services, such as education and health care, although in the short run this may affect agricultural growth. It is also beneficial when “the rapid diversification of agriculture toward crops with high market value may lead to declines in basic grain production, risking shortages in bad years and dependency on international suppliers” (Netting, 1993: 259) and, it is an important part of households being able to survive market competition in agricultural modernisation.

The village community plays an important role in the economic life of local households. There is usually a village market where household products are sold; and

the village community is also the core of people's social life. Relationships between women are important to economic life in villages, as they are involved in many kinds of exchange transactions and create active female networks: "in everyday village life women customarily met at the places of collective family labour: the village wash-house and fountain, the baking-house and the milk depot, the garden fence, the shops, the common village refrigeration plant" (Inheteen and Blasche, 1987: 32). This is important but in Shang at least has changed, as I discuss later in the thesis.

In her research on household production in the Philippines, Folbre (1984: 304) develops four useful ideas, which are that:

"altruism in the family coexists with conflict of interest over the distribution of goods and leisure time; individual shares of the family or household' total income are determined in part by individual bargaining power within the household; the relative bargaining power of men, women and children changes in the course of economic development; and changes in bargaining power lead to changes in the distribution of goods and leisure time and affect the price of goods, including children, produced in the household".

This analysis is particularly concerned with the distribution of income and leisure time within rural households from the perspective of bargaining power, and it closely examines inequalities in the distribution of good and leisure time between men and women in households, including because women carry a disproportionate share of the costs of rearing children. It shows the positive relationship between domestic and household inequalities and bargaining power, and argues that political and legal changes may influence women's bargaining power in the long run.

The character of work and employment in the changing rural economy has drawn considerable analytic attention. For Wallman, work is a platform for managing both economic and non-economic resources:

“work is then not only ‘about’ the production of material goods, money transactions and the need to grow food and to cook the family dinner. It must equally be ‘about’ the ownership and circulation of information, the playing of roles, the symbolic affirmation of personal significance and group identity- and the relation of each of these to the other.” (Wallman, 1979: 7-8)

She also emphasises that the value of an individual’s work not only depends on the society where he or she lives, but on such things as options, constraints and obligations. The place of work also matters in both traditional and modern societies: home-centred work, household production and work without employment, all make a difference. Another crucial factor is the particular person, relating to their age, gender, identity and skills. Any of these factors bring about a specialised division of labour, also influenced of course by the impact of new social relations and divisions of labour. Technology also impacts on the value of time at work, and as Wallman (1979: 15) comments “the division of labour concept is useful to us only if we give it a time dimension” because “a realistic assessment of the time values of work cannot be made without reference to the technology used in the performance of that work”. Time is obviously an essential resource in the system of the household in all societies.

Pahl (1980) has influentially argued that the concept of work is more productive for discussing the division of labour in the household economy in industrial societies than that of employment. With the emerging of a self-service economy, employment in the formal economy had declined. The availability of household privately owned goods like fridges, washing machines and cars has helped produce a very different style of living in households and these also have an impact on time use, task allocation and choice of work. The key example is the invention of internet, allowing more flexibility in work and employment practices (Castells, 1996). In other words, the skills and time (Minge-Klevana et al., 1980) required for work in the changing

economy and increases in the availability of advanced technological goods has changed various modes of work and had related impacts on styles of life and work in households.

Relatedly, Gershuny and Pahl (1979) have discussed work outside employment and also what they call a 'culture of unemployment', related to the contemporaneous development of more work in the informal economy and increases in unemployment in the formal economy. This is echoed by Wallman (1984: 23) in commenting that in contemporary industrial societies there are two important trends, "one is that the availability, experience, organisation, and function of employment in the formal economy is changing; the other is that the value of work outside the formal economy is increasingly widely recognised". In highlighting the hidden work of everyday life, work includes both formal and informal activities in various kinds of social organisations such as households and communities.

It has been commented that the social division of labour in industrial society is substantially a matter of renegotiating responsibility for the resources of livelihood at every level (Wallman, 1984: 22). Because of industrialisation and urbanisation in China, the opportunity for farmers to work in cities has increased dramatically. There are more and more farmers leaving their villages to seek for better paid jobs. However, the majority of jobs they are doing are without a formal contract or having just a temporary contract. Inequalities between former farmers with contract work and those without are significant, with the Household Registration System (*Hukou* System) discussed earlier also playing a part. This is because the Hukou System restricts the free movement of people from villages to towns or cities to set up

residence, gain employment and receive equal access to social welfare services as urban citizens (Blecher, 1983).

The achievement of urban and rural segregation has occurred through two means: one is “to impose a high opportunity cost for leaving rural areas by tying incomes to participation in daily collective farm work”; and the other is “to make it difficult for outsiders to live in urban areas through the denial of urban *Hukou*” (Zhao, 1999: 768). An unprecedented labour migration from rural to urban areas in China started in the late 1980s, and tens of millions of rural migrants now work and live in cities without the permanent legal status required by the Household Registration System (Zhao, 1999; Murphy, 2002). Zhao compares this with migration in earlier periods of Chinese history, and proposes that “current migration lacks a sense of long-term commitment. Most migrants leave families behind, return to their families during periods of unemployment, and seldom assimilate with the urban population. Very few settle down for a long-stay in cities” (Zhao, 1999: 767). Additionally, the Household Responsibility System has influenced labour migration because rural workers could now more freely allocate their time and residence.

The domestic division of labour reflects power/status within the household (Goody, 1964; Morris, 1990). The division of labour is a useful way to understand the processes of change in the organisation of work and employment; and in a household, the division of labour not only reflects social and economic changes in a society in terms of changes in work patterns (Thompson, 1967), but also demonstrates the organisation of all kinds of resources. Consequently in the case of my own research, it is important to look at divisions of labour and work in the processes of change

which the Chinese small-holding households I am concerned with are living through. The division of labour has several aspects of analytical interest, including “the categorisation of different types of work in particular societies; the comparison of societies with different classifications of work; and consideration of modes of recruitment of persons into roles as workers” (Schildkrout, 1979: 69).

The concepts of work, divisions of labour and changes in these all reverberate in a household context. Household labour is composed of different types of work and needs to be analysed in their cultural and institutional contexts (Pfau-Effinger, 2010). On this, Pahl (1984: 233-243) is interested in the interrelationship of household types, occupational status and household structure, and he raises some important questions: How do households use the labour of their members? How important is the source of labour for domestic maintenance and improvement? And how can the informal labour of relatives, friends and neighbours, who can be paid or unpaid, be encompassed?

Age is important too and children’s role in household divisions of labour will change over the duration of the family cycle; but for many of them, children are closely connected to economic processes and household livelihood. The economic role of children is widely recognised. In spite of this, as Schildkrout comments, children and women can be said to do work but not to have occupations because “their economic roles are not the primary means of defining their persistently sub-ordinate social positions”; this reflects in most societies the low status of certain types of work such as food preparation, child-rearing, commodity production and distribution (Schildkrout, 1979: 83). Netting (1981: 172) writes that “children both worked on the farm and provided support for the aged, and there was the further expectation that

unmarried children working at nonfarm occupations would send all but a subsistence minimum of their earnings back to their parents". Age and family stage are often better predictors of a household's organisation and work patterns. However, as Schildkrout (1979: 69) points out, age has been under-researched in relation to the household division of labour, because of the relative insignificance of children and also of older people in the labour force in modern western industrial societies. But for countries with rapid changing economic and demographic structures, things are different. The importance of children's economic contributions is highlighted in developing economies and rural societies. Children's economic participation varies according to age, gender, birth order, family size, education, parents' occupations and class. In addition, increasing awareness of the importance of education is making changes in children's economic role in those societies.

The importance of the household division of labour is vividly demonstrated by the implicit contract in small-holding households, which exists as part of them managing both their human and their economic resources. Netting (1993: 67-69) comments helpfully that:

"The generality of implicit contracts neither ensures harmony nor avoids conflict... Both sexes and all ages from the age of about seven on took part in making hay, tending and foddering livestock, milking, irrigating the meadows, and grape harvesting. Gender differentiation was manifested in male ploughing, manuring, making cheese or herding on the alp, kneading bread, cutting and transporting firewood... while women gardened, fed the pigs, cooked and kept house... When men were working away from the village, women managed the farm on their own, and single adults could be self-sustaining. The best security for old age was to have adult children still resident in the village, and the value of this implicit contract to provide care for dependent elders may be reflected in marital fertility that shows no signs of family limitation... when the access to a reliable livelihood through household labour and property is tied so closely to a farm and its resident kin group, we may predict that a web of implicit contracts will emphasise the

interdependency and economic welfare of the group over a duration that may approach several lifetimes.”

Compared with waged labour, small-holding has been advantaged by the small, enduring, flexible and self-reproducing kinship-based working unit of the household, particularly in relation to the development of intensive agriculture. The specialised human capital needed has been created and supported in the domestic setting, and the devolution of the managerial role to the household level has minimised the need for any external hierarchical control of labour processes. Kinship rights and duties also help provide the foundation for a generational division of labour in small-holding households, with, for example, clear expectations of children, who must participate in various farming work at different ages.

Although the traditional rigid sex-linked division of labour is declining, traditional patriarchal values have been seen to still influence different aspects of household work and employment, such as the position of daughters as a source of domestic labour (Greenhalgh, 1988), and inequalities in employment and payment between male and female (Gershuny and Pahl, 1979; Pahl, 1980; Gershuny, 1979). Barrett (1980: 249) has seen this as fundamental to industrial capitalism:

“a model of women’s dependence has become entrenched in the relations of production of capitalism, in the division of labour in wage work and between wage labour and domestic labour. As such, an oppression of women that is not in any essentialist sense pre-given by the logic of capitalist development has become necessary for the ongoing reproduction of the mode of production in its present form.”

Thomas (1988: 536-37) supports such a view and states that “the sexual division of labour within the household and labour market, once established, served to reinforce each other, as they continue to do today. Women’s low wages and their segregation

in a limited number of occupations effectively consolidated their position in the family, and vice versa”. But is this still so, thirty years on?

Also, rather than adopting externalist and deterministic explanations like this, Pahl has pointed out the importance of recognising different choices and points of view regarding household and economy:

“women are perhaps more likely to perceive the household as the basic economic unit and to arrange their balance of work in term of the needs of the household as a whole. Furthermore, in general women are more likely to manage the non-waged work of all members of the household: if anyone is to take final responsibility for the order and amount of domestic and child rearing work, it is most likely to be the woman.” (Pahl, 1984: 84)

To develop a more sophisticated view of gender in the division of labour, Guyer et al. (1988) have critically employed Bourdieu’s concept of ‘habitus’, pointing out that:

“habitus is a powerful evocation of overdetermination, but it provides no guide to describing variability over time in a way which allows either an assessment of the causes and repercussions of particular improvisations or an understanding of how the generative principles are imbued with staying power. There are methods neither for analysing the internal structure of the ‘habitus’ nor for exploring ‘its’ shifting links to other forces and structures.” (Guyer et al., 1988: 251)

The framework for analysis of the division of labour by sex that they use includes tasks, time and overtime patterns. Jacka (1997: 22) believes that the gender divisions of labour in rural Chinese household are “partly shaped by certain Confucian ideals and family structures” and she further comments that the Confucian ideals confine women to “the ‘inside’ sphere of family and home and contributed to a division of labour such that domestic work has largely done by the women”.

Gender is an important determinant in allocating and managing household resources, and results in replicating wide inequalities within the household (Wahhaj, 2006; Udry, 1996), as well as in economic and social life more generally. Yanagisako

(1979) suggests that attention here should be turned to domestic organisation and social inequalities in marriage, including the impact of age at marriage, marriage transactions and forms of marriage. She also argues that relations of inequality within and among household members indicate the need to examine wider political and economic processes. The main economic inequalities discussed are those of income and labour in small-holding households, which are both the origin and also the result of differentiations in the control of land and household structures. Consequentially, the unequal character of people as workers in households results in further inequalities regarding both material and non-material organising resources.

In China, the Household Responsibility System has had effects for household divisions of labour, with the impact of decollectivisation on peasant families of great consequence:

“the return to household production has, however, restored to the peasant family its traditional role as a basic production unit, reversing the direction of change in the organisation of work and family life over the past two and a half decades. As a result, the organisation of farm work is once again based upon the household division of labour.” (Nee, 1986: 185)

Nee suggested, nearly 30 years ago now, that “the division of labour contained in a peasant household is still adequate for handling the entire cycle of agricultural production” (Nee, 1985: 185). Earlier fieldwork in different villages in China before the collectives of the 1930s and 1940s held that the peasant household as the core production unit in rural society suppressed individual behaviour while generating a high level of production (Wong, 1973; Yang, 1965b; Fei, 1946). When small-holdings replaced collectives within the Household Responsibility System, Griffin (1984: 305) in 1984 wrote that “the new responsibility system has affected incentives in such a way that the peasantry now works longer hours than before, works with

greater intensity per hour than previously and also works with greater intelligence, imagination and creativity”.

The division of labour in Chinese rural society has been traditionally linked to households composed of parents and married sons, with tensions over the relative consumption and contribution of household members to the household economy often resulting in household division. The Household Responsibility System restored patriarchal power over women and children, and it also led to a sharp increase in agricultural productivity; and this in turn encouraged the displacement of surplus labour from agriculture. Together with wider changes of urbanisation and industrialisation occurring in China, there have been changes to this both for the household and its individual members, with later chapters exploring this in detail.

Conclusion: Chinese Small-holder Households in Narrative Inquiry

Research

The discussion of the literature in this chapter has centred on the idea of the household as a system of culture and resources, with the intricate interplays of people and resources greatly influencing the viability of households. This involves the relationship between a domestic group and its resources and means of subsistence, which is viewed around labour in the household and who is suitable or appropriate to carry this out (Stenning, 1958). Household viability consequently becomes prominent in communities and societies where socio-economic transitions are taking place, and many studies have stressed the importance of studying this in both industrialised and rural societies (eg. Sharma, 1977; Sharma, 1980; Cohen, 1976; Wallman, 1984; Netting et al., 1989; Netting, 1965; Huang, 1998). Importantly, in

order to gain a better understanding of people's actions and the capacity of the households concerned, these studies pinpoint the significance of looking into changes in managing resources and changes of livelihoods in households which are experiencing a changing local environment.

Industrialisation and urbanisation have had significant impacts on households and their resource management, labour divisions and members' activities. People's activities are also of course related social and cultural meanings and emotional bonds, together forming the central aspects of household life. The literature discussed has provided several key ideas that are very helpful in analysing the research data as presented in later chapters. Firstly, Wallman's (1984) idea of households as resource systems highlights the value of different kinds of resources, which encourages me to look widely at how people understand and talk about this. Secondly, there is the importance of the resource manager in the household and its related cultural and practical activities, which indicates that something important about the relative status of such things has changed, and this points me to take particular note of the details of the gendered aspects of how such matters are organised. Thirdly, non-material resources such as information, time and identity are increasingly crucial to households, which among other things suggests that these may be not only differentially located within but also between households. Fourthly, the changes in household economic life are underlined by the increasing 'fuzzy' boundaries of households and the importance of this is reflected in the focus of my analysis in what follows. Fifthly, household networks affect people's access to and use of social resources and both geographical and affective networks are important, again with my analysis exploring the dynamics and effects here. Finally, gender has considerable

influence on all dimensions of household life, including the allocation and management of household resources, related power of control and inequalities in the household, and I also pick up on this in later chapters.

Using ideas drawn from the literature discussed in this chapter, in the chapters following the detailed accounts of members of the four research households in Shang Village will be presented and analysed. Chapter 3 briefly provides an introduction to the Huang, Fang, Cheng and Zhu households. The substantive chapters which then follow explore key themes in depth through analysing my research data.

In Chapter 4, I take forward various key points discussed in this present chapter, to explore their practical applicability and utility in analysing and making sense of the lives and understandings of people in the Shang Village households. The four households will be compared and contrasted regarding the divisions of labour in each household, its members' work and their changing economic lives. Kinship in rural China has been studied from the perspective of lineage as the most important local grouping, but it is also important to study kin-related institutions such as family, household and village in concrete grounded contexts of practice. Therefore the analysis in Chapter 4 concerns the household as a whole, including its structure, activities, emotional bonds, social and cultural meanings and also everyday practices. As well as persisting over time, important tasks for rural Chinese households concern family division, marriage and reproduction; and the major events for household life are underlined by traditional festivals including ancestor worship, which are also matters discussed. Chapter 4 also explores people's different roles in each of the research households. Who is the household head, who is the resources manager, and what impact do such arrangements have? The analysis will consider the relationship

between cultural expectations concerning gender, age, seniority regarding responsibility for household resources and tasks, and also what actually happens, and so the relationship between the household as a 'system' and its practical management. Household divisions can be an important factor for rural households, not only impacting on household structure but also influencing household labour, people's economic lives and related important tasks concerning marriage, reproduction and related changes, and this aspect of household life will also be explored and the range of effects examined. These aspects of the Shang households and the lives of their members are analysed in the setting of a changing local environment, and the effects of such changes on people's work both in and out of the household, including types of work and forms of payment, and changes in people's work identities, will be discussed, enabling a further assessment of the applicability or otherwise of ideas in the literature examined in this present chapter.

Chapter 5 focuses on the analysis of resources in the four households and their economies, in particular emphasising Wallman's (1984: 213) view that it should be the household as a whole that is focused on, in a particular environment, and with its viability depends on the combinations of styles and circumstances. Viewing the household as a whole, a unit, raises questions regarding what the resources are, what choices and options are dependent on such resources, and what the styles and circumstances of each household are. Resources are defined as both material and non-material. Material resources are structural and commonly include land, labour and capital; while non-material resources are such things as information, time and identity. Information is inevitably considered as an important resource for households; and the value of time changes according to a given activity and whoever

carries it out. This chapter also develops Wallman's (1984) approach, by exploring and analysing small-holding household members' life stories. Their stories explain the characteristics of the small-holding household as a corporate social unit with manageable productive resources. Also, recognising the significance of non-material and organising resources, I will analyse the personal and household stories in these households in terms of information, time, identity and knowledge, in order to understand how the use and value of these resources are affected by the management and value of other resources. Finally, the chapter investigates the relationship between household resource dynamics and the impact on household boundaries and changing livelihoods, by addressing such questions as, how do household members evaluate these resources, which resources are in focus, how does household resources management affect household boundaries, and how do both material and non-material resources impact on opportunities and constraints?

Chapter 6 analyses the workings of networks and social capital in the four households and their importance in a changing and industrialising setting. Social relationships facilitate transforming and expanding resources so as to meet people's material and experiential needs, while informal and personal networks affect people's access to resources. The analytical focus here is on the character of household networks, showing among other things how close or distant people in the household are and the extent to which kinship ties are influenced by a strong patrilineal and patrilocal tradition. Chapter 6 is also concerned with social events such as celebrations and crises, which are useful in exploring the quantity and quality of social resources and social capital that a household has in specific circumstances (Cohen, 1990; Wallman, 1984). In particular, the analysis of crises in the research

households illustrates what the urgent changes are and how networks operate in such a context as a household strategy adopted in some specific circumstances (Pahl, 1984; Crow, 1989; Warde, 1990; Wallace, 2002). Networks also provide social capital. Social capital is embedded in networks, highlighting inequalities in people's ability to access social resources through their networks because of their particular social location. Social events such as celebrations are the main focus for this part of the analysis, including who organises, prepares and attends a social event; and how people differently access and capitalise social resources through networks as presented in crisis situations.

Chapter 3 The Four Households Introduced

This chapter provides a brief introduction to the Huang, Fang, Cheng and Zhu households in Shang Village, outlining the composition of each household, its members' major activities, and its organisation. Before going into detail, I start by sketching out some basics about small-holder households in the South of Anhui province. Each small-holder's house usually has two or three storeys, with a big courtyard in the front of the house and a room which can be seen as the sitting-room. The main entrance to the house opens onto this room, which is wide, and in the middle against the central wall¹ of the sitting-room is usually a big square table with four long benches at each side of the table. On the central wall hangs a large painting and at the two sides of the painting there is a pair of scrolls containing a poetic couplet. In the example I am thinking about, there is also a long but narrow rectangular table against the wall, and on this table are a traditional clock-box and some decorative items, such as a little statue or a vase with some flowers. There is a room at both the left and right sides of the sitting-room. These rooms in some houses are bedrooms and in other houses are storage rooms for grain. There is always a door in the corner of the central wall of the sitting-room leading to these rooms and also to a kitchen, a simple toilet and stairs for access to the rooms upstairs. The rooms upstairs are usually bedrooms and one or two storage rooms. Behind the house, there is normally another yard and an outbuilding for pig rearing.

¹ The central wall is the wall facing the main entrance of the house.

The Huang Household

Huang Shuji² has two daughters. He lives with his mother Mrs Huang, his wife Juan, his elder daughter Ju, son-in-law Min and two children, his granddaughters. They live in a three-storied house, which was his maternal grandparents' house and rebuilt in the 2000s for Huang Shuji's daughter Ju's marriage. Huang Shuji has been living with his parents in this house both before and after his marriage. Huang Shuji has a brother, Hui. When Hui was about to marry in the mid 1980s, he received some financial support from Huang Shuji to build a house next door. Huang Shuji's mother Mrs Huang has spent her whole life in the village as a small-holding farmer. She used to help her two sons' households with gardening, childcare and some housework; now she is over eighty and she only washes her own clothes.

Huang Shuji is the Party Secretary of the village and about sixty years old. Huang Shuji is the official Household Head on the Household Registration Booklet (Hukou). He was the Director of the village for ten years from 1973 to 1983, and then the Party Secretary of the village for thirty years. Now he is still the Party Secretary. He has also been the village doctor for about forty years since the 1970s, and has been the only doctor in Shang Village since then. In the time of Chairman Mao Zedong, Huang Shuji was called a 'bare foot doctor'³. Huang Shuji also does the majority of the work for the household's eight-mu⁴ (a Chinese measure, about 5360 square

² Shuji, in Chinese, means the Communist Party Secretary. In China, it is a respectful way to address people as "surname + the title of their position".

³ The "bare foot doctor" scheme was initiated under Mao Zedong in 1972. "Bare foot" symbolically means farmer because they work in the fields without shoes. The term "bare foot doctor" thus refers to the farmers' doctor.

⁴ Mu is a Chinese measure for fields, and one mu equals 666.66 square metres. So I use the round number 670.

metres) of rice and rapeseed fields, redistributed after the collectivisation era. The production of the fields is mainly for household consumption.

Huang Shuji's wife Juan has always been a small-holding farmer too, working on the household vegetable garden and in backyard pork farming. In recent years, she has only kept one pig, for household consumption at the Chinese New Year. Since 2011, in addition to her household activities, she has also worked on a part-time basis for the County Council in cutting grass and trees.

Huang Shuji's elder daughter Ju trained to be a primary school teacher at the age of nineteen. She has been both a Chinese and a maths teacher in the village school for children aged between six and eight. This is the only school in the village. In recent years the officers from the educational department of the County Council have proposed many times to Huang Shuji a plan to close the only school in the village. However, Huang Shuji, Ju, and two other teachers, and some villager representatives have been trying their best in meetings to persuade the officers to keep it open. This is because it is the closest school to the village, with the next nearest school about 3km away in a nearby village. When the children finish their first three years of primary study in the Shang Village school, they have to go to the primary school in the nearby village and most of them go to school on foot in the early morning and come home in the late afternoon. Ju, her father and the other two teachers believe the existence of the village school is more suitable and convenient for the children under eight, because most of the children's parents work very hard for low-skilled jobs in cities and have no time for taking and collecting their children to and from school.

Ju's husband Min took his father-in-law's surname 'Huang' after the marriage. On the Household Registration Booklet, Min is 'Huang Min' and appears under Huang Shuji's household, instead of under his previous name 'Zhang Min'. Min lives in the Huang household because of the uxori-local marriage tradition. In China uxori-local marriage is usually considered as a low status marriage for the man because China is a patriarchal society. For Min, Huang Shuji is his father, rather than his father-in-law. Min's biological parents live in another village, and Min told me that he used to live in a very poor family and his parents have also been in poor health, so that both of them could not work as hard as normal farmers. He said he liked studying but the poverty in his family prevented him continuing studying after his primary school years. Min has a younger brother. Although he is the elder son for his biological parents, his parents are very happy for him to be the son in Huang Shuji's family, as Huang Shuji is such a nice father. Usually, Huang Shuji and Min go to visit Min's biological parents and take them some necessities every two weeks. When he was 22, Min married Ju. Before the marriage, he was an apprentice carpenter. His master is a friend of Huang Shuji and introduced him to Huang Shuji's daughter. After he married into the Huang family, he has worked for about fifteen years as a porter in a small logistic company in Tunxi, which is owned by Huang Shuji's cousin.

Tian, ten years old, is Ju and Min's daughter. Jie is Huang Shuji's younger daughter, and Mei is Jie's daughter. Mei is eight. Both Tian and Mei study in the primary school in the nearby village. When Mei was two years old, both her parents started working in a paint producing factory in the big city Hangzhou, about 230km away from Xiuning County. Mei has been living with her maternal grandparents since her

birth. Her parents come to stay at the Huang house on some public holidays and Chinese New Year.

Figure 2. The Huang Household



The Fang Household

Mr Fang, Lao, and Mrs Fang, Yu, are both over sixty-five and have two sons and a daughter. In the Fang household live Mr and Mrs Fang, their elder son Liang, Liang's wife Chun and their grandson Qing. Mr and Mrs Fang's younger son and their daughter are both married and have children, and they work and live in the city of Tunxi. The Fang house was restructured in the early 1990s when the elder son Liang was about to marry. The two-storied open space house was converted to a three-storied house with two sitting-rooms, five bedrooms, one kitchen and two bathrooms. Among these, a sitting-room, a bathroom and two bedrooms belong to the elder son Liang. The Fang house has two front doors, one leads to the sitting-room belonging to Mr and Mrs Fang, and the other one is to Liang's sitting-room.

When Liang and his wife have guests, he often takes them directly to his sitting-room from his front door. Liang, his wife and their son Qing usually eat with Mr and Mrs Fang, as Liang pays a monthly sum to his parents for their meals.

Mr Fang used to manage their backyard pork farm, slaughter pigs in the village, and help Mrs Fang with their ten-mu (about 6670 square metres) of rice, rapeseed and cotton fields. Mr Fang stopped working as a backyard pork farmer about six years ago and since then has worked with his son Liang on different building sites in the centre of Xiuning. This work pays better than farming, and the money is paid daily. However, he still slaughters pigs for other village households in the month before the Chinese New Year.

In addition to the backyard gardening of vegetables, Mrs Fang, Yu, is a backyard pig farmer. She has two female pigs and seven piglets. Five of the piglets are to be sold to a local pork trader, and the other two are for consumption by the family and their friends during festivals and celebrations. They usually buy pork from the local market for daily consumption. The pigs Mrs Fang keeps are a local black species, fed only with home-grown vegetables and grains. In spring and autumn, Mrs Fang used to ride her tricycle around the Tunxi area selling her sun-dried home-grown vegetables, including beans, bamboo shoots and cabbages. Two years ago she started to work in a small plastic processing factory near Shang Village, particularly in the winter time.

Because both Mr and Mrs Fang are involved in industrial work and do not have much time for their fields, when a brick-producing company offered them a good price to rent their land two years ago, they decided to let their household fields,

eight-mu (about 5336 square metres) in size, to the factory on a five-year contract; and their other two-mu (about 1334 square metres) household field is also rented to a company to plant trees on a five-year contract.

The elder son Liang became a brick worker after his secondary schooling. From 1980s to 1990s he was self-employed, working in Shang village and nearby villages for households who were rebuilding their houses. Since the late 1990s, he has been working away from home on various building sites in the Tunxi and Xiuning areas. Since their marriage, Liang's wife Chun has always worked with her husband as an assistant in working on various building sites. She is also paid for cooking lunch for the workers at some of the building sites. Liang's son Qing has just finished his studies in a vocational medical school and he is about to start work as a nurse in one of the best hospitals in the city of Tunxi.

Mr and Mrs Fang's other son, Wen, has become an accountant and has worked in Tunxi since leaving university in the 1990s. Wen has married and has a daughter. Mr and Mrs Fang's daughter Hao, after training in a vocational school, moved to Tunxi to work as a tourist guide. She has married and has a son. Usually both Wen's family and Hao's family come to visit their parents at weekends.

Figure 3. The Fang Household



The Cheng Household

Mr Cheng, Dong, and Mrs Cheng, Jin, have two sons and two daughters. In the Cheng household, there are five people: Mr and Mrs Cheng, their elder son Kun, Kun's daughter and Kun's younger brother Gang's son Fei. When there was the family division in the 1980s, two sons together built two attached houses on the site of Mr Cheng's old house. Mr and Mrs Cheng have been living with their elder son Kun since the division took place. Since they were married in the early 1960s, Mr and Mrs Cheng have grown rice and rape seeds in their eight-mu (about 5336 square metres) of fields, as well as growing vegetables in their backyard garden, and also keeping some chickens and a few pigs. Two thirds of their household fields were rented out four years ago to a neighbour for cultivation. Now only Mr Cheng is involved in rapeseed cultivation on his remaining land. He also grows some

vegetable in the backyard garden, and keeps four piglets for the family and for his younger son Gang's friends in Beijing.

Kun, Mr Cheng's elder son, is about fifty and he used to be a well-known carpenter in Shang Village. Kun became an apprentice electrician in the 1990s when he became aware that industrialised wooden products were much more competitive than traditional ones. Since the mid 1990s, Kun has been an electrician for various building companies in Xiuning and Tunxi, and these various temporary jobs have enabled him to make enough savings for marriage. Kun's family was financially poor in the 1980s and 1990s and he married in 2003 when he was already in his forties and his daughter Xin was born in 2004. However, his marriage broke up in 2009 because he believes his wife, Qiu, was disappointed by their low standard of living. Later he found out that she went to join some of her friends who were established as migrant workers in Shanghai. Although his wife has not had much contact with him and her daughter in recent years, Kun still hopes that one day she will come back home. Kun is not only busy working as an electrician but also helps his father with some agricultural work during the season for intensive agricultural activities.

Mr and Mrs Cheng's younger son Gang and his wife Hua have been working and living in Beijing since 2005. In 2001, Gang and his wife left the village to go to Inner Mongolia, where they worked on a construction project organised by a close friend from Tunxi. When the construction project finished, the boss of the construction project started a house moving business in Beijing and in 2005 Gang was offered a job there as a porter. His wife was also offered a job in the company, cleaning the employees' dormitory and cooking for them.

Gang's son Fei is fifteen now. He is in his first year of high school in the Xiuning County High School in the town centre of Xiuning. Although Gang and his wife want their son Fei to live and study in Beijing, this is not possible because of the Chinese Hukou System. Gang and his wife are still considered as outsiders in Beijing and so they are not entitled to many of the social benefits there, such as children's education and medical insurance, etc. Fei is very clever and in 2013 he was ranked second in Xiuning County in the high school examinations, leading to him being selected to study in the best high school in the county. Fei had also studied for three years in the Xiuning Middle School in the town centre of Xiuning.

Since 2010, which was Fei's first year in middle school, his father Gang decided to rent a flat for him close to his school, because the commute from his village takes at least one hour by bicycle. Gang wants Fei to have more time for study and rest, instead of spending time in commuting. Gang has very high expectations for his son. Gang told me that he works so hard in order to generate enough income for Fei's education and he always dreams that in a few years Fei will be able to achieve good results in the university examination and can then study in one of the top universities in Beijing. Gang also told me that the achievements Fei has already had in his studies has become the primary motivation for his and his wife's hard work. Gang and his wife usually come home for the Chinese New Year period and Gang always gives his brother Kun a lump sum of money for the whole household usage. Gang told me that he feels ashamed that he cannot stay in the village taking care of his parents, his son and brother's family, because he has to work hard in the city to earn money for his son and the family. He only can express his gratitude to his parents and brother Kun by offering this financial support. The fund he gives to Kun annually covers the

living costs for Fei and Mrs Cheng in Xiuning and provides some support to Kun for looking after his father in the village and makes a small contribution for Kun's daughter's education.

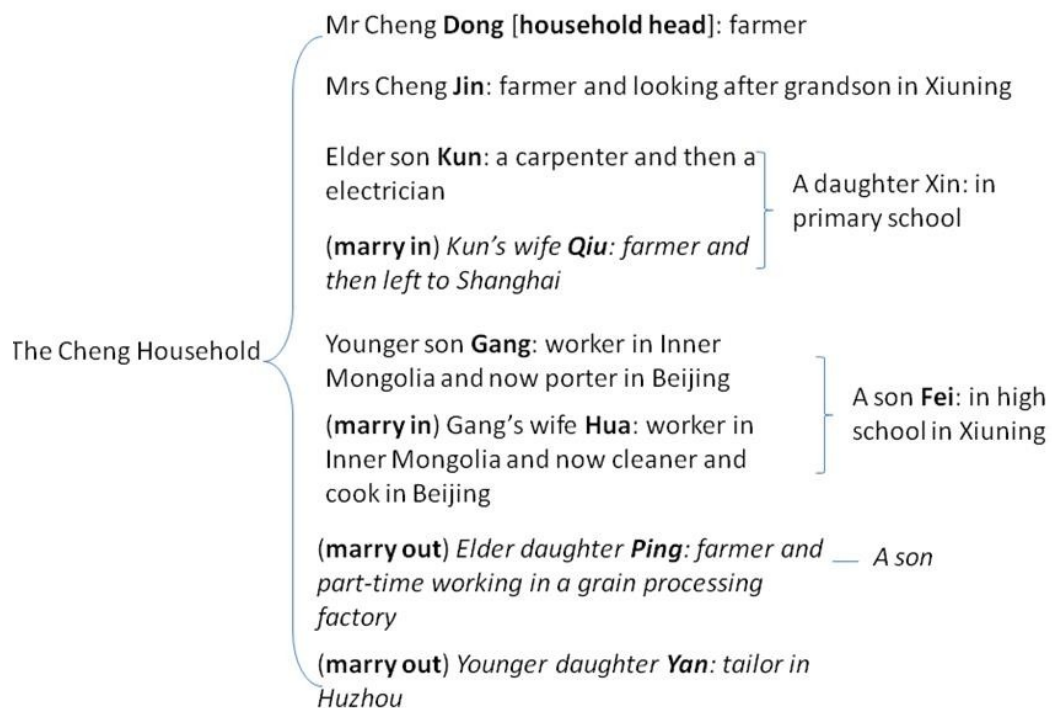
Mrs Cheng had to stop working on the small-holding when she moved to Xiuning to live with her grandson Fei in 2010, in order to look after him there. Mrs Cheng and Fei go back to the village to stay with their family members at weekends. They often take with them some vegetables from their garden to Xiuning when they return on Sunday. During the week, Kun often comes to visit Mrs Cheng and Fei, having lunch with them in Xiuning, bringing them some 'convenient and modern' food bought from supermarkets.

Kun's daughter Xin is nine and in her fourth year in primary school. She had her first three years of primary education in the village primary school and then had to go to another primary school in the nearby village in order to continue. Usually at 7.20am she starts her walk to the school, taking about forty-five minutes, in order to be there by 8.30am and the start of the first class.

Mr and Mrs Cheng's two daughters are married and live with their husband's family in other villages. Their elder daughter Ping is a small-holding farmer and housewife. Their younger daughter Yan has been a tailor for twelve years working in a clothing company in Huzhou, a city in a neighbouring province (Zhejiang Province). Ping worked with her sister in the same clothing factory in Huzhou from 2007 to 2008, and she was introduced to that job by her sister Yan. However, in 2008 Ping went back to being a small-holder and housewife again, living in her husband's family in another village in Xiuning County; and then since 2010 she has been working in a

part-time job in a grain processing factory in her husband's village. Ping has a seven-year-old son. Yan married in 2011 and has no children. Yan's husband is from a nearby village and works in an animal feed producing company in Xiuning. Ping and her family usually come to the Cheng household for lunch on Sundays. Yan's husband comes to visit Mr Cheng and Kun about once a week, and sometimes he comes to lunch with Mrs Cheng and Fei in Xiuning. Yan comes home usually during the national holidays.

Figure 4. The Cheng Household



The Zhu Household

Mr Zhu, Bo, has four brothers and he is the fifth child of his parents. Mr Zhu and his wife Wei have two children, a son Tao and a daughter Hong. There are seven people

in the Zhu household: Mr Zhu's mother, Mr Zhu and Mrs Zhu, Mr Zhu's son Tao, Mr Zhu's daughter Hong, Hong's baby daughter and Mrs Zhu's sister Ying. In 2009 the Zhu household moved into a large new four-storied house, alongside of which is a specialised pork farm with about eighty hogs. Mr Zhu has always lived with his parents, both before and after his marriage. The family division for five sons was not easy. Mr Zhu recalled that the success of the division among them was due to his father Lao Zhu's good management and the diligence of his brothers.

About seven years ago, some of the fields and house of the Zhu household were expropriated by the County government because it was needed for the construction of a high speed railway track. The County governors proposed to compensate the Zhu household with two new flats (one for Mr Zhu's parents and one for Mr Zhu's family) in the Farmers Apartment, located in a new developed area in a suburb of Tunxi. However, the Zhu household was not happy about the idea of living in a flat in a high-rise building. Also they would have had to give up running the small convenience store that was located in part of the lounge of their house. After their negotiations and with the help of some relatives and friends in Tunxi, eventually the household was compensated with a good sized plot of land in another part of the village on which to rebuild. They also received some financial compensation for the closure of their small store.

From 2008 to 2009, not only did they build a new four-storied house on the new land given as compensation but also ran a specialised pork farm. Mr Zhu's parents carried on living in the same house with Mr Zhu after the relocation. However, Mr Zhu's father passed away in 2013.

Mr Zhu and Mrs Zhu used to cultivate rice, rapeseeds and soy beans, keep about fifteen pigs and some chickens. Also since 1992 they had run the small store in their old house, selling some necessities for local households, such as sugar, salt, soy sauce, tooth-brushes, tooth paste, matches, soap, sanitarytowels, toilet paper, etc. They had the idea of running a convenience store because when the villagers needed these items, they had to ride by bicycle to buy them in the closest store, which was in another village 5km away, and those who had no bike had to ask their neighbours or relatives to shop for them.

Mr and Mrs Zhu started the specialised pork farm in 2009, as they thought the convenience store would not have so many customers as the village then had very good roads, and most villagers had motor bikes and many working in Xiuning and Tunxi, where they could shop in various supermarkets. Mr Zhu told me that at that time, although many households in the village had given up pork farming, they still thought that pork farming was the only way they could generate a good income, because they already had the necessary skills and knowledge. Even so, they had to work really hard.

Mr Zhu's mother is very experienced as a pork farmer, and sometimes she helps with the less heavy work for the pork farm, such as mixing the food for the pigs and helping the vet Mr Liu, who usually comes to visit or work on their farm once a month.

Mrs Zhu's sister Ying has also lived in the Zhu household since 2010 when Ying retired as a village school teacher. Ying has never married, and Mr and Mrs Zhu invited her to live with them so that she would keep busy after her retirement,

accompanying Mr Zhu's mother, helping her sister with pork farming, and helping look after Hong's baby.

Mr Zhu's son Tao is a Masters student in economics. In 2012, Tao completed his undergraduate studies in economics in a University in south China and passed the examination to pursue his Master study in a very prestigious university in Beijing.

Mr Zhu's daughter Hong has worked in a bank in the city Tunxi from when she received her BSc in Finance in 2008. She married in 2010 and had a baby daughter in 2011. Her husband, who is originally from Xiuning, was her high school classmate and they also went to the same university. Her husband worked in Tunxi in an accounting company after university. However, after two years, in 2010 he was relocated to work in the headquarters of his firm in Hangzhou. Before her husband's relocation, Hong and her husband rented a flat in Tunxi; and after her husband left Tunxi in 2010, Hong moved back to live in her parents' house. She then bought a flat in Tunxi in 2011 and plans to live in it when her daughter reaches school age. She has a car and drives to work in Tunxi daily. Hong's husband usually drives back to visit her and the family at weekends from Hangzhou, taking two and a half hours. While Hong is at work, her baby daughter is looked after by her grandmother Mrs Zhu Wei, her grandaunt Ying and her great grandmother.

Figure 5. The Zhu Household



Chapter 4 Divisions of Labour, Household Work and Changing Economic Life

Introduction

This chapter presents an analysis of data concerning the four households introduced in Chapter 3, focusing on household heads and resource managers, household divisions, and related divisions of labour and household work. It is also concerned with the understandings and comments of individual members about this. The first section examines the roles of household head and resource manager, in order to explore the relationship between the individual 'self' and the cultural expectations, 'rules' and ways of managing relationships current in the household context, and also the relationship between this and resource management in a practical sense. The following section is concerned with the household division process and the related re-organisations of resources and labour that follow. The last section of the chapter is concerned with changes in the household and the effects of this from the perspective of new modes of work both within and outside of the household. Households are cultural entities involving normative expectations and strategies, with both external and internal cultural factors impacting on household formation and management (Carter, 1984), while the rights and duties that people see as existing shape both the workings and the boundaries of households (Yanagisako, 1979). The analysis also explores how they perceive the household in the changing social and economic environment of the village, and the meanings they ascribe to their own and other people's choices and activities.

The Household Head and the Resource Manager

My analysis of the roles of the household head and the resource manager is based on interviews, informal conversations and fieldnotes, as discussed in Chapter 2. The focal point is the relationship between the individual and cultural expectations about households, which exerts an impact on resource management in the four households I am concerned with. In this relationship, the meanings people give to household divisions of labour are explored in relation to three sets of things: first, gender, age and seniority in the household; second, individual aspirations, domestic influences and responsibility in the household, in particular in relation to organising tasks; and third, a holistic approach to the connections between cultural expectations and the solutions for practical problems that each household arrives at.

The head of the Chinese household is referred to as ‘Jiazhang’ and the household manager is known as ‘dangjia’. Usually the Jiazhang is the senior male and this is shown on official documentation, in particular the Household (Huoku) Registration. Differentiation between the two roles provides the household with the “cultural basis of the coexistence and reconciliation of ultimate aspirations and practical management” (Cohen, 1992: 363). The accounts given by members of the four households in Shang Village describe the household manager ‘dangjia’ as in charge of financial management and financial distribution in the household. In these four households the household manager ‘dangjia’ is the wife of the household head. When the wife is absent or unable to manage, as in the Cheng household, the eldest son has to take responsibility for managing the finance and related matters in the household.

Regarding the Huang household, my fieldnotes start with a lunch preparation on 02/06/2012 and an interview with Huang Shuji on 05/06/2012:

Before the start of the lunch, I went to the kitchen to greet the women of the Huang house who were busy preparing for the meal. Then I had a short chat with Huang Shuji's wife Juan, asking her about the organisation of lunch from shopping to cooking. She joked that Huang Shuji was only good at sending out invitations. She further explained that she always did the shopping, prepared the ingredients and cooked. Huang Shuji's brother Hui's wife always helped her with washing and cleaning, and sometimes Juan's elder daughter Ju helped with cooking if she had no job to do in the village school. I asked who usually decided what dishes to cook and Juan said she always manages the meals and kitchen in the house. She said sometimes Huang Shuji might propose the dishes, but the decision-making was hers. She is very proud of her cooking, and said she felt very pleased when she saw the guests enjoying the meal she prepared.

Interestingly, she commented that she is a 'lucky' woman in the village, as Huang Shuji is a nice man, who leaves the household surpluses to the wife. So she can use the money freely to shop or buy something for herself. She also added that she thought this was because Huang Shuji is better educated compared with other people in the village. When I further asked her about what being 'lucky' means, she said she felt the freedom and respect given her by her husband (Fieldnotes extract, 2 June 2012, p43).

Then on 05/06/2012, I discussed with Huang Shuji his views on domestic divisions of labour and the managerial responsibilities in the household. An excerpt from my interview with him shows the topics covered:

Tingting: "Huang Shuji, I am interested in knowing about the management of the internal tasks in your household. Some of these tasks are managed by different members, such as you do quite a lot work in the rice field and your wife is responsible for the meals. I would like to know more about your views on the household members and domestic tasks, who does what in your household, and why you think this is the right thing for each member?"

Huang Shuji: "[laughing] I think this is a good question. In fact, I have never thought about why we have different jobs to do in our house. It seems very natural for us to do them as a routine. I am a man so I generally do the heavy work in the fields, and my wife does more of the housework and looks after the vegetable garden. She also does some work for the County Council, cutting grass and trees when there were not many agricultural activities in our house. I am always busy with the matters in our village and seeing patients."

Tingting: “I see. You are the head of the village. Are you also the head of your household?”

Huang Shuji: “I’m only the head on the document. You know the Hukou document [laughing]. In China, usually we men are the household head, aren’t we? Why do I say only the head on the document? In fact, the head of my household is my wife [laughing]. She is ‘dangjia’, managing almost everything at home.”

Tingting: “So what are the differences between you as the head on the document and your wife as the actual head?”

Huang Shuji: “I think I am the one in my family having the decision-making power for big things, such as my daughter’s wedding and the arrangement of important household belongings. I do much more heavy work in our fields. My wife handles our internal household matters and belongings including cooking and domestic matters. She also looks after our bank accounts and savings.”

Tingting: “You say she looks after the bank accounts and savings. Does it mean she actually manages them? If so, could you please tell me a little bit more about your understanding of her management of your household?”

Huang Shuji: “Yes, she actually manages them. If she wants to use money for something, she just uses it and then she tells me. I trust her. She has been very good at managing our household from preparing meals to organising big events ever since our marriage.”

Tingting: “Does her management involve decision-making power?”

Huang Shuji: “Yes, in fact, she is involved in making decisions with me on all big matters like our daughter’s wedding, purchasing health insurance for my Mum. Small things like shopping, buying things for the household are decided just by her.”

Tingting: “How about your household agricultural production? Do you both manage this together?”

Huang Shuji: “Yes. But in fact, it seems we never spend much time planning or organising agricultural activities. It is so usual for us just to do it according to our experience. We were born as farmers and this is natural for us. We all know it so well.”

Tingting: “Ok. About agricultural activities, you do it naturally. This refers to the ways of labour division in the household. So what is the natural way of labour division in your household for these farming activities?”

Huang Shuji: “I think the most natural form of the labour division is that the husband, the man, does the heavy work and the wife, the woman, does light work in the field assisting the man’s work. She looks after chickens and pigs and she does the housework as well. The other members like the son helps the

father to do the heavy work, and the daughter usually helps the mother to do work in the garden and house.”

Tingting: “When there is a social event in your household, like inviting people for meals or celebrations, how are they organised?”

Huang Shuji: “Usually my wife and I have some discussions, and the celebration is actually having meals together. My wife is in charge of what to prepare and cook. For cooking, she does not want my ideas. She also knows the people in a market in our neighbouring village. When she needs help for shopping, she asks me to go with her, because my motor bike is convenient and can hold more things than her bike. Since she knows the sellers in the market, when she buys a big quantity, they often deliver to our home. In fact, my wife managing these things in our house helps me a lot. I really have no time to look after these things for our household, as I deal with village matters and treat patients. You know, I always resolve family disputes in the households in our village. Often I am called to help resolve family arguments and fights. These are often because of money. I also often tell the men in the family to give some money to the wife or give the financial management to their wives. I think women are good at it. But most village men control money. It is the custom.”

Tingting: “So it is the custom that men control money in many households. Why do you think you are an exception?”

Huang Shuji: “In a village, men generally control everything. Traditionally, women have no control, no power. But nowadays it is changing. I think the change is because of the influence from the city. As we say, women are ‘half the sky’. There are more and more village men working in the cities and they have no time to manage everything as it was done in the past. So they have to leave the management to the women at home. I think trust is important in this matter. My Mum has always told me to respect women ever since I was a kid. Although my Mum is a village woman, she is a very open minded person. I also see that the disputes and arguments in some households in our village are often initiated by the older generation. When I was called to their disputes, I always say to them ‘since your wife is willing to manage and she is able to manage, why not leave her to do so. You make yourself too busy and messy when you control too many things’.”

Tingting: “Do the men listen to your suggestion?”

Huang Shuji: “Even though they listen to me, I think the change they have to make is not so easy, and needs time. Man is the dominator in the house, it has been the tradition from our ancestors for thousands of years. In many rural households, the wives are ‘dangjia’. However, they have no real power or control, because the majority of men control the money.”

Tingting: “Indeed. It is the tradition in our culture, in particular in traditional rural societies. In your household, your wife is not only the ‘dangjia’ but also the financial manager. You said you trust her and respect her, which is

influenced by your Mum. You leave the power of financial control to your wife, do you think this is because of the influence from your Mum or let's say your family culture, or it is because of influences from the city, as you said before?"

Huang Shuji: "Er, I think it is mainly personal as I think it is important to trust and respect the woman, so I think it is the family influence like the influence from my Mum."

Tingting: "I see. In your household, who are the other members involved in your household work and activities?"

Huang Shuji: "My daughter Ju helps her mother do the work in the kitchen sometimes. Min is really a good son. He helps me in the fields at weekends and goes with me to visit our relatives and bring our relatives to our place for lunch. He helps me and our family in different activities." (Interview extract, 5 June 2012, lines 17-104)

In the Huang household, decisions concerning important issues are usually made jointly by Huang Shuji and his wife Juan together. Juan is in charge of household savings and finances and manages them herself except for 'big' matters. She comments that she is competent to manage the kitchen and other internal household activities, and she is also very interested in these activities. She also stresses that she is a 'lucky' woman as she has the ability to do whatever she likes, in particular that she has full control over household financial management, making a clear distinction with other village households. For Huang Shuju, "man is the dominator in the house, it has been the tradition from our ancestors for thousands of years", although his own household is different. He also sees this tradition as changing because of influences from the city. Although women are 'half the sky', he sees the change happening because "there are more and more village men working in the cities and they have no time to manage everything as it was done in the past". In this gradual change from the traditional male-dominated style to a more woman-oriented system of domestic management, Huang Shuji highlights the importance of 'trust', a belief in women's

competence as represented by the shared power between the married couple in the Huang household. Huang Shuji considers his wife as 'dangjia', the resources manager for the household, and Juan also considers herself as 'lucky' in being resource manager for her household. For her, being 'lucky' involves the freedom and respect she has from her husband, which she sees as coming from him being better educated than other Shang men. Huang Shuji also emphasised the culture of 'trust' and 'respect' towards women in his household, which however he sees as coming from the influence of his family and in particular his mother, rather than education.

In my interview with him, Huang Shuji sees family arguments and fights as often happening in the village, frequently occurring because of money and the financial decision-making powers existing between husband and wife in these rural households. Although Huang Shuji suggested to these village men they should give financial control or part of it to their wives, it is not easy for men to 'trust' their wives to manage the household savings, for male domination has been the tradition for thousands of years in Chinese village households. Both Huang Shuji and Juan see the importance of 'trust' and 'respect' between married couples, which exert considerable influence on household management. Juan's understanding of 'good luck' is highlighted by her freedom in managing household resources and the decision-making power regarding household matters. However, this type of 'good luck' is not so common for village women, though practical problems raised by social and economic changes are reshaping individual roles in village households and making them in this direction, as discussed later.

In terms of household divisions of labour, Huang Shuji believes that in farming, it is 'natural' for men to do the heavy work and woman the less heavy agricultural tasks

and housework. In the informal conversation with Juan extracted from earlier, she clearly sees herself as competent in shopping, cooking and organising social meal and downplays any participation by Huang Shuji in the kitchen and related tasks by joking that ‘he is only good at sending out invitations’. For Wallman (1984: 22), “the allocation of the responsibility for these tasks is partly a matter of household structure, partly a matter of personality or individual preference”, and this seems a good description of the Huang household. This allocation of responsibility also reflects changes in gendered divisions of labour more widely in Chinese rural households, converging with changes in the economic situation and in the pattern of employment roles. As Huang Shuji commented, “there are more and more village men working in the cities and they also have no time to manage everything as it was done in the past. So they have to leave the management to the women at home”. It is common that women are household managers ‘dangjia’ in rural China; however, the holder of domestic power is usually whoever has control of household finances. In the Huang household, Juan has management and control of household finances and savings, although she consults with her husband when there are significant sums of money involved. The traditional cultural practice in rural households that a senior man as household head dominates in money matters is now changing in response to social and economic changes in the wider context, and Huang Shuji’s comments suggest that it is practical necessity that is compelling men, often reluctantly, to engage in ‘disputes’ regarding household management matters. The changes he mentions are both a cause and a response to the need to find solutions for practical problems for the households, and they are also shaping individual people’s roles in their households, because impacting on their aspirations, preferences and choices.

And overall, the Huangs seem further along this path of change than many other households.

In the Fang household, the household head, Lao Fang, is on the surface reluctant to accept any loss of traditional status by symbolically holding the key to the drawer in which the household's savings are locked. However, it is the resources manager 'dangjia', his wife, Yu, who actually manages financial and other household resources and finds solutions to the practical problems they face. In an interview with Mrs Fang on 15/03/2013, she spoke to me about the impact of gender expectations, the meaning of her particular role in the household and the related changes occurring. Her husband said that their household division of labour reflects not only local cultural expectations but also that this facilitates the smooth working of their household, but her view is more complicated:

Yu: "You want to know who manages our household and what we do for the household's work. I think I manage everything, from farming activities to socialising for our grandson. Lao Fang (Mr Fang) works at the building site from morning to evening. I am in the situation that I have to carry on and manage these things in our household. If I could choose, I would not want to manage so many things. You can make a real effort, but you don't get much credit for it. For my grandson's study and job, I have been building a relationship with the director of the Education Bureau through my friend Mrs Yuan. However, my daughter-in-law thinks it is a must for me to do this for the grandson, so she never feels grateful. I look after all the farming and domestic activities. However, Lao Fang holds everything, the money, tightly. He thinks the man is the controller at home. I have to work in a small factory in the village to earn some money for myself. It is better to rely on yourself. Asking for money from the man is not comfortable."

Tingting: "Is Mr Fang the official household head in the Hukou System?"

Yu: "Yes. As the head, he is the only one who dares to control me. But when my daughter-in-law is arguing or complaining, he does not dare speak. So everything, good or bad, I have to deal with in this house. In this house, I have to be the 'dangjia' person."

Tingting: "Why do you have to be the 'dangjia'? It seems that the 'dangjia' takes lots of responsibilities, including the good and the bad."

Yu: "Indeed. As a woman, in particular a woman in the countryside, I have no other choices. We have had to listen to the husband since ancient times."

Tingting: "I see. You think a woman should listen to her husband. You also said it has been like this since ancient times. How do you know this?"

Yu: "I have not been to school. I understand this from my mother and other people's behaviour in the household. It seems we know it from when we are born. In the past, even in the cities, it was the same. Women have no status. She should be obedient to her husband. It seems as a woman this is the only important thing I should know in my life, I understood this from other people's behaviour and telling."

Tingting: "You said women have no status. How important do you think you are as a female 'dangjia' in your household?"

Yu: "I organise almost all the activities in the household, so I think I am very important in our household. I really cannot imagine a situation when I was not doing this. But no matter how great your contribution to the household, as a woman your status is always lower than your husband."

Tingting: "Why do you think this is so? Is it your view or you have been told this?"

Yu: "Since ancient times, in a house or in a society it is men who are in a prestigious position and women are in a lower position. It is the rule and you have to follow it. I remember when I was a little kid, I was told by my family and I have seen these differences between men and women in my house and in the village. My parents' family also lived in this village. But there are a lot of changes now, compared with my mother's time, in being a housewife."

Tingting: "It sounds very interesting. Could you please tell me a little bit more about the differences between your mother's role and your role in the household?"

Yu: "My mother was also a country woman, illiterate. I remember she just did the housework, childcare and some farming work. My father dealt with social events and meeting people. At that time, every household was so poor, and I do not think they had savings. I remembered we felt so blessed if our tummies were full. Now our life is much better and I think women's status is also better than at that time. You see now we country women can socialise and have more freedom to make choices and do what we like."

Tingting: "I see. It has certainly changed a lot. When you are socialising with people like your friends in the city and organising celebration like the one for Wen's daughter's birthday, how do you make the decision and organise it? I think these events need money. How is the money allocated for these events?"

Yu: "Lao Fang has always held our family savings. He says it is safer for a man to look after it. I think it is just a matter of form. Our money, and also now we have some bank booklets, are locked in a drawer. Only Lao Fang has

the key. When I need to use money for the household, I just tell him. Eventually, he always opens the drawer. Then he does not care much about the rest. I usually go to the bank accompanied by Mrs Yuan. She worked in a bank. She helps me withdraw, deposit and carry out other saving services. I do not know how to read and do not know how to use the bank services. I just follow Mrs Yuan's suggestion. Lao Fang trusts her. When I go home I tell him what services I have used for the savings and how much money I withdrew and he just has a look at the figures in the bank booklet and locks it back the drawer. Do you think he just cares about the form, like the door keeper [laughing]? Sometimes I tease him about this, letting him give me the key and open and lock the drawer. He says it is not safe for women to do this. Funny, isn't he?"

Tingting: "Does Mr Fang asks you how do you spend the money?"

Yu: "I usually tell him what I have done with the money, because every penny is used for the household and a lot of it for the grandson."

Tingting: "So eventually you decide how to use the money?"

Yu: "Er, I think so. We discuss but I do the shopping for our house and farming. I also shop for food for daily meals and celebration meals. When I have no money, I just ask him to open the drawer and give me the bank booklet."

Tingting: "I see you are very important in your household, and I also see the differences between you and your Mum, regarding the differences in the economic situation. You said you thought women's status is better than at that time. Do you think you have more influence in the household compared with your mother, although she was also very important in her household in managing many activities?"

Yu: "I think I have more influence in the household than my Mum. Er, I think I have more decision-making power and freedom in using money and about socialising with friends." (Interview extract, 15 March 2012, lines 41-117)

Lao Fang's control lies in his direct access to the drawer where the household savings documents are locked. His reason is that it is 'not safe for women to have the key', while Yu clearly sees this as 'just a matter of form'. In fact, the household finances and other resources are actually managed and largely decided by Yu. She expressed her belief that a woman's status is always lower than her husband is in a household, although she is also aware she is very important in their household because she controls, manages and carries out so many activities. As she said,

“everything good or bad I have to deal with in this house” and “I organise almost all activities in the household”. Clearly she is the resources keeper in the Fang household. Wallman (1984: 21-22) argues that the resource keeper is in many respects more central than the formal or legal head of household, who is “not necessarily the manager of all its resources or the decisive focus of its livelihood”, and relatedly that “particular members of the household system tend to... take over the management of particular household resources”. Both of these things apply to the Fangs.

When Mrs Fang told me about her role in the household, I started by thinking that the importance of an individual in the household is identified primarily by their involvement in household activities. However, when she talked about the differences between her mother and herself, I came to the view that the differences between women as ‘dangjia’ over the two generations are being mainly considered from the aspect of individual influence, where such influence is closely connected with a person’s status in the household. Influence was in fact used by Yu to explain the improvement of her status in the household compared with her mother, saying “now our life is much better and I think our women’s status is also better than at that time... I think I have more influence to the household than my Mum... I have more decision-making power and freedom in using money and about socialising with friends”. In traditional rural households, ‘dangjia’ is usually the woman, and she is important because of her essential involvement in household and farming tasks, while she is also usually the keeper of domestic resources. However, because of this, the ‘dangjia’ becomes the household resources manager when a woman takes on the management of household economic resources. Moreover, a woman’s influence

increases as she gains more freedom to make choices, manage economic resources and participate in activities outside of the household in a wider community, all of which then enhance women's status within the household.

I also had the chance of talking with Lao Fang, when he returned home from working at a building site in Xiuning:

Mr Fang came home around 6pm and Mrs Fang was preparing dinner. Our conversation started with cooking. Mr Fang said he did not like cooking, although he used to do it from when he was a kid to help his mother who was engaged with a lot of domestic and agricultural work. I further asked him about his views on his mother's activities. He said thirty years ago women were very tough because of extremely poor living conditions. He also commented that village women had much lower status in households compared with how it is nowadays. What interests me is Lao Fang's comment that "women, in my Mum's time, were just servants for the husband's family". While I was having dinner with Mr and Mrs Fang, Mr Fang teased Mrs Fang, saying if he behaved as men did in the past Mrs Fang may divorce him. Mr Fang thinks women are independent nowadays. I asked him how he thinks women can be independent nowadays; and he said women have more information and autonomy because they have much better living conditions and more opportunities to know about modern life out of the village. But he also added that he worried about many 'bad' influences from the city and modern life, such as encouraging women to be equal with men; and he said he does not think women could be equal with men (Fieldnotes extract, 16 March 2012, p21).

For Lao Fang, the status of village women has improved, due to changes in living standards and women's increased opportunities for learning and accessing information about 'modern life'. Also clearly Mr Fang empathised with his mother's experiences and he also believes his way of treating his wife is better than men in the past. But at the same time, he is also insistent that women cannot do things as men do, which are represented by his worries about influences from the city and holding the key for the drawer holding their household savings documents, and cannot be equal with men.

Regarding the Cheng household, in some informal conversations I had with Huang Shuji's mother and also his wife Juan, I was told that, before she left the family, Mr Cheng's elder son Kun's wife had often complained about Kun's financial control at home, and I was also told that many people in the village thought this was the major reason for her leaving. I carried out an interview with Kun on 27/05/2012. In talking to me, Kun frequently reflected on the choices made by the members of his household, in particular the impact of two events, namely his wife leaving the family, and his mother's relocation to Xiuning to look after Fei (the grandson of Mr and Mrs Cheng). The Cheng household is as a result currently managed by two men, with the household head being Mr Cheng and the resources manager Kun:

Kun: "My father is the head and we respect him and listen to his opinions. In the countryside, a father is usually the head of the household."

Tingting: "How do you see the role 'household head' and the differences from what other members do?"

Kun: "I think the head had more influence in the past. Nowadays I do not see the importance of the head of the household. Nowadays I do not see that he is different from other members."

Tingting: "I see. You said the head had more influence in the past, compared with the current situation. What are the differences between the household head in the past and the head in current situation? Could you please give me some examples from your household?"

Kun: "They are not important because their words are not influential any longer, as they were in a traditional household. I remember my grandfather was the head of our household. My parents were still living in my grandparents' house. My grandfather's words were a must for everyone. My grandmother had no right to act on her own. My parents were also very obedient to my grandfather. Nowadays, the head is the same as the others. Everyone has the right to do what they want to do. You see in my household, there are only two men, my father and me, and a child. My Mum has to look after my brother's son in Xiuning, and my wife escaped from home to go to Shanghai. These would have been impossible in the past, in particular in the countryside. My mother used to 'dangjia'. My father is also old, I have to be the 'dangjia' and take responsibility for looking after the household, my father and my child and household work and help my father with the farming activities. The household needs women's involvement, but now I take the

man's role and also the woman's role. It is very tough but we have to face reality. So sometimes my sister comes to help us preparing meals, like in the case when we have guests for lunch or dinner at home. She also helps my father with some farming work."

Tingting: "You said your mother used to 'dangjia', meaning that she managed many activities in your household. Now you are the 'dangjia', and you said the management includes housework and farming activities. In your household, who usually makes decisions such as in matters like production planning, purchasing a valuable item or renting some land out? These are related to household financial management."

Kun: "Yes. My father used to decide these things, and my mother was 'dangjia'. 'Dangjia' is usually the woman in the household. But now my father is old and my mother is away, so I do these things for my father. Usually I talk with him and ask for his opinion before doing things. It is always better to ask before doing. He is much more experienced than me. My parents' savings and their bank booklets were given to me to manage in 2010 when my mother moved to Xiuning with Fei. I always discuss with my father about using their money and the plan of organising something for our household. My brother always gives our household a lump sum of money. I always put this money in my parents' savings."

Tingting: "Is the 'dangjia' the woman at the senior position in the household?"

Kun: "Like my mother, the 'dangjia' is the woman in the highest generation in our household."

Tingting: "Was your wife 'dangjia' in your family, composed by you, her and your daughter?"

Kun: "No. We lived with my parents, so my mother was 'dangjia'. My wife just managed herself."

Tingting: "When you had an income, did you manage this yourself or give it to your mother who was 'dangjia'?"

Kun: "I managed it myself. I also gave some to my father as our contribution to the meals we had that were prepared by my mother."

Tingting: "Do you know whether your mother did the financial management and decision-making, when she was the 'dangjia'?"

Kun: "I think my mother was involved in the decision-making but the final power was with my father. He used to hold our household savings. When my mother decided to do something, she always consulted my father. Then my father gave her the money."

Tingting: "So the control of your household savings and bank booklets was passed to your hand directly from your father?"

Kun: “Yes. I think my father trusts me and I am the only one who could help him do the job in the house. There was no other choice. You know it was also the expectation in the countryside that money is usually managed by the man.”

Tingting: “I see. So who did the shopping in your household, such as for food, farming essentials and other items for your household? And now who does these?”

Kun: “In the past, when my mother was ‘dangjia’. When she got the money from my father after her consultation with him, I remember she often did the shopping with my sister Ping. Now I do these for the household. But I think in the countryside usually women do the shopping except for big items for agricultural usage. Men are not good at bargaining. But now I have to do these as there is no woman to do them in our house.” (Interview extract, 27 May 2012, lines 67-130)

For Kun, the heads of households were more important in the past because they had more influence over household members, and their words were ‘a must for everyone’. He gave an example from his paternal grandfather’s household, in which “my grandmother had no right to act on her own. My parents were also very obedient to my grandfather”. Cheng household management is now in the elder son Kun’s charge, for as he said “I have to do these as there is no woman doing them in our house”. In Kun’s comments, women’s role in the household is underlined by her involvement in specific household activities. Although he does not explicitly say this, Kun implies that he is in favour of the traditional household structure by highlighting that “My Mum has to look after my brother’s son in Xiuning, and my wife escaped from home to Shanghai. These would have been impossible in the past”, when he was talking about how important a household head was in earlier times. Kun’s mother Jin used to be the ‘dangjia’ in the Cheng household because she was the senior woman, the highest generation among the female members. This is very similar to age-ranking in Carter’s (1984: 46-47) study of rural Maharashtra. However, Mrs Cheng had no direct access to household finance, which was entirely

controlled by Mr Cheng. When Mrs Cheng moved to Xiuning to look after the grandson whose parents were working in Beijing, the only resident adults in the Cheng household were Mr Cheng and Kun, and so they had to find a practical solution to the household management problem following the 'escape' of his wife.

Kun's comments concern what happens when the influence of traditional cultural expectations become weaker, in particular with respect to the influence on the gendered aspects of the division of labour and resources management in the household. As a consequence, Kun and his father had to adapt to the 'new' situation in the household in order to 'face reality'. In such a situation, his sister Ping's help with food preparation and farming work is drawn in. The Cheng household's strategy has been forced on them by circumstances and demonstrates the use of external personnel to achieve household goals (Cohen, 1976; Carter, 1984; Wallman, 1984; Bourdieu, 1977).

Through talking with other villagers, I understand that Kun's wife Qiu left the family for reasons connected with Kun's financial control. When Huang Shuji was involved in resolving family disputes, he often used Kun's family as an example in suggesting that village men should give a reasonable amount of money to their wives. But Kun instead believes that his wife wanted to go to the city because he was poor. Kun said in an interview with him that in his household men control the money and this is the right way because following traditional ideas. From my interview with Kun, I got the distinct impression that Kun and his father shared the same view that women are important labour for certain household tasks, such as shopping and looking after children, but they do not think women should share decision-making power and the management of economic resources. So as Fei needs to be looked after in Xiuning,

Mrs Cheng stays with her grandson there and returns to the village only at weekends. I met Mrs Cheng occasionally at some weekends in the village. On one of these occasions she told me that she preferred life in village to that in town, but she has to look after her grandson because she is the only woman in the household. The effect is, however, that she manages a different household, that with her grandson in Xiuning.

In the organisation of household resources and tasks, the usefulness of kinship in drawing on people external to the household is shown by the Zhu household as well as the Chengs. I interviewed Mr Zhu, Bo, on 28/06/2012, during which we talked about the work and resources allocation in his household, which is related to his family business. In his account, Bo Zhu emphasised the importance of his wife Wei's role in household work and in the development of their family businesses.

Mr Zhu: "Before our relocation, in 2007, my parents took care of the fields, gardens and backyard pork farming. My wife and I were also involved in farming activities with them while we were running the convenience store. When we relocated, we finally got a good sized plot. So we use it to build a pork farm in our backyard. We only grew some vegetables in the field. Since my father was in poor health and my mother is also old, after our relocation it was mainly my wife and I who managed all the various matters in our household, garden and pork farm. My sister-in-law Ying came to help us and also to be with my parents and now she also helps with looking after my daughter Hong's baby."

Tingting: "In your household, there are lots of activities. In these activities, who usually makes the decisions? Who is the head?"

Mr Zhu: "I am the head on the Hukou but I listen to my wife [laughing]. I think she is very good at 'dangjia', she manages all kinds of issues in our household, and I am the head who is good at networking for the household and drinking with directors [laughing]."

Tingting: "Your wife manages all kinds of issues in your household, does she also manage the money?"

Mr Zhu: "Yes. I give all of our money to her to manage. I often get drunk since I have to attend many social meals, so I'd better keep away from the

money [laughing]. My daughter is a professional financial manager in the bank. My wife is lucky to have such an assistant helping her manage our money. So I have nothing to worry about.”

Tingting: “That sounds interesting. So your wife manages the money. Does she manage how to spend the money? And who does the actual shopping for your household?”

Mr Zhu: “She manages it and decides how to use it. She is a very good ‘dangjia’. She often goes to shop with her sister. Ying is very helpful to us in doing housework, pork farming and looking after Hong’s baby and my parents. I am too busy with networking outside. Without Ying, it would be too much for my wife doing all these.”

Tingting: “Does your wife discuss with you her plans for spending money or her shopping plans?”

Mr Zhu: “Yes, she talks about these things with me. Since she manages so well, I often just listen and nod my head [laughing]. She also has two very good assistants Ying and Hong. These make me feel nothing to worry about the tasks in the house, as well as our pork farming. The only concern is me, the social connector, and my job is related to our sales and income. My wife and her sister have been doing very tough work for the house and the business. I always feel very grateful to these women. The only thing that I think I could use to express my gratitude is often telling them to use our savings to buy some nice clothes. You know my wife and her sister are this type of traditional diligent countryside women. They work hard and never waste a penny for buying extra or enjoyment for themselves.” (Interview extract, 28 June 2012, lines 18-53)

Bo Zhu is the head of the Zhu household and in the interview he spoke about his complete trust in his wife Wei and also how highly he values her and her sister’s contributions. Mrs Zhu manages household money and has complete freedom in deciding how to use it. Her daughter, Hong, assists her with financial management and her sister, Ying, with the household’s many activities, both of which contribute to Mr Zhu’s assessment of her as ‘a very good dangjia’. In the Zhu household, it was very noticeable that particular kinship relations supports the management and organisation of the household, which in turn impacts on how its different members

understand what and who the household is composed by (Yanagisako, 1979; Carter, 1984). Although the Zhu household follows traditional cultural expectations that women carry out domestic tasks and men the tasks connected to the wider community, for the Zhus the structure of the household, its members' activities and their influence on each other, and how its resources management works, all add up to a different picture from the other three households in my research. Domestic power in the Zhu household is acknowledged as held by Wei, and women's contribution and status are highly valued. As a consequence Mrs Zhu's sister Ying is considered to be one of the most important household members. These relationships are ordered not only by kinship relationships but also by principles of affection in responding to the practicality of resources management:

It was the Chinese New Year period but Lao Zhu's (Mr Zhu's father) health was worsening. When I was visiting Lao Zhu in the Zhu house, I saw that Wei and Ying were extremely busy. Wei was cooking porridge particularly for Lao Zhu. When the food was ready, she brought the porridge bowl to Ying and Ying was feeding Lao Zhu. Then Wei was cleaning the pig farm and also mixing pig feed with her mother-in-law. Mr Zhu and Tao were talking with some guests in the sitting room. I had a conversation with Wei and Mr Zhu's mother at the pig farm. Later Ying came to help with things in the farm when Lao Zhu was sleeping.

In front of me, Wei and Mr Zhu's mother gave plenty of praise to Ying for her contribution to the Zhu household. Wei said their family had got busier and busier in recent years. Although Wei thinks she is good at raising pigs and Mr Zhu is good at networking for managing the farm business, she stressed the importance of Ying's help with all the things in their house and work at the farm over these years. Not only do they have a fairly big pig farm, but also they have to look after Hong's baby and Lao Zhu.

Ying said that she wants to help the Zhu family, because she has plenty of time after her retirement and also her sister Wei and Mr Zhu are extremely busy in generating money for the household, in particular for Tao's study and Lao Zhu's treatment. Ying also said Mr Zhu often asks Wei to give her money as reward for her contribution to their household, but Ying never accepts. She said "I have nothing to do after being retired. It is my pleasure to spend time with these lovely people. I really enjoy it" (Fieldnotes extract, 27 February 2013, p84).

Love and affection are the bond here, but clearly the high appreciation of household work and those who carry it out cement this bond. And this in turn is linked to a sense of equality between all members.

Household Division

The discussion so far has explored how some members of the four research households perceive the intertwining of broad household roles, resources and cultural expectations. In this section about household divisions, I discuss this from the perspective of the marriage of children, especially sons. This is one of the most important events for rural households, and as Cohen (1992: 359) comments, “family division at some point was almost inevitable, between father and son, married brothers”. When a son marries, difficulties in the practical management of household matters are likely to bring about a family division. In rural China, it has been customary that a family divides into several households when its sons become adult or get married, and this has usually resulted in an equal distribution of family holdings among brothers, including through verbal or written agreements. However, as Chen (2009: 54) points out, family division is “affected not only by the availability of resources but also by power dynamics in the household, because each family member would have a different vested interest in keeping the family unified or divided”. I now start exploring this by reference to the stories about marriage that were told to me. In doing so, it needs to be noted that in the Fang, Cheng and Zhu households marriage is virilocal, while in the Huang household it is uxori-local.

The Fang, Cheng and Zhu households share the common characteristic of rural households pointed out by Chen (2009), that it is common for parents to live with one of their adult sons and all household members share common property and a budget. Rural household division is also of course affected by the extent of household resources, the individual interests of people, and power dynamics in the household. These combine to form an important part of the cultural aspects of a household, and their patterning also explains differences between the four households.

A Fang household division occurred at the beginning of the 1990s when Mr Fang's elder son Liang was about to marry, although the division was not finally settled until 2001 when their other son Wen was also married. During my first interview on 09/09/2011 with Mr Fang, after his brief introduction of members of his household, he told me a story about ongoing conflicts about household division, beginning with:

“My family become problematic when the wife of my elder son Liang came to our house. She was always very jealous of my younger son Wen. I do not know why. As a matter of fact, Wen is living away from us and his family really depends on Wen's hard work in Tunxi. Instead, Liang's family is dependent on us... Our daughter is a very good girl. She really cares about us. She phones us almost every day to ask about how we are.” (Interview extract, 9 September 2011, lines 3-8)

After his marriage, Liang and his wife, Chun, lived with Mr and Mrs Fang. Their house had been specially reconstructed just before the marriage. After this first interview, I conducted another interview with Mr Fang on 07/05/2012. This was because I wanted to gain more detailed information about Liang's marriage and its impact on the household division of the Fang household. In this second interview, Mr Fang provided more details of this and his ideas about why the problems had arisen since Liang's wife was part of the household:

Mr Fang: “When Liang was about to marry in 1990 I remember, we (Mr and Mrs Fang) had a conversation with Liang discussing the division plan. Our house used to be a two-storied house with three bedroom rooms upstairs. Liang used to be in the same room with Wen, Hao (their daughter) has her smaller bedroom, and one room is for us (Mr and Mrs Fang). In that conversation, we told Liang our plan to add one more floor so that we could have two more bedrooms on the second floor. We also planned to reconstruct our lounge on the ground floor, in order to make the other lounge out of that big lounge for Liang’s new family, as well as a staircase at the back of Liang’s new lounge leading to upstairs. We said to Liang that after the construction, he would have his own lounge and two big sized bedrooms on the first floor. We thought that one of the big bedroom would be for Liang and his wife and the other for his future child. There was a door between our lounges, like now, as you see. So the door is usually shut and Liang’s family could have their own space. The other three bedrooms were for Wen, Hao and one for my wife and me. This was our division plan. In the conversation, Liang was happy and agreed with the plan. However, the day after he came to talk with me again saying the division was not fair and not clear. I knew that was his wife’s idea. I asked him whether it was his wife’s opinion. He said it was. She thought the total size of Liang’s share was smaller than the rest of the house. She thought when Wen married, he would have the rest, since Hao was the daughter and she would marry and reside in the man’s family and she had no right to have a part of the house, even though she had a small room.”

Tingting: “You think that was Liang’s wife’s opinion. Was that said to you by Liang or her?”

Mr Fang: “By Liang. She asked Liang to complain to me.”

Tingting: “You said at the beginning that Liang agreed with your proposal. Have you had a formal agreement on that?”

Mr Fang: “We just verbally agreed at the beginning. In the countryside we usually make a verbal agreement. However, in my household division, we eventually had a written one in front of a witness who was Huang Shuji.”

Tingting: “So how did eventually you reach the written agreement?”

Mr Fang: “Oh, it was tough. We had the written agreement in 2001 when Wen was married. I said Liang came to complain, that was in 1990. I became angry and told Liang to stop being unreasonable. We used our married years, in fact our lifetime’s savings, to reconstruct the house for him, to prepare his wedding and give some money to the bride’s family as was the custom. However, he was still complaining about nonsense. I scolded Liang and then he did not say anything until the wedding. Oh, you can’t think what it was like after his wedding when his wife came to live with us, she was often grumpy. For our son’s sake we have to tolerate her. My wife and I knew it was she was jealous of Wen, even though Wen had been away from home studying and working since 1992. We see that even nowadays on weekends when Wen comes with the family for lunch, Liang’s wife is grumpy and cold.

We do not care. She is such a person, never knowing how to be grateful. Wen was very generous and he also knew the brother's wife wanted the property. So Wen told me many times that he was not interested in his part of the house and he would like to settle down in the city. Wen married in 2001. After my wife and I and some friends' carefully thought it over, in 2001 when Wen married I thought it was a good time to propose to Liang to make an agreement to solve the division problems, in order to protect Wen's interests. Otherwise, we know Liang's wife, this selfish person, will make problems for Wen when we (Mr and Mrs Fang) die... Hao (Mr and Mrs Cheng's daughter) is very nice to her (Liang's wife) and Qing (Liang's son), she comes to visit us at weekends and always brings a lot of food from the city for us and Qing. Qing's Mum never thinks to get something for Hao's son, but she is less cold to Hao, because Hao does not get anything from her parents since she is a daughter. So she (Liang's wife) isn't jealous of her." (Interview extract, 7 May 2012, lines 2-51)

The Fang household division stories show a quite strong son preference and such a preference also affects both the conjugal and intergenerational bonds; and it is also obvious that the organisation of household resources and household members' relationships are affected by the fact that son's wife pushes her husband to lobby for more resources from their parents-in-law (Yan, 2003). In 2001 Mr Fang decided to divide the property formally by making a written agreement in front of a witness. Although Wen was not interested in being a part of it, in the agreement Wen was allocated two rooms in his parents' part of the house. I asked Mr Fang how he had reached that solution to the division between his two sons and how Wen could manage the two rooms, as he is working and living in Tunxi. Mr Fang told me that:

"I had been thinking about this solution for years, asking friends and people like Huang Shuji about it. I know Wen was nice to give everything to his brother, but I think Wen is one of the sons, and he should have at least some part of it. I am not that type of traditional man saying this. In the traditional way, she (Liang's wife) should be obedient to her husband's family. However, now her husband is obedient to her. It was because she was too greedy, so I wanted to make sure Wen had a share. If she had been grateful and not so selfish, I would have been happy to leave the whole property to Liang... Wen

does not manage it, but when we (Mr and Mrs Fang) die, I think they must reconstruct the house again, so at that time it will be decided by the brothers. Wen also could leave the whole property to his brother, but according our agreement, Wen should be paid by Liang an amount of money equivalent to the value of the two rooms, if he wants to buy them.” (Interview extract, 7 May 2012, lines 67-78)

I also asked Mr Fang about how to produce an agreement for a household division, and he said that:

“We had a standard copy which we borrowed from our neighbours who had gone through the same process or we could have obtained one from Huang Shuji. But people always need to make changes according to the specific situations in each household. It is hand written. At the end, Liang, Wen and I signed and dated it in front of the witness Huang Shuji.” (Interview extract, 7 May 2012, lines 84-88)

The household division in the Fang Household only concerns the actual house, for Mr Fang told me that his wife’s and his lifetime’s savings were spent on preparations for Liang’s wedding, including reconstructing the house, the wedding itself, and some funds given to the bride’s family. When I asked Mr Fang about the items which are listed in the agreement, he told me that:

“We only divided the house. Liang’s wife knows we have no money to be listed, otherwise she would ask Liang to have our money too. From the 1990s to 2000 we indeed saved some money by our hard work. We were selling watermelon, pigs, corn and dried vegetables and beans in Xiuning and Tunxi, by riding our tricycle around. These savings have been used for Liang’s son’s nursery and school. The rest is for buying food and items for the household. She (Liang’s wife) had no words of thanks even though almost all our savings had gone for her son’s education. You know Qing had his junior high school in Tunxi. We paid his tuition fees and extra charges for students from places out of Tunxi.” (Interview extract, 7 May 2012, lines 97-105)

As Huang (1992) emphasises, the division of family property is the most important component of a household division, and this is true of the divisions in the Cheng and

the Fang households. The Cheng household division happened in the 1980s. In an interview with Mr Cheng on 08/11/2011, he told me that he had decided to build two attached houses for his sons in order to be ready for their marriages:

“I thought to build two houses for our sons because I wanted to prepare for their marriages. You know it is the same as in the city, men become more attractive to women when in good time they have a proper house for the wedding. The other reason was that at that time I was not so old, so that I had much more energy than nowadays and could give some help to my sons.” (Interview extract, 8 November 2011, lines 49-54)

Mr Cheng was pleased about how the household division happened, saying that:

“At that time, Kun was 20 something, I think 22, and he was a skillful carpenter and earned some money. He always gave us (his parents) most of his income. Gang was four years younger than Kun, so he was 18. He left junior school when he was 16. We wanted him to study but he did not want to, and he told us we were very poor and he had to work to earn money. So Gang started working in a slaughter house in Tunxi, thanks to an introduction by a friend. He also gave us most of his earnings. Actually I saved the money they both gave me for their future, to be spent on things like house reconstruction and their marriages. When I told them about my plan for the household division, the house reconstruction plan, they were very supportive and told me to decide. There was not any conflict between them, unlike in other households.” (Interview extract, 8 November 2011, lines 71-81)

The household division for the Chengs only concerned the property, as with the Fangs. Mr Cheng directed the division and his old house was turned into two attached two-storied houses, with the money for this coming from household savings. As Mr Cheng told me, his sons had given him most of their income and Mr Cheng had saved this for the household reconstruction and their marriages. Mr Cheng further explained the details of how the savings were spent and what happened after the division:

Mr Cheng: “I recall that the total cost of house reconstruction was about seven hundred yuan in the late 1980s. After the house reconstruction, I only

had two hundred yuan left in savings. Gang continued to give me most of his income till he married in 1996. After his marriage, his wife controlled his income, but he still gave us some money during different festivals. Kun married in 2003 and we have been living together after the house division in the 1980s. He was not afraid of his wife, and he continued give us money monthly after his marriage. They (two sons) have been very thoughtful about each other and have never complained about how I spent the money for their marriages. But I think I was quite fair in using the money for this. We should always have a fair and honest heart in dealing with these division things in order to convince the children. However, it was very unlucky that in 2009 Kun's wife left because she thought Kun was poor."

Tingting: "Do you think that the allocation of your household savings for your sons' marriages was another form of household division?"

Mr Cheng: "Of course. These divisions are not finished in one day or a few days. Many things had to be decided and it took a long time. That's why I say it is important to have a fair and honest heart when dealing with these divisions in order to maintain the agreement of the sons". (Interview extract, 8 November 2011, lines 93-109)

Mr Cheng described the household division as a process occurring from the late 1980s until the completion of his sons' marriages in 2003, highlighting that "these divisions are not finished in one day or a few days". The stories I was told about household division in the Fang and Cheng households explained that the series of life events that occur during the division process were mainly in respect of property and household savings in relation to the sons' marriages. In the Cheng household, there was no formal agreement due to the trust and care between his sons, which made a written agreement unnecessary:

"My two sons get along very well with each other, so we have no written agreement. They do not need that. In fact, I asked them once whether they needed a written one, but they laughed at me saying they were not like those selfish brothers. I am very pleased for them. They trust and care about each other. What is nicer than trust and care between brothers? Although my sons work hard for their money, I think they do not care for the money for themselves. They always think about others and everyone in the family." (Interview extract, 8 November 2011, lines 122-128)

In my interview with Mr Zhu on 10/06/2012, when I asked him about any household division in his household, he replied interestingly:

“I do not think there will be a division in my household. Hong (his daughter) and her family will live in their flat in Tunxi when the baby is older. My house and what I earn from working on the pork farm will be for my son, now for his studies, later for his marriage and his children’s education in the future.” (Interview extract, 10 June 2012, lines 47-51)

I then asked him if he had talked about this non-division plan with his children, and he said that:

“I have not. But they know it is the plan even without my telling them. It is our culture. The parents’ belongings will be for the son. The daughter belongs to her husband’s family. Hong has had a decent life and she will settle with her family in Tunxi. So she is fine.” (Interview extract, 10 June 2012, lines 56-59)

After telling me his plan for the non-division between his son and daughter and that Hong ‘is fine’, Mr Zhu was enthusiastic in telling me the story of the household division that had involved his brothers and himself, for he thought this would interest me because “the story was rare even for rural people”:

Mr Zhu: “My parents had five sons, and I am the youngest. My eldest brother married at the beginning of the 1980s. So my parents had to find a solution to his marriage and housing problem, and we had to divide the household. You can imagine that it was not easy to do division among five sons. I really admire my parents. They were living a very poor life, but they managed their household well. I also have very nice brothers, diligent and understanding. I remember I was about sixteen and working with my parents in our fields. My eldest brother was also doing farming activities with us. His wife is from our village, a simple and nice woman. I remember the funny things about our division. There were three rooms in our parents’ old house. I had been living with my fourth brother and my parents in a room, the other two brothers in another room, and the biggest room was for my eldest brother and his wife. You see how many people were squeezing together. Before it was me in my

parents' room and the eldest brother was in a room with my fourth brother, and the second one was in a room with the third one.”

Tingting: “Did that mean that the biggest room was allocated to your eldest brother?”

Mr Zhu: “It was temporary solution because of their marriage. But we had nice time living together. For me, I felt cosy as we had one more woman in our house [laughing]. But my father felt it, he was sorry for his sons because at that time it was the only solution because we did not have enough money to build or reconstruct our house. Honestly, reconstructing a house for five sons is not easy. You see my father had a very nice solution about a year after my brother's marriage. I think my father felt sorry for them and his other sons, and more than that, he was concerned about the living space for his future grandson. I remember when we were having dinner together, my father said we should think about the household division seriously even though we were happy living together. He was very grateful to my sister-in-law, because she was very easy going, working hard for our household and never had complaints about squeezing in with us in a small house. We know my father was eager to have a grandson, and he said so that evening to my eldest brother and sister-in-law. I still remember my father's funny words to them, like ‘I am working hard to find a solution to your house and you should work hard to have a child’. They had been married about a year and we did not hear anything from my sister-in-law. You see my father could not wait. Even nowadays in the city, grandparents are always looking forward to their grandchildren when their children get married...” (Interview extract, 10 June 2012, lines 66-95)

The Zhu household division in the 1980s started from the allocation of a room to the married eldest son, so that the previous way of sharing of rooms was disturbed. Mr Zhu's father was concerned about the living space and household division and the impetus was his eagerness for a grandson. So a year after his eldest son's marriage, Lao Zhu, Mr Zhu's father, carried out the household division plan over several stages. It is clear that the availability of resources in the household has direct impact on how the process of household division involves (Yan, 2003). Initially, Lao Zhu proposed selling his house to one of his sons:

“My father knew my second brother could afford to buy the house. My second brother was running a pig slaughtering business in villages in Xiuning county and earned more than us working in fields. My second brother bought

the house with four hundred yuan... Between my father and my second brother, there was a written agreement signed in front of our director Huang Shuji. So the house belonged to my second brother, and we all were still living in it.” (Interview extract, 10 June 2012, lines 113-118)

Lao Zhu then proposed that his eldest son should build a house in a part of their household garden by him lending the eldest son the four hundred yuan he had received:

“My father was clever and he lent that money to my eldest brother, suggesting that he should use it to build a house in a part of the land of our garden. So my brother had his house in less than a year, with our relatives and some neighbour’s help, as many of them are carpenters and brick workers. So this help saved a lot for my brother. Soon they had their baby boy in their new house. It was a simple house with cheap bricks and wood. Everyone in our family was happy about the new house and the new born baby. That was because of my father’s clever plan for dividing the household. I think one year after my brother’s family moved into their new house, they also returned my father the amount. My father used it in a similar way to help my third brother build a house on another part of our household land. He just asked my third brother to be responsible and return the money borrowed from relatives and friends. When my third brother had his house, my fourth brother was living in his house for a few years before the third brother married. My parents and I were still living in my second brother’s house. My second brother was very good to us. He earned quite good money in the late 1980s by becoming a merchant and buying and selling pigs in villages just with a motor bike. He then rebuilt the house he bought from my parents for his marriage. Then he lent my fourth brother and me some money and helped us to build our houses. When I started my little grocery store, my second brother again lent me some money. He is very supportive and thoughtful for our big family. When I had my own house, I asked my parents to live in my house, as I saw that my second brother’s wife was not a very easy going person. Before my parents were living in their house.” (Interview extract, 10 June 2012, lines 121-131)

The Lao Zhu household division for his five sons took about fifteen years to accomplish, and eventually every son had a house and family. In several informal conversations with Mr Zhu’s mother, she praised her sons for their supportive collaboration during the household division. In addition, I took notes of things said during informal conversations with her and Ying (Mrs Zhu’s sister) while they were

playing with Hong's baby in the courtyard of the Zhu house about this same household division:

She (Mr Zhu's mother) said Lao Zhu used those four hundred yuan to make their sons independent. In fact, four hundred yuan was not enough for a basic one floor house made of bricks and wood. So the sons actually had to borrow some more money from friends and relatives. If they wanted a better house with two floors and made from steel, they had to borrow more. The pressure of returning the money that they borrowed from others made their sons more diligent and work harder. When her eldest son moved to his house, Lao Zhu also divided chopsticks and bowls as these were the only household items which could be divided, so that when a son moved to live independently, he would take some chopsticks and bowls with him from his parents' household.

They (Mr Zhu's parents) lived with Mr Zhu, and the other four sons have been giving their parents a monthly stipend and a hundred yuan for the traditional Chinese festivals from all five sons. At that time Lao Zhu was seriously ill and because of this the sons made the decision together that they would share the medical costs. Small diseases are covered by the 'Cooperate Medical Insurance' tailored for rural people which only costs sixty yuan per year and covers sixty percent of medical costs, but serious ones are not.

Mr Zhu's mother emphasised that things such as allocating the responsibilities for taking care of their parents, in particular when they were old, were also important parts of the household division. She commented several times that she was very satisfied with her sons, who do things for their parents with a good heart and in harmony, so that they never had conflicts and everything was based on verbal agreement. She told me she could depend on the relationship between the children and trust them. I further asked her about how cooperative her daughter-in-laws were in the division matter. She said that they were all easy going and obedient to their husbands, except for the second son's wife. However, the second son was not the kind of man who was afraid of his wife (Fieldnotes extract, 17 June 2013, p125).

The agreement for the sale of the house between the Zhu father and one of sons, the Zhu household division, and related important issues concerning their parents' maintenance and the younger brothers' housing and marriages, were all based on verbal agreements. There was, as Mr Zhu's mother saw it, a good relationship and trust between her sons. Mr Zhu's account emphasised the important role of his

second brother regarding the household division, saying that “my second brother is very good to us”. This brother was the wealthiest in their household, which enabled him to buy the parents’ old house so that his father Lao Zhu could use that initial fund to help the other sons to build their own houses. The same brother also financially helped to start Mr Zhu’s little grocery store, and he commented that “he is very supportive and thoughtful about our big family”. Mr Zhu’s thoughts about the division in his own household are different, for everything is for his son. This is the same as in the Fang and Cheng households. The concern is only for the sons in the household, with the division focused on property allocations between them. However, there are also variations among these three household divisions. The main differences relate to how the division occurs, its timing, and how the agreement was made. These accounts by people in the three households present the household division as similar around broad cultural normative expectations, but with differences in ways of carrying this out. These stories also put flesh to Goody’s (1976) argument that household form is a result of property-holding and inheritance systems in agrarian societies, and Cohen’s (1992) comment that variations in household division reflect the fact that each household has to make the best of its own situation.

Virilocal marriage is the common aspect in the Fang, Cheng and Zhu households, and in their household divisions the son’s interests were the fundamental concern. Differences among these three households can also be clearly seen, with each division process characterised by the unique way of carrying this out in each household, in order to ‘make the best of its own situation’. As a result, the virilocal aspect is less important in the household division process than contextual matters.

From the above stories of household division told by members of the Fang, Cheng and Zhu households, the variations in the nature of the division, its timing and how the agreement was reached were shaped by household structure, the relationship between the sons, and the personality and power of their wives. In the Fang household, the younger son Wen was studying and living in the city, and the elder son Liang was obedient to his wife who was described as jealous, difficult and greedy. Mr Fang was not happy with his daughter-in-law and clearly believed his elder son would take complete control of the property once his parents died, and this was why he decided on having a written agreement regarding allocation of the property. In the Cheng and Zhu households, the brothers concerned had harmonious relationship and the people in both households that I talked with said that it was the trust between the brothers which made a written agreement unnecessary.

The marriage of one of Huang Shuji's daughters was uxori-local. Huang Shuji has two daughters and he played a major role in the selection of his elder daughter's husband. Huang Shuji told me the story of Ju's marriage and the related household division in an interview which took place on 14/05/2012:

"I knew Min through my friend who is a carpenter in our village. At that time Min was his apprentice and came from a neighbouring village. My friend proposed Min to me saying that Min was a diligent and smart boy. I went to my friend's shed and had several meetings with Min, before introducing him to Ju. Ju and I were happy about him. He was also happy for the uxori-local marriage. Then he married into our family and changed his surname. So he became Huang Min and the son in our Huang household. Their children also use 'Huang' as their surname. You asked me about the household division. My house was rebuilt in 2002 for Min and Ju's marriage. Because of the marriage, the house automatically belongs to our son Min. I inherited my parents' house. I had been living in the house with my parents all the time. When my brother Hui was about to marry in the mid 1980s, I provided some financial support to build his house, which is attached to my house. My household is different. We do not have the usual division because we only have daughters. So the elder one's husband becomes our son and he

automatically has our property, goods and fields. The household division is not only a matter of the division of property and some goods, but also concerns the division of responsibilities and duties for parents and unmarried brothers. So you can see in my household we need a son, who will not only have our property and goods but also responsibilities and duties regarding us when we are old, as well as keeping our Huang lineage going by using the surname. For this I also hope that Min and Ju will have a boy in the future [laughing]. You must think I am very traditional. Although I really respect equality between boy and girl, having a boy is always the common desire for every family, in particular for rural households. Physically boys are different from girls. They can do heavy work. I think having a boy and a girl is a desirable situation for a family. It seems more balanced.” (Interview extract, 14 May 2012, lines 7-29)

The traditional view as expressed here is that rural households need boys because certain kinds of agricultural work require strength. Huang Shuji has two daughters, so through Ju’s marriage he gets a son. He also hopes that Min and Ju will have a boy, as he thinks “it seems more balanced”. On the other hand, he commented to me that the desire for a son in the family is a traditional idea, perhaps because he thought I expected this. I then asked Huang Shuji about the legal rights of Min as a son in the Huang household and whether his younger daughter has a share in household property. His response was that:

“Min is officially registered as my son ‘Huang Min’ in our Household Registration Booklet. This is enough. We do not need any agreement. He will have our house and fields when we die, and he also has a son’s duties to look after the parents, in particular when we are old. My younger daughter has married so that she is now a member of her husband’s household, as an old saying says ‘a married daughter is as thrown water’, she is no longer the member of her parents’ family. She has no share in the house and fields. You know a woman should return her land to the village committee when she marries a man who is in another village. Then she would be allocated a similar sized piece of land from the village of her husband, because she is treated as a member of the husband’s household and so as a member of that village.” (Interview extract, 14 May 2012, lines 31-40)

Because in an uxori-local marriage the daughter's husband becomes the son, Ju and her husband Min are entitled to inherit her parents' property and all the belongings from the household. In the Huang household, the other daughter is married and she is not considered as the member of her parents' family any longer. Huang Shuji considered Min as having legal rights because Min is officially registered as his son in the Household Registration System.

The household structure and uxori-local marriage in the Huang household make it different from the other three households. The differences between the two types of marriage mainly lie in the opposite residential pattern in households, that is, marrying and living with a daughter in a viri-local marriage and marrying and living with a son in an uxori-local one. Nevertheless, for rural households the practical meaning of both kinds of marriage is very similar, because accounts by people in the four households have commonly shown that, for households, having a son and keeping the family lineage going through the son is the central concern in both forms of marriages.

Marriage for Yodanis (2010: 175) has "always shown the stamp of the particular culture, and is undergoing changes that are reflected in new practices, rules, and beliefs". Uxori-local marriage (at the bride's place) has been both a tradition and also a necessity in rural China, because of economic needs and practical management purposes regarding agricultural work and family continuation. However, whether there are any great differences as compared with the viri-local households is by no means clear cut. In order to gain a thorough understanding of this, I visited the research households in late afternoons when people were back home from work, and

I interviewed Min, son-in-law of the Huang household; Chun, daughter-in-law of the Fang household; and Ping, daughter of Mr Cheng:

When Min came back home from work around 6pm, Mrs Huang, Juan, was moving dried vegetables from courtyard to a storage shed. Min went directly to help Juan after parking his motorbike. Huang Shuji was talking with me in the sitting room. When Huang Shuji saw this, he could not hide his delight and kept praising Min's diligence in front of me and also emphasised how important to have a son for rural households. I interviewed Min in the vegetable shed, because he said he wanted to talk privately about his views on his marriage and related matters (Fieldnotes extract, 17 November 2014, p173).

Min: "you know, people often ask me about what is being a son in uxorilocal marriage is like, in particular, my friends in Tunxi. Although uxorilocal marriage is not common in the city, I do not think uxorilocal marriage is a rare thing."

Tingting: "Why do you think so?"

Min: "It just sounds like a different kind of thing. However, it is common in families in the city with only a daughter. In the city, most families have only one child. In the urban family, the only daughter will be the one to inherit her parents' wealth, and so does her husband. Like my colleagues, they all treat their only son-in-law as the real son. In the countryside, like my parents (the Huang couple), they also provide everything for and will give their all their things to the son who is married in their family through uxorilocal marriage."

Tingting: "So do you not think uxorilocal marriage is typical in the countryside?"

Min: "Er... I find it is not a rare thing. But there are differences between rural and urban households. You see, in the city men do not have to change to their wives' surname. And rural parents do have quite a high expectation of the son, but urban parents do not have the same kind of expectation."

Tingting: "So what kind of expectation, do you mean?"

Min: "Urban parents, who have only a daughter, know that their belongings will be their daughter's and son-in-law's when they die. But they do not have any particular expectation of the son-in-law except that they expect the son-in-law to be good to their daughter. In the village, it is different. My parents-in-law want me to be the same as the son in a rural household, being responsible for the wife's family. Rural parents really care about this."

Tingting: "So what is your responsibility to your wife's family?"

Min: “I really treat my parents-in-law as my real parents, and I must be loyal to them and their family. I will take the responsibility to look after them when they are very old or ill.”

Tingting: “Do you think rural parents are more traditional than urban ones?”

Min: “Of course. A son is a must in the family [laughing].”

Tingting: “Why do you think they are more traditional and think a son is so important?”

Min: “Traditionally, a son ensures the continuation of the lineage. In the countryside, a son is very useful in agricultural work, for the heavy tasks.”

Tingting: “I see. So how are your experiences as a son in the Huang house?”

Min: “The Huang house provides me with much better living conditions than that in my biological parents’ family. I have really had a great time since from the marriage. My parents (Huang Shuji and Juan) have been very kind to me and also to my biological family. Huang Shuji and I often visit my biological parents, and he and my Mum (Juan) always prepare lots of food for my biological parents, as you know they are very poor. I am very grateful to them (Huang Shuji and Juan). You know, this makes me feel that I should be more diligent and responsible in the house. I really feel that I am a son in the Huang family rather than a son-in-law.” (Interview extract, 17 November 2014, lines 6-43)

Min considers that uxori-local marriage is not as rare as it seems to urban people. Indeed, when an urban family has only a daughter, the parents will give all their belongings including their property to the daughter and her husband. However, he interestingly sees important differences between the ‘one daughter family’ in cities and the ‘daughter(s) only family’ in rural villages. Using the wife’s surname, having a significant sense of responsibility for the wife’s family and taking on the duties of looking after the wife’s parents are the typical demands of the ‘son’ who has married in. This has been the tradition in rural society; while in cities, nowadays there is little distinction between virilocal and uxori-local marriages, although urban parents of a ‘one daughter family’ view their son-in-law as their son, as there is no other son in the family.

I organised an interview with Chun, daughter-in-law of the Fang house, on the evening of 18/11/2014. The interview took place in the sitting room of Chun and Liang's house. When she knew that I was interested in her experiences and views about her family life, she started talking in a complaining tone:

Chun: "My parents-in-law are not fair to Laing and me. They love their second son Wen much more than Liang. Parents, in villages and cities, always give importance to the elder son and his wife, but my parents-in-law are different. In addition, I have given them a grandson. However, it seems this does not add value to my position in this family. They have been trying their best to benefit Wen."

Tingting: "Why do you think so?"

Chun: "You know they have been spent lots of money on Wen's education, so now Wen has a decent job in Tunxi; while Liang is a worker, and he did not receive much support from his parents for his education. You see the bias."

(Liang was bringing us two cups of tea and said the following.)

Liang: "Chun, it was not because of lack of support from my parents. It is because I am not cut out for study. I did not like studying."

Chun: "You always stand at your parents' side!"

Tingting: "Mr and Mrs Fang have been trying their best for Qing's education and job."

Chun: "They have to do it, because Qing is the eldest and only grandson in the family. I do not think they are as good as they should be to their grandson."

Tingting: "Why do you think so?"

Chun: "Like my neighbours, many of them have built houses that are for the eldest grandson. You see my parents-in-law only leave this part of house to us. I do not want to think about this. When comparing with neighbours' and friends' parents-in-law, I really feel upset." (Interview extract, 18 November 2014, lines 3-23)

Obviously, Chun has expected a great deal from her parents-in-law on the grounds that she has married the eldest son in the Fang house and given birth to the elder grandson for the household. She has very decided and unrealistic ideas about what is

‘fair’ and sees anything else as a ‘bias’ against her. In expressing these, she commented negatively about her parents-in-law. It seems that she use ‘Laing the elder son and Qing the elder grandson’ to justify her desire for everything possessed by the Fang household. As a matter of fact, Mr and Mrs Fang have worked hard to generate savings and build networks for Qing’s education and job, and they have also been trying to keep a balance and to be fair with their children. But rather than this, Chun is comparing a lot with other people, and this may be the main cause of her dissatisfaction.

Ping, Mr Cheng’s elder daughter, had a lengthy conversation with me on 19/11/2014 during her afternoon break at a grain processing company in the village where her husband’s family lives:

Tingting: “As a daughter, can you tell me your views on the household division in your parents’ house?”

Ping: “In countryside, the division is for sons, my brothers. It is the tradition. As a daughter, I think it is right for the brothers. I live with my husband’s family. I do not need anything from my parents. For the sons, the division is important.”

Tingting: “Why do you think it is important for sons?”

Ping: “They need a house and money to marry. Even though the man does not care about those material things, the woman does care about it. It is the culture. When a woman marries a man, she detaches from her parents’ family and becomes a member of her husband’s family.”

Tingting: “So when there is a family division in your parents’ household, do you provide some suggestions?”

Ping: “Not at all. Usually the father decides. I’d rather provide many suggestions about the division in my husband’s family. That is connected with my interests. But when I married my husband, his family had already divided. I think it is good to do the division before marriage, as you know many women are never satisfied with their parents-in-law’s proposals. In particular, the division is difficult when a family has several sons. The wives make the situation complicated.” (Interview extract, 19 November 2014, lines 1-17)

Although there are many changes in rural China, awareness of the need to provide for daughters is still not very high. This is because daughters marry out and they become more interested in things in their husband's household rather than that shared with their brothers. As Ping said, "I'd rather provide many suggestions about the division in my husband's family. That is connected with my interests". Ping's account sees differences between son and daughter in a rural household division are due to the influence of traditional culture and practicality in life.

Change, Gender, Age and Tradition

Following Wallman's (1984) work on the household as a resources system and Carter's (1984) work on the household as a cultural system, my analysis above has focussed on the roles of the household head and the household manager and what happens in the circumstances of household division. I now consider the broader matter of the manner in which households have adjusted to the successive waves of social and economic changes that have impacted on rural China. The focus is in particular on the change from agriculture to industry, changes in the division of labour in the household, and changes to traditional expectations and women's part in these.

The Huang household's domestic work and its relationship to farming work is mainly managed by Huang Shuji and his wife. Their elder daughter Ju, who trained to be a primary school teacher, has been working in the village school. Ju's husband Min, who used to be a carpenter before his marriage, has been working for about fifteen years as a porter in a small logistics company in Tunxi, which is owned by

Huang Shuji's cousin. Min told me in an informal conversation that this job enabled him to earn much more than he could as a carpenter. Huang Shuji's younger daughter Jie and her husband have been working in a paint producing factory in the big city of Hangzhou; and when they decided to become workers there, they left their two-year-old daughter Mei in the care of Jie's parents (Huang Shuji and Juan). Huang Shuji's wife Juan also has worked part-time for the city council, cutting grass and trees. I had a conversation with Juan about her work for the city council on 28/05/2013.

Juan got this job by chance because she was introduced to a County officer, and she decided to do the work because she had some free time. As she said to me, "so I decided to work for the Council. It was not for money. It was because if you have free time, staying at home is a waste". She prefaced this with:

"When Mei started the primary school, I felt I had a lot of free time. At that time on the way to our garden I met a County officer who came to the village about some matters, and he asked me whether I was interested in work, cutting grass and trees. I thought, why not, since there is not much work to do in the house. There are no small children to look after. Nowadays we have a washing machine and a rice cooker. These give me much more free time. So I decided to work for the Council. It was not for money. It was because if you have free time, staying at home is a waste." (Interview extract, 28 May 2013, lines 26-32)

She liked the work for two main reasons: one is flexibility, and the other is that it gives her independent earnings:

"It is flexible as I am not working full-time and have no formal contact. The Council officer usually phones me in advance asking whether I would like to work on certain days and in certain areas. If I decide to go and when I get there, they just tick my name in a box. So I get paid according to the hours of work in a month. I quite like the job and I find this is great because I can also earn some extra for myself..." (Interview extract, 28 May 2013, 34-39)

Juan told me how good it is for a woman to work in the community and earn her own money and used an example of women in the city who she had heard about from the TV. She also commented about Kun's wife who left and went to Shanghai:

“I think a woman should have her own work to do, rather than spending all her time on household work. But this is very difficult for country women. Generations of women have spent all their time in the village. Like my mother and mother-in-law, they have never been out of the village to see the city. They do everything for the household, fields, children and children's children. That is a very bitter life. The countryside is so poor that you have to work hard. In the past, women had no rights and they just obeyed their husbands. Now it is much better that we can make our own choices... Men have become less traditional. Huang Shuji really respects me and is very supportive of my work. Some men are not so nice to their wives. You know Kun. He is a nice person, but he just behaved the way that very countryside men do to his wife. So she left. In the past before she left, sometimes I teased Kun, telling him to watch the TV to see how women and men behave in the city. It does not mean we should copy the city and abandon our traditions. But this kind of equality between men and women is good for everyone. When I cut trees in the communities in Xiuning, with some ladies in the community, we talk and from them I hear many interesting things and stories. They live in a town and have better education so they know more than our countryside people.” (Interview extract, 28 May 2013, 43-58)

From her comments about TV and gender equality, it appears that Juan values her job with the Council, not just because it provides her with a chance to explore a bigger world and a more dynamic context, but also because it gives her a sense of gender equality. After this conversation with Juan, I had an informal short conversation with Huang Shuji the day after, on 29/05/2013. He commented on Juan's work in relation to the household:

Huang Shuji was very supportive of Juan's work and he thought it opened her eyes to see the world. He told me that he saw the importance of women's rights at home and in the society from his work dealing with household problems in Shang village. He seemed very supportive of the idea that rural women should not only be involved in household chores and it is good for them and the family that they have some chance to see what life is like outside the village. He told me that his wife's work does not affect his household organisation. He also believed countryside men too need to see the world through working in towns and cities, which could make them have a

better understanding of their wives' choices (Fieldnotes extract, 29 May 2013, p104)

Huang Shuji is expressly concerned with women's rights at home and in society and thinks that men in rural society could gain a better understanding of their wives through working in towns and cities.

Mrs Fang, Yu, also has a part-time job in a small plastic processing factory near Shang Village, where she has worked for two years. Yu told me that she works in the factory on the days she is free, and the work is paid daily. On 09/06/2013 in the late afternoon, I met Mrs Fang on her way back home from the factory, and we had a conversation while I walked with her when on my way to the Huang house:

She said she was very satisfied with the job as it pays daily, though she did not like the pollution of micro dust on her clothes. The pay was much higher and came quicker than agricultural work and selling dried vegetables. She had no contract with the factory. During our conversation she complained about her husband Mr Fang who often told her to stop working in the factory. I asked her why, and she said it was because he disliked the idea that women work for others. She told me he was narrow minded and she just replied to his complaint with 'why could he work far away from home but not her'. She carried on working and doing what she liked. She also said although in 2013 she spent many days working in the factory, she still could easily manage the household chores, which gave Mr Fang no reason to complain further. She said she was still working on the soya beans and rapeseed fields, vegetable gardens, and had some pigs. In these two years, she had stopped selling sun dried vegetables, because her work in the factory allowed her to earn much more. She emphasised the importance of independent earning for women, giving her freedom to use money and to make her own choices (Fieldnotes extract, 9 June 2013, p117).

Mr Fang has worked for six years with his son Liang on different building sites in Xiuning without a formal contract. By doing so, he is now earning much more than he had by agricultural work and pig slaughtering. Moreover, he is also paid daily.

Because both Mr and Mrs Fang are now involved in industrial work, two years ago when a brick producing company offered them a good deal to rent their land, Mr Fang decided to let out most of their household fields, keeping only a little field on which Mrs Fang plants soya beans and rapeseed. In spite of these changes, compared with Juan, Mrs Fang's husband is not as supportive of his wife's choice of outside working as Huang Shuji is. Nevertheless, she continued doing the work that attracted her because of its high pay and flexibility. She was clear that, as long as she could manage the household as she used to, Mr Fang had no reason to complain, even though he would have preferred his wife to stay in the house. Such traditional beliefs and expectations about how people, women especially, should live and work in rural households have been changed by the increased demand of labour from the industrial sector, where financial rewards are higher than in agriculture. These opportunities brought by industrialisation have provided a way for women in particular to enjoy greater freedom of choice and a degree of economic independence. And as with Mrs Fang, they have also provided an opportunity for the women concerned to explore their individual wants and needs, in a parallel way to their husbands.

On 27/05/2012, I conducted an interview with Cheng Kun and I was also invited to lunch in the Cheng house. Mrs Cheng, grandson Fei, and Kun's sister Ping and her family were all there for lunch. Usually the Sunday lunch was organised and prepared by Ping. Mrs Cheng talked very little. Mr Cheng, Ping and I had an interesting conversation. They had been telling me stories about their experiences of working in the city and they also talked about social change and tradition, and I asked their permission to record the conversation. When I returned home to Tunxi

that afternoon, I also took notes of important points at the beginning of the conversation that had not been recorded:

While we were having lunch I asked Ping about her current work in a grain processing factory in her husband's village. She started talking about this work, which she liked much more than the year she spent working in a clothing company with her sister Yan in Huzhou. Then Mr Cheng became a bit excited talking about his feelings about his daughters and other women in Shang village working in the city and the impact on village life. The women in the village had almost all gone to work in cities and that the village market had disappeared. He said he still remembered the village market in the past. There were lots of villagers bargaining and chatting around the marketplace, and most of the people there were women with small children. Mr Cheng became sad when he told us about the market, which used to be the village women's favourite point of leisure where they socialised and shared their stories and experiences while they were shopping there. Mrs Cheng agreed, and both Ping and Kun said they remembered when they were there with their parents and grandparents. With a pitying look, Mr Cheng said now most of the young people had gone to work in cities, which made the households and the village a 'paradise' for the aged and children, and the village was not the same village any more (Fieldnotes extract, 27 May 2012, p40).

Following Mr Cheng's concern that most of the young villagers had left to work in cities, Ping talked about having worked in a clothing company in Huzhou:

"Like my sister, these villagers want to earn more for a better life, so they have to work far away from home. But honestly I felt the workers' lives are very difficult in the cities and they suffer from lots of things. I worked only a year with Yan in Huzhou. I could not live that kind of life so I came back. My son was too little at that time. When I felt depressed in the city, I missed my child more. I worked there and lived with Yan and other eight girls from the countryside in a dormitory. My job was through being introduced by my sister, in fact all the jobs in cities for countryside people are the result of introductions from people you know, relatives and friends. For us country people, work in cities is paid well. However, these are cheap jobs, without access to any social welfare. So only people from the countryside do it, because we have no education and can only do these cheap jobs. People in the city have a better education so they get good jobs that pay more and are less tiring. Although we were in the city, we only had contact with other rural people there and had our life in a closed little space. At that time I felt we struggled in an abandoned corner of the city. We could not live as decently as urban people. They (people in the city) look down on us and call the worker from villages 'the muddy ones'.... Honestly, I feel only myself when I am with my family members in the village. No matter how much money the work in the city pays, I will not leave my home and village again. I really

suffered from missing the free and natural life in the village and my family members.” (Interview extract, 27 May 2012, lines 11-29)

Ping gave up her job in Huzhou after a year and decided to return home to be a small-holding farmer and housewife, although she has also worked part-time in a grain processing factory in her husband’s village since 2010. However, in contrast to Ping, her sister Yan preferred the freedom of life in the city to life on the land and stayed in Huzhou.

Mr Cheng then talked about Yan in a complaining tone:

“These younger people, they do not want to listen to older people’s opinions. They think they know everything and think the city is always better than the countryside. When I saw Yan and Gang, I told them to think about staying at home. The young people think older people’s words are useless. I think they cannot believe my words until they hit their head against a brick... I am really worried about Yan. She has been married for a year, leaving her husband in the village. A woman should consider her family and having a child. How does this impact on her husband? Do you think this is traditional?...” (Interview extract, 27 May 2012, lines 33-40)

Kun continued the conversation by commenting that:

“The city is very attractive for us farmers. But I have to admit that Gang and Yan are really more open-minded and knowledgeable than us. I found they have got a different mind-set from those of us who just know the soil. Many times when I too was trying to convince them to come home, their words really made me wordless... Dad, the best thing is to follow your own nature. They are not moved by our worries. They stay away so there must be a reason why that suits them. In fact, they want a better life for themselves and their children rather than a life of struggling in the village.” (Interview extract, 27 May 2012, lines 41-47)

The unfolding conversation showed not only the conflicting views about work and family life that can exist between some older and some younger people, but also the implicit challenge to the traditional expectation that children are obedient to their parents’ wishes. For example, Ping described her sister Yan as “a person who gives priority to freedom and her own stuff”; while in some contrast, Kun sees the family members working in cities as more open-minded and having a ‘better life’ than

struggling in the village. Kun's words to his father brought home to me that the choices some people made to stay in cities were made in a situation where there was little other choice for them. Sharma (1980) has stated that migration from rural to urban areas to seek employment is caused by industrialisation and urbanisation. Though true when speaking at the level of society, it is much more complex for household members taking up different possibilities according to what Kun sees as 'to follow your own nature'.

The Zhu household has focused its economic activity on its pork farming business since 2009. This was because, as Mr Zhu explained, "the convenience store was losing customers. You see the village has nice roads and villagers have motor bikes and can travel to shop in big supermarkets in Xiuning and Tunxi". In my interview with him on 05/09/2011, Mr Zhu told me that pork farming seemed to be the only feasible way for them to generate income to pay for their children's education:

"I had to have a business as I have two good kids who are good at studying, and if you want your children to receive a good education and have a bright future, you have to have enough money for their education. Education will change their life... Although many households in the village had given up pork farming and work in cities, my wife and I thought pork farming was the only way that could make us a good income. That is the only type of farming we know about. Since we are diligent, we thought we could make it as long as we worked hard. We also have parents at home, and my father has been ill. So we could not leave my parents to work in the city. We do not consider that the city is our future. We like being farmers in the village. When we were relocated, we insisted on living in the village rather than in an apartment... But we expect our children to have decent lives in the city. My daughter has settled in the city, now we are working hard for our son." (Interview extract, 5 September 2011, lines 58-69)

Here Mr Zhu is not only putting forward good reasons for him and his wife not moving to a city, but simultaneously planning for his children to be able to escape

from the land, and at the same time recognising the limited choices he and his wife could make in his comments about ‘the only way’.

‘Change’ has been highlighted in how people tell about their household stories. Huang Shuji’s wife Juan and also Mrs Fang Yu are satisfied with their outside work, mainly because of the flexibility of work, daily pay and the information they get when socialising with the people who they meet through this. The importance of gender equality is expressed in their talk about their understanding of the greater freedom of choice that rural women are able to have in recent years, how to balance work in and outside of the household, and about their husbands’ attitudes towards their jobs. In Mrs Fang’s case, she thinks it is right that she can work for others, as her husband has already done this, and she also says it is not necessary to be obedient to her husband’s opinions as long as she can find a balance between her individual choices and household matters and reach reasonable ways of managing these. In terms of ways of living and personal development, the younger generations of people have a different approach to the older generation, and they frequently want to experience urban life or earn more in order to afford their children’s education. Kun and Gang in the Cheng household and Mr and Mrs Zhu have the same opinions about education, which is viewed as the only way for rural people to achieve a successful life in the city. Kun, Mr and Mrs Zhu do not want to live the rural life, and they are working hard in order to have enough capital to finance their children’s education and later detachment from the village. They believe an urban life is much better than a rural one regarding resources and quality of living, but that is for their children. Ping’s experiences of working in a big city and her views about this show that, at the level of households and individuals, ‘change’ is much more complicated than being

just reluctant to embrace new things or just easily leaving the village behind and engaging with the industrialisation and urbanisation process. As Ping commented: “for us country people, work in cities is paid well. However, these are cheap jobs... I felt we struggled in an abandoned corner of that city... not live as decently as urban people... I feel only myself when I am with my family members in the village”. However, Ping’s sister Yan does the same work as Ping in the city, but Yan likes living in the city even though her husband remains in the village. ‘To follow your own nature’, in Kun’s phrase, is a practical way in which rural people make choices between the different possibilities brought about by the social and economic changes occurring.

Conclusion

Griffin (1984) has commented that the Chinese household system has beneficial effects in allowing people self-management and considerable flexibility and motivation. In the four research households and thirty years on, agricultural production has become more limited, focused on particular activities, and people’s choices about this are affected by the availability of resources in the household and opportunities in the local environment, as well as the ongoing wider process of industrialisation and urbanisation. As discussion in this chapter has shown, the choices people make and the economic activities they engage in are based on the resource system of household and also embedded in cultural expectations about proper ways to behave, as well as practical decision-making in particular circumstances.

What people say and the stories they tell about the household head and resources manager is useful for understanding several aspects of management in the four households. Firstly, the accounts by people in the four households show that household manager is the person who primarily controls economic resources and is responsible for important matters in the household, although in traditional village households men are dominant by being both the head and the manager. In these four households, there are three female managers, excepting the Cheng house where there are only two adult men.

Secondly, people's accounts show how financial resources are managed in these village households. In modern village households, 'household head' is just the senior male whose name is written on the official document of the Household Booklet; while the household manager looks after the important financial resources and makes decisions about using them either solely or jointly with the head. This is different from traditional village households, where men control household finances. However, women in the Huang, Fang and Zhu households manage household savings and financial matters. What people's stories show is that trust between a married couple is crucial to effective resources management in households. In a traditional household, the senior man is dominant in a household, and 'trusting women' is unnecessary as the man is 'naturally' believed to be a competent head and manager. But by comparison with this, the changing circumstances that village households have to respond to are reshaping the relationship between husband and wife. There are more and more men involved in industrial work in cities and the household work and economic resources management has to be left to their wives. Eventually, women's capability in managing these important resources is shown by their actual

involvement, so the changing environment has provided women with increasing opportunities for managing important household matters.

Thirdly, women's status in the village household can be understood from whether they have the control of household financial resources. The level of trust from a woman's husband and how much financial resources she can freely access or manage is an indicator of her status in the household. Regarding the exceptional case of Cheng household, although Mr Cheng and Kun both believe Kun's wife left because of thinking that Kun is poor, in fact it seems that this happened because of her dissatisfaction with her low status in the household, as she had no trust from her husband, no access to household money, and no managerial power.

The matter of gender is again emphasised regarding the process of household division. Household divisions in the four households are all about the allocation of resources for sons. 'Son' is the central concern in the household division, regardless of virilocal or uxorilocal marriage. The divisions in the four households illustrate the different ways of carrying it out, which are dependent on the demographic composition and available resources in the households. In each household, the process takes particular shape around each household organization, and combines solving practical problems with meeting traditional expectations.

The practical problems in household division are concerned with how to use available resources, including economic, material and human resources, so as to meet these expectations, with the marriage of sons at the top of them. Resources are divided exclusively to male descendants, and daughters are clearly cut out. When the household only has female descendants, such as the Huang household, they adopt a

son who marries their daughter and he will become the household head and inherit household property and capital when the senior male dies. Although other changes are happening in the village and households, there is no change about this and parents have not yet become aware of their daughters' needs.

In circumstances of change, people's different views of and ways of adapting to this are influenced by tradition concerning gender and generation. People's choices about working and living are key to understanding how people adapt to the changing environment. In terms of choices for work, it is noticeable that women have and make use of greater opportunities in making decisions and engaging in a world that is not limited by the boundary of land and house. Not only do Juan and Yu, two household wives, enjoy their work time and are pleased with the payment for this, but they also value the freedom of choice that economic independence brings them.

The differences between the generations are shown by different choices and attitudes towards traditional life styles and choices. On the one hand, older people like Mr Cheng and Mr Zhu think that village life is best and they find it hard to live without the land; on the other hand, the older generation has also worked hard to earn enough for their children's education and prepare them to leave the village. Regardless of the attractive aspects of urban life and the influence from industrialisation and urbanisation, people of older generations are generally more attached to the village; while the younger generation are not only attracted by the resources and ways of living in cities, but also are pushed by their rural parents to pursue a more educated and affluent life in the urban world through education.

Discussion and analysis in this chapter has been concerned with changing household economic life. Household resources management and related household strategy, gendered divisions of household labour and its impact on household resources management, interpersonal relationships in the household and household division on marriage, all show the household in a process. Changing household economic life is also represented by people's choices of work outside the household, and here the discussion of women's role, status and their influence in the household economy and generational patterns of choice are also important.

Chapter 5 Resources and the Household

Introduction

The Shang Village research households are complex in both structure and organisation and also how their members relate to each other over time. My approach to investigating this is influenced by Carter's (1984) view of households as cultural systems and particularly Wallman's (1984) emphasis on them as resource systems. The former emphasises the culturally defined expectations and unfolding strategies in the household, while the latter examines the management and use of different kinds of resources, including time and information, of households in a particular cultural setting. Following discussion in the previous chapter about the impact of resource management on household organisation and changes in this around household division and also wider socio-economic changes, this chapter presents my analysis of what household members say about resources and their relationship to the household economy and the livelihoods of members. In exploring this, I use material collected during the Chinese New Year of February 2013 as well as at other times. Most household members who work in cities return home for Chinese New Year celebrations, and as a consequence I had the opportunity to meet and talk with many people who had been living and working there. In both interviews and informal conversations, material and non-material resources were discussed as well as individual people's experiences, how they saw the significance of different resources for the household, and the links between people's motivations, aspirations, resources organisation and the overall livelihood of the household. As Wallman (1984: 28) points out, "even those who limit the resource concept to material items will

recognise that resource management involves organisation and some number of layers of social and cultural embroidery”. She also states the need to include more than land, labour and capital, to encompass services, and also time, information and identity matters. These analytic concerns structure this chapter.

My observations of family reunions for the 2013 Chinese New Year celebrations in each of the four research households suggest there is a major conflict between land stewardship and personal identity, which usually arises for the small-holding famers when they have to make important life choices. Clearly, land is the most important resource for them and for agricultural production generally, but also these farmers see themselves as endowed with a particular identity that is of low status and places them at the bottom of Chinese society. The lives they live limit farmers in accessing many resources, in particular non-material resources such as information and education, which are important resources that make a considerable difference over generations to household organisation and livelihoods, in particular in the context of the current rapid changes in China. A perceived conflict between ‘land’ as material resource and ‘identity’ as a non-material resource was expressed by Mr Cheng in an interview during Chinese New Year 2013:

“I am so happy to see the house filled with people. I am the only one of my household sunk in the soil. They abandon their land to me. In the late afternoon while I am having dinner, I am always sitting at the door to see the villagers coming back from their work in towns. I feel sad. Nowadays it is more difficult to meet villagers around the place than it used to be. Most of them have moved to live and work in big cities, like my children. The land means nothing for them. Because they were farmers, they had to change their lives, but for an old person like me it is fine to remain bound up in farming. Depending on land solely will not make us grasp the future. I understand why my children are working hard far away from home, for their children’s future and to avoid the status of being a famer.” (Interview extract, 19 February 2013, lines 21-30)

Mr Cheng told me this in a sad tone. His words made me reflect on the connections between land, identity and people's choices. This relationship primarily concerns material and non-material resources and how these impact on people's choices around the particular circumstances of their households. My fieldwork indicates a notable reluctance and negativity when people were talking about 'land' and 'being a farmer'. Nevertheless, when they talked about 'future choices', most of them also said that they would like to return to the village when they were too old to work. This underlines the importance of resources in household life and that people make difficult decisions in different circumstances.

In what follows, analysis starts with the classic material resources of land, labour and capital. The focus is on how household members interpret these resources, including because of their experiences of transitions from collective production in People's Communes from the late 1950s to the Household Responsibility System from the late 1970s. It considers such matters around related social and economic changes from a team to a household, commercial appeal, and people's detachment from land while having their roots in the local soil. The next part of the chapter discusses something Wallman touches on but does not explore in detail, which concerns services and household exchanges. The third section is concerned with how household members understand non-material resources such as information, time and knowledge and the impact of these resources on ideas about identity and the choices people feel they can make. This focuses on eating and ideas about a 'calling' as a farmer. The chapter concludes by discussing changes to household boundaries and the re-shaping of household livelihoods regarding how people's lifestyle choices affect other household members' choices and also household management overall.

Land, Labour and Capital

The household as the central unit of agricultural production and also consumption in rural China was recognised and underpinned by the Chinese Household Responsibility System after 1978 (Cohen, 2005). Land is the vital resource for small-holding households. However, small-holding farmers are tied to the land and to a low social status. The stories that people told me about land centred on changes in rural China and conveyed to me the complexity of the attitudes to land and related material resources of people in these households. These expressed a mixture of dilemma and excitement, while they were trying their best to adapt the social and economic changes occurring. Their stories reminded me of the Chinese adage, ‘wade across the river by feeling the stones on the bottom’. There were no other choices for these households other than to respond to such changes; and they had to cross an ‘unforeseen river’ step by step, managing different types of situations; and eventually they will or will not reach the bank by their different ways of adaptation.

The production team has been one of the typical characteristics of rural China from the late 1950s to the early 1980s. The people in the four research households have their unique stories about the changes leading from the production team in the Commune period to the household oriented production since implementations of the Household Responsibility System and economic reforms in the early 1980s.

Mr Zhu, Bo, told me that ‘starvation’ had been his main memory of the People’s Commune period.

During our conversations he said to me that: “I dreamed of eating an apple and a full

bowl of rice with some stewed meat during my childhood. Thanks to the Household Responsible System, my dream has become reality and I have also become a meat producer”. Huang Shuji and Bo are of similar ages. Their experiences were expressed in their stories of their childhoods. Huang Shuji had helped with the accounting side of the production team during the last two years of his primary schooling. He had been very proud of working for the People’s Commune after school, although this did not count as formal work to earn working points. He said:

“I was naïve to be proud of that. However, I remember life was very hard for everyone. I saw that people were often ill because of the shortage of food and unbalanced work. I remember I saw my Mum always doing the housework when I woke up during the night. When I was a child I really wanted to be a medical doctor.” (Interview extract, 27 October 2011, lines 17-21)

Huang Shuji also told me about the change from team production to the household as a production unit:

“I believed the quality of life in the countryside has been improved a lot, because we can manage the land and production by ourselves. Since the Household Responsibility System, our village people have become happier and happier. I have been the only doctor in the village for about thirty years. I really see that our people have become healthier and healthier. When they have good management of their activities and good attitudes towards life, they become healthier.” (Interview extract, 27 October 2011, lines 23-28)

The accounts of the Fang household were given at a New Year’s lunch with Mr and Mrs Fang and Mrs Yuan. Their friend, Xiao Yuan, is a retired bank employee in Tunxi. When she was sent to work in Shang Village as a ‘knowledgeable youth’, Mrs Yuan became the family friend of Yu and Lao Fang. In February 2013 during Chinese New Year, Mr and Mrs Fang and I were invited to lunch at Mrs Yuan’s house. They said they could not help recalling stories about the 1960s and 1970s. While we were having lunch I was fascinated by their conversations and did not use a voice recorder as this would have been seen as impolite, as this was the first time I

was a guest at her house for a New Year celebration lunch. So I made some notes about the conversation that occurred as soon as I got back home:

“Mrs Yuan said she always felt as if her three years working in Shang Village in the early 1970s were only yesterday. She toasted Mr and Mrs Fang several times with wine, expressing her gratitude to them for their good care of her although they had been in a very poor condition themselves. Mrs Fang told Mrs Yuan that she had really liked having a knowledgeable youth as an apprentice staying with them, because talking with Mrs Yuan and listening to Mrs Yuan’s stories about life in the town was the most exciting thing for her.” (Fieldnotes extract, 20 February 2013, p71)

After our lunch at her house, Mrs Yuan took us to a nearby newly developed park for a walk. Mrs Fang also continued talking about the People’s Commune period, as she saw that I was fascinated by those stories. She was also happy for me to turn on my voice recorder:

Mrs Fang: “You cannot imagine that time when we were working for the production team. Personally I prefer the household small-holding. You heard Mr Fang say he did not mind that kind of team work. In fact, I think he had got used to starvation and extremely bad family conditions when he was a child, so that he could cope with famine in the early 1960s. We would not have had famine and agricultural disaster if we were in small-holding households. But thanks to the new leaders, it was they who encouraged the Household Responsibility System. That made the great change to farmers’ lives. Then we worked hard for the household and became richer and richer... The nicest thing at that time (People’s Commune period) was Mrs Yuan’s companionship.”

Tingting: “So how did it work when Mrs Yuan stayed at your house? Did she pay for staying?”

Mrs Fang: “The State gave a living allowance for the youths to the big production team which was in charge of several small production teams. The big production team was a village and composed of small production teams based on several households in a geographically close area. According to the State policy, the farmer household would get eight Chinese yuan for hosting a youth. Mrs Yuan used to collect eight Chinese yuan monthly from the big production team, and then gave it to us. She ate and slept at our place. Our house was divided into three rooms by some thin wooden boards. We only had beds filled with straw under the sheet. Mrs Yuan had a room to herself. Since she was from the city I always tried to make her comfortable in the

countryside. In autumn when we had newly dried straw, I always put much more new straw in her bed. Having enough food was the biggest problem at that time. When we got more rice or were allocated a piece of meat for the household, I put more rice and meat in her bowl. She was young, only eighteen, and needed more energy for her hard work in the countryside. It was not easy for an urban girl to do the work in the countryside. I also know she had no menstrual period for a long time. She was such a nice girl. She ate whatever we had in the house. I knew she often felt starving, as all of us did. However, she always pretended to be full, in order to save food for others in the house. Also, at that time we had just had our elder son Liang.” (Interview extract, 20 February 2013, lines 3-35)

Such touching stories not only reveal the friendship between the Fang household and Mrs Yuan, but illuminate how people coped with the difficulties of that particular time and political context. They also show what they felt about how material resources were organised between a production team and a household. Mrs Fang stated that the team production system was the reason for the famine and agricultural disaster that occurred, and she also thinks that the Household Responsibility System has significantly improved farmers’ lives, allowing people to work hard for their household and become better off.

During the walk after lunch, when I asked Mrs Fang about the Household Responsibility System, she said “I felt the real freedom of being able to manage resources and production for the household, and I was motivated to work on the small-holding and to improve the quality of agricultural production and household life”. She then told me a very interesting story as an example of the management of labour in the household in the commune period:

Mrs Fang told me how busy women were during the commune period and told a story about the management of housework and childcare in the early 1970s. When she gave birth to her elder son Liang in the 1970s, she only had a month off work, and she did not get any points during her maternity leave. She worked in the fields until she was about to deliver the baby. When the baby was just a month old, she had to leave him alone and go back to work.

I was surprised by her story of childcare. She said it was normal at that time. When there was no help from other household members to look after a baby, women usually left a young baby in bed since they could not yet crawl. When a baby started crawling, she put them in a big farmers' basket with tall sides and locked them in at home. When Liang was bigger, Mrs Fang often put him on her back in a type of sling. She said the mothers were allowed to go home to feed their babies twice a day, once in the mid morning and once in mid afternoon. The feeding time, including walking to their homes, was only about half an hour.

She said very seriously that women were much harder than men. In the evening she had to do the rest of work in the house when her son was asleep, such as walking to a river near the house to wash clothes and dishes while her husband just went to bed after dinner. She commented interestingly that "my husband always thought he had done enough as he had worked for the team the whole day. Although I left the production team for only half an hour twice a day, I was not going home to sleep". She said women had gained much more freedom since the Household Responsibility System and the economic reforms of the early 1980s. Compared with men, she described women at that period as like obedient cattle, too busy and ignored by society. She thought that nowadays domestic power was more balanced in farming households and men had gradually become more aware of women's contribution to household life (Fieldnotes extract, 20 February 2013, p71-72)

Mrs Fang's account emphasised the importance of women's role during the People's Commune period, for women not only had to do as much work as men in the production team but also the entire work of the household. What she said also shows that household labour was an important resource for the production team, and that men seemed unaware of themselves as members of the household and contributed nothing to domestic work. She also said a few things about management in the production team, but seemed reluctant to evaluate this and just told me "it was a pity and has already past. I do not complain about anyone at that time. Everyone was constrained to do what they were told at that time. Fortunately we have a much nicer life now". Her comments have things in common with what was talked about in

conversation with Mr Cheng, Dong, shortly before this and led me to re-think what he had said.

On 13/02/2013, I was invited to a goodbye lunch for Gang and his friends, who were leaving for Beijing after their New Year celebrations spent in the Cheng household. After lunch Dong was quite excited and he asked me to go to his house for tea so that he could continue talking to me. Kun said Mr Cheng was excited because of the wine he had drunk at lunch. However, I thought it was because he was emotionally affected by Gang and other relatives leaving to work far away after them being together at New Year. So I went to the Cheng house with Mr and Mrs Cheng and Kun for tea and further conversations. Mr Cheng continued talking about the People's Commune period, which people at lunch had talked about. Gang seemed to be embarrassed in front of his friends from Beijing when Mr Cheng started talking about poor management in the production teams. At that point, Gang stood up and said "let's drink a toast to our nice life and forget the past". Mr Cheng knew I was very interested in his story about the production team, and he continued talking about this when we were at his house:

Mr Cheng: "You know when Gang stood up to make the toast, I realised I may have spoken too much. So I have kept the 'nice part' of the conversation for you [laughing]."

Tingting: "Thank you so much. I am indeed very interested in the stories you told about hard times in the 1960s and 1970s."

Mr Cheng: "As I remember it started in 1959, our land, farming tools, livestock and all means of production belonged at that time to our production team, including everyday things like tables, woks and bowls. The funny thing was the communal kitchen. Village women were encouraged to come out of the house and to contribute to socialism, industrialisation and agricultural modernisation. My wife had worked in the communal kitchen."

(Jin was very quiet and she seldom spoke in conversations. She sat on a stool peeling vegetables and listening to our conversation. However, at that point

when Mr Cheng mentioned her work in the communal kitchen, she added some comments.)

Mrs Cheng: “At the beginning we women were quite excited and active in that communal kitchen in our team. We were extremely busy. We had to work for the kitchen to earn points and also did the housework when we returned home in the evening. Soon we had not enough food for the members of the team, as our production had decreased a lot.”

Mr Cheng: “In fact, those unrealistic ideas led to the terrible agricultural disaster and the failure of the communal kitchen. You know the communal kitchen only lasted for one year. Without sufficient food how we could work hard for production? and vice versa, we had no energy to work hard, which was no good for production.”

Tingting: “Were the points awarded equally to team members?”

Mr Cheng: “No. Men got ten points for a day’s work, eight for women, five for children and old or weak people. But you know we became less and less motivated when production became so bad.”

Tingting: “Why was that?”

Mr Cheng: “Oh, I think people became less responsible when the work was for a team rather than their own household. You know the farm animals became thin, weak or even just died when they were under the management of the team. However, the main problem was that there were too many cadres in a team, such as team leader, vice team leader, work points supervisor and manager, kitchen managers, kitchen inventory managers, scientific agricultural technical manager, accountant and inventory manager, etc. You see now in our household, I can manage these things alone without those titles.”

Mrs Cheng: “Also at the beginning of the communal kitchen, people became selfish and ate more than they did at home, since the food was free to team members. They ate more and worked less than they did in their own house. Then we set a fixed amount for everyone. So people complained and did not put effort in their work. Eventually the disaster and famine happened.”

Mr Cheng: “The cadres were managing by their mouths regarding those useless administrative things rather than putting their hands in the soil. Without hard work in the fields, they were entitled to eat much better than normal members and have special kinds of dishes different from the food cooked in a big pot for the majority of team workers. There were many meetings and visiting of cadres from different teams, so the communal kitchen had to prepare special welcoming dishes for them. Sometimes, in order to show cadres from other places that we were a ‘good’ team, we had a better meal during their visit by borrowing ingredients from other teams. After that we had almost liquid rice porridges for every meal for a long time, in order to save something from our poor production to return to the other

teams the borrowed ingredients. We often had to search for wild roots and herbs for food to boil in a metal drinking cup on a fire in the evening when we came back from work. So you see the problem. What a time!”

(Mr Cheng sighed and then had a moment of silence.)

Mr Cheng: “It was why the normal members were not motivated to work. We were not happy about the system so we put less effort into work even though we were punctual in registering our presence to the points manager at the gathering site. So we still gained the points for a day’s work but the effort was different. Oh, the other funny but unpleasant thing about that time was the implementation of scientific agricultural methods. Some so-called scientifically specialised cadres wanted to show the government their ‘contribution’. So they invented different methods of agricultural production. They did not believe the farmers’ traditional ways of ensuring agricultural production, although our experience was based on thousands of years’ accumulation of knowledge. They must implement their new methods which attracted lots of cadres visiting a ‘good’ scientific example. However, eventually those methods caused nil yield of several seasons of beans in the early 1960s. What a pity!”

Tingting: “Thank you for telling me these stories. I feel sorry for people’s suffering during in those times.”

Mr Cheng: “I am very glad to share them with you. I cannot forget. They are still so vivid in my mind. I am very grateful for the life we have now. Although it is not perfect, at least we have the freedom to manage the land and the household in a meaningful way, in the way we want.” (Interview extract, 13 February 2013, lines 34-102)

It is clear from what both Mrs Fang and Mr Cheng said that they welcomed the freedom to manage household resources, because they wanted what the Household Responsibility System restored. The things they emphasised about the transition from production teams to households as the unit of agricultural production included recognition of individual identity and choice in household production, the realisation of personal aspirations, better management of material resources, and the greater value given to labour in the household. However, there is something of a puzzle here, concerning the reluctance of young people to hear any critical remarks about the People’s Commune period.

During the lunch, Gang did not want Mr Cheng to carry on talking about the story of the People's Production Team and Gang emphasised that by interrupting and saying "let's drink a toast to our nice life and forget the past". Gang's reluctance to hear about 'poor management' during the People's Commune period reminds me a similar case involving Mr Fang, which happened in one of my conversations with Mrs Fang about that part of Chinese history. Mr Fang interrupted our conversation and told me that older village people rarely talk about that history because it is related to politics; and usually young people are not interested in listening or talking about this because it is 'old stuff'. In the Cheng household, Gang did not want to hear those stories and chose to forget about such things. Gang may feel embarrassed because he may think it is not elegant to talk about 'old stuff' in front of his city friends. However, Mr Cheng was very interested in talking about them. Mr Cheng was enthusiastic in talking to me about them because he knew I was a young listener but also interested in that past. Maybe Gang is sensitive to the political issues as well, but clearly he is also someone who sees this as an unpleasant story associated with village and a dated way of life.

Mr Zhu, Bo, too spoke about the importance of freedom in the management of material resources by telling me about his family businesses in running a convenience store from the 1990s to the mid 2000s and also their specialised pork farm. Mr Zhu said on a number of occasions that the main purpose of doing business was to generate capital for children's education. In a conversation I had with him in 2011 when I was visiting his pork farm, he spoke about how the convenience store started:

Mr Zhu said he had hesitated when he was planning to start the convenience store in the 1990s, because he was a bit timid about starting a business in a closed-minded local context. He said he thought it might be considered too adventurous and opportunistic in other people's eyes. Eventually, he started it because his business idea was based on the good intention of making local people's lives easier. Additionally, he said encouragement from his urban relatives was also very important to his confidence, which made him understand that the social environment was different from the past. In the past, doing business was considered as opportunistic. But he was right to run the store, as not only did the villagers did not see him and his family as being opportunistic, but also people liked his store (Fieldnotes extract, 18 October 2011, p17)

A similar story was told to me about Mrs Fang Yu's business in the 1990s, selling vegetables in Xiuning and Tunxi from a bike equipped with two big baskets. Yu said the purpose of the business was to generate some more capital for the household, because their younger son Wen was good at studying and had passed the entry exams for a university. She was very proud of Wen as he was the first university student in the village. Although Mr Fang was not happy with the idea of 'a village woman being involved in business', he still supported her venture:

"I knew China had changed and we farmers also had the right to do business. Moreover, as a village woman, I too had the freedom to do that in the new environment. We needed money for Wen's education. Mr Fang was too honest and timid. So I had to do something for us. I really enjoyed the experiences of selling vegetables, although it made me busier. Together we managed our fields, gardens and pigs. Selecting and preparing the sun-dried vegetables relied on my own work. He (Mr Fang) was not patient enough for those preparations. I was also preparing pickled vegetables and selling them in the winter" (Interview extract, 12 September 2011, lines 5-12).

The accounts of their commercial activities by Mr Zhu and Mrs Fang illustrate changes in the management of material resources (land, labour and capital) in rural China when the basis of agricultural production shifted from the team to the household. Both Mr Zhu and Mrs Fang repeatedly highlighted the significance of 'freedom' and potential ways of generating capital for farming households in the new

social and economic context of the 1990s. Mrs Fang's account also includes that she thought that gender roles in Chinese farming households had changed as a result of the changing social and economic environment, although this is patchy and more advanced in some households than others.

For small-holding households, land and labour are the most important factors in agricultural production. Wallman (1984) suggests that the resources of land, labour and capital are scarce for households in non-industrial settings, while in industrial society people and households are also restricted by the distribution of resources. In the changing social and economic context of modern China, the significance of the unequal distribution of and access to resources between rural and urban societies is underlined by the conflicted feelings of small-holding farmers regarding land and identity, and many people's choices in detaching themselves from the land to work in cities. Succinctly, in order to generate relatively more capital than they could in small-holding, many villagers decided to become workers in the construction industry and in other jobs in urban areas.

On 12/02/2013, the third day of the Chinese New Year, I came to Shang Village to give my New Year greetings to the four research households. When I arrived at the Cheng household in the afternoon, Mr Cheng, Kun, Gang and Gang's two city friends were sat talking around the table in the courtyard. I was given permission to record part of the conversation that I was involved in. This conversation further illuminates the conflict between resources and identity that many farmers express, the impact of resources on the small-holding household life, and the change in gender roles in the household as affected by the management of its resources.

As I noted earlier, Mr Cheng was quite upset about Gang leaving for Beijing with his wife and friends the next day; and in the conversation he complained about the impact of urban life on rural society:

Mr Cheng: “In recent years we have not had a proper New Year. You (Gang) always leave at the beginning of the New Year.”

Gang: “Dad, I have to and you know I only have 7 days holiday. I also have to allow two or three days for the journey.”

Kun: “Yes. I do not see the lively New Year celebrations in our village any more. I remember in the past we had a month of celebration, and there were some dragon and lion dance performances in the village. But now the village becomes very quite after just a few days of the New Year.”

Gang: “I also miss that time. I always dream about the Lantern Festival on the fifteenth of the New Year. When I was a child, I used to make our lanterns with Kun and we also helped Mum to make gluten rice balls (a typical food for the celebration of that day).”

Mr Cheng: “New Year in our village has become very plain. I do not feel the atmosphere of New Year. Most of the villagers have to work in the cities and they only have the short holiday that the urban people do.”

Gang’s friend [laughing]: “I think we urban people teach you rural folk many ‘bad things’, like a speedy life style and materialism. However, to earn money people have to adapt to an unnatural urban life style. When I have nothing to do, I would like to live in a village that is close to nature.”

Gang: “Of course. It is for Fei’s future, otherwise I would prefer staying in my village. You know I disliked being farmer and I disliked the village because the only resource that we farmers had was land. This made us isolated on a piece of land, narrow minded and poor. I used to dream about becoming an urban man. However, having now worked in different cities, I hope to return to the village when I have earned enough money for the family and my son’s future education. Contradictorily, I hope my son’s future is in the city.”

Mr Cheng: “Although I heard that urban life is highly pressured, cities have many more advantages than the countryside. The important thing is wealth. I heard that the income of years of hard work in agricultural cultivation is much less than a monthly wage in the city.”

Gang: “It is because we have no knowledge and we only can do hard manual work. In cities, the wage depends on people’s level of education. Although in the city we earn much more than working in fields in the countryside, we do those low-skilled jobs and we are considered as the ones at the bottom of society.”

Mr Cheng: “This is why I always tell you (Gang) and your sister (Yan) to return the village and live a simple life.”

Gang: “Dad, I will return to the village of course when I have earned enough for Fei’s future. I do want him to have as much education as he is capable of receiving. I want to stay in the village when I have earned enough for Fei, but I do not want Fei to stay here. There is no future here.”

Kun: “In any case, our roots are here.”

Gang: “Yes, the land is our roots as farmers. Although it seems we have been changed by the influence of the things in city, I think we have a very deep feeling for the earth on which we have lived our lives. We only feel the uttermost comfort when we are here on the soil we belong to.”

Kun [to Gang’s friend]: “As an urban man, you may find it is difficult to believe that farmers, like my brother, live in cities, but, their souls never leave the land.”

Gang’s friend: “I understand that life has been quite difficult for farmers in recent years. Everything becomes more expensive, such as basic expenditure for daily life and children’s education. When farmers come to cities, they have to face lots of tough situations. I know the major issues are identity, money and the punctual payment of wages.”

Gang: “Indeed. I know many rural people in Beijing and they often were not paid punctually by dishonest business men. I think all these things are because of our rural identity and lack of knowledge. Therefore, I have to work hard, in order to save enough capital for my child’s education. I love the land where I grew up, but I hope Fei can pursue his dream far away from here. It is contradictory, isn’t it? I do not want my son to be a farmer.”

Tingting: “What do you expect Fei to be in the future?”

Gang [laughing]: “A white collar worker! I always give admiring glances at those white collars when I am in Beijing. Status is so important in our society, for work and all aspects in life. We rural workers work seven days a week, but urban people only work five days. The more you are educated the more you earn, and the better the work conditions are. They have houses, cars and all kinds of services. Although we are in Beijing with our rural workmates, after work we are only able to spend our time in our own space - the dormitory. We do not fit in the city because we only know things about the soil. So the only way for our rural children to change their identities is through education and knowledge.”

Kun: “Absolutely right. Many years ago, I had the dilemma of choosing between being a farmer staying in the village and being a worker in a city. Some of my friends asked me to go to work with them in big cities. I know being a worker will make me earn more than staying in the village. However, I cannot endure being looked down upon by people in the city. We have no knowledge and in the city we can only do low status work. So I would rather

like to be here with my family. Eventually, we will have to return to our home in the village. We could not afford to buy a house in the city and honestly we do not like to live in the city. That is not our place. We are tied to the land. But I have to work hard so that my daughter can receive as much education as possible.”

Gang’s friend [laughing]: “You know in the city we always say it is very important for children to have fathers who have power or money. So when women look for potential husbands, they always use this criteria. Men with power or money are well connected in society, their children will have easy lives.”

Kun [laughing]: “In order to have decent lives, poor farmers’ children have to study hard.”

Gang’s friend: “Nowadays in the countryside, do you still think girls are less important than boys?”

Kun: “Nowadays women are becoming more and more important. So even though my child is a girl, I will support her studying and I hope she will be a well-educated woman. Ignorant women are really trouble-makers in families. Like my wife, she is very ignorant so she made irrational choices.”

Gang’s friend: “Society has changed. Women are more dominant than men not only in families but also at workplaces. I know lots of excellent women managers who perform much better than men.”

Mr Cheng [laughing and speaking to Gang]: “I also see your wife has become your manager, and she becomes more elegant than the country ladies.”

Gang [laughing]: “She has become much more advanced than me. She knows more than me. When we have discussions, I am always convinced by her arguments. This is because she always listens to the radio when she is working, cleaning the offices and the dormitory of the company. So she knows lots of things.” (Interview extract, 12 February 2013, lines 15-104)

The shortage of resources in small-holding households is evident in particular in the conversation between Mr Cheng, Kun, Gang and Gang’s friend. Capital is one of the most important resources for village households, because this enables them to access other resources, in particular the non-material resources connected with education and knowledge. Land and labour are the key resources for village households. With recent social and economic changes, villagers are moving to cities in pursuit of work with better pay. Gang’s motivation is the strong one of earning money for his son’s

education. But he is also quite clear that he will return to the village when he has earned enough because, as he says, he is rooted to the local soil. However, Gang does not want his son live in the village because 'there is no future here'. For Gang, agriculture and village life restrict access to the abundant resources available to people in the city (Murphy, 2002). In both Gang's and Kun's eyes, rural life impedes access to the majority of resources. For Gang, the choices made are to provide sufficient capital for his son's education, but the detachment from the land is temporary and he will return to his village. As he expressed it, insufficient capital and limited educational resources in rural society have created a particular kind of identity for small-holding farmers, which make it difficult for them to adapt to urban life and for city people to accept them. It has also been commented by Murphy (2002) that the distribution of resources is unequal between rural and urban China and that rural life is restricted by the shortage of resources in general; however, migrant workers are forced to return to their villages, mainly because of the social welfare hardship associated with being low-skilled workers in cities.

Although small-holding farmers have a very close relationship with the soil, people who stay like Mr Zhu and Mrs Fang have been trying their best to earn extra money for their children's future, while others have left the village to access the better material and non-material resources available in cities because they do not want the lives of their children to be impeded by the constraints connected with the land and village life. Those who leave find low-skilled jobs in cities to earn money for their children's education, while those who stay also earn money for this and they also have to be guardians of the farming land that has nourished their identity.

Changes in access to resources also affect the gendered division of labour in families and households. Conversations about women's influence in both households and paid employment have greatly increased. There are more opportunities for women to be educated and to gain other knowledge and information and this has enabled them to take on new and sometimes very different roles in the economy. The importance of non-material resources in the Shang Village small-holding households around information, knowledge and time has been influenced by the spread of urbanisation, modern commerce and industry and the attraction of big cities. In the following section, my analysis focuses on exchanges between households as part of managing resources.

Exchanges of Services

Having insufficient resources is one of the most important things for village households to cope with during their adaptation to the social and economic changes that are affecting their lives. Using exchanges of services is an important way for village households to obtain resources that are not available to them but which might be obtained through exchanges of goods, capital, labour and services with their own family members or with members of other village households. Resources management, related gendered divisions of labour and dynamics of household life are underlined by how services and exchanges occur and are organised in households.

Huang Shuji has two daughters, Ju and Jie. Jie is married and lives with her husband's family, while Ju's marriage has brought the Huangs an adopted son, Min. Huang Shuji often praised Min in front of me, stressing that 'Min is the right son for

the Huang household'. Once Huang Shuji and I talked about his two granddaughters' schooling and Huang Shuji again praised Min's contribution to the household. That interested me and I was given permission to record the conversation:

Huang Shuji: "Min brings the two kids to their schools and sometimes at weekends he brings them to have some fun in Tunxi. You see Jie (Huang Shuji's younger daughter) and her husband are working in Hangzhou, and the childcare of her daughter Mei is completely handed over to us. Min has contributed a lot to look after Tian and Mei. Min is such a nice guy that you cannot see the differences of his attitude and behaviour to the two children. Mei is Jie's daughter, but Min treats her as same as his own daughter Tian. Even Mei's teachers think Min is her Dad. You know my mother often says Min is our son even from his previous life. I really cannot imagine his absence from our family."

Tingting: "So can you tell me more about Min's contribution to looking after Tian and Mei?"

Huang Shuji: "In the morning, Min gets up very earlier and makes some simple breakfast for the kids. Then he rides his motor bike brings them to their school before he goes to his work in Tunxi. Sometimes when I am not busy, I say to Min to leave me to bring the children to their school. But he tells me he wants to do that, suggesting I should not use a motor bike very often because I am aged. What a thoughtful man! The children's school is 3km away and Min has to use his motor bike to bring them in the morning in order to be punctual at school. Only Min and I can ride a motor bike, but now I use it less because I am aged and my body is not as flexible as it used to be."

Tingting: "Min is really helpful to the children and your household. I remember you also said Mei's teachers think Min is her Dad."

Huang Shuji: "Yes. Mei's teachers see Min everyday but never see Mei's father. When the teachers know Min is Mei's uncle, they also praise him many times in front of me. I also think Min is really the same as Mei's Dad, as he is involved in Mei's life on a daily basis. However, Mei's Dad is away for work. I am pleased that Mei is very happy with Min, and I see she is closely bound with Min rather than her own Dad."

Tingting: "So you think Min gives both Tian and Mei good fathering?"

Huang Shuji: "Yes, indeed. For this, Mei's parents are very grateful to Min. Min offers his care and fathering to Mei, so Mei is happily living in our house when her parents are absent."

Tingting: "That is great! You said sometimes at weekend Min brings children to have fun in Tunxi, doesn't he?"

Huang Shuji: “Yes, he works in Tunxi and has made some friends there. He asks his friends and colleagues about interesting places for children to play in Tunxi, so at weekends he often brings them to playgrounds, the children’s library and parks in Tunxi. You see how thoughtful he is. He is not only a good son in my household but also a great father for the children.”

Tingting: “Who collects the children from school in the afternoon?”

Huang Shuji: “You know we are lucky. My brother Hui’s grandson is also in the same school with Tian and Mei. Hui’s son does delivery work in different villages and he has a van. So in the afternoon Hui’s son collect his son and Tian and Mei. They live just beside us. You see it is very convenient!” (Interview extract, 16 June 2013, lines 2-37)

Huang Shuji also talked to me about his relationship with his brother Hui’s family.

He said:

Huang Shuji: “We have a very good relationship with Hui. You know we rarely shut our entrance door when we are not at home. Hui’s wife and daughter-in-law stay at home for most of time, so they always keep an eye out for us. When we need something from each other’s house, we just go to their house to collect it. Although Hui’s family and my family live in two houses, we are actually like being in a same house. My mother lives with me but she often goes to Hui’s house for chats or to give a helping hand to Hui’s wife. Hui’s wife is also very nice. When she cooks nice meals, she just gives a shout at the door, and then we go to their table to get some of her nicely cooked food in our bowls. You see it is very easy and cosy. This kind of harmony is what my mother has said to us since we were kids “harmony always can make things go smoothly”. I think you may not see this often in the city.” (Interview extract, 16 June 2013, lines 51-60)

This conversation with Huang Shuji makes me reflect on the differences in organising between village households and city households, which are mainly shown by their different ways of organising services and exchanges within households and between households. These ways of household management are influenced by not only cultural normative expectations but also the available resources. My conversation with Huang Shuji about childcare demonstrates Min’s importance in the Huang house, and as pointed out by Huang Shuji, Min is “not only a good son in my household but also a great father for the children”. The exchange of services between

his household and that of his brother Hui, like collecting children from school, watching out for each other's house, and sharing food, shows that fulfilling cultural expectations and related duties is important in generating useful human, material and non-material resources for village households.

For the Fang household, the exchange of services is interpreted differently between Mr Fang and Mrs Fang, and I talked with their younger son Wen about this too:

When I asked Mr Fang about what kind of services they receive from different household members or from other households, he said that: "I do not think we need some kinds of services from others. Life becomes simple now and we just need to work to earn some money and to buy some food". Mrs Fang entered the conversation and said to Mr Fang: "indeed, you do need others. Things in our households are relying on others!" Obviously, Mrs Fang, Yu, is not happy with Mr Fang's answer to my question, and she listed the things in order to show Mr Fang that the household needs services from others. She said she needs some of the neighbours for selling hogs, Mrs Yuan for going to the bank, and Mrs Yuan's friends for finding a job for their grandson (Fieldnotes extract, 16 November 2014, p171).

In Mr Fang's eyes, services and exchanges have become simple in the modern context, and it is one's work that is essential for earning and buying food. Mr Fang's understanding of services and exchanges reveals his ideas about household management in an industrialised context, where better paid work and money are essential to a secure life. Also he thinks people can just simply buy food. Mrs Fang Yu views household life in the changed context very differently, as needing many services and exchanges that are an important kind of help in combining traditional rural activities as selling hogs and modern aspects of living such as banking services and job seeking.

Wen and his family came from Tunxi to stay with his parents for the weekend when this conversation took place, and he told me his views after hearing his parents' opinions:

Wen: "I think the way of living in rural households has changed a lot. Traditionally, people needed lots of help from each other for agricultural activities. I remember when I was a child I often saw my aunties coming to help my parents with ploughing and planting activities. My elder brother Liang also helped. My younger sister Hao and I were quite small. We just helped our parents with gardening work. My parents also helped with my relatives when there were lots of busy agricultural activities. My father used to slaughter pigs with other villagers. With several men, they often work as a team to slaughter pigs in village households. Now not many people do the slaughtering job. Rural households do not keep as many pigs as they used to do, because it is not worth it. And now there are some merchants as middlemen come to the house to buy pigs and then they sell the pigs to big producers. Although my mother said correctly, I think my father is also right. You can see we do not have many interactions with those relatives and neighbours as we used to do. It is because life becomes easier and rural people just think about how to be wealthy. So they go to work in cities and earn more. So they can just buy food rather than producing food. You see my parents have rented much of our land out and they do not cultivate agricultural food as it was done in the past. In the past, people in my village exchange home produced products, like eggs, rapeseed, and beans. Now villagers do not need to exchange products as they did in the past. They just buy them in big supermarkets at a cheaper price." (Interview extract, 16 November 2014, lines 36-45)

Wen sees the different views of household and village life as those of now and the past. In a more traditional rural society, it is essential to exchange services to obtain certain resources for the households, but for Wen people do not interact in that way as frequently as in the past, because of the influence of industrialisation and marketisation.

However, the Cheng household often needs Mr Cheng's daughter Ping to help with cooking, because there is no woman in the house and securing the living expenses for the household relies on Gang's financial contribution. As discussed in the previous chapter, Kun talked about the impact of the absence of women in his household and

that he has to do household things that would otherwise be done by women. When they need to prepare meals for guests, Ping comes and does the cooking and related preparation and washing tasks. I asked Kun about divisions of labour and related exchanges of services for his household; and it is clear that Kun has a very strict view of the gendered division of household labour and related impact on services and exchanges. He said:

“Men and women are different and some work must be done by women. Like cooking for people, Ping has to come to help, because men cannot cook nice food as women do... People have different personalities, like my brother, he can survive in the city. But I cannot. You know, when Gang comes to celebrate the New Year with his friends, he asked me to employ a hourly-paid worker for cleaning our house. Although he would pay for that, cleaning work is pricy. So in the end, Ping did the cleaning work for us to welcome Gang’s friends.” (Interview extract, 17 May 2013, lines 7-13)

Clearly, services are involved here, but while Ping’s contributions are an important ‘exchange’ for Kun and his father, what is less in evidence are exchanges benefitting Ping and so these seem one-sided. Kun, the elder son of the Cheng household, has views about women regarding particular household activities and that there is no woman in his household to do certain household tasks. Ping, a married daughter, comes to visit her parent’s family on a weekly basis, and also helps with her parents’ household work when there is a need. In the example of cleaning work to welcome Gang’s friends, Gang proposed that Kun should pay a worker for the job and Kun thought it was pricy; eventually, “Ping did the cleaning work for us”, Kun said. For her parents’ sake, Ping offered her help out of love and without any expectation. Her services to the Cheng household demonstrate that Ping, as a daughter, is trying her best to fulfil filial duties to her parents’ household, although she had married into her husband’s family. The significance of daughters’ involvement in their parents’ households has been pointed out as a prominent fact of cultural expectations, that

Chinese daughters should behave as ‘little quilted vests’ to warm their parents’ hearts (Shi, 2009; Murphy et al., 2011).

The Zhu household has a more complex system of services and exchanges related to the management of all sorts of resources in this household. I asked Mr Zhu to give me a list of services and exchanges happening between household members and between his and other households, and he said:

Mr Zhu: “As you see my wife and I have been managing the family businesses from running a small store to a pork farm. At the beginning, we had my second brother’s financial help for running our store. After two years, we returned him the money for the start-up. At the time there were only my wife and I managing the shop. My parents were helping with our cultivation and gardening. When Ying retired, she came to live with us and helps with our farm and some of the housework. She has offered a great deal of help to us. My cousin and her husband in Tunxi help us a lot with networking for the business and solving relocation matters. You see this kind of exchange of help with others is crucial to our life, regardless of anything you do.”

Tingting: “Yes, indeed. These exchanges are related to people, finance and goods. I think you may miss out an important person, Mr Liu.”

Mr Zhu: “Oh, it is amazing. How could I forget Mr Liu? You are right! He is very important to our household. He has been our private vet since the start of the farm, and most importantly, he had been offering lots of help and care to my father and our family during the last days of my father’s life.”

Tingting: “Do you think these services from other people and exchanges between people have changed over time?”

Mr Zhu: “I think change is certain and has affected our needs for different matters. I mean the changes of ways of doing those things. But these are still always important to our lives.”

Tingting: “So do you think when your life becomes more modern than in the past, you still need as many as interactions with people within and outside of the households?”

Mr Zhu: “Of course. The modern world cannot offer us everything. We have to find ways to get what we need.” (Interview extract, 19 November 2014, lines 4-26)

From the accounts of people in the research households, the ways of ensuring services and exchanges are presented differently and people have different views of these. Certainly, the kinds of services and exchanges in these village households and their overall importance depends on the availability of resources and the efficiency or otherwise of ways of managing them. However, although Kun has a very gendered view of people's activities and related services and exchanges in rural households, and Mr Fang sees services and exchanges in rural households as changed by a modern way of living, the fundamental importance of services and exchanges for village households remains, because resources are insufficient in the small-holding households. As Mr Zhu commented, "the modern world cannot offer us everything. We have to find ways to get what we need", and as Mrs Fang emphasised to her husband, "Things in our household are relying on others!"

Information, Time and Knowledge

During my fieldwork in the four households in Shang Village, people's conversations and behaviours at the dining table often provided valuable information and insight. This was particularly so during the 2013 Chinese New Year period, when I heard many stories about the resources systems of these households. Here my discussion focuses on information, time and knowledge.

Stories told over people's dinner time show how village households manage information and related resources. Dinner is one of the few times that people can easily meet to exchange information. The dining time of each household became a focus for my observations, and the following discussion concerns typical dinners in

the four households on the basis of observations during February and March 2013. The typical features of such a dinner are that men usually sit at the dining table and have conversations with other men in the household, while women had their dinner sitting on stools beside the entrance door or in the courtyard talking with neighbours. After dinner, usually women washed the dishes while men, holding a cup of tea, stood outside of the house and talked with men from neighbouring households or people on the road, or they would go to their neighbours' houses to sit and talk. The following excerpts from my fieldnotes describe the arrangements in the four households:

A typical dinner at the Huang household: Huang Shuji and Min were talking at the table. Huang Shuji's mother and wife were sitting on stools in the courtyard, eating a bowl of rice and some vegetables while talking with Hui's (Huang Shuji's brother) wife, who was also holding her bowl of food and eating in the courtyard that was just beside the house. Huang Shuji's two granddaughters were having their dinner in front of television in the room attached to the sitting room.

Mr Fang and his son Liang talked about their day at work at the dining table. Liang's wife was listening and commenting sometimes. Mrs Fang was eating outside of the house and talking to a neighbour.

Mr Cheng was sitting on a stool beside the entrance door and greeting the villagers on bikes or motor bikes going home from work. Kun and his daughter Xin were having dinner at the dining table. From time to time, Mr Cheng was asking Kun some questions; then they had some short conversations. One or two neighbours also came to the Cheng household for short conversations.

Dinner in the Zhu house was striking. The household members were sitting at a big dining table and they were having very interactive conversations (Fieldnotes extract, 17 March 2012, p21-22).

The information exchanged among men at the dining table was mainly about their daily activities and news related to their farming interests. Among women, it was mainly about specific activities or events that they had experienced during the day or

some news of certain items in shops. Men and women from the same household only occasionally had conversations with each other. This was commented on by Mrs Fang in saying that “my husband used to think that it is not interesting to talk to me and that women only knew things about domestic things”, although in fact little change is discoverable at the Fangs’ dinner table. Women’s activities are largely limited to housework and fieldwork, so that men are very interested in talking with male neighbours who might be able to provide different and useful information. But as they met each other often, something more was going on than this. Men were keen on talking with other men at dinner and afterwards they talked outside their house or went to neighbours’ houses. When I interviewed Mrs Fang and Huang Shuji’s wife on 19/03/2012, they told me that for men information is considered to consist of two types: useful information, exchanged among men; and trivial information, exchanged among women. On the surface, men saw information from women as less important because restricted by their activities and the geographical area. But of course now in the present, women’s knowledge and the information is the same as or better than men’s, so in some contexts what they say is more valued and influential due to the changes in women’s work and related experiences:

Mrs Fang: “I prefer having my dinner while having conversations with neighbours outside of the house. This is because my daughter-in-law often comments unreasonably on the conversations between Lao Fang (Mr Fang) and Liang. If I was sitting with them, I would like to tell her to shut her mouth. But Lao Fang is fine with her. Luckily, the lady who is my neighbour is a nice person. We often talk about our experiences of work and shopping. She works in a factory in Tunxi, she knows quite a lot about interesting things in Tunxi... Lao Fang has also become interested in my daily experiences at work. He often comes to talk with me when I am washing the dishes in the kitchen. In the past, he rarely asked me about my day and just talked about his own day with me.” (Interview extract, 19 March 2012, lines 42-51)

Huang Shuji’s wife: “I like spending time talking to Hui’s wife. She is very outgoing and also a funny person. She always tells us, my mother-in-law and

my daughter, lots of interesting things that are going on. She even knows new things such as policy changes related to the countryside much earlier than Huang Shuji... This is because she works in a chess and card playing centre in Xiuning. She is in charge of cleaning and making teas for people, and she hears a lot and gets lots of information from other people's conversations while they are playing chess and cards there." (Interview extract, 19 March 2012, lines 93-99)

Mr Cheng and Mr Fang told me that they mainly obtain information through kinship and neighbourhood ties. Mr Cheng also spoke about the importance of particular information exchanged with his neighbour because of their shared worries about the lives of their children who live in distant cities. As noted earlier, Mr Cheng spoke about the village market that used to exist. He described the market as the best place for the villagers to gain useful information and knowledge:

Mr Fang: "Our information now comes from some relatives and neighbours... We often talk with some of our neighbours after dinner in the courtyard. Sometimes talkative villagers will stop on the way and join our conversation... When there is a question, I often ask my wife in the first instance. She knows more and more now because she knows more people from her work in the factory. She often asks about her colleagues at work." (Interview extract, 19 March 2012, lines 110-115)

Mr Cheng: "I have spent a life-time talking with neighbours during dinner times. During the day, we were busy with our cultivation and work in the fields. We only had time to talk at the dinner time in the evening. Nowadays we are old and have less agricultural work to do; and my neighbour's children are also working far away in big cities. So we have more time and often meet for a chat in the afternoon... We often talk about the stories we heard from our children in big cities. I told him a lot about Gang's life I heard from Kun; and he told me a lot about his daughters living in Shanghai. When we hear some news on TV about the city where our children live, we will tell each other. The information we exchange about the cities makes us less worried about our children who are far away from home. We have never been to big cities and we used to think there were lots of bad things there, like crime. Nowadays we have more information by talking with each other, and we feel much more relieved... In the past, we had a market in the village, where we could meet people and had very interesting conversations. When I was a kid, I loved staying at the village market. I learnt lots of knowledge there that was useful for farming and life... It is a pity that nowadays the village has become

a boring place for young people.” (Interview extract, 22 March 2012, lines 9-24)

Access to and the exchange of information in the small-holding households in Shang Village are greatly affected by ideas about gender, as these comments show. There are increasing opportunities for rural women to participate in work outside of the village and this provides them with different experiences and information from these activities. However, in at least some more public contexts, many of the village men behave as though women still live very constrained lives.

There is a notable exception to this among the research households. Dinner time in the Zhu house is different from in the other three. All the members of the Zhu household almost invariably sit at the dining table. My fieldnotes after having dinner with them in May 2013 shows the importance of knowledge and access to useful information in impacting on gender dynamics. In the Zhu house, Hong and Mrs Zhu’s sister are educated and as a consequence considered to be the most important sources for obtaining information for the household and their business:

Mr Zhu’s daughter Hong knows all the news and policies related to rural households. So at the dining table, Mr and Mrs Zhu talked a lot with Hong about politics, policies and news, from the local area to the world. Mr Zhu had some problems in understanding an amount of subsidy he received from the government, and he explained to Hong his problem at the dining table. Mrs Zhu and her sister were involved in the conversation and expressed their opinions. After dinner, Hong turned on her laptop and found related policies and governmental documents online and explained to her parents and aunt on the basis of those documents. Mr Zhu and others were very pleased with the information provided by Hong. Mrs Zhu told me that knowledge was so important, because they could not read and fully understand legal documents and so could not find the right information that was useful for their business. They relied on Hong for up to date information. When they could not read official documents, they asked Mrs Zhu’s sister for help (Fieldnotes extract, 7 May 2013, p85).

This highlights two important aspects of non-material resources in the village small-holding households. First, knowledgeable household members are the most important sources of new knowledge and they facilitate access to high quality information. Second, where women are the knowledgeable household members, this changes the structure and dynamics of the dining table. This is why the way of having dinner and of talking to each other in the Zhu household was different from the others. Compared with the men in the other research households, Mr Zhu has more experience of meeting different kinds of people and this makes him more open-minded and receptive to change.

Many of the younger generation came back to Shang Village in the Chinese New Year period, when I spoke with many of them. The value of non-material resources like information and education is widely recognised as important, but small-holding farmers' access to these things is impeded by their rural location. The result is that many younger people are trying to detach themselves from the land and a rural way of life. However, as well as this pursuit of a better life, there is for many people still a sense of belonging and rootedness in the countryside rather than cities.

Huang Shuji's younger daughter Jie works in a paint producing company in a big city and sees her work as showing her how to manage time and to create value out of time:

Jie: "I have a very strict timetable, working from 8am to 12 noon and from 2pm to 6pm, from Monday to Friday. There isn't a strict timetable for farming activities and housework, and I prefer having a strict timetable because this trains me to be good at managing my time. When I firstly arrived in Hangzhou, I felt overwhelmed by seeing people rushing to work in the morning. Gradually I liked the way of organising time in the city. In the countryside, we have no timetable but we also have no holidays. In Hangzhou, I work for five days and I also do a part-time job cleaning dishes in a

restaurant at weekends. This means I earn much more. ‘Time is money’, city people always say... When I was in the countryside, I did not know how to use time. So I think we waste a lot of time in the village.”

Huang Shuji: “I do not think so. Time is also important in farming activities. However, we consider time as based on seasons and the span of a year. People in cities consider time on the basis of the span of a day. We have different ways of managing time, but we do not think farmers waste time in the village. Time is very valuable for agricultural productions. Farming work is always planned according to time. Isn’t that right?”

Jie: “Dad, it is right. However, the environment of the countryside does not stimulate people’s passion to create value from time. When it is winter, people have little farming work and they just stay in the house doing the odd bit of domestic work.”

Huang Shuji: “We do not think on a daily basis. We know what we should do in which period of the year. Except for farming, there are no other work opportunities here.”

Jie: “In the city I have felt a kind of pressure, which is good and makes people more active. I have learnt from my work in the city to plan activities on a daily basis. You know, I have so many activities there that I have to use a diary to make notes. City people always have a notebook. Definitely, there are lots of opportunities in the city. It is an appealing place. My husband and I can earn much more than staying in the village. We have also learnt how to manage our time in order to generate income from other jobs. At our age, life is concerned with earning money for our daughter’s education and saving some for the future when we are old.” (Interview extract, 14 February 2013, lines 5-31)

Work and location affect people’s perception of time; and different aspects of how to earn a livelihood become matters of concern at different life stages. The value of time is emphasised in Jie’s comments about time management both in her work in a factory during the weekdays and her part-time job at weekends, and she sees this both as a kind of pressure and as providing opportunities. As Huang Shuji points out, time management is also crucial to agricultural production, but for farmers the timetable is critical and seasonal. But it is in discussing the pressure of day to day planning that Jie shows her preference for and she truly accepts the city philosophy that ‘time is money’, because her daughter’s education and her desire to save money for the future are her major concerns.

Of course time resources are viewed differently by people in different situations, and the value of time changes according to people's ways of spending time and the people they spend time with. A discussion between Mr Cheng and Gang started because Mr Cheng was upset about Gang leaving to return Beijing, as I discussed earlier, because of their different life stages and livelihoods, Mr Cheng and Gang have different priorities for spending time on activities, although both are compatible with spending time with family members:

Mr Cheng: "Time seemed cruel to us old people. When my children are not here I feel the day is too long. When they are here with me, the day becomes too short. They are too busy to remember their home."

Gang: "Dad, don't be so negative. Though we are busy, we will never forget you and our home. Believe me, time flies, and soon Fei will go to university, and I will stay home with you for longer."

(When Mr Cheng started talking with Gang's friends in the courtyard, Gang turned to me and continued the conversation about time.)

Gang: "Tingting, I did not want to say this in front of my Dad. You know, I wish time would pass faster, because I am eager to see Fei become a university student and find a good job. Then the financial pressure on me will be less. Now most of my income goes on Fei's studying, the rent in Xiuning, and some maintenance fees for my parents' household. However, I am also scared of seeing time fly by. I see that my parents have become much older. I feel very sad that I cannot stay at home with them. I have to work hard far away from home, in order to earn more money for the family. These words I cannot speak in front of my Dad. I know he feels lonely because we are away from home. While I am still struggling for money in the city, my child has grown up and my parents have become very old. I wish I could have more time to stay at home with my parents, however, the reality is tough..." (Interview extract, 12 February 2013, lines 126-141)

Choices about time allocation are affected by cultural, personal and local options as well as constraints (Gershuny, 1979; Gershuny and Pahl, 1979). This also changes people's relations with other people, including those in their household.

On 13/02/2013, I was invited to the Cheng family lunch organised by Gang. Mr Cheng's daughter Yan sat beside me and we talked about her life and her job as a tailor in the city of Huzhou. She is different from other members in her household and indeed most people in the village:

Yan's clothing is more modern and elegant than the other people in the Cheng house. She told me a lot about her preference for the dynamics of city life such as going to sing with friends in the evening and participating in walking exercises with local people at weekends. She also expressed her disappointment at urban people's unfriendliness towards workers from the countryside. Because of her rural identity, she said she has to change her ways of dressing and behaving, in order to integrate into city life.

When I asked her about her long-term plans, her reply surprised me because she said she treated everyday as her last, so that she kept optimistic about enjoying her time although she had unfair treatment at work and from neighbours who addressed her as 'earthy girl'. She also said that many of her workmates returned to their homes in villages as they could not adapt to urban life, in particular because of discrimination from urban people. She believes that attitude is important, in particular for those of lower social status. She said: "if you look down on yourself, how can you expect other people to respect you?" (Fieldnotes extract, 13 February 2013, p64)

Yan's story gives the impression of 'the sense of movement and progress' that has been discussed by Jacka (2006: 255) as "there was also a greater sense of personal agency and the power of individual migrant women to change their own destiny and less resignation to being blown about by the winds of fate".

In Chinese society, particularly rural society, identity is closely connected with social status as defined by occupation. On 17/02/2013 I met Qing, Mr and Mrs Fang's grandson, at the Fang house. We started talking about his new job as a nurse in a city hospital. During our conversation, Mr Xiang, a match maker, came to the house to give his New Year greetings. In fact, Mr Xiang had come to talk about a potential wife for Qing. Mr Xiang talked with Qing for about ten minutes, then Qing continued the conversation with me when Mr Xiang left:

Qing emphasised the importance of knowledge in helping to change his social status. He said because he had a good job there were lots of people introducing girlfriends to him. Mr Xiang had come several times to introduce different girlfriends. Qing's clothes were very elegant compared with the villagers. Qing said knowledge was the only way to change farmers' lives, and that he likes the city lifestyle (Fieldnotes extract, 17 February 2013, p72)

The importance of knowledge for small-holding households is also illustrated by something Huang Shuji said to me:

Huang Shuji: "When I was sixteen I became 'an educated youth returning to his village' after junior high school, and I did not have the chance to receive any further education until I was selected to be a potential village leader and sent to receive further education in the county cadre school in the late 1970s. At that time I was the only high school student in the village, so I was selected by the county government to study medicine in that school. Being a medical doctor was my dream and I always feel satisfaction when I am able to use my knowledge to help the villagers." (Interview extract, 27 October 2011, lines 59-65)

In general people of the younger generation think about how knowledge impacts on their life style and identities. Qing is a good example of this, dreaming of becoming an urban person, while by contrast, Huang Shuji values knowledge because of the benefit to other people in the village. Kun identified another aspect in an interview, in which he stressed the link between change, knowledge and education:

Kun: "Our farmers only know how to do basic things in the fields, don't they?"

Tingting: "Knowledge of agricultural production is also very important."

Kun: "Society is changing, and knowledge of agricultural production cannot make our lives better [laughing]. Only education can make people successful everywhere in society... I mean people have good jobs. No matter how much we know about nature, we are the poorest. However, education has become so expensive, so we have no choice. We must work hard to earn more for our children's education." (Interview extract, 20 May 2012, lines 7-15)

Kun's view that 'we have no choice' sees a direct causal relationship between education, occupation and success. When I was at the Cheng house on 12/02/2013, something very similar was said to me by Fei, who asked for a meeting with me:

After conversations with Mr Cheng, Kun, Gang and Gang's friends in the courtyard of the Cheng house, Gang phoned Fei, who was at one of his school friends' houses, because Fei wanted to meet me. Fei came back soon. When he saw me, he started asking me about studies in the university. He said he was looking forward to going to a top university in Beijing. He also told me about his hard work at school, and his slogans 'fight against time' and 'save every second to study more'. I asked him about his motivation for studying, and without reflection he answered directly 'changing destiny', which means to have a high prestige job in a big city, he explained (Fieldnotes extract, 12 February 2013, p63)

Like Qing and Fei, Mr Zhu's son Tao thinks that 'knowledge through education is the only way for farmers to change their identity and to detach themselves from the earth'. Changing themselves is many young villagers' calling in life. When I was at the Zhu house to give my New Year greetings, Mr Zhu and Tao talked with me while the other household members were busy with hosting other guests. Mr Zhu also showed me a 'model household' certificate awarded by the county government to the Zhu household. This was for a household that had made a particular impact on local society. The story I was told about the award emphasises the importance of non-material resources for people:

Mr Zhu: "Usually in the whole county only three households are selected to get this honourable award every year."

Tingting: "It is very impressive. What are the criteria for being a 'model household'?"

Mr Zhu: "I heard from the TV that it is mainly judged by the positive impact of the household on the local area. Oh, a few days ago my name was announced as the award receiver on the news on TV."

Tingting: “Congratulations again!”

Mr Zhu: “Many thanks. I think Tao’s excellent academic performance was one of the crucial factors for this award. He is the only one who has passed the national exams for a Masters degree in the village.”

Tao: “I think my Dad has been great for local society, not only because he runs a prosperous business but also because he has made several donations for rebuilding a road in the village. Importantly, without my Dad’s hard work, I would not have had the chance to carry on with my academic career.”

Mr Zhu: “Oh, since last summer Tao has also started volunteering to help village children study during his university vacations. A great impact on the local minds, isn’t it?”

Tingting: “Tao, how did the idea of volunteering come to you?”

Tao: “I often heard that children from countryside have a much worse performance at school. I am from the countryside. I experienced difficulties in studying. The educational resources are worse in the countryside than in cities. I just want to give a helping hand to children in the village. It is so important to support them by teaching them the right methods of studying, because all their parents are farmers and have no idea about this. The only way for us to improve the quality of life is education. However, education is so expensive that farmers cannot afford it. When I was at home for university holidays, many villagers came to me asking for some help with their children’s studying and the parents also wanted to pay some money for my tuition at a cheaper rate than other teachers. I know it is difficult for rural parents to earn money for their children’s education, so I decided to be a volunteer to offer help to the children in my village. ”

Mr Zhu: “It is a matter of knowledge. Although I work hard for money, I realise knowledge is the only thing can enhance our happiness in life. I also plan to do part-time studying in Huangshan university when I have earned enough. I believe knowledge makes us more open-minded and happier. ”

Tao [laughing]: “My Dad is great. He and my Mum have worked very hard to support my sister and my studies. Without them, I would know nothing of the world beyond the village. Honestly, I prefer urban life because it is much more dynamic than that in the countryside. Importantly, the city is a place that facilitates the realisation of an individual’s dreams.”

Mr Zhu: “Of course. There is no future in the countryside, although I have to be here.”

Tingting: “Do you really think so?”

Mr Zhu: “I have no knowledge and cannot survive in the city. Educated young people cannot survive in the village, because the village cannot provide them with the things that they need and desire in their lives.”

Tingting: “What do you mean by ‘the things that they need for their lives’?”

Mr Zhu: “Er, I think in the countryside there is no space for further development. It is simply because of the shortage of resources, like capital, knowing the right people, information and education and opportunities for work.”

Tao: “I think the shortage of educational resources in rural society impedes the vision and the access to other resources that are available in cities.”

Mr Zhu: “Tao, I hope in the future you could carry on with helping our village in various ways when you have a good job in the city.” (Interview extract, 14 February 2013, lines 14-79)

In this conversation about the ‘model household’ award to the Zhu house, Mr Zhu and Tao emphasised the importance of knowledge gained through education as the only bridge for village people to cross to ‘the urban world’, rather than just working in it as low paid workers. So many young people in Shang are eager for an urban identity as part of accessing abundant resources and pursuing their dreams. However, the clearest expression of this is made in Mr Zhu’s comment that ‘there is no future in the countryside’.

Conclusion: Household Boundaries and Changing Household Livelihoods

In this chapter, analysis has been concerned with both material and non-material resources in the four research households, as well as resources concerning services and exchanges that have occurred among household members and also between households. It is true that land is the most fundamental resource for agricultural production in village households, but people’s different feelings towards land

illuminate issues concerning their identities and the impact of identity matters on their livelihoods. In the process of industrialisation, urbanisation and modernisation, land has lost its value in generating capital for these village households; however, at the same time, the meaning of land and the sense of identity that is given by land are rooted in the mind of the older generation of Shang villagers. Although people's life choices are constrained by land, they still want to return to it after their lives as workers in cities. Nonetheless, most of the older generation of farmers expect their children to receive high education and through this to detach their lives from the land. People's pursuit of freedom in making life choices not only impacts on the structure of necessary household labour, but also results in new gendered divisions of household labour. For the research households, education has direct impact on people's social status and quality of life, while the availability of educational resources is directly affected by financial investment in education. If there is a possibility to work for better paid low-skilled jobs in cities, then rural parents are willing to take this and work hard to earn money for their children's studying. All of these resources concern household strategies and decisions about them have reshaped the ways of managing services and exchanges in the four research households.

The different kinds of changes to livelihoods and life choices discussed in this chapter have effects regarding the boundaries to the village households, not just to the activities and identities of their members. In discussing the impact of large economic changes at the local level of boundaries and the management of different kinds of resources, Wallman comments that:

“This process in turn altered the meaning and management of ‘local’ resources. Similar change can be expected similarly to affect boundaries and resource management wherever it occurs. But it need not affect them in the

same way: its outcome depends in each case on the kinds of people included and excluded in the new local system, and on the style and scope of local livelihood. Even where comparable areas have equal access to the same resources, they may not have the same organisational options.” (Wallman, 1984: 16)

This is certainly true of the local context of Shang Village. These processes are having a decisive if complex influence on the reshaping of household boundaries, with a variety of ways in which this is happening, as I have shown here. Chinese rural households have experienced dramatic social and economic changes from the People’s Commune period to the implementation of the Household Responsibility System and now to the current ongoing experience of industrialisation, urbanisation and modernisation. This chapter has focused on the impact of both material and non-material resources on the four research households and also Shang Village more generally. The related stories of members of the households discussed in this chapter clearly demonstrate that different styles of livelihood differ between the households, even though they have similar objectives in view and experience similar material circumstances, and the necessities of life for all of them are fairly similar. The differences, the things that produce different outcomes, are connected with the availability and quality of information, time-use, and also people’s knowledge and their desire and ability to re-make their lives and identities.

Most farmers have a deep affection for the land and are rooted in a particular way of life. However, their access to resources of all kinds, and especially capital, information and knowledge, are restricted. These are revealed as the least available resources for small-holding households; and as Wallman (1984: 26) points out, the viability of any resource system is threatened by the least available resource. An agriculture-based economy for the village households is declining because more and

more people are leaving the land and becoming workers in cities rather than carrying on with farming activities. Further, the capital generated by this hard work in the city is mainly used to finance the education of members of the younger generation, to enable them to have high status jobs in the modernising economy. Although the Zhu household is an exception and most of its members are involved in their pork farming business in the village, Mr Zhu's motivation is the same as other village parents, to generate capital for his children's education so they can have an easier life living in a city environment and fit in there.

It might be thought that this is only one response to the constraints and lack of resources of rural village life, for there are examples in this chapter and Chapter 4 of people making use of new opportunities, in taking up part-time daily paid work while still small-holding, in working in low skilled jobs and living in dormitories but later returning to the village, for example. This is true – but, these people too are motivated by raising funds to educate their children so that they can have different identities and can make different lifestyle and livelihood choices.

Household boundaries are shaped by people's changing activities, choices and focuses at different stages of life. Some of the city workers expect to return to the village when they are old, while the younger generation of people have a different identity and want a different way of life as provided through the opportunities given by education. These opportunities and choices are not simply 'there', but happen because of social networks and different ways of interacting with other people. The next chapter will focus on exploring the social networks and social resources of the research households.

Chapter 6 Households and Networks

Introduction

The idea of ‘society-as-network’ inspired me when I was conducting fieldwork in Shang Village and the idea that “relationships are not units, they are processes whose meaning and value changes in response to other things going on at the time” (Wallman, 1984: 68) is something I find useful in exploring how households act as and through networks. Its importance was brought home to me by various things mentioned in the previous chapter – Mrs Fang’s friendship with Mrs Yuan helps her with banking matters, the Cheng household relies heavily on Ping for many household matters, wider friendship links are crucial for the Zhu pork farm business, and more generally many Shang villagers have been introduced to city work by other village people. Wallman discusses two different but related ways of viewing household networks:

“One situates its contacts in relation to the local context; the other classifies these contacts in terms of their practical or emotional resources value. Combined, they imply the household’s relation to the neighbourhood: the extent to which its ‘valuable’ contacts are also geographically close gives some indication of the household’s investment or involvement in the local area.” (Wallman, 1984: 60)

This has a further importance because how networks operate as social capital helps explain their significance for the household seen as a resources system, something I discuss later regarding how the research households respond in times of crisis. However, the discussion starts with the neighbourhood and the impact of closeness in the local area of Shang Village.

Household Networks, Kin Ties and Neighbourhood

Figure 6. Villages and Towns around Shang Village



The geographic nature of the Shang household networks in relation to their neighbours is relatively straightforward. In Chinese rural society, several generations of the same family usually live in close proximity and kinship ties are embedded in a strong patriarchal, patrilineal and patrilocal tradition (Huang, 1992; Chen, 2009). For Shang Village, there are five overlapping aspects of each household's networks. The first is composed by the household members themselves; the second involves the people who live in the immediate neighbourhood; the third is the whole village and those who live in it; the fourth involves people who live in nearby villages and towns; with the fifth being those who live in other places. In my fieldwork, I was interested in how people told stories about their experiences in ways which reveal the people who they see as included in their networks.

The strongest impression I gained concerning the research households is that the household itself acts as a fundamental and powerful network, supporting both its individual members and the household as a resources system. The basic unit is the small-holding household, in which kinship ties play a significant role. The Chinese Household Registration System supports this form of household by restricting the geographic mobility of Chinese farmers and constraining several generations of the same family to live in close proximity (Huang, 1992). However, as the previous chapter has discussed, many people find ways around this, including over the generations and through education. An example will help explain:

I was invited to have lunch at Huang Shuji's house after a visit at the Fang household. On my way to the Huang house on foot, I met Huang Shuji, Min and Huang Shuji's brother Hui. Each of them rode a motor bike with two passengers sitting at the back of each motor bike. When we all arrived at the courtyard in front of Huang Shuji's house, Huang Shuji very proudly introduced the passengers to me. They were Huang Shuji's relatives, who had travelled here from two nearby villages. They were introduced by Huang Shuji as 'special and important' guests. Such happiness was in the air of the Huang house with the arrival of their guests. (Fieldnotes extract, 26 September 2011, p3)

The distinguished guests were Min's father and maternal uncle and Huang Shuji's younger daughter's parents-in-law and the in-laws' brothers. There were also other guests: Huang Shuji's brother Hui's family members, two neighbours and Huang Shuji's friend from another village. Hui's house is attached to his brother Huang Shuji's house. Before the start of lunch, the informal conversations in the courtyard between the guests had indicated that Huang Shuji organised such a lunch event with them about every month:

I was conducting fieldwork in the village and staying at the Huangs' house. I was lucky enough to go to a special lunch with the relatives and friends of the

Huang household. This kind of lunch with relatives, friends and two neighbours is a recurrent event for the Huang house (Fieldnotes extract, 2 June 2012, p43).

This lunch with relatives and two neighbours at the Huang house was an ordinary event, but its frequent repetition with the same people shows the particularity of the networks involved for this small-holding household, demonstrating the importance of kinship ties and their connections with neighbours. Neighbours are those people with whom the households have very frequent interactions in daily life (i.e. not just people who live near by) and are part of the means of livelihood, with Huang Shuji expressing this to me in an interview after the lunch:

Huang Shuji: “I am always being told by my mother that we should live in a harmony with people in the neighbourhood. Her words make me very careful in my work as village medical doctor, director and party secretary. She sets me a very good example, respecting people and in particular the neighbourhood. She has never been out of the village in her life, except several days stay in the hospital in Xiuning”.

Tingting: “It is interesting that she has never been out of the village in her life”.

Huang Shuji: “She is a traditional farming woman. We in a farming household can produce the basic things which sustain our life, such as grain, vegetables, meat. In addition, we need some exchanges of products with our neighbours, like selling and buying between different households in the village or sometimes in the nearby villages. We know which household specialises in which kind of products. We often buy eggs from a well-known chicken farming household in the nearby village.” (Interview extract, 2 June 2012, lines 39-48)

In Chinese rural society, people’s interactions with other households in the village can satisfy the basic needs of life, with it being the household that is considered as a basic social and economic unit rather than the individuals in it. From this point of

view, I understand the significance of Huang Shuji's mother's emphasis on ensuring harmony in the neighbourhood, because these interactions are between people in a small and relatively closed local network. Ties are made up of relatives in the same and nearby villages and the neighbours who are closest to the households, with 'choices' variously geographical, practical and emotional. But although the research households are composed of people who are connected by similar kinship ties, the networks of each household are structured differently.

The network of the Huang house is composed of household members, relatives and neighbours in the same village, relatives and friends in other villages, and relatives in Tunxi city. The people in from other villages are the motor bike passengers mentioned above: Min's father and maternal uncle, Huang Shuji's younger daughter's parents-in-law and the father-in-laws' two brothers.

Min's father was very grateful to the Huang's family. His manner impressed me when we exchanged greetings after Huang Shuji's introduction. As soon as he saw Mrs Huang, Huang Shuji's mother, he bowed very respectfully and then held the old lady's hands saying in Xiuning dialect with an emotional and trembling voice "Thanks Madam, you have a great son, I feel I owe lots of gratitude to him" (Fieldnotes extract, 26 September 2011, p3).

Before lunch, Min's father bowed and expressed his gratitude to Mrs Huang, Huang Shuji's mother. Mrs Huang said to him: "since we are not far from each other, do come more often with Min's uncle. You must miss Min. Is your wife getting better?" (Fieldnotes extract, 2 June 2012, p44).

Huang Shuji's friend (to Min's uncle): Cheers! 'Jiu Jiu' (maternal uncle) [emphasising tone] is the most important one! You see our Shuji always leaves you the seat at the head of the table.

Min's uncle: It is a great honour! Cheers!

Friend (to me): You know it is our Chinese culture. The maternal uncle's words have the most influence. It is 'Jiu Jiu' made that decision for Min to join such a nice family.

.....

Neighbour: Our Shuji is really a great man. He tries his best to look after people in our village.

Friend: Therefore he is always very busy.

Neighbour: He never forgets to call us to have a nice meal together. Let's toast our Shuji. [standing facing Huang Shuji] Shuji, many thanks! I toast you with a full glass!

Huang Shuji: [standing] Not at all! Since we live very close to each other, it is just a simple thought to call you here. With our motor bikes, just ten minutes. [drinking the wine] Now our life is much better, and this gives us more chance to have meals together.

I had the opportunity to meet people at the Huang household's social and family events because I always stayed with the Huangs during my research in Shang Village from 2011 to 2013 and again in 2014. At the lunch at Huang's house in June 2012, I sat in between Huang Shuji's friend and Min's uncle. On the other side of Min's uncle was one of their neighbours. I recorded this lunch conversation as I found their talk very interesting and they were all comfortable with the voice-recording device. For Huang Shuji, it is in part geographical location, and in part that now life is much better, that provides them with the chance to meet frequently at his house for lunch. The conversation also illustrated the traditional aspects of kinship ties, with the emphasis on the maternal uncle as an important person in making decisions for nephews. Huang Shuji is a very respectful person and he cannot neglect important kinship ties, and so he kept the 'head of the table' seat for Min's maternal uncle at the dining table, which is in front of the central wall in the Huangs' sitting room.

Huang Shuji said, "Since we live very close to each other, it is just a simple thought to call you here...", when the neighbour toasted him. These words attracted my attention, so the day after I talked with Huang Shuji about the lunch while his

feelings in saying this were still fresh in his mind. This was not recorded as Huang Shuji was going to a meeting with the County governors. However, he talked for longer than I expected and seemed very enthusiastic about exploring this with me:

We talked about fifteen minutes. Huang Shuji was very pleased that everyone enjoyed the lunch yesterday. He said it had been over many years that he and his wife organised these lunches. He also expressed his gratitude for his wife's help. I asked whether he remembered when it started. He said it started when Min married Ju in 2003. At the beginning he had thought often about inviting Min's biological parents and their family. He wanted to make it easy for Min and his biological parents to see each other. Also, since the parents were rather poor, he wanted to provide them with good (meaty) meals. Min's uncle's (his biological mother's elder brother) lives next to Min's biological parents and he is always very helpful to Min's biological family. Huang Shuji always rings the uncles as well to accompany Min's father in order to make the lunch more enjoyable. Then he also called the younger daughter's parents-in-law and their relatives, after she was married, in order to be respectful to their family as well. He emphasised the importance of being equal with his daughters' in-laws and the importance of being respectful to uncles from the maternal side, in accordance with traditional practice. His brother Hui and Hui's family, Huang Shuji's best friend and two neighbours were also invited to this lunch. He said his best friend is good at social meals and in facilitating mutual communication such as toasting. His brother Hui and Hui's son-in-law, who live next door to Huang Shuji's house, always attend this lunch. Huang Shuji said he believes many people make for a better atmosphere, and he joked that he has a huge dining table that welcomes people to decorate it. During my three attendances at this lunch, there were usually twelve to fourteen people sitting at the table. Women (Huang Shuji's mother, wife, daughter and Hui's daughter) were usually cooking and helping in the kitchen, and they kept some food back which they ate at a smaller table in the kitchen (Fieldnotes extract, 3 June 2012, p44-45).

My conversation with Huang Shuji shows that these frequent contacts in the Huang household are mainly with relatives. Huang Shuji is very thoughtful and respectful in terms of kinship ties. Huang Shuji also has relatives in Tunxi city, and when I asked him earlier about how frequent he went to Tunxi, he told me that:

“I go there usually during traditional festivals to see my aunt. My cousins also come here during holidays and festivals and when I call them to take some home-produced agricultural products for my aunt in Tunxi. I know my

aunt likes our home grown vegetables, corn, rapeseeds oil. My cousins have cars so it is quite convenient for them to come to collect some products. My aunt is also old and in poor health and does not like travelling by car. She has not come to see my mother for many years because of the distance.” (Interview extract, 21 May 2012, lines 42-48)

So, even though greater distance reduces the frequency of meetings, the availability of cars can help to maintain kinship ties and also exchanges between these households.

I interviewed Mr Fang in October 2011, with the people in his networks including family members, relatives and friends in Shang village, nearby villages, and Tunxi city. He also has a younger brother in a city faraway in the north of the Province. Although he seemed a little reluctant, he still expressed his disappointment about his younger brother in a distant city who has not returned to the village to see the relatives in some detail:

Tingting: “Are your relatives living in Shang Village?”

Mr Fang: “My elder sister lives here (Shang Village), having a family, and a younger married sister in the village just nearby. My wife’s brothers live just a few steps away from our home, but it is another village. You know my two kids live in Tunxi. Our relationship with relatives are fine.”

Tingting: “How often do you see these relatives?”

Mr Fang: “Er... not very often. We are quite busy with work. We just meet in the New Year and sometimes when we need some help. Oh, you know Xiao Yuan (Mrs Yuan). You saw her last time at my place. She lives in Tunxi. She comes more. She has retired. [after sipping some tea] Tingting, there something I do not know if I should say. You are here researching and maybe it is not useful for you.”

Tingting: “Do not worry. Please tell me.”

Mr Fang: “I want to say something about my brother. Er... We have not seen him for many years. He does not want to be connected with us farmers... er... I am really not happy with him [talking very sadly]. He is the youngest one in my family. He went to university and became an engineer in Wuhu (a city in the North of Anhui province). He even missed the funeral of my Dad a few years ago... Who knows what he is doing. Nowadays it is very easy to

take a train to come back to have the last chance to meet Dad! [He appeared to be very angry]...”.

Tingting: “When did you see him last time?”

Mr Fang: “I remember it was the year before my Dad’s death. Er... My Dad died in 2007, so it was 2006.”

Tingting: “Did he come back for a holiday?”

Mr Fang: “Yes. It was the Chinese New Year. He brought his son and grandson back to see our father. My father only saw my brother’s son two or three times, and the grandson only once in 2006.”

Tingting: “Do you think it is because of the distance that makes your brother not come back home?”

Mr Fang: “No. I think he does not consider us at all. He only thinks about his home in Wuhu. He forgot that the village is his home. Nowadays travelling is very convenient. He has a decent job and earns much more than us farmers. Like most of our relatives, the farthest place we have been is Tunxi. We have no time and money for travelling. This brother has been everywhere. He even went abroad, but not his village. Er... He looks down upon useless farmers... [what follows was Mr Fang telling the story about hard time in his parents’ home when the whole family was experiencing hardship in order to support his younger brother’s university education]”. (Interview extract, 7 November 2011, lines 22-57)

Mr Fang clearly does not consider geographical distance to be a factor in his brother stopping visiting his relatives in Shang Village in these years, but instead that his brother looked down on him and other relatives in Shang Village because they are ‘useless’ farmers. This is a more extreme version of some of the comments made by people visiting from Tunxi, described in the previous chapter. My discussion with Mr Cheng in the Cheng household also involved him disagreeing with the idea that working away from home causes disagreement:

Mr Cheng: “My wife is now living in Xiuning in order to look after Fei. I look after our fields, gardens and animals. Thanks to Kun. It is very thoughtful of Kun to help me whenever he can. He is alone to look after the little girl. Guang (his younger son) and his wife have been in Beijing for so many years. I think they have made a fortune by working hard. I hope that eventually they will come home or even live in a nearby city.”

Tingting: “Why do you hope so?”

Mr Cheng: “In Beijing they can earn money, but it is not home, is it? Gang has many friends in Beijing. You see, I am also keeping hogs for his friends [laughing]. I understand it is important to know people in this society. As a farmer, I find this village has provided enough for me. Sometimes I do need help from certain people. But when we are not too stubborn we understand that nature has given us enough. Why do these people worry about money? Money does not make us happy, does it? I only hope our nature is blessed, less flood and drought. My younger daughter is also working far away. She does not want to come home, having kids. Oh, for this I am very unhappy about her. For these people, home is a Holiday Inn. But honestly, I do not think they are very happy. When we have meals together, I hear a lot of complaints from Gang, his wife and my daughter. Why? I really do not know them. What do you think?”

Tingting: “Well, I think it is a matter of choice. Are there other people who you have frequent contacts with?”

Mr Cheng: “My two sisters live in Xiuning and a village not that far from here. They come to see me sometimes or there is something for them to talk over with me. They have become grannies, looking after their grandchildren for most of the time. My wife has a brother in Xiuning. Since my wife lives in Xiuning, she said she comes to see her brother sometimes. Her brother used to come to visit us.”

Tingting: “How about your friends or neighbours, who do you have regular contacts with?”

Mr Cheng: “Oh, yes, with my two neighbours. We have chats when we work in fields and gardens, or on the way. We chat a lot. Sometimes we just pop into each others’ houses to have a chat. It is very nice to have such neighbours.” (Interview extract, 9 November 2011, lines 19-46)

For Mr Cheng, some kinship ties persist while others – with Gang and also his youngest daughter – become more problematic and there are tensions. However, as links with his sisters continue, while that with his wife’s brother has declined, factors regarding kin ties and generation seem to be involved in these network patterns.

The understanding of networks in the Zhu household has similarities and differences and is illustrated by a conversation with Mr Zhu and my observations of a celebration dinner for Mr Zhu’s son Tao’s achievements in studying in June 2012.

When I asked Mr Zhu how he thought about the people he knows, his response stressed the importance of people for the growth of his business:

Mr Zhu: “Honestly, I think if I have not those people’s help and support, my pork farming business would not work, nor our relocation in 2007.”

Tingting: “Can I ask you who those people are?”

Mr Zhu: “My relatives and their friends. Now these friends are my friends.”

Tingting: “Are they also in Shang Village?”

Mr Zhu: “No. They are in Tunxi. I know them all through my cousin and her husband. When I needed help to start up the pork farming, they helped me find some solutions through their friends, like a small loan from a bank and some useful advice from people in the Agriculture Committee. Gradually, his friends have also become my friends. We have quite frequent contacts.”

Tingting: “You said they are in Tunxi, do you contact them frequently?”

Mr Zhu: “I often go to see them in their office. We often have dinners together. You know, my cousin’s husband is a well-known medical doctor in Tunxi. He is often invited to dinner because there are so many people who want treatment from him. In order to help me build networks, he often asks me to the dinners. My cousin is also very sociable and organises dinners with various people. They often tell me to join their dinners, very thoughtful. So my relationships with them have become closer and closer. Now we are like brothers and sisters. Before Hong moved home, I also often went to see her at her work before the dinners in Tunxi.”

Tingting: “Do you have many contacts with your neighbours?”

Mr Zhu: “We used to have close contacts with our neighbours when we had the small shop. They often came to my shop not only for shopping but also for long chats. That shop was for the convenience of our neighbours. But now we haven’t. You see running the pork farm is very demanding and requires our time and energy, like cleaning, feeding, dealing with sick piglets, and the business. Many times the traders come to our farm to slaughter the pigs in the early morning. We moved to this site at the end of 2008. I think my neighbours are also very busy and work outside of this village. We do not see each other often. We see our new neighbours sometimes, and we usually just say hello and have a simple chat on the road.”

Tingting: “So now you do not have many contacts with your old neighbours, do you?”

Mr Zhu: “Well, it seems everyone is busy [laughing].” (Interview extract, 17 October 2011, lines 84-113)

Our conversation took place in Mr Zhu's courtyard beside his pork farm. Mr Zhu's mother and Mrs Zhu's sister Ying (cuddling the baby, Hong's daughter) were talking with the vet Mr Liu, who was busy with surgery and immunising piglets. Mrs Zhu was cleaning the pork farm and sometimes helping Mr Liu. During our conversation Mr Zhu's phone rang several times and he apologised. These were from different people related to his business and two of the calls were asking him for dinners in Tunxi with friends who are directors in the government offices. We talked about half an hour, and then he had to leave to meet a pork trader to discuss about the sale of piglets (Fieldnotes extract, 17 October 2011, p16).

There were six tables of people, about sixty people in total, at the celebration dinner for Mr Zhu's son Tao for his achievements in studying in a restaurant in Tunxi. Mr Zhu told me that half of them were relatives and the others were friends. The relatives were mainly his brothers' families and Mrs Zhu's sisters' and brothers' families, and some of their cousins as well who are farmers living in Shang village and nearby villages. The friends were mainly officials and directors from different departments in Tunxi, including friends of friends (Fieldnotes extract, 29 June 2012, p59).

As this indicates, there are many people in the Zhu household's networks, including relatives and friends but extending well beyond this to a range of official and professional contacts, primarily because of the needs of their pork farming business. However, after relocation and the start of the pork business, they now have fewer contacts with both old and new neighbours. Apart from a cousin and her husband, Mr Zhu and Mrs Zhu's relatives are farmers living in Shang village and nearby villages. However, the majority of Mr Zhu's friends are people with professional jobs in Tunxi city and with whom Mr Zhu has very frequent contacts. The other three research households have their closest contacts with relatives in Shang Village, and then with friends and neighbours in nearby villages. All of them have kin and network links with people living in cities, like the Huang household with relatives in Tunxi, the Fang household with friends in Tunxi and relatives in a distant city; and

the Chengs with just some friends in Beijing. Their city connections are clearly different in kind.

Kinship and neighbourhood ties structure essential networks for these village households. It is only geographically that they occur and have importance, for these close bonds also help meet the small-holding households' need for economical production and investment in cultural traditions. However, when a household, like the Zhu house, is shifting from being a traditional small-holding household to specialising in a commercial family business, then friendship ties connecting its members with people with higher social status become crucial for accessing capital and information resources.

In small-holding households, the household itself is a fundamental and powerful network, with household activities carried out through a household division of labour which also encompasses managing household resources and tasks. The internal household networks in these research households are exclusively composed by kinship ties of both birth and marriage. The importance of the maternal uncle was emphasised in several of the Huang household's social events. In addition, compared with the other research households, the Huangs have put the most effort into maintaining their kinship ties, such as the connections with two daughters' parents-in-law and related relatives. Huang Shuji's family culture is the most strongly influenced by such traditional normative expectations.

Emotional Connections and Networks

The affective nature of networks provides a way of thinking about people's emotional connectedness and how close they are in terms of their feelings about various other people. In terms of the contacts that the individual and the household have, Wallman (1984: 65) comments that "the balance between the quantity and quality could reflect household style or ethnic culture as much as resource options. Some people invest in (or only report investing in) a handful of relationships as a matter of deliberate choice". The analytical focus here explores the affective nature of network connections in the research households in terms of 'key people' in such networks.

Following initial fieldwork in Shang Village over 2011, I returned to the village to discuss the topic of networks with people in the four households in 2012. My interviews and observations at this time were more focused on specific people and specific ties, and for each household I explored more stories and accounts to explore the affective nature of their networks in some depth. Some of my observations and conversations were with Huang Shuji. One such occasion was when Huang Shuji's friend, who was always invited to the family lunch discussed in the previous section, came to visit him on the afternoon of 07/05/2012. The conversation was not recorded but I wrote detailed notes later that day:

Huang Shuji's friend, Mr Wu, had been a village director for eight years in a neighbouring village but retired in 2010. Huang Shuji often mentioned that he is the person with whom he can share everything. He came to talk with Huang Shuji about a dreadful situation in his family. His younger son asked the parents' financial support to get a mortgage for a flat in Tunxi city in order to marry his girlfriend. However, Mr and Mrs Wu were very unhappy about this and the marriage, because they did not trust the girl, who threatened their son that she would not marry him if he could not buy a flat in Tunxi. When they discussed this matter in front of me, Mr Wu told me that

“Huang Shuji is the most trustworthy and influential figure in his family, even my naughty son is obedient to what Huang Shuji says”. Therefore, Mr Wu asked Huang Shuji to go and talk with his son when he had time. Huang Shuji agreed that he would go to see him tomorrow afternoon (Fieldnotes extract, 7 May 2012, p32).

In June 2012 when I continued fieldwork, I asked Huang Shuji how Mr Wu was. Huang Shuji told me some stories about Mr Wu’s household, in particular this issue concerning his younger son. This then developed into an in-depth recorded interview:

Tingting: “You have told me that Mr Wu is one of your best friends, and I am also interested in the other people who are close to you and your family. Could you please tell me a little bit more about your relationships with these people? And who they are?”

Huang Shuji: Yes. I would say Mr Wu and I are more like brothers. We have known each other for about forty years, since we were in the cadre school together. We have very similar work experiences. Mr Wu was the director of the neighbouring village for twenty years and then became the Party Secretary of the village till his retirement. We have shared a lot during our work.”

Tingting: “I remembered last time he said that you are an influential figure in his family. How do you have influence on his family members?”

Huang Shuji: “[laughing] Oh, I do not think I am so influential, but his family respects me and also treats me as one of them. So does Mr Wu. I see him as a brother. Before we got married, we often went to each other’s house, at that time, it was our parents’ house. We were quite young, around our twenties. We discussed our jobs and helped each other when anyone had problems. We always referred to each other’s parents as parents. At that time in the 1980s life was very difficult and it was rare for us to eat meat. If my mother cooked some nice food, she always asked Mr Wu to our place for meals; so did his mother. We have always helped each other’s family. When we need some help for the work in our fields, we always come to each other’s home to help. ”

Tingting: “It is a lifelong and very deep friendship, and I also see its impact on your families. Do you have close relationships with other people? Or is there someone who is very close to your family?”

Huang Shuji: “I think we are also quite close to our relatives, as you see them coming for lunch.”

Tingting: “Yes. I remember. They live quite close to you, so do you think this helps your frequent contacts with them?”

Huang Shuji: “I think so. Usually we farmers do not like travelling long distance as we are not used to it. Min’s mother only comes to my house during the Chinese New Year because she is very sick even on a motorbike. These relatives are nice people. Min’s parents have always been in a poor situation and both of them are in poor health. I am trying my best to organise this type of lunch about every month. I think in particular Min’s parents are very happy to see Min often and the granddaughter. They come here so we can cook something nice for them. I know that they live a life of austerity. They only eat some rice and a vegetable and a pickle every day. Although they kept some hens, eggs are always for friends and for sale to save for their younger son. If I forget to organise the lunch, my mother always reminds me about it. My mother is a very warm-hearted lady. She just wants them to have a nice meal together. Min and I also go to see his parents with some food about every two weeks.”

Tingting: “I can see these times during lunch that everyone is enjoying themselves.”

Huang Shuji: “Yes. I am really happy everyone enjoys it. They coming here really make me happy. I understand why my mother and actually our Chinese culture value the importance of harmony a lot. There is nothing that can compare with this kind of happiness in life. Tingting, this is why I have told you in the past that I do not want to leave the village. There are many people who ask me why I do not ask for a promotion to work in the county government. Honestly, according to my experience, I am qualified to be a civil servant in the county government. As a village director and party secretary, we are not paid and not treated as a civil servant. But I like the people around me in the village. This brings me the greatest joy in life.”

Tingting: “Yes, this feeling among people is very precious. You also always invite your younger daughter’s in-laws and in-law’s brothers. Are you very close to them?”

Huang Shuji: “Of course. My younger daughter married later than the elder one, and after her marriage I always invite her in-laws with Min’s parents. We get along with each other very well. When I invite my daughters’ in-laws, I often tell their brothers to join us. It is because traditionally the maternal uncle is the one who should be respected before anyone else. I also tell the paternal uncle, who I am more familiar with, to come for lunch as well. So those you see are very sociable. And my friend and two neighbours join us for a better atmosphere.”

Tingting: “Yes. I see that. So you are also very close to these two neighbours?”

Huang Shuji: “Yes. Actually I would rather call them friends instead of neighbours. They are about my age. We have been playing together since we were very little. We also help each other about working in fields or some problems in the family. My mother is also a very good friend of their parents. It is a pity that all of their parents have passed away, otherwise my mother

would have nice time with them. She still often tells us about her time with these neighbours' parents.” (Interview extract, 25 June 2012, lines 46-108)

This gives a clearer picture of the social lunch organised in the Huang household, and its motivation around the emotional connectedness between the Huangs and their guests, with the people concerned living quite close to the Huang house. Compared with my fieldnotes on 03/06/2012 about Huang Shuji's comment about it being 'just a simple thought' to get people together, what he said when interviewed on 25/06/2012 showed it was more complex and the guests at the lunch were the people who are emotionally very close to the Huang household.

This was confirmed on a later occasion in 2013, when I was invited to observe a meeting of the village representatives committee which discussed an issue about the village school on 16/04/2013. This also shows the close connectedness between Huang Shuji and Mr Wu, and the background is that the meeting took place in the Huang house:

They were about ten people at the meeting. Huang Shuji was the chair. His friend Mr Wu was there as well. Officially Wu was not one of the participants in the meeting. However, I was told by Huang Shuji that he was always invited to discuss and give advice in meetings of the village representatives' committee. Besides, Huang Shuji also told me that when such meetings ended Mr Wu always stayed with him to continue discussion of the issues raised in the committee meeting, and often he stayed for dinner or lunch, carrying on discussing and offering his opinion. Usually this type of dinner or lunch is only for Huang Shuji and Mr Wu, with Huang Shuji's mother, wife, and granddaughters usually eating at the small table in the kitchen. After my observation of the official meeting, I stayed at the Huang house for lunch. At the dining table in the lounge there were three people: Mr Wu, Huang Shuji and I. Because I was a guest, I was asked by Huang Shuji and Mr Wu to stay with them, although I wanted to be in the kitchen with other members. I asked Huang Shuji why the other family members usually had lunch or dinner in the kitchen after a meeting, and Huang Shuji said that they did not want to stop their conversation about important issues in the village. During the meeting, Huang Shuji expressed his gratitude and toasted Mr Wu for his support of his own work for the village (Fieldnotes extract, 16 April 2013, p79).

The Fang, Cheng and Zhu households have some similar network characteristics as the Huang one. They have close relationships with relatives who live in the same village and neighbouring villages; and they also have close contacts with some neighbours. These are strong ties embedded in the local context and supported by kinship links and the largely closed environment of the village with both material and non-material resources being limited. But it is in fact weak ties, those with contacts, friends or relatives who are not geographically close, which can help these households to generate new information and resources (Granovetter, 1973; Burt, 2004). I will discuss further these different kinds of social ties in the following section of the chapter, while here I look more closely at the affective nature of networks in the Fang, Cheng and Zhu households.

In rereading and reorganising my fieldnotes, there were many comments recorded which provided illustrations of the affective nature of networks in the Fang household. One of these was written on the 16/02/2013 about a celebration for Mr Fang's granddaughter's tenth birthday:

This celebration was for Mr Fang's younger son Wen's daughter on her tenth birthday. I was invited. This morning Wen collected Mr and Mrs Yuan and me from Tunxi City and drove us to Shang Village. Mr and Mrs Yuan are family friends of the Fang household. They have retired as bank employees and live in Tunxi city. Wen works as an accountant in a company and also lives in Tunxi. In the car, Wen said to us that he wanted to invite everyone to celebrate his daughter's birthday in a restaurant in Tunxi. However, Mrs Fang insisted that it was so important that it should be organised at home, and Mr and Mrs Fang suggested that they should organise this celebration for their granddaughter.

When we arrived at the village not far from the Fang house, I could sense the happiness there, hearing people talking and seeing several pleased faces on the road welcoming us. I could not recognise whose the faces were until Wen told us that they were his relatives from different villages. There were also

many people talking in the courtyard in front of the Fang house. In the lounge, there were two big round tables. Mrs Fang saw us coming and became happier, telling us it was her good idea to have the celebration at home. She said it was cosier than just a meal in a restaurant. She said she was happy to see so many people and there were another two tables in the rooms upstairs. Before the celebration lunch, inside the house some people were talking and having traditional snacks like tea eggs and some nuts. In the courtyard, some people were talking and smoking; and in the kitchen mainly women were preparing ingredients, cooking, washing and talking.

The majority of people there for the celebration were the Fang family's relatives from local villages. Only Mr and Mrs Yuan and I came from Tunxi. In the villagers' eyes, we were special guests because we are from Tunxi, the city. They were very kind and made us 'Tunxi people' sit at the table in the middle of the lounge. Some of the relatives were very keen to make tea for us and help us to peel the eggs. Wen sat with us talking. During the conversation between Mr and Mrs Yuan, Wen and me, it was said that Mrs Yuan helped Wen to find his job in Tunxi after leaving university. Wen told me that Mrs Yuan had given a lot of help to his family, and with his mother, Mrs Fang, Mrs Yuan was like a sister. So Wen always addressed Mrs Yuan as 'aunt'. Wen also told us that his mother is really attached to Mrs Fang and him, and he joked that he thought if Tunxi was a village then his mother would move there, because of her close connections with Mrs Yuan and Wen (Fieldnotes extract, 17 February 2013, p71).

This conversation with Mr and Mrs Yuan and Wen made me very interested in the connections which exist between Mrs Fang and Mrs Yuan and her son Wen, although they live in Tunxi. After the lunch celebration, many guests left in the afternoon as they said they had something to do at home or in the fields. Mr and Mrs Yuan and I were asked to stay for dinner, after which Wen would drive us back together. I helped Mrs Fang and her sisters in cleaning the tables and then I helped in the kitchen while they were washing the dishes. This led to a conversation with Mrs Fang and her two sisters, which allowed me to explore further the 'connectedness' topic raised in the conversation before lunch with Wen and Mrs Yuan.

Mrs Fang and her sisters were in a very good mood when talking about their relatives, probably because of the celebration, which provided the opportunity for people to relate emotionally. I recorded the conversation we had while washing the dishes in

the kitchen; however, there was quite a bit of background noise, so I also took notes later that day while listening to the recording:

One of Mrs Fang's sister was excited to tell me that she had met a brother, who she had not seen for years because of an argument. But today when they met they automatically forgot the past, and talked and enjoyed the celebration. I thought her words were especially pleasing to Mrs Fang. Mrs Fang was nodding her head and she also repeated that it was a splendid idea to have the celebration at home. Then the other sister of Mrs Fang commented that Wen is Mrs Fang's favourite child so that Mrs Fang was very keen to celebrate Wen's daughter's birthday. When I asked Mrs Fang how often she came to Tunxi, Mrs Fang was laughing and said that she would like to live in Tunxi so that she could see Wen and her friend Mrs Yuan every day. Her sisters laughed and said Wen is indeed a very thoughtful son, and Mrs Fang said seriously that she loves the life in the village where she felt herself. She also added that she has many relatives in the village who are very nice to her. She said now she went to Tunxi less often than the past, about every two months, because of her work in a local plastic processing factory. In the past, she went to Tunxi about every month. Mrs Fang said she met with her sisters about every two months. Mrs Fang's sisters also work in factories in their villages, not far from Shang. They also work at weekends and their current work commitments mean they have less time to see each other (Notes and interview, 16 February 2013, p70).

As special guests from Tunxi, during the celebration lunch I sat at the table in the middle of the lounge of the Fang house with Mr and Mrs Yuan, a couple from Tunxi and some of the Fangs' relatives. The couple from Tunxi were Mrs Yuan's friends; the husband works in the Education Bureau, and had helped Mrs Fang's grandson make applications for school and then a job. Through this they became the Fangs' family friends. From my conversations with Wen, Mrs Fang and other people during lunch, I learned that people at this birthday celebration were mainly relatives of the Fangs, with the 'Tunxi people' (Mr and Mrs Yuan, the couple and I) the only friends at the celebration. Wen said during the lunch that they had invited almost all their relatives and also friends who were close to the Fangs, in total about fifty people.

Although this celebration event was for the Fang granddaughter's tenth birthday, it is clear that this celebration event is mainly about maintaining connections with the people, relatives and friends, who are emotionally close to the Fangs. This also illustrates the importance of social networks and social resources that are embedded in these connections. First, it shows that the emotional connections between people are underlined in relation to household events that are affected by normative cultural expectations. Their tenth birthday is one of the most important celebrations for children in Chinese culture. Mrs Fang is closely emotionally connected with Wen, so she put considerable effort into organising the birthday celebration for Wen's daughter. During the celebration, Wen's daughter and the relatives' children were enjoying a cake and playing by themselves at a table that was specially prepared for them, while the adults were having their meal and talking separately. Second, it shows that connections separate from emotional ones exist. The director of Education Bureau in city Tunxi and his wife were invited, who are friends of Mrs Yuan and have ordinary friendship with the Fangs, but they are not emotionally close to them. Their presence at the Fangs' family event shows that Mrs Fang is also using the occasion to maintain this connection for the sake of Qing's job.

The Cheng household is composed of Mr Cheng, Kun and Kun's daughter. Mrs Cheng and their grandson also return to the village every weekend to spend time with family members. Mr and Mrs Cheng's elder daughter Ping and her family live in a nearby village and they come to visit nearly every weekend. Their younger daughter Yan is working in a city a long distance from Shang Village, and she and her husband often came to see Mr Cheng and Mrs Cheng in Xiuning. In May 2012, when Mr Cheng knew that I would like to have an interview with some of his household

members about their networks and connections, he proposed that I should speak to his son Kun because Kun knew better than him about Mr Cheng's younger son Gang's networks. As a result I interviewed Kun on 20/05/2012, a Sunday, as Kun is involved with his electrical work except on Sundays:

Kun: "My father said you wanted to know about the networks in my household."

Tingting: "Yes. I would be very grateful if you could tell me about the networks that people in your household have and how you think about it."

Kun: "I think networks are very important, as a Chinese saying goes, 'more friends more ways' [laughing]."

Tingting: "Yes, indeed, networks are about people. Why do you think this is important?"

Kun: "You see nowadays we are not like in the past, a closed village. I think if you only do agricultural work, networks are not so important, and you just need the fields and physical hard work."

(At this point the discussion with Kun turned to agricultural and non-agricultural work, how he sees the differences and how he evaluates 'knowledge' gained in different types of work. This part of the interview commented on in Chapter Five.)

.....

Tingting: "So could you tell me about the people who have close contact with you and your household? And how does network play an important role in your household?"

Kun: "Er, the people we have close contact with are our relatives. My sisters' families, er, some of my aunts and uncles and cousins."

Tingting: "Before, you said the Chinese saying 'more friends more ways'. So do you and your family have some friends?"

Kun: "I have some friends, in fact, they are my work mates from when I was a carpenter and an apprentice electrician. My family also has some friends and they are mainly my father's friend from other villages. Oh, we also have friends from Tunxi and Beijing. They are my brother Gang's friends."

Tingting: "I remembered your father told me that he had good relationships with two neighbours."

Kun: “Oh, yes. I think they are also his good friends. They often meet in our house. They are of a similar age. I think it is very good for my father, since my mother is away accompanying Fei in Xiuning.”

Tingting: “I agree. So these people you have mentioned are the ones who are close to you and your household?”

Kun: “Yes.”

Tingting: “Why do you see them as close relationships?”

Kun: “Er, we contact each other more often and they are important in many things.”

Tingting: “So could you tell me a little bit more about their importance in many things?”

Kun: “If there are things we need help within our family, we always think that someone among them will give some help, all kinds of things when we need people’s help or advice about the way to do it. Like my sister and brothers’ jobs, these needed friends’ help. My work is the same. Usually my friends, actually they are work mates, give me information about new projects that need electricians. When we have problems at work, we always try to help each other to solve the problem. Just a few weeks ago, one of these friends argued with our boss because of unfair treatment, so another friend’s relative in Tunxi came to help this friend and eventually the friend’s relative solved the problem with our boss.”

Tingting: “So these people who offer help are the ones you usually have more contact with?”

Kun: “I think so.”

Tingting: “In terms of the connection with feelings, do you think the relatives and friends you are talking about are also very close to you and your household?”

Kun: “Er, yes, it is. We contact each other more often because we think these people can be trusted. We also speak about our feelings when we contact each other. But this depends on the people. For some things we can share with one person, and something else can be shared with someone else.”
(Interview extract, 20 May 2012, lines 1-67)

From the interview with Kun, the affective network of the Cheng household as he sees it is composed by relatives and friends, the majority of whom are villagers. Among the friends, for Kun they are all work mates; and those from Tunxi and

Beijing are Gang's friends. The affective connectedness for Kun consists in having more contact and being able to rely on people for practical help. This needed some prompting from me and after some hesitation ('Er') Kun highlighted friends at work; and when I furthered asked about close relationship in terms of feelings, Kun commented these were people who give advice and help and can be 'trusted' and things can be 'shared' with them.

In February 2013 after finding out that Mr Zhu's father Lao Zhu was very ill, I went to Shang Village to visit Lao Zhu. Afterwards, Mr and Mrs Zhu insisted that I should stay for lunch. So I had lunch at the Zhu's house and this was followed by a long conversation with Mr Zhu. While Lao Zhu was very ill, Mr Zhu turned down attending some business and social events. Mr Zhu was not in a good mood because of his father's situation; however, he was interested in talking with me about his feelings. To talk was a very natural thing after lunch. Our talk was not recorded because this would have been very insensitive in such a sad context:

Mr Zhu sighed deeply and told me that he thought his father Lao Zhu would not survive this time, and he had already discussed Lao Zhu's funeral with his brothers. Besides talking about Lao Zhu's treatment and situation, Mr Zhu told me a few times that he was touched by the people who gave support to his household, in particular, Mrs Zhu's sister Ying, his cousin from Tunxi Mei and a friend, the vet, Mr Liu. Ying helped take care of Lao Zhu every day as she was Lao Zhu's daughter. Although his cousin Mei was busy working in her office in Tunxi, she came to visit Lao Zhu almost every day. Since Mei's husband is a medical doctor in Tunxi, through their networks they contacted and invited many well-known doctors in Tunix and Shanghai to visit Lao Zhu, in order to find a possible treatment for him. Mr Liu was Lao Zhu's friend and became the Zhu's pork farm vet since the business started in 2009. Mr Liu usually came to the Zhu house every two weeks, having some work to do for the farm and having a chat with Lao Zhu. Mr Liu lives in another village and he used to be a vet in a state owned pork farm from the 1970s to 1980s. Since then, he has been a farmer. During Lao Zhu's last days, Mr Liu came to the Zhu house about every two days on his bike in order to visit Lao Zhu and gave a helping hand in looking after Lao Zhu. Mr Liu would also talk with Mr Zhu's mother, comforting her.

Mr Zhu told me that he was not interested in working for the business at that time and he had refused to attend social events in Tunxi. He said nothing can compare with the time spent with close people. He also said the friends in Tunxi were just business friends, he was not able to share intimate feelings with them (Fieldnotes extract, 27 February 2013, p82-83).

The network connections of the Zhu household are clearly indicated here, commenting as it does on the people who are emotionally close to the Zhu household in addition to its key household members. Although the Zhu household is connected with many people compared with the other three research households, in this crisis situation it was apparent that the people with whom they had strong emotional connections are Mrs Zhu's sister Ying, Mr Zhu's cousin Mei and the vet Mr Liu.

It has been pointed out by Wallman (1984: 65) that people's investments in social relationships indicate resource options, household styles and choices and also normative cultural expectations. The accounts from people discussed here regarding the affective nature of networks not only illustrate Wallman's idea about household styles and choices related to resources options and normative cultural expectations, but also helps explain that emotionally closely connected relationships are critical in reaching solutions to many important matters in households.

The stories I was told about network connections in the research households reveal that trust, sharing and emotional bonds are key factors in people's understanding of their links with other people. These are also influenced by family tradition and cultural expectations. For instance, both the lunch at the Huangs' and the birthday celebration at the Fangs' show that the connectedness between people and maintaining certain type of networks are influenced by household tradition and culture.

Further, these emotional bonds are crucial to a household's choices and solutions to 'big' and consequential matters. These close links are the most accessible ties because of their emotional bonds and they can facilitate or generate useful social resources for the households. This is why Mrs Fang involved the director of the Educational Bureau in her family event, in order to strengthen the level of connections with him with the purpose of Qing's job in mind. And the Zhu household, major events such as house relocation, running the pork farm and Lao Zhu's illness relied enormously on their emotional and affective networks, kinship and friendship ties.

Lao Zhu passed away in March 2013. During my visits to the four research households in Shang Village from 2011 to 2014, on several occasions I found myself immersed in various household crises in addition to Lao Zhu's final illness and death. In fact, these crises have considerably enriched my understanding of the households and their networks, and so I now focus the analytical lens on such crises in the households add to what I have so far discussed about networks and bonds.

Networks As Social Capital: When Crises Occur

The above discussions of the locational and affective aspects of household networks concerned people are in the networks of the four research households and how close the connections with them are and for what purposes. What follows focuses on the context of a crisis occurring in each household as a means of exploring how networks can provide social capital for purposive actions in such circumstances. For Lin (1999b), a social network is the analytical focus of social capital in action and he

points out that access to and the use of social capital are affected by people's positions in the network structure: the closer the link then the greater the potential access to social capital. However, Lin also recognises that even distant people can be significant on occasion (Lin et al., 2001a; Lin, 1999b).

My research visits in Shang Village from 2011 to 2013 and again in 2014 led me to experience a wide range of social events in the research households, including marriage, celebrations, traditional festivals and family rows. Lin's (2008) network approach to social capital was a stimulus when thinking about my fieldwork data to use crisis as a means of analysing the 'capitalising' of the social resources embedded in household networks. Cohen (1990) has pointed out that the celebration of festivals indicates the quantity and quality of the social resources and capital that a household has. However, the comparison of my data about celebrations and about crises has led me to the view that crisis is a more powerful means of doing this. This is because crisis situations require people to consider, first, what the urgent changes occurring in the households are and what aspects require access to and use of social capital through their networks; and second, they highlight how these networks operate in these particular contexts. And through this they point up the quantity and quality of the social resources embedded in the networks that a household has and which of these can be actualised or capitalised. Crisis situations, then, can provide a good basis for understanding why and how particular network links are important and what the practical strategies are in each household when they are confronted with urgent circumstances and changes. Using Crow's (1989) discussion of the concept of strategy, Wallace (2002: 277) has pointed out that the importance of strategy in household research is based on "households or individuals themselves what they are

doing in order to understand how they make sense of their own environment”. People’s relationships are actually processes and their meanings and values change in response to other things going, with crisis situation making this apparent.

In July 2011, Huang Shuji’s mother had a heart attack when she was at home. It was fortunate this happened when Huang Shuji was returning home from his work in a villager’s house. He called the emergency medical service and his mother was treated in the county hospital in Xiuning. When I visited the Huang household in September 2011, when Huang Shuji was told me about this he was still very upset as it had happened just the day before. Him telling about his mother’s heart attack and the following problems with the hospital interested me, so when I visited later I asked if I could conduct an interview with him about it. Huang Shuji was agreed to share the details of these events with me, with the interview occurring on 05/09/2011:

Huang Shuji: “My mother had the heart attack on the 11th July. When I came home around 11am I found it strange that I had not seen her (his mother) in the courtyard. She used to wash or do something at our courtyard. I called out ‘Mum’ when I entered our house. There was no answer. Then I went to the kitchen and saw she was lying there. I was so scared and knew it must be a heart problem. I called the emergency service. In hospital my Mum was treated effectively as it was an emergency. But then we had a problem with the hospital beds. It was a very busy period for the hospital so there were not enough beds for patients. My Mum was allocated a bed in the corridor. It was hottest period, about 38 to 39 degrees Celsius. In the hospital wards there was air conditioning. So I asked the doctor whether my Mum could be allocated to a ward as she was very old. I thought the noise and heat in the corridor did not benefit her recovery. But the doctor refused saying that the ward was full. I thought it was because we were farmers.”

Tingting: “I see. So you thought there were some vacancies in the wards?”

Huang Shuji: “Of course. I am going to tell you what was happening, then you will understand what I said. My Mum was very weak after the treatment. When she saw I was talking with some nurses about a bed in a ward in the corridor beside her bed, she just waved her hand. I understood she was telling me not to ask. So I did not have further discussion, actually like begging, with the nurses. In the evening, my Tunxi cousins’ family came to the hospital to

see my Mum. They felt a little bit angry with her bed being in the corridor. So they asked me and my brother whether we had talked with the doctor. We told our cousins that it was useless to ask the doctor. So they replied we will help you sort this matter tomorrow when the director of the doctors is around. My cousins also told us we should have told them the problem earlier so that my Mum would not spend the night in the corridor.”

Tingting: “So what happened the day after?”

Huang Shuji: “One of my cousin found a doctor through his networks in the hospital in Tunxi. Then the doctor in Tunxi just called someone in that county hospital and the problem was solved. My Mum was transferred to a comfortable bed in a ward the day after just before lunch time. So you see I know there were beds in wards. But it was because we were farmers.”

Tingting: “Amazing. So do you think the people in Tunxi are more powerful?”

Huang Shuji: “[laughing] Of course. You see only a phone call from Tunxi, and the problem was solved. I was trying hard to discuss it with the doctors and nurses, but it was useless.”

Tingting: “Before you said your cousin said you should call him earlier. Since you thought that people in Tunxi are more powerful, why did you not call your cousin?”

Huang Shuji: “Oh, I knew this. But I think it was habit. It was because we farmers usually do not like using networks. It is because we are used to relying on ourselves.”

Tingting: “I see. Your mother even waved her hand to stop you asking the doctor. You said ‘farmers usually do not like using networks’ and ‘were used to relying on yourselves’. Could you talk about this a little bit more? I want to understand why is it a habit or family tradition. Or other reasons?”

Huang Shuji: “Er, I tell you we farmers only know our hands and hard work for our fields. We are not like people in the city always thinking, socialising and networking. Since we were kids, my mother has kept telling my brother and me to be diligent and not to think about relying on others. In fact, I think it is a little bit opportunistic to use people.”

Tingting: “Well, I see your point. When you were confronted with the bed problem in the hospital that day, had you thought about asking someone else’s help, like your cousin?”

Huang Shuji: “Honestly, I did think about one of the cousins in Tunxi, because I know he is well connected. But again, the habit, I just do not want to bother him. So I thought we had to endure it. On the other hand, I was quite worried about my Mum in the noise and heat in that corridor.”

Tingting: “Sorry for carrying on asking you about the network questions. I am very interested in knowing why you did not want to bother your cousins.”

Huang Shuji: “I thought they were busy at work. The other reason is, if I asked him, he would have to ask others to find the right person to contact the hospital.”

Tingting: “If he was a doctor, was it more likely you would have bothered him?”

Huang Shuji: “[smiling] Yes, if he was a doctor, I would have thought it was more reasonable to bother him. You know, this bothering people thing makes me feel like owing a debt to the people who helped me but I do not know them and do not know how to pay the debt back.”

Tingting: “Fortunately, your cousin helped you solve the problem. Do you think are there some other people who could help you solve the problem if you asked?”

Huang Shuji: “Er, maybe some officers of the county government offices I know from meetings. But I do not think there is someone who could help in this case.”

Tingting: “Ok. So what kind of situation in the hospital in your Mum’s case could make you definitely think of asking for someone’s help?”

Huang Shuji: “If the noise or heat was too disturbing for my mother.”

Tingting: “Ok. So if you felt you had to ask someone’s help, who would you prefer bothering, your cousin or the officers in the county government?”

Huang Shuji: “Of course, my cousin.”

Tingting: “Why?”

Huang Shuji: “They are our close relatives.”

Tingting: “So you would consider the type of relationship you have with the people you would ask for help, rather than who is more powerful or has more connections?”

Huang Shuji: “Indeed! I think the type of relationship is important. I also think this would affect if people are willing to help.” (Interview extract, 5 September 2011, lines 5-78)

Huang Shuji showed that he was reluctant to use people in his networks when there was a crisis. However, the story about the bed problem for his mother in the hospital explains that he saw this becoming such a problem that he did eventually use network connections. The phone call from the doctor in Tunxi was more effective

than Huang Shuji's several attempts to negotiate with doctors and nurses. For him, this was because they are 'just farmers'. Huang Shuji also told me there were potential people to provide some help: his cousins and county government officers he known from meetings. In fact, the people he thought could help if asked are all from Tunxi, the city context. Huang Shuji's structural position provides the available social resources in his networks, and interestingly although he has social resources that could help in this situation, he did not call on this. The hospital bed issue was eventually solved because his cousin actively offered help and used resources in his own networks.

When I asked Huang Shuji if he had to use the social resources in his network then who he would prefer 'bothering', his cousins or the county officers, he was quite clear it would be his cousins because they are close relatives. Further, when I asked him what would most affect his mobilisation of social resources in his networks, the type of relationships, the power of the available resources, or the quantity of the potential connections, Huang Shuji responded that "I think the type of relationship is important. I also think this would affect how people are willing to help". This refers to the quality of the available resources, that is, whether they can actually be relied upon to help.

The crisis in the Fang household was told to me by Mrs Fang in recalling a family row from a few years before. My interview with her was mainly about her relationship with Mrs Yuan, and she told the following story as part of this:

Mrs Fang: "The important matters in our family are all thanks to Xiao Yuan (Mrs Yuan). About five years ago when Qing (Mrs Fang's grandson) finished middle school we had a family row, mainly between my daughter-in-law (Qing's mother) and me. What a dreadful time! Qing was not good at

studying and he got bad results in the examination for going to high school. But his Mum insisted he should go to high school.”

Tingting: “Was Qing interested in going to high school?”

Mrs Fang: “Not at all. He did not like studying. After Qing got his examination results, one evening when we had dinner together, we talked about the potential future for Qing. Lao Fang (Mr Fang) and I suggested Qing going to a vocational school. When Qing’s Mum heard this, she got very angry and started arguing with us, complaining that we do not care about Qing, just about Wen and his family. For this argument, we were very sad and went to Tunxi and lived at Wen’s place for about a week. In Tunxi, I often went to see Xiao Yuan, telling her the problems at home with Liang’s wife. Thanks to her help, we solved our problems at home and also Qing’s future.”

Tingting: “Could you tell me a little bit more about how Mrs Yuan helped with the problems and Qing’s future.”

Mrs Fang: “Qing’s Mum was very jealous of Wen. She always thought we cared more about Wen. In fact, we always cared more about Liang’s family. Liang’s family always had dinner with us without giving a penny. Qing had his middle school in Tunxi City. Because he was not a resident in that local school in Tunxi, his tuition fee was much higher. So half of Qing’s tuition fees have been paid from our savings (Mr and Mrs Fang’s savings). We were caring about Qing’s future by giving some ideas, but she was so pissed off. I told these things to Xiao Yuan and she was very kind and suggested that she would come with us back home to have a chat with Qing’s Mum.”

Tingting: “I see. So you went back home after about a week accompanied by Mrs Yuan?”

Mrs Fang: “Yes. I think although Qing’s Mum is a bad tempered person, she is always respectful to Xiao Yuan.”

Tingting: “Yes. I think Mrs Yuan is a very nice person. I guess Qing’s Mum listens to her.”

Mrs Fang: “Yes. After we went back the village, Xiao Yuan had a private chat with Qing’s Mum in their sitting room. After the chat Xiao Yuan came to my house telling me that she gave some suggestions to Qing’s Mum about Qing’s further study and also about family relations.”

Tingting: “So she told you the details about their conversation.”

Mrs Fang: “She mainly said about the suggestions for Qing’s studying.”

Tingting: “What was Mrs Yuan’s suggestion for Qing?”

Mrs Fang: “The same as us. It was better for Qing to study in a vocational school and learn some practical skills.”

Tingting: “So Qing’s Mum listened?”

Mrs Fang: “Yes. More than that, I was surprised when a day later Liang came to have a chat with me and he brought two hundred yuan for us, saying it was for having dinner with us. I guessed it was because of Xiao Yuan’s chat with Qing’s Mum. I asked Liang and he said it was a suggestion from Xiao Yuan. So from that time, every month Liang gives us two hundred for eating at our place.”

Tingting: “So Mrs Yuan made Qing’s Mum understand that you cared about them.”

Mrs Fang: “Yes. Liang also said sorry for his wife to us and told us not think about the row anymore.”

Tingting: “That was nice. So after Mrs Yuan’s chat, Qing’s Mum was nice to you.”

Mrs Fang: “Yes. I think Xiao Yuan made them realise how she behaved was not right.”

Tingting: “Then how did Mrs Yuan’ help about Qing’s studying and the job Qing is going to start in the hospital?”

Mrs Fang: “Xiao Yuan has a good friend in the Education Bureau in Tunxi. He was the director of an important department in the bureau. But I cannot remember the name of the department in the bureau. So this director helped Qing. Qing had bad marks but the director used some networks in the vocational school in Tunxi and got a place for Qing in the class training to be a nurse. So Qing has studied for five years to be a nurse. But it is worthwhile. Being a nurse in the hospital in Tunxi is a very good job. So all these things make Qing’s Mum very happy, and she is much better now with us. Oh, you know. People helped us and we must thank them. So when it is a traditional festival, I always go to the director’s home accompanied by Mrs Yuan to thank him with some of our home produced products. You know, the director is a fan of home grown products.”

Tingting: “So you cared about your relationship with the director.”

Mrs Fang: “Of course. Also for Qing’s future, I think we had to rely on him to help Qing find a job.”

Tingting: “I am also very happy for Qing to have a nice job. Did he get the job by himself?”

Mrs Fang: “No. Without knowing people, how could he access a job in Tunxi? It was because of the director in the Education Bureau. He has a friend in the HR hospital. Five years ago, when he helped Qing get a place in the nurse class in the vocational school, he told Qing in person that Qing should study hard and learn so that in the future he could help him find a job.”

Tingting: “I see. Qing must listen to his words.”

Mrs Fang: “Yes. Xiao Yuan and this director are so nice to us. Over these years, they come to our family to visit us at some weekends. They always encourage Qing to study hard. You see we farmers do not know about studying so we do not know how to talk with Qing about it. We just say ‘study hard’, but the child does not listen to our words. Xiao Yuan and the director are educated and they know how to speak with Qing about studying.”

Tingting: “Last time at Wen’s daughter’s birthday celebration, I saw the director came as well and you have very good relations with him.”

Mrs Fang: “Indeed. Mrs Yuan and the director are our best friends. I am very lucky having them as friends. When our neighbours saw they were here, they were even joking that ‘you have special guests’.”

Tingting: “Why do you think your neighbours said that?”

Mrs Fang: “They knew a little bit about them from our causal chatting. Also they know they are city people.” (Interview extract, 2 May 2013, lines 24-106)

In her relationship with the director of the Education Bureau in Tunxi, Mrs Fang cares about and puts effort into this because she values the importance of this tie for purposive actions, regarding Qing’s education and his future job. However, her relationship with Mrs Yuan is more affective and less purposive but also often very effective. When I saw Mrs Yuan first time in the Fang house in 2011, I was introduced to her and given some information about the relationship between her and the Fang household. In the 1970s, Mrs Yuan was one of the people sent to work and live in Shang Village as a knowledgeable youth living in the Fang household, and their friendship started then.

The crisis in the Fang household turned into a happy story thanks to help from these two friends, who were both considered ‘special guests’ of the household even by neighbours. From this, the household was helped a lot: Qing’s studying and job, and Wen’s job discussed earlier regarding Wen’s daughter’s birthday celebration, with

Qing and Wen shifting from having a rural to an urban identity as a result of their education and jobs. Access to social capital is shaped by the structural positions of social actors and closely connected with occupation (Lin, 1999b, 1999a). However, it can also be accessed and capitalised through social network connections. The Fang family accessed social resources in the ties they have with people of a high social status. In the case of Mrs Yuan, this came from a friendship that arose from a state policy in the 1970s, with the continuing link with her also opening up access to resources for the next generation.

Another crisis throwing light on how networks can generate social capital concerns the Cheng household and an injury that Mr Cheng had in the 1990s. When I was formally introduced by Huang Shuji to Mr Cheng for the first time in 2011, Mr Cheng told me the story about the injury, which had happened to him about twenty years before. He repeated this story on many occasions and the injury was clearly very significant to him, as I heard him tell the story to different people on various occasions. In addition to fieldnotes from many of these, I also conducted an interview with Mr Cheng's son Gang. This took place after a lunch involving the Cheng household members, Gang, and Gang's friends from Tunxi and Beijing, and occurred in a restaurant during the Chinese New Year festival in 2013. My fieldnotes focus on what Mr Cheng himself told me:

Mr Cheng showed me the scars on his arms and legs, which had been made by lead bullets from another hunter one night when Mr Cheng was in the mountains hunting rabbits and a type of local mountain deer, which was intended for the meals at Gang's wedding. He was sent to the hospital in Tunxi after the villager who shot him found him. However, after being diagnosed in Tunxi, the doctor who had been treating Mr Cheng suggested that he should be transferred to one of the hospitals in Hefei, the capital city of the province, as his injury was too serious for the Tunxi hospital. The doctor also suggested an expert in that hospital in Hefei. The whole family, in

particular Gang, was in a blind panic because Gang's wedding would be in a few days. However, Mr Cheng's health was more important. After family discussion, Kun and Gang decided to transfer their father to the hospital suggested in the faraway city. So Gang had to reschedule his wedding; meanwhile Gang asked his friends in Tunxi who had contacts in Hefei to ask the doctor there to make his father's surgery as soon as possible. Gang's friends in Tunxi finally found the right people in the hospital in Hefei and arranged the surgery for Mr Cheng to take place in two days time.

In the 1990s, travel from Tunxi to Hefei was not as easy as nowadays. By train it took eight to nine hours, by bus ten hours. There was a direct flight from Tunxi to Hefei but it was very expensive. The journey to Hefei posed another big question for the family. Mr Cheng wept when he was telling me this story. He said he had always felt that he did not know how to thank those people who helped him and his family. Mr Cheng emphasised the importance of Gang's friends' great help in this event, without it he would not have survived. One of Gang's friend in Tunxi also asked his friend who was a driver in Tunxi to help. So the driver borrowed a van from his company to take Mr Cheng, Gang, Kun and one of Gang's Tunxi friend to Hefei. Then Mr Cheng had a very successful operation. Gang, Kun, Gang's friend stayed there looking after Mr Cheng until he was discharged from the hospital (Fieldnotes extract, 1 November 2011, p22).

I interviewed Gang after lunch with Mr Cheng's family and Gang's friends on 13/02/2013. This was a goodbye lunch for Gang and his friends, who were leaving for Beijing the day after. Gang organised it and I was invited, and it occurred during the Chinese New Year period. Gang, Gang's wife and his friends from Beijing had spent four days at the Cheng house. They came to Shang Village in cars and Mr Cheng and the family prepared hams and many local agricultural products for them to take back to Beijing. The interview took place in the restaurant:

Tingting: "I am very pleased to meet your friends. Could you tell me a little bit about how you become friends with them, like Mr Shi from Beijing and Mr Xu from Tunxi?"

Gang: "We have been friends for many years. Mr Xu worked at the state owned slaughter house in Tunxi and I met him when I went to work there. It was Mr Zhang from my village who helped me get that job. At that time, Mr Zhang was the manager, but he later set up his own meat processing company. I and Mr Xu worked for his company before I went to work in Inner Mongolia and Beijing. So with Mr Zhang we have been friends ever since."

Tingting: "Who asked you to work in Inner Mongolia?"

Gang: “Mr Zhang’s friend. Many of Mr Zhang’s friends became my friends during those years. They saw I was a guy working hard, so they asked me to work with them in some projects in Inner Mongolia.”

Tingting: “Your father was very grateful to your friends at the lunch. He also told me his story of the injury twenty years ago. Your friends had given him great help.”

Gang: “Yes. I have also been very grateful to these friends. Even if it was twenty years ago, I cannot forget their generous help. They helped find the doctor in the hospital, the journey to Hefei, look after my father in the hospital, and also Mr Zhang provided financial support. You know it was very expensive for us to pay for surgery in a famous hospital in Hefei. Then I rescheduled my wedding. Our family savings had been used for my father’s operation, and Mr Zhang also financially supported my wedding four months after.”

Tingting: “Yes. I see. Their support has been so important in that event. Could you tell me a little bit more detail about how they helped you find the expert in the hospital in Hefei?”

Gang: “Yes, it was very difficult to know how to find the right person for such an urgent event. I had to ask my friends’ help. I thought they are from the city and they may know someone in another city. Fortunately, Mr Zhang has a friend in the Health Bureau in Beijing. So he contacted this friend to ask whether he could find someone in Hefei to make my father get treated as early as possible. It was because of the urgent situation and also because it was very expensive for us to stay in Hefei, like food and accommodation. Mr Zhang’s friend from Beijing knew someone in the Health Bureau in Hefei, so the person from the Health Bureau in Hefei helped us find the expert for the operation on my father.”

Tingting: “Very interesting. So Mr Zhang helped you to connect with the right person at the end. And did you have further contacts with the people in Hefei and Beijing after your father’s operation?”

Gang: “I did, to thank them. I usually post something to them every year around the time just before the Chinese New Year.”

Tingting: “Still now?”

Gang: “Yes. You know, I met the person working in the Health Bureau a few times after I came to work in Beijing. We became friends as well. You see, at this time I will also take some of the hams and agricultural products to his family. This is the way to make friends, we need to show our respect and gratitude. The agricultural products are nothing for them, but it represents my gratitude to them. Now my father only looks after four piglets for our friends. They like our traditionally farmed pork.”

Tingting: “So you have contact with each other in Beijing. Has he helped with other matters after you became friends with him?”

Gang: “Yes, he has helped with something related to medical services in Beijing for my work mates. As we are not local Beijing residents, it is very difficult for us to access to some of the good hospitals there. We need networks, don’t we?”

Tingting: “How often do you and your friends come to visit your family?”

Gang: “My wife and I come once or twice a year at national holiday periods. My friends have only come twice. This is the second time.” (Interview extract, 13 February 2013, lines 133-179)

What Gang told me not only confirmed the importance of networks, but also showed that he was very aware of what the available resources in his networks were that he could capitalise for purposive actions. He is clear that ‘the way to make a friends’ is by showing gratitude in a symbolic way that would help preserve those social resources in the Cheng household’s networks. Similarly, that their pork farming is now only for friends suggests their wider approach maintaining social capital and as an effective strategy for managing different kinds of household resources.

In discussing the affective aspects of network connections in the Zhu household, when Lao Zhu was dying Mrs Zhu’s sister Ying, the vet Mr Liu, and Mr Zhu’s cousin Mei, contributed both their time and their emotional energies. Compared with the other research households, the Zhu household network is much bigger and has more ties with people in Tunxi city. However, the people in Tunxi are mainly business friends who help facilitate Mr Zhu’s business. Lao Zhu passed away in March in 2013 and I attended his funeral on 29/03/2013. In addition, I was invited to the social lunch after the funeral, during which I had conversations with people sitting at the same table. The family members of someone who has died usually organise a lunch to thank the people who have helped them and attended the funeral.

People's conversations at the lunch threw additional light on this crisis in the Zhu household:

At the same table, sitting besides me was a man from Tunxi who is Mr Zhu's friend. He was talking with one of Mrs Zhu's relative, who was sat besides him. From time to time, they involved me in their conversation. Many times during the lunch, they talked about Lao Zhu's illness and his last days. The friend was interested in Mr Zhu's cousin's husband's efforts to find doctors from Shanghai to treat Mr Zhu. The relative was very interested in talking about Mrs Zhu's sister Ying's efforts in the Zhu household, in particular in taking care of Lao Zhu during his last days. They also went into detail about how to find the doctor in Shanghai and about Ying's involvement. The very interesting point for me was that the relative made the comment that "Ying is the emotional pillar in their house" (the Zhu house). The friend also agreed and said that when Lao Zhu was ill, Mr Zhu met him and talked very emotionally about his father's situation and Ying's involvement and help to other members in the Zhu household. I entered their conversation and praised Ying's role during critical period. It seemed my comment made the friend more interested in talking about Ying. He repeated something about Ying that he told the relative, and then he stood up and walked to another table toward Ying, calling everyone's attention by saying, "Everybody, let's toast Ying together. She is the one Lao Zhu and the Zhu family will never forget". So everyone stood up and toasted her.

After toasting Ying, interestingly, this friend also walked to a table where all the people there were officers from different government offices in Tunxi. The friend went to the table saying "I toast you all, you are also the ones always standing beside Mr Zhu". When he came back to sit beside me, I asked him why he said they were the ones always standing beside Mr Zhu. Then the friend told me in a few sentences stories about Mr Zhu's relocation to a new place in 2007 and about his grocery. He said those Tunxi people helped Mr Zhu to relocate to the new land that he and his family were happy about. This reminded me about an interview I had with Mr Zhu in 2011 (Fieldnotes extract, 29 March 2013, p 181).

As a consequence I revisited the interview transcription and my notes from 17/10/2011, which were quoted in extract in the first section of this chapter; I repeat a short section from it here:

Mr Zhu: "Honestly, I think if I have not those people's help and support, my pork farming business would not work, nor our relocation in 2007."

Tingting: "Can I ask you who those people are?"

Mr Zhu: "My relatives and their friends. Now these friends are my friends."

Tingting: “Are they also in Shang Village?”

Mr Zhu: “No. They are in Tunxi. I know them all through my cousin and her husband. When I needed help to start up the pork farming, they helped me find some solutions through their friends, like a small loan from a bank and some useful advice from people in the Agriculture Committee. Gradually, his friends have also become my friends. We have quite frequent contacts.”

Tingting: “You said they are in Tunxi, do you contact them frequently?”

Mr Zhu: “I often go to see them in their office. We often have dinners together...”. (Interview extract, 17 October 2011, lines 84-95)

The Zhu household has a considerable number of network ties which contain rich social resources they are able to call upon in crisis situations and in more ordinary contexts. They mainly used their ties with Tunxi people for their business, as shown for instance regarding the relocation matter. Although Mr Zhu has four brothers, it was the affective connections with Mrs Zhu’s sister Ying, vet Liu, and cousin Mei, which were the resources that were capitalised and which provided practical as well as emotional support for the family during Lao Zhu’s last days. These connections are all clearly of a purposive kind, but with the latter affective too.

The accounts of people in the four research households show that access to and the use of social capital in crisis situations is among other factors affected by people’s social status regarding the high or low status of their occupation. In a crisis situation, village households are pushed to seek for and use social resources from their network ties with people in higher positions in the social structure, because these ties facilitate accessing more effective social resources. That this helps to solve problems in a crisis situation is shown by the city relatives’ phone call about Huang Shuji’s mother’s hospital bed, Mrs Yuan’s help with the family row and Qing’s educational

choices, city friends' help with securing Mr Cheng's surgery, and Mr Zhu's cousin's help with their relocation and during Lao Zhu's illness.

What these stories about crises indicate is that the quality of social resources is more important than the quantity when in crisis situations. The Huang, Fang and Cheng households do not have many ties which connect them to people with high social status. But when crises occur, the ties they do have are able to provide valuable resources which help them overcome difficulties.

In the case of the Zhu household relocation, resources from their network links with city friends were crucial. Regarding the crisis of Lao Zhu's illness, although the Zhu household has lots of connections with people in Tunxi city, the resources they capitalised here came from those few people who are more emotionally connected with the household, including Ying and Mr Liu, whose social status is of farmers. In this circumstance, Mr Zhu had no interest in capitalising social resources from the connections with the city friends he maintained for his pork business. Instead, he valued his kinship ties, which provided the most effective resources in that circumstance. This also conveys that the quality of ties within a household network should not be examined just from the view point of people's structural position in a society, but is importantly related to people's understandings of changes in the household and also of the value of different relationships in the process of adaptation to changes.

Conclusion

The complexity of the household seen as a 'system' has been discussed in detail in Chapter 4 around the divisions of labour, household work and changing economic life of the four Shang Village households. Gendered divisions of labour in these village households are prominent, with women having become the household resources managers managing the household's economic resources. Although this is the tradition in patriarchal rural society, village men have become more open-minded and generally have come to trust their wives' management abilities. This has partly occurred because of the substantial increase of better paid industrial job opportunities for village men, with many now working in a very different environment compared with the village. This has gradually reshaped men's attitudes towards women and the possible organisation of control in households. It has also in part occurred because women are in fact very good at managing household resources and tasks and many men accept this. However, as commented by Huang Shuji, Mr Fang and Kun, men's power over the household is deep-rooted and men are often reluctant to accept the corollary, that women are just as good as and equal to them. However, women's confidence in their abilities and their pursuit of their freedom independent from men is being further developed through their involvement in work outside of their households and the village.

The value of both material and non-material resources is interpreted differently across the generations of household members, as discussed in Chapter 5. People's views of kinds of resources are varied and connected with their understanding of the value of other resources in certain circumstances and at different stages in their lives.

Knowledge and education are commonly seen as the only means to change rural people's destiny because enabling them to gain high prestige jobs and good livelihoods in cities. For villagers who are parents and grandparents, financial capital is important and is mainly used to fund children's education. So many younger parents are willing to become workers in cities in order to earn enough for this purpose, although often they also think they will return to the village in old age, because their roots are in the soil. However, the youngest generations dislike being farmers and dislike living in villages, and have a considerable detachment from the land and adaptation to changes and a city way of life, for they are more profoundly influenced by the modern world. People's access to and mobilisation of networks and social capital underpin all of the things concerning resources and household activities discussed in earlier chapters, and so networks and social capital have been the focus of analysis in this chapter. This has provided a different angle from which to explore the kinds of network relationships existing in each household and how people are connected. Kinship and neighbouring ties are located in circumstances of close proximity. The ties of friendship are usually built through work or by introductions by emotionally close kin. Making friends is in fact viewed largely but not entirely as purposive for facilitating certain actions.

The emotional bonds among people in networks are shaped by their understandings of normative expectations as well as love or liking, and are often highlighted by how events and celebrations are organised and carried out. For the research households, their emotional bonds are mainly composed by relatives, but also include friends and neighbours. Sharing important social events strengthens these emotional ties. The availability of social resources and how networks operate in practice as effective

social capital are explained by how people choose to draw on certain ties but not others when crisis situations in the households occur. The 'objective' usefulness of networks and social resources are affected by social status, but in practice the ability to rely on people with whom there are strong emotional links is more important.

Network is an important part of the household resources system and focusing on this shows how social resources are embedded in household practices. Exploring the organisation of household activities and events, as I have done in this chapter, shows how people's network connections work in practice. It also interestingly demonstrates the usefulness of focusing on crises, for this demonstrates that people's different understandings of the value and effectiveness of their social networks shapes how they mobilise the available resources to solve critical problems in crisis contexts. Bian (1997) argues that strong ties are more helpful in the Chinese society because strong ties involve trust and obligation. However, the stories of the crises in the four households demonstrate mainly the importance of weak ties that help generating useful non-material resources which are scarce in the rural households.

Conclusion

The narrative inquiry project discussed and analysed in this thesis has explored the dynamics of four households in Shang Village, in the Huangshan area of Southeast China, where small-holding livelihoods are being challenged by social and economic changes in the local area due to the wider industrialisation and urbanisation processes occurring in China. My research is concerned with how rural households are responding to these changes, and how the resources they have affect their livelihoods, choices and household viability. These households are interdependent ‘systems’ involving cultural expectations, resource dynamics and economic activities and affective bonds, which together make up the lives of their members. In exploring how this ‘works’ and unfolding changes in it, I was drawn to thinking of these households as ‘resource systems’, similarly to how Wallman (1984) conceptualised and studied a small group of London households and their material (land, labour and capital) and non-material resources (information, time, identity and knowledge), the exchanges with other households they engaged in, and the social resources embedded in their social network connections. My analysis of my fieldwork data regarding the four households has focused on three major areas: the economic lives of the households and their divisions of labour and household work; the organisation of material and non-material aspects of the household economy; and social networks and the social resources that the households draw on.

The cultural system of the household is stressed by Carter (1984), including the rules and strategies that relate to household structure, activities and management; while Wallman (1984) proposes the idea of the household as resource system, concerning the impact of non-material as well as material resources on household livelihoods. In

my research, the meanings of household activities and styles of household livelihood are explored by integrating both cultural and normative aspects and also resource aspects into concerned of an intricate and complex household and its workings. Using a narrative inquiry approach, and the three main analytical focuses in the thesis, have together enabled understanding the dynamics of the research households from a comprehensive viewpoint. In addition, knowledge and education have been highlighted as crucial resources for village households in their adaptations to change. Working beyond Wallman's and Carter's approaches, my research has presented multi-faceted household lives in considerable depth of engagement and also in doing so has highlighted that the researcher and household members engage mutually constructed process of producing convincing narratives about households, people's activities and the related meanings they assign to these in a rapidly changing historical and social context.

My research as a result makes a distinctive contribution to the current state of knowledge about Chinese rural households in four key respects: concerning the conceptualisation of household life, by seeing it as a complex many-faceted set of people and activities, a system; my use of a narrative method of inquiry to carry out research on village households; regarding how household members experience and understand their lives and the changing context they live in; and changing gender roles in these rural households.

Firstly, I have conceptualised the household in Shang Village as a 'system', that is, as composed by interdependent relationships and activities on the basis of its members' cultural expectations and preferences, resources dynamics and economic activities. Netting (1993) comments that small-holding households, their activities

and the related meanings its members give to these should be considered in a more integrated way, because the small-holding household is not only a farm enterprise, but also a social group with affective bonds, maintaining its continuity through time and in the context of the scarcity of resources. This is something I have pursued across Chapters 3, 4, 5 and 6. In addition, my analysis has also recognised that the boundaries of these small-holding households have been significantly reshaped by an ongoing process of household members' managing resources in such a way as to adapt to social and economic changes, and also increasingly working outside of the village, sometimes on a temporary or part-time basis, sometimes more permanently. The style of living in the four households and the choices their members make is of course affected by the allocation and optimisation of the limited material and non-material resources they have. And as I have shown, there are important variations and differences here, although on the surface people share a similar resource base.

From the collectivisation period through to the Household Responsibility System, although things have improved, the village household has experienced an overall shortage of material resources such as capital, information and education. This is reflected in the changing patterns of work in these small-holding households, in order to pursue sufficient funds for children's education and their possible future careers in cities. The accounts and stories of people in the four research households show that rural parents (and grandparents) often take on relatively better paid but still low-skilled work in cities, in order to provide financial support for their children's education. The young generations of people who were born in farming households but who lack resource are attracted by an urban way of life, high status occupations and greater access to desired resources.

Social resources, not just material ones, play an important role even when access to other resources is restricted. The range of responses to crises in the research households shows how villagers are adapting to change by mobilising – capitalising – the social resources embedded in their networks as a form of social capital. A problem becomes a crisis when the resources needed for its solution are not readily available. The crises spoken about to me by people in the four research households are all concerned with non-traditional aspects of life, such as hospital treatment, education, careers and administrative work in governmental offices, rather than traditional small-holding life in the village. People’s close relatives and village neighbours are unlikely to be of direct assistance in these kinds of crisis, and it is the ‘weak ties’ with their connections in cities that are drawn on as a consequence, as my research shows.

Conceptualising and researching the household as resource system has also brought to attention the practical ways that Shang people adapt to the changing environment by trying to achieve the best organisation of available resources in their household. The village households mainly depend on agricultural production on the land distributed to the household. The small-holding household used to be a basic and intensive unit of production and consumption and the small-holding activities engaged in maintained self-sufficiency. However, industrialisation, urbanisation and other facets of modernisation have had wide impact over the last thirty years and have also had significant effects regarding the resources and cultural expectations of village households. The small-holding household members make choices about how to live their lives in this context. Importantly, as my research shows, the choices made and the strategies used by village household members to adapt to these changes

have in fact furthered the processes of industrialisation, urbanisation and modernisation, although it is inevitable that there are many difficulties during the process and many varieties of adaptation. The majority of household members have become part-time, temporary or permanent workers in cities, with members of the younger generation studying hard to be qualified to compete for high status jobs in the city, strong presences in my research findings.

Secondly, Mills (1970 [1959]) stresses the significance of meanings and the importance of bringing together biography, time and social structure in investigating the processes of continuance and change in a society. The experiences of the village household members and their understandings and use of different resources have been explored here through a narrative inquiry approach. This views the accounts and stories that people tell as versions of reality, told from particular viewpoints, and with an individual's storytelling giving meaning to events as constructed in a grounded context (Riessman, 1989). However, as my research shows, individual people's different ways of coping with changes and talking about this reflect not only that person's role and aspirations in a particular household, but also the particularities faced by Chinese small-holding households more generally.

As a result of people's efforts to adapt to changes, household styles of livelihood and boundaries have been and are still being reshaped. Also household members' adaptations to these changes have in turn contributed to the process of change and of urbanisation, industrialisation and modernisation. Clearly, the stories people tell have constructed the meaning of continuity and change in household life located in a specific social context. These stories concerning people's responses and adaptations to changes also speak to their sense of identity and understandings of their lives and

those of others in their households, a strong flavour of which comes through in my research.

A narrative approach is concerned with stories about individual people's lives, in my research in the household context. Notably, these life stories are not stories in the sense of fictions or made-up accounts. In my narrative inquiry project, the stories told by these village people and households are concerned with the meaning of people's life experiences and their specific viewpoints concerning identities that are constructed in a larger social process. Using a narrative inquiry approach has enabled me to investigate and reflect this complex matter from detailed perspectives, in order to gain valuable insights into how people understand things and why they make the particular choices about material and other resources that they do.

Relatedly, a narrative inquiry approach recognises that the researcher's presence makes a difference, because this approach stresses that the researcher is an active agent in the making sense of interacting with participants, and interpreting and analysing the storied and lived lives they are told about. During my research process, the idea of 'joined up thinking' (Stanley, 2009, 2013) about stories has always informed my reflections on my fieldwork activities and recordings of these, concerning the ways that storied lives and lived lives intermesh with past experiences and present practices. I find 'attentive responsiveness' to people's telling about their lives is critically essential, with my attentive inquiring and understanding the intermeshing of the past and present an important dimension of my research. This is also emphasised by Jamieson et al. (2011) in researching families and relationships, including that self-reflexive awareness has great impact on the data collection

process because it involves interactions between researchers and respondents, as well as the processes of constructing and interpreting data.

The stories that people told about life in the People's Commune period and their understandings of resources and identities in their present lives are complex ones. There is no clear cut and simple 'past' and 'present', but their interconnected presence in people's ongoing lived experiences. But of course the meaning of those experiences, the effects of different life events, people's different attitudes at different times and on different occasions, are crucial to social inquiry, and attentiveness to them is the key means of achieving a 'joined up thinking' that connects individual people's accounts with large-scale social processes.

My presence as a researcher in the inquiring process has impacted on how people have explored their life experiences with me. My research involvement with the village households indicates that being attentive with people and concerning household events is the most important thing in gaining in-depth accounts from people about their experiences. It is perhaps inevitable that someone's age impacts on how they think about and understand a particular historical event: for example, Mr Cheng's son Gang thought his city friends and I might not be interested in Mr Cheng telling stories about the People's Commune period, because those are considered by him and many young people as 'old stuff' and relating to difficult matters. However, my 'attentive responsiveness' influenced the older generation of people, like Mr Cheng and Mr Fang, who found me a 'rare' listener for their past experiences, which they value but not speak about much. This response from the young also affects how these older villagers understand their past experiences and also themselves in the present context, which came to light while talking with me. In

addition, being a family friend because of my father's connections as a youth in the village has brought a sense of familiarity between the villagers and me, and this has facilitated rich data collection by being trusted with in-depth conversations and being invited to personal events, sometimes of a life and death kind. Furthermore, my researcher's involvement in the inquiring process has helped in constructing 'storied stories', that is, the interpreting and analysing I have carried out and written about here. Regarding my research, village households and people's lives have been storied in a purposive manner with particular analytical focuses, discussed in the different chapters of the thesis. All of these interactions between me and the research households and their members in the research process have been the fundamental means for achieving sociological understanding of these households in the context of ongoing social changes.

The four research households have been broadly conceptualised as resource systems, as discussed and analysed in earlier chapters. Resources have been analysed regarding household divisions and work, making decisions and expressing choices, resources management influenced by gender, age and cultural normative expectations, and networks as social resources. Situating this conceptualisation in a narrative inquiry approach has underpinned my exploration of village households in present-day China, their adaptations to current enormous changes in their living environment and their choices for life as connected with their understandings of their past experiences. In-depth accounts of the kind I have drawn on cannot be obtained by detaching research from the particular time and context and people's relationships within particular social structures and processes. Of course, some understanding of households and peoples' lives can be gained from a different focus and using another

kind of approach, but exploring the intersections of biography, time and social structure in the way I have done in this thesis requires the in-depth, considered attentiveness of a narrative inquiring approach and methodology. This has provided important insights into understanding the meaning of people's choices and activities in their various adaptations to change.

Third, matters of identity are an important aspect of this changing social and economic context. In village households, how people see themselves and others is one of the shaping and organising resources at work. Identity, or more exactly biography as the telling of lives and selves, is one of the focuses of narrative methodology, and it has been pointed out that the continual production of 'the self' and meaning arises from people's interaction with others (Mills, 1970 [1959]; Elliott, 2005; Merrill and West, 2009; Stanley, 2009). My research shows how people's thinking about self and identity is crucial to the success or failure of adaptations to social change and also to urban life. It also highlights that self identity, which is continuously being modified, is best studied by analysing the stories that people tell, for these do indeed express a point of view, that of the people who are living out the processes of change.

In the research households, some members are of a generation born in the 1990s after the distribution of agricultural land had stopped. These young people have different views of farming life and of their own identities from the older generations. In order to earn money for their children and family, the older generation of farmers have detached themselves from the land to do temporary work in cities, even though they still see their roots in the village. However, the aspirations of the younger generation are more concerned with getting rid of the farmer identity and becoming a city

dweller. On one level, this is a matter of free choice and the attractions of the city. However, using a narrative inquiry approach focuses on the stories that people tell of their life experiences, and in my research these stories told in conversations and interviews reveal the difficulties that members of all the four households face in coping with inadequate resources as they adjust to change, with identity matters being both a cause and a consequence of this process of adaptation.

So the identity and lived livelihoods of people in of small-holding households are not only a matter of resources as shown on the Household Registration Booklet, but are also a basis for their understanding of what is happening to them and others in a changing society and how best to respond. People in the four households are active in this, as agents and not just recipients of change. Their choices are made in an interactive way in balancing ‘ultimate aspirations’ and ‘practical management’, and as my analysis has shown, these choices have to take account of the availability of resources of different kinds in the broader context of the cultural backgrounds of the households.

Fourth, analysis of my fieldwork to date has shown throughout that the adaptations of the households and their members to social and economic change have altered gender roles; and also that people, especially women, have grasped this opportunity to re-structure household work and also paid employment choices and divisions. These changes of gender roles are closely connected with resource management and household organisation. Household forms are affected by cultural gender ideas and expectations (Linares, 1984) and gender is also socially constructed in the household context (Bott, 1957; Glazer, 1980; Walby, 1988; Morris, 1990). In the research households, these changes in the domestic context are shown in the management of

both material and non-material resources, regarding the shifting relationship between 'household head' and 'resource manager' and the increasing status and decision-making role played by the resource manager. Traditionally, the senior man was the holder of domestic power in households and his wife did not have a say regarding the most important resources of land, labour and capital, while the changes occurring have had a dramatic impact on this as well as other aspects of gender in these household. And as my research has shown, these changes are in turn also shaped by the different ways of obtaining and managing resources, and the management of particular resources by different household members, that exist.

In the research households, the wives of household heads have gradually become the managers of resources. This is because of the impact of the increasing availability of paid employment opportunities of an unskilled kind in the industrial sector, with the financial rewards being much higher than through farming activities. Male farmers are attracted to industrial construction work, and so the management of resources in the small-holding households has to devolve onto their wives. But it is even more so because rural women have more and more opportunities, and also the required knowledge, to improve their own and their household's financial circumstances and also to increase their social resources through non-agricultural work outside of the house. There are many signs of change to expectations, attitudes and activities regarding gender matters in the Shang Village households, including seemingly mundane things like people's interactions at the dinner table, with these complex matters related to access to and the management of material and non-material resources. Crucially, what has shifted is how people understand and value the relationship between resources management and practical matters in the household.

Finally, my research has shown the importance of both traditional values and the new values that people see arising from modernisation in how they are adapting to change. Individuals in the households walk a tight-rope in attempting to keep a balance between respecting tradition and keeping pace with change. Confronted by industrialisation urbanisation and modernisation, analysing the four households in terms of resources has demonstrated that, although material resources are not plentiful, people experience themselves to be more limited by the non-material resources available to them. Though there are variations in resource management between the households, all four have members who have sought out better material resources by becoming temporary low-skilled workers in cities. But it is due to the much greater importance people assign to non-material resources that members of the younger generation are making increasing efforts to become permanent city dwellers, in order not just to access resources unavailable in the village, but more fundamentally to live different kinds of lives and be different kinds of people. The only way available for them to do this is to equip themselves with sufficient knowledge through education. But how to do this? My research shows that, among the many changes occurring, the social networks of village households are changing too. Traditionally, the networks of village households were primarily those of kinship and neighbourhood ties. In order to access and mobilise social resources for other wider purposive actions, people have to develop 'weak' but effective ties with city dwellers in high status positions of different kinds and these are of critical importance to the solution of significant problems and crises experienced by the village households.

Although the result of my study of four small-holding households in one Chinese village, Shang Village in Huangshan, cannot be generalised to all rural households in China, it does have explanatory power. It provides a grounded understanding, backed by the analysis of richly detailed research data, of rural households in the processes of adaptation to ongoing social and economic changes. ‘Social change’ is not just a slogan, but stands for how people struggle to live their lives, make choices, and endeavour to adapt in productive ways. My research, and the narrative inquiry approach it has adopted in looking at ‘resources’ in a very grounded and detailed way, has provided a distinctive and I hope convincing account of the processes they are engaged in.

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