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WOMEN IN CHINA'S  
LONG TWENTIETH CENTURY



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# 1. Marriage, Family, Sexuality, and Gender Difference

China has long been portrayed by Chinese and foreigners both as the home of a thoroughly entrenched patriarchal family system and as a place where the 1949 revolution and the post-Mao reforms massively rearranged marriage, family, and affective life. The scholarship reviewed here introduces nuance and local variation into this picture, and redraws some sections of it altogether. Patriarchy and gender hierarchy (the term favored in scholarly discussion more recently) are locally variable, mediated by other sorts of ties, and at the same time extremely adaptable to the successive environments of revolution and reform, flourishing in new venues even as the old ones disappear. Revolution and reform from the final years of the Qing dynasty to the present have been both corrosive and preservative of family arrangements, reconstituting gender relations in ways that can be distressingly predictable or intermittently surprising. Across the long twentieth century, key meanings of modernity have been worked out in public discussions—official, intellectual, pop-cultural, and overlapping—about marriage, family, sexuality, and gender difference.

## MARRIAGE

The story of Chinese marriage practices in the twentieth century has often been told as a transformation from family-based oppression to limited individual choice—or in another register, from feudalism to socialism—with the PRC's 1950 Marriage Law marking an important, if ultimately incomplete, moment of progress. Every piece of this story has been called into question by recent scholarship. Courtship practices and discussions about love and attraction have indeed changed across the twentieth century, but the temporality of these changes is uneven and not easy to clas-

sify. Women's transition into married life turns out to be more partial, less traumatic, and more varied than we have usually acknowledged. The Marriage Law produced more long-term effects than its feminist critics realized and was used in ways unforeseen and not endorsed by its authors. If marital satisfaction receives more public discussion than it used to, so does marital discord.

### *Courtship and Wedding Practices*

Social spaces in which young people might meet one another proliferated in urban areas during the Republican period, expanding significantly in towns and villages after 1949, particularly in the 1960s and 1970s (Davin 1988; Gates 1999; Y. Yan 2002). Nevertheless, Sulamith Potter and Jack Potter (1990) note considerable constraints on contacts between young men and women in 1970s and early 1980s Guangdong. In a study of the politics of marriage from the early 1960s to the mid-1970s, based on policy documents, case studies in the press, and a small number of interviews, Elisabeth Croll (1981) found a range of parental involvement in the marriage choices of their children, with parents often initiating a match in rural areas and consenting to their children's choices in urban areas. These types of parental action were generally regarded as compatible with free-choice marriage. Through the end of the Mao years and well into the reform era, parental participation in mate choice continued in both urban and rural settings, although senior generations no longer had unilateral control (Parish and Whyte 1978; Honig and Hershatter 1988; Selden 1993; Whyte 1993; X. Zang 1999; Y. Yan 2002; Yuen, Law, and Ho 2004; Friedman 2006). Mothers appear to have exercised more influence in their children's marriages and family relations in general than did fathers (X. Zang 1999; Jankowiak 2002). During the collective period, officials attempted unsuccessfully to discourage betrothal and its attendant gifts, with their connotations of family exchange and the purchase of women. Attempts to encourage courtship had more effect in urban than in rural areas (Croll 1981).

The rearrangements in rural life caused by collectivization affected marriage choice, but not always in the way that policy makers intended. Croll (1981) suggests that because the geographical mobility of peasants was limited during the collective period, in contrast with the Republican era, primary kin groups retained a great deal of influence over rural marriage negotiations. William Parish and Martin Whyte (1978) find that during the collective period, bride price (at least in Guangdong) became far more important than dowry, enough to cover much of the expenses of the bride's family and leave enough surplus to help bring in a wife for the son. They

link the increase in bride price to women's increased work in the fields, which made the acquisition of rights to women's labor more valuable.

The notion of an ideal spouse, which did not necessarily overlap with that of an ideal affine, emerged during the collective period. Political and socioeconomic standing, although sometimes in conflict, were both considered important (Croll 1981). In rural areas, migration was strictly controlled, some locales were better off than others, and marriage was generally patrilocal. Marriage migration was one of the few ways that women could move out and up, and women's mate choice was profoundly influenced by spatial hierarchy (Lavelly 1991), a trend that intensified in the reform period (C. Fan and Huang 1998; C. Fan and Li 2002; L. Tan and Short 2004).

Since the 1980s, discussions of compatibility, affect, and intimacy have loomed large in public discussions of courtship (Honig and Hershatter 1988). The spread of television and foreign programming have also shaped village social imaginaries and notions of desirability and appropriate behavior (Y. Yan 2002). Yunxiang Yan (2002, 2003) further finds that changing expectations of courtship have been shaped importantly for both young men and women by periods of migrant labor outside the village. Under the post-Mao reforms, he notes that young men are valued for the ability to articulate emotions and to make money, and young women for beauty, adornment, and a sweet temperament (see also Hooper 1984; Honig and Hershatter 1988; Jankowiak 1993, 2002; Yuen, Law, and Ho 2004).

Yan (2002, 2003) also suggests that among the youth of rural North China, love, intimacy, and premarital sex have become the focus of courtship. Autonomy in mate choice, the main courtship issue among young rural people soon after 1949, is no longer particularly controversial. In Fujian in the 1990s, according to Sara Friedman (2000, 2005, 2006), state enforcement of minimum marriage ages has encouraged young couples to get to know one another, and even to cohabit, prior to marriage. Yan and Friedman both find widespread acceptance of premarital sex between engaged couples, although Friedman adds that speaking about sexual activity and sexual pleasure may incur social disapproval. Other scholars find that female virginity has continued to be valued in a bride, even as premarital sex has become more common (Whyte 1990; X. Zang 1999). Yan (2002, 2003) notes that young women, supported by their fiancés, have taken initiative in dating, determining marital gifts, and deciding when the newly married couple should separate households.

Many of the reform-era changes in mate choice and wedding practices were already under way in the Mao years, and urban bureaucratic structures continued to shape the lives and marriage calculations of young people

and their parents well into the reform period (Whyte 1990). These included the possession of a coveted urban residence permit, which limited access to the “urban public goods regime” (Solinger 1999) and was as difficult to obtain in new boomtowns such as Shenzhen (Clark 2001) as in more established cities. Nevertheless, the reform era involved new considerations in the search for an ideal spouse. Men from poor rural areas were willing to enter uxori-local marriages (marriages into the household of the wife’s family) to women in prosperous peri-urban areas, while women from poorer inland provinces began to marry out to coastal areas, leading to bride shortages in their regions of origin (Davin 1997, 1999). In the Pearl River delta, some migrant women entered into long-term liaisons with Hong Kong men in a practice of “cross-border polygyny” (Lang and Smart 2002). Among urban Shanghai women in the 1990s, James Farrer (2002) finds pressure to marry up the social scale defined in the terms of the market economy. Since women are the first to be laid off when enterprises downsize, they look to men for material security while simultaneously stressing the importance of emotional expressiveness and connection in making a good match. At the same time, young men under increased pressure to provide for a future wife also need to know how to demonstrate romantic feelings.

Urban women have begun to entertain the possibility of transnational upward mobility through marriage to foreign citizens. In such transactions, Chinese women may represent “traditional” values of support and nurturance to bride-seeking men from other Asian nations (Clark 2001), while overseas Chinese and foreign men represent the possibility of modernity and wealth to urban Chinese women (Ong 1999; Erwin forthcoming). Anxieties about Chinese masculinity and the ability of Chinese men to “master” transnationality by marrying and satisfying white women are aired in popular media productions, eliding the role of Chinese women altogether (Erwin 1999).

Until the 1980s, rural marriage rituals, although somewhat modified from pre-Liberation practices (fewer sedan chairs or religious observances, less elaborate wedding feasts), continued both to feature the transfer of gifts between families and to occasion official exhortations to frugality (Croll 1981). In the reform era, both bride-price and dowry costs have escalated dramatically, often requiring contributions beyond the couple themselves (M. Johnson, Parish, and Lin 1987; Honig and Hershatter 1988; Ocko 1991; Siu 1993; Whyte 1990, 1993; Pasternak and Salaff 1993; Bossen 2002). A disapproving state has framed this development as a resurgence of old customs in a time of new prosperity (Honig and Hershatter 1988; Potter and Potter 1990). Croll (1994) links rising bride prices to the increased need

for family labor: when one family gains a daughter-in-law's labor, another loses a daughter's economic contributions. Potter and Potter (1990) attribute more elaborate and expensive weddings to the need to cement kinship ties, which became newly important in the early years of the reforms. Whyte (1990) has determined, however, that the rise in wedding costs in Chengdu began in 1970, well before the current reform-era rise in incomes. Helen Siu argues that the increase in marital payments in the Pearl River delta is no longer about transfers of wealth or declarations of prestige involving the bride's and groom's families but, rather, comprises "the intense and rapid devolution of property to the conjugal couple at the time of marriage itself" (1993: 170). Yunxiang Yan (2002, 2003) confirms this conclusion for rural north China. Here the old practice of marital payments has taken on new meanings, marking the changing relationship between senior generations and their children.

In urban Xi'an, Maris Gillette (2000a, 2000b) notes the adoption during the 1990s of elaborate, rented Western-style wedding gowns among Hui (Muslim) Chinese as well as the Han majority. The selection and display of these gowns is an occasion for brides to define themselves as modern and cosmopolitan through consumption. Gillette also argues that urban Hui women's willingness to wear these gowns bespeaks a lesser degree of involvement with formal Islamic religious practice than that of men.

### *Revisiting Women's Transition into Married Life*

Descriptions of marriage practices across the twentieth century, among both elites and the less affluent, have focused on the patriarchal, patrilocal, and patrilineal features of marriage. Scholars have paid particular attention to the disjuncture marking a woman's move from her natal to marital family (M. Wolf 1972, 1985; Johnson 1983). Much feminist scholarship has explored the disadvantages of this practice for young rural women: it uprooted them from childhood social networks, made them temporary and therefore less-valued members of their natal households, subjected them to a wrenching transition and a period of extreme vulnerability to husbands and in-laws, and in the postrevolutionary period placed constraints on their ability to develop political and social networks that would support them in leadership roles (M. Wolf 1972, 1985; Johnson 1983). At marriage, Rubie Watson (1986) tells us, rural women literally lost their childhood names and were known henceforth mainly by kinship terms, denying them the full personhood attainable by men. Margery Wolf's now-classic (1972) concept of the uterine family, in which women built affective ties to their own children while improving their standing by contributing to the patriline

of their marital families, remains an important exploration of daily coping strategies under conditions of patrilocality. Her analysis (1975) of suicide statistics among newly married women in early-twentieth-century Taiwan is a grim reminder that the transition from daughter to daughter-in-law was fraught with emotional and physical danger.

From the Republican period to the present, Croll (1995) argues, girls have anticipated and undergone a major rupture in their lives at the point of marriage. She speculates that this gives rise to a crucial feature of gender difference, "female-specific concepts of both measured and fantasy time" (1995: 6), which has alienated women from political change, itself imagined to take place in linear time advancing toward a glorious future. The cluster of scholarly work on twentieth-century marriage reviewed here, however, read alongside recent work on marriage practices in the late imperial period (Ko 1994; Mann 1997), indicates that we need "to revise what has been portrayed as the lonely, subjugated predicament of women in a major marriage," and acknowledge that women have "contributed their part in shaping marital expectations and the content of accompanying rituals" (Siu 1990: 50).

Marriage practices have not been uniform. In work that ranges from the late imperial period to the recent past, Hill Gates (1989, 1996a) argues that a petty-capitalist mode of production centered on family businesses led to regionally variable marriage forms in which families sought to maximize the returns on young women's labor, and in some cases to commoditize women outright. Arthur Wolf (1975) describes high rates of minor, or "little-daughter-in-law," marriage as reflected in northern Taiwan population registers. He and others find that some version of minor marriage was practiced, if not as commonly, in the Pearl River delta and other areas, where it was associated with poverty (A. Wolf 1975; R. Watson 1994; Hayes 1994).

Arthur Wolf also uses data from Taiwan to discuss uxorilocal marriage, which he argues led to weaker conjugal bonds and higher divorce rates than major marriage (A. Wolf 1975). Uxorilocal marriage, however, has not always been regarded as an inferior practice, as Weijing Lu (1998) suggests in her study of mobility-conscious elites in the lower Yangzi during the eighteenth century. In rural Yunnan, Laurel Bossen (2002) finds that uxorilocal marriage has been practiced for generations without stigma, and that in the reform period it has enabled men to expand their political and economic influence via both natal and marital kinship networks.

Marjorie Topley (1975) describes nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century marriage resistance among women in silk-producing areas of the Canton delta. She links lifelong refusal to marry, as well as various forms

of delayed marriage, to employment possibilities for unmarried women in sericulture. Spinster sisterhoods emerged among working women who swore not to marry, announced their vows in rituals similar to those of marriage, and often resided in spinster houses, contributing support to the families of their brothers (Sankar 1984, 1985; Jaschok 1984). When the silk industry collapsed during the depression of the 1930s and the subsequent Japanese invasion, many of these women migrated to Hong Kong and southeast Asia, became domestic servants, and joined Daoist or Buddhist vegetarian halls in which they passed their retirement. Their relationships with one another were sometimes sexual (Sankar 1985).

Janice Stockard (1989) describes a widespread and accepted pattern of delayed-transfer marriage in the Canton delta in which women remained in their natal families for variable but sometimes lengthy periods after marriage, visiting their husbands' families on ritual occasions and contributing to the economy of their natal households by working in the silk industry. In contrast to Topley, she argues that this was not marriage resistance, but rather an alternative set of marriage practices supported by the woman's family and regarded as proper behavior. By the turn of the twentieth century, it could shade over into forms of sanctioned marriage resistance in which a woman negotiated a compensation marriage so that her husband could acquire a secondary wife. Siu (1990) points out that delayed-transfer marriage was practiced in this area well before the advent of mechanized silk production, and that it was common among elite families who had no direct need for their women to generate income. In her reading, delayed-transfer marriage, accompanied by large dowries, was a means for elite families to distinguish themselves from commoners in a process by which earlier non-Han customs "were creatively fused with Confucian practices" (Siu 1990: 52). In the early twentieth century, Siu hypothesizes, delayed-transfer marriage was adapted into a form of marriage resistance by silk-producing women. Studies of women's writings in southern Hunan (Silber 1994; Chiang 1995; F. Liu 2004) suggest that a form of delayed-transfer marriage may have been practiced there as well, and that there too the practice may have been an indicator of non-Han origins or influence. In southeastern Fujian, a variant of the same practice has persisted well into the 1990s in spite of assiduous state attempts to discourage it during the collective period (Friedman 2000, 2006).

Structures of affect and their change over time remain particularly opaque in the scholarship on women, but much of what we do know concerns a woman's transition into marriage. In a study of women's expressive culture in the early-twentieth-century Pearl River delta, Rubie Watson

(1994) describes girls' houses, where girls took up residence from about age ten until marriage. There young women learned "bridal laments, funeral dirges and embroidery styles" (1994: 39), religious and work songs, festival customs, and sometimes literacy skills. Through bridal laments, young women reaffirmed their existence as sisters and daughters, mourned the forthcoming separation from natal family, and actively participated in their own transformation into wives (R. Watson 1996). These laments sometimes describe marriage and a woman's separation from family in terms of death and war (Martin 1988). Elizabeth Johnson (1988) points out that weddings and funerals are occasions at which women, but not men, are permitted to articulate their feelings, and the feelings they express deal with concerns specific to their position as women in the family. In her study of women's funeral laments in a New Territories Hakka village in the mid-1970s, Johnson (1988) notes that a woman may take the occasion of lamenting a deceased relative to mourn her own fate and criticize others (including the deceased) for their treatment of her, while presenting her own virtues, much as women do in Hakka bridal laments (Blake 1978). Such laments were orally transmitted and few of them survive. Potter and Potter (1990) found that laments were no longer sung in the Guangdong village where they conducted research in the 1980s, but that marriage was still defined as a wrenching experience for women.

At marriage a bride left friends as well as family. The "women's script" (*nüshu*) written and sometimes sung by women in southern Hunan prior to 1949 (Silber 1994; Chiang 1995; F. Liu 2004; L. Zhao 2004) records *laotong* (lit., "old same") relationships between girls and young women, describing them as formally negotiated non-kin pairings between age-mates from different villages. They were expected to last a lifetime, and their interruption at marriage added to the pain of departure from a network of girlhood attachments. Silber contends that "a reading of village exogamous marriage solely in terms of the way it changes a bride's relationship to her natal family slights the importance of non-kin social arrangements" (1994: 49). This point is reinforced by descriptions of girls' houses and women's friendships in the delayed-transfer marriage area (Stockard 1989; R. Watson 1994) and the women's *dui pnua* networks of coastal Fujian (Friedman 2006), which permitted affective networks among girls of the same age to flourish. Put another way, formulaic expressions of antipathy to marriage (McLaren 1996, 1999; F. Liu 2004) may well have expressed reluctance to part from peers as well as natal families.

Texts written in women's script yield other messages as well. McLaren (1996, 1998, 1999) finds in them an oral transmission of a women's culture,

reinterpreting Confucian norms for women, in which tales of women's abduction feature heroic endurance, virtue, and resistance to male intimidation. Fei-wen Liu (2001) uses *nüshu* and *nüge*, women's songs, to explore the ways that widows negotiated the demands of fidelity to a dead husband and the practical need to produce a son through remarriage or acquire one through adoption.

Ellen Judd's research in north China (1989) calls attention to a practice that was and is far more widespread than delayed-transfer marriage: postmarital dual residence, in which a newly married woman goes back and forth between her natal family (*niangjia*) and marital family, often spending the majority of time in her natal family until her first child is born and continuing to visit frequently even beyond the death of both her parents. Unlike patrilocality but like the uterine family, this fluidity of residence is not given formal articulation; it exists in the interstices of patrilocality and does not actively challenge it. Nevertheless, it is crucial to understanding how women negotiate the profound transition required by patrilocal marriage. As Judd points out, visits to the *niangjia* also secure a daughter's ongoing aid and caregiving for her aging parents, even if her obligations are less than those of a son. On occasions such as the Dragon Boat Festival, Mayfair Yang (1994) finds that gifts exchanged by married women and their natal families play an important role in expanding relationships between villages and lineages. Xiangqun Chang notes the crucial role of non-agnatic (i.e., women-linked) kin in providing social and material support in a famous Jiangsu village, creating networks that combine "the functions of banks and insurance policies" (1999: 172). Potter and Potter (1990) describe networks of women who have married from one village into another, then helped to arrange matches for younger women from the same natal village, while Judd (2005) notes that such matchmaking contributes directly to women's networks.

### *Marriage Law and Its Discontents*

Free-choice marriage was a major theme of the New Culture Movement, which began in 1915 (K. Johnson 1983; McElderry 1986; Z. Wang 1999; Glosser 2002, 2003), and was later codified in Guomindang law (Davin 1976; P. Huang 2001a, 2001b). The Guomindang attempted rural reform campaigns against underage marriages and extravagant weddings through the 1940s, but these were limited in geographic scope and effectiveness (Gilmartin and Crook 2005). In their rural base areas from the 1930s on, including the Jiangxi Soviet and the Shaanganning border region, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) promulgated marriage reform—free-

dom of marriage, abolition of purchased brides, minimum marriage age, and divorce under certain specified conditions—as a means to mobilize young men and women and bring women into work outside the household (Belden 1970; Davin 1973, 1976; C. Hu 1974; Hua 1984; Walker 1978). Implementation of all these measures proved difficult throughout the base area period. Peasant men—and their mothers—complained bitterly about the divorce policy of the Communists; in practice, it was subsequently discouraged by local cadres, although it was more commonly permitted again during the Civil War period of the late 1940s (K. Johnson 1983; Hua 1984). When the intellectual agenda of family reform collided with peasant desires, Kay Ann Johnson (1983) and Judith Stacey (1983) have argued, the CCP deferred to the peasants, beginning a series of compromises in party (and later state) policies about women. Arranged marriage remained near-universal in the rural areas and was the dominant form throughout China during the Republican period (Croll 1981).

The 1950 Marriage Law of the PRC abolished “feudal marriage” and “marriage by purchase” and established freedom of choice as a fundamental principle (Meijer 1971; Davin 1976; Ono 1989; Croll 1981; K. Johnson 1983; Stacey 1983; Ocko 1991). The law also asserted the rights of adults to divorce at will. Croll (1981) identifies this intervention as an attempt to transform marriage from an exchange of women between groups, controlled by senior generations, to a personal relationship between individual and equal partners. Friedman adds that the state’s emphasis on conjugality was intended to draw married women (and men) out of kinship networks and into “the more encompassing intimate community of the socialist nation” (2005: 313; see also 2006). This important juncture in the transfer of power from older to younger generations helped empower young women in particular, as described by Yunxiang Yan (2003) and others (see, for example, Diamant 2000b).

The radical nature of the changes proposed in the Marriage Law can be partially indexed by the depth of resistance to them. Just as before 1949, these provisions were difficult to implement in rural areas. State authorities soon found that they led to serious resistance on the part of parents and prospective parents-in-law (Davin 1973, 1976; Croll 1981; K. Johnson 1983). A man and his parents, having acquired a wife and daughter-in-law at considerable expense, were disinclined to lose their investment through divorce. Mothers-in-law were among the most vociferous opponents of the Marriage Law. Kay Ann Johnson (1983) argues that that the party-state advanced its marriage reform agenda very tentatively. Aside from a one-month period of intensified publicity for the Marriage Law in March 1953,

party officials soon backed away from attempts to enforce the law, particularly when it engendered conflicts with the priorities of land reform and collectivization (Croll 1981). Divorce spiked briefly in 1953 with the campaign to publicize the Marriage Law, remained low throughout the rest of the Mao era, and began to rise with the advent of the economic reforms (Honig and Hershatter 1988; X. Zang 1999).

Recent research by Neil Diamant (2000a, 2000b) takes issue with this earlier scholarship, however, arguing that peasants in particular made active use of the Marriage Law and that its implementation was more protracted and more disruptive of social order than previously understood, extending well beyond the party's campaign. Drawing on local court records and government work reports, he traces the effects of the law up through the Cultural Revolution. Peasants, in spite of the "feudal thinking" attributed to them by the PRC state and most feminist scholarship, appeared less concerned with questions of social standing and privacy than urban dwellers and more willing to seek divorces aggressively. Diamant names the law's main beneficiaries as young rural women and high-level male officials, who acquired younger, more sophisticated wives. Older people, poor men, and soldiers were the losers, in spite of recurrent party-state attempts to protect the marriage stability of military personnel.

Most scholarship on the Marriage Law has tended to assume a high degree of internal unity on the part of the party-state. Where scholars have seen resistance, they have traced it along an assumed fracture between state and society. In addressing assertions by earlier scholars, as well as Chinese government pronouncements, that "the state" had liberated women, they have complicated the picture by suggesting that the state was inconstant in its efforts and that society was full of resisters, particularly local cadres and mothers-in-law (K. Johnson 1983; Stacey 1983; M. Wolf 1985). Yet as Diamant (2000a, 2000b) cogently argues, "the state" was not a uniform entity, and enterprising peasants in particular made effective use of the range of different agencies and jurisdictions to whom they could appeal for divorce. He further notes that the law set into motion effects that state officials could not control, and that local interests could work in favor of marriage reform as well as against it. Where earlier work highlighted the ways in which marriage reform conflicted with land reform, Diamant contends that Marriage Law reform took much of its language and methods from land reform, rather than being undermined by it. Furthermore, women exercised more agency in this situation than the older scholarship suggests. Judd (1998, 2002) corroborates this point, finding that older rural women interviewed in the late 1980s remembered little about the Marriage Law

but could retell in some detail how individual women had managed to leave marriages, with the state playing an “indirect, enabling role” in support of women’s agency (2002: 7).

Whereas Diamant focuses on the unintended and apparently quite disruptive effects of the Marriage Law, Susan Glosser (2003) argues that the law was intended to bring the domestic realm into closer relationship with the state, not to disrupt it. It was not primarily a means to raise women’s status; its central concern was the state’s relationship to society. The CCP, she notes, made nation building an explicit part of a couple’s marital duties, codifying the May Fourth idea that a reformed family would lead to a strong nation. Philip Huang (2005) characterizes divorce law practice in the 1960s and 1970s, with its focus on a mediation process that forcefully encouraged marital reconciliation, as a core component of what he calls “Maoist justice.”

The Marriage Law was successful in raising the age of marriage, broadening a practice that had begun in urban China during the Republican period. By the 1930s, only about 10 percent of urban women were under age fifteen at marriage, and the percentage continued to decline in the PRC (X. Zang 1999). In rural areas, the collective era saw a rise in marriage age to the early twenties (Selden 1993), although there were still eight million new marriages of women under fifteen in 1990, with the number falling to half that four years later (X. Zang 1999: 275).

In 1980 the state promulgated a new Marriage Law, which eliminated references to older practices such as concubinage and raised the age of marriage to twenty-two for men and twenty for women. It made no major departure from the approach of the earlier Marriage Law, but it did mark the beginning of a new round of public education aimed at persistent rural practices such as arranged marriage and bride-price payments (Croll 1985c). Implementation of new articles of divorce in 1990 made divorces easier to obtain (P. Huang 2005). Further revisions to the law in 2001 explained marital property rights and legislated against marital violence (Farrer and Sun 2003; M. Chen 2004). In the reform era, women as plaintiffs have used the courts mainly in marriage and family cases. In a pattern echoing Diamant’s findings for the 1950s, intellectuals appeared more reluctant than workers to sue for divorce (Woo 2002).

### *The Question of Marital Satisfaction*

In the reform period, discussions of love, marriage, and sexuality were no longer closely monitored by state authorities, except where criminal activity was involved. Cautionary tales in the popular press discussed prostitu-

tion, rape, domestic violence, sexual harassment, concubinage, and other “neotraditional forms of oppression” (X. Xu 1996: 384; see also Jaschok, Milwertz, and Ping-chun Hsiung 2001). But popular journalistic literature (*jishi wenxue*), radio call-in shows, advice columns, gossip, and personal stories also took up situations where the moral stance was less clear: the search for romantic love (Hooper 1984; Honig and Hershatter 1988; Y. Chen 1994; X. Xu 1996; Farrer 2002), satisfaction or the lack thereof in marriages, and extramarital affairs (Xu 1996; Parish and Farrer 2000; Farrer and Sun 2003; Yuen, Law, and Ho 2004; McDougall 2005; Friedman 2006).

Popular discourse on marriage encompassed a profusion of contradictory themes (Parish and Farrer 2000): women were reportedly both more mercenary and more romantic than men when seeking a mate; husbands were both privileged and henpecked. Drawing on Chinese social surveys from the late 1980s and early 1990s, Parish and Farrer found that when wives’ incomes approached those of their husbands (a situation they found to be widespread in urban families), they had more control over household purchasing decisions and stronger beliefs in gender equality. As an urban wife’s income increased, so did the time her husband spent on household chores, although her satisfaction with the domestic division of labor did not necessarily rise.

Popular writings, hotlines, and call-in radio programs directed at both urban and rural audiences devoted serious attention to compatibility, sexual satisfaction within marriage and detailed instructions about how to achieve it, and the menace of adultery and how to prevent it (Honig and Hershatter 1988; Jankowiak 1993; Evans 1995, 1997, 2002; X. Xu 1996; Erwin 2000, forthcoming; Farrer and Sun 2003; McDougall 2005). Sexological research, with both statistical and ethnographic components, became a legitimate field of scholarly inquiry (D. Liu et al. 1997; Hershatter 1996; Farquhar 2002). Discussions of middle-aged and older widows in the media urged them to abandon “feudal” attitudes and embrace romance, remarriage, and sexual knowledge and activity, even as ethnographic evidence suggested that the attitudes and practices of older women were quite varied (Shea 2005). Many of these marriage and sexuality discussions highlighted women’s purported differences from men in patterns of emotional and sexual satisfaction, and their simultaneous dependence upon men, who alone could provide that satisfaction (X. Xu 1996; Evans 1997, 2000).

By the 1990s, extramarital love was a common theme in news stories and television dramas. Interviews with men and women in Shanghai suggest that participants in such affairs understood them as a product of social change, a legitimate expression of romantic feelings unsullied by material

concerns, and a sexual exchange involving indirect compensation from the man to the woman (Farrer and Sun 2003). In this analysis generational differences are more salient than gender differences, shaping relationships to both labor and marriage markets. Although men and women both stressed the centrality of sexual passion in discussing extramarital relationships, they also understood participation in sexual affairs to be a gendered exchange in which, in Farrer and Sun's phrase, "men trade money for sex, and women sex for money" (Farrer and Sun 2003: 16). Such affairs coexisted with a code of family responsibility in which philandering spouses often made significant compromises in order to keep their conjugal households together. Both men and women saw sexual satisfaction as important, but the significance of extramarital affairs in media accounts was gendered in ways that paralleled mate choice for marriage: women sought affairs with men of higher status, while men looked for young and beautiful partners (Farrer and Sun 2003).

As in the Republican period, both male and female anxiety about deception and trickery by sexual partners acted "as public allegories of social relations in the market society" (Farrer and Sun 2003: 17). Devotion to constancy and idealism in romance became a critique of slippery market morality, and irony in storytelling about sex became a means of coping with the storyteller's inability to reach unattainable moral standards.

Equally a topic of public discussion was the rise in divorces, almost two-thirds of which were initiated by women, often on grounds of incompatibility or the desire for greater fulfillment (X. Xu 1996; Parish and Farrer 2000; Xiong 2004). At the same time, divorce was often portrayed as disadvantageous to women, particularly when it was preceded by a man's extramarital involvement with a younger, more attractive "third party." Women's Federation officials and emergent women's organizations found themselves divided over whether to push for punitive measures against men and their "third-party" partners, or to encourage women to leave unsatisfactory relationships as a sign of self-respect (Honig and Hershatter 1988; X. Xu 1996; Farrer and Sun 2003).

## FAMILY

Much sociological literature (usefully surveyed in X. Zang 1999) takes the family or household rather than women or gender relations as the unit of analysis. The findings in this literature, nevertheless, have profound implications for the analysis of women's lives. They suggest important temporal lags but not fundamental divergence between urban and rural patterns.

Overall, this literature on the family indicates that whereas the state may not have transformed marriage and family practices by edict, state policies on collectivization and decollectivization have contributed to long-term changes in rural household composition and relationships. Younger women are among the chief beneficiaries of these changes; older women, perhaps, are the neglected remainder.

### *Household Composition and Family Power*

The extended or joint family—patrilocal, patrilineal, and multigenerational—remained a powerful ideal at least until the establishment of the PRC (Croll 1985a). A woman's status in the family rose with the birth of children, particularly sons (Croll 1985a, 1994), who formed the core of her affective life and old-age support—her uterine family—even as they reproduced the patriline (M. Wolf 1972). Nevertheless, in spite of the power of this cultural ideal and its practice by those who could afford it, joint families did not predominate in the Republican period. Croll (1985a) offers a brief survey of the literature establishing this point.

During the New Culture Movement, radical critics blamed the patriarchal joint family for many of China's ills, saying that it thwarted individual development, promoted a slave mentality, perpetuated generational and gender hierarchies, monopolized people's loyalties, and prevented interest in wider social and national issues (Schwarcz 1986; Glosser 2002, 2003). Nuclear families built on free-choice companionate marriage were promoted in May Fourth and New Culture writings as the key to both individual happiness and the building of a strong nation. Although the desired form of the family had changed, Republican-era writings reinscribed its centrality to social order. They closely linked equality for women to family reform and national regeneration, but primarily reflected the economic and identity concerns of urban educated men (Glosser 2002, 2003).

From the New Culture period through the 1930s, the family envisioned by educated male reformers depended heavily on a gendered division of labor in which women's domestic roles were written into modernity. In 1930s urban periodicals such as *Family Weekly* [Jiating xingqi], the nuclear family became the site of modern urban consumption, the cornerstone of economic health, and the place where women contributed to the nation by creating a comfortable and nurturing environment for husband and children (Glosser 1995, 2003). Emphasis on the home, however, did not always connote a desire for the modern. The Ningbo community in Shanghai, a native-place group prominent in the business elite as well as in white-collar and artisanal jobs, prided itself through the 1940s on a cult of domesticity

in which women did not go out to work, which Ningbo people explained by reference to Confucian womanly virtues (Mann 1994).

Across the twentieth century, nuclear families have become the dominant urban family form (Whyte and Parish 1984; Jankowiak 1993; X. Zang 1999). In rural areas, meanwhile, the revolution brought enough stability that more poor men could afford to marry, resolving the rural family crisis brought on by years of war and class stratification (K. Johnson 1983; Stacey 1983). From the 1950s on, collectivization undermined households as units of production and inheritance while leaving the practice of virilocal marriage intact (Croll 1985a; K. Johnson 1983; Selden 1993; Y. Yan 2003). Throughout the collective period, family heads lost a degree of economic control, and family division became easier (Pasternak and Salaff 1993; Diamant 2000b; Y. Yan 2003). Mark Selden (1993) finds nuclear families and smaller family size to be the pattern in rural northern China during the collective era; Parish and Whyte (1978) cite similar findings for Guangdong in southern China. Yet even as the composition of the household slowly changed, the network of extended male kin remained important in ways that both facilitated collectivization and disadvantaged rural women. Collectives generally comprised groups of male relatives and their households, reconstituting lineage ties and making it difficult for women to attain positions of responsibility, especially because women continued to marry out of their natal communities (Diamond 1975; K. Johnson 1983; Stacey 1983).

In spite of the long ascendance of the nuclear family, Whyte (1993) finds patrilocal residence rising again in several urban areas under the reforms, perhaps because of changing economic pressures. Under socialism and its successor, market socialism, people have needed family and an extended web of family connections to help negotiate jobs, housing, and access to services. Thus, urban parents have sometimes remained involved in the postmarital living arrangements of their children, even as their role in mate choice has diminished. Meanwhile, under the reforms, neolocal residence (establishing a new residence separate from either family after marriage) is increasing in the countryside, as is delayed childbearing, bringing urban and rural practices into closer alignment (Selden 1993; X. Zang 1999; Riley 1997). In wealthy areas of the countryside such as Zhejiang, women have been demanding construction of a mansion for neolocal residence as a condition of marriage (Sargeson 2004). Selden (1993), however, also notes a rise in stem and joint families among rural entrepreneurs, perhaps paralleling Whyte's findings among urban families. And Croll describes the formation of what she calls "the aggregate family" (1994: 173), an arrangement in which patrilateral or affinal networks of kin living separately pool

resources and labor to maximize opportunities. Although families may be dividing more rapidly than before, she suggests, the division is not complete; families who cook separately may own property jointly and cooperate in economic activities.

Household division means, among other things, that mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law no longer routinely live together as they did before 1949 and in the early years of collectivization. Daughters-in-law have more independence, although if they work outside the home, the mother-in-law often becomes the primary provider of child care. In general, Judd (1994) observes, household division at marriage contributes to the increasing power of the younger generation, and is partly a shift in generational rather than gendered power.

Yunxiang Yan (2003) also sees a rural shift in power since 1949 to younger generations, who enjoy a degree of autonomy that their elders never experienced. With the rise of the rural conjugal family, involving increased intimacy and joint decision making by married couples, he describes a “waning of the patriarchal order” (Y. Yan 2003: 218; see also Sargeson 2004) and the emergence of an ethos of individual development in which emotion, personal desires, familial affection, and the expression of opinion are emphasized. This shift, Yan suggests, has particularly changed the lives of young rural women. In a major challenge to many anthropologically based social histories, Yan urges scholars to rethink the “corporate model” of the Chinese family, which stresses its economic functions, and to pay more attention to individuals and their relationships within families, particularly in heretofore relatively opaque rural households.

The shift in social emphasis from family to conjugal ties is not uniformly celebrated. In urban areas, elderly women worry about insufficient retirement income and rising health-care costs (Y. Liu 2004). Although the 1980 Marriage Law requires that both sons and daughters take responsibility for the care of aging parents, documents from the collective era and more recent accounts of rural fieldwork frequently mention complaints by the elderly that their children provide insufficient material or emotional support (Siu 1993; Diamant 2000b; Hershatter 2003, 2005a; Shea 2005). It appears that previous expectations of reciprocal support between generations are under challenge, to the general disadvantage of the older generation (Y. Yan 2002, 2003; Sargeson 2004)—a majority of whom are widowed women. Yan calls this a “crisis of filial piety” (Y. Yan 2003: 218). He suggests that the state—through its policies of deemphasizing the family’s functions, promoting marriage and family reform, installing formal bureaucracies to replace rule by kinship networks, and constraining the

development of nongovernmental social organizations—has unintentionally contributed to “the formation of the uncivil individual” responsible only to himself or herself (2003: 16).

### *Women, Law, and Family Property*

For the first two decades of the Republican period, civil law continued to be based on the Qing code, taking the patrilineal family as the social unit, until the Guomindang Civil Code of 1929–30 established the importance of the individual for legal purposes (P. Huang 2001a, 2001b). Women in the Qing code were granted what Huang calls “passive agency” to endure or resist abuse, and were sometimes held criminally liable if their resistance (to rape, for example) was deemed insufficient. In contrast, the new Guomindang law regarded women “as fully autonomous and active agents” (P. Huang 2001a: 11), able like men to control their own marriage choices, inherit property (Bernhardt 1999), and seek divorce. Patrilineal succession, which the Guomindang lawmakers regarded as “feudal,” was no longer to be a valid basis for legal claims to property. Instead, for legal purposes, kinship was to be organized into “relatives by blood” (maternal and paternal alike), “relatives by marriage,” and spouses (Bernhardt 1999).

Kathryn Bernhardt (1994; see also Croll 1980) finds that in urban China the law substantially increased women’s access to divorce, even though a gap existed between code and practice. Divorce was available by mutual consent and on the grounds of spousal and familial cruelty, desertion, and adultery. In protecting the rights of concubines not to be expelled, however, the law also made it difficult for wives to get rid of concubines without divorcing their husbands.

Huang argues that the Republican code as well as custom and legal practice deprived women of protection even as it granted them new rights. Working as a prostitute, being sold without overt coercion, or remarrying as a widow, for instance, were assumed to be a woman’s choice, regardless of the material constraints or actions by relatives that might have put her in these situations. Furthermore, the Guomindang code’s stipulation that husbands and wives had an obligation to cohabit was sometimes used to force unhappy or abused wives to remain with their husbands rather than taking refuge in their natal homes (P. Huang 2001a, 2001b). Similarly, Bernhardt (1999) shows that daughters, in spite of equal inheritance rights (see also Ocko 1991), found these rights undercut when fathers continued the widespread social practice of dividing their property among their sons prior to their deaths. In the Republican period, women brought into mar-

riage some property of their own, including personal goods, gifts, and previously earned income. The Guomindang Civil Code of 1930 gave women the right to manage this property independent of their husbands (Ocko 1991). Yet although married women might maintain some control over cash gifts they received at marriage and might augment this fund with earnings from waged work or sidelines, their claims on family property were limited (R. Watson 1984).

Widows, deprived by the code of the right to designate a patrilineal successor for their husbands, found themselves with reduced custodial control over family property; now they were just one among many possible heirs and were often pitted against their own children. Widowed daughters-in-law were in even worse straits, with neither custodial nor inheritance rights (Bernhardt 1999). No one has studied the situation of widows in the PRC, but Christina Gilmartin (1990) notes that widows in reform-era rural China still had difficulty claiming family property.

Although the Marriage Law of 1950 allowed women to hold formal title to land, effective control of a family's landholdings remained with heads of household, who were usually male (Diamond 1975; Bossen 1999). Women were equally entitled to family property (sharing that right with their brothers in natal families and their husbands in marital families), but since the main form of property after collectivization was housing and household goods and since women married out, in practice inheritances generally went to sons. In short, women had little control over property (Davin 1988, 1989). Women who attempted to claim their land after a divorce were often met with violence (Davin 1976). Parish and Whyte (1978) found that in cases of divorce in rural Guangdong during the collective era, wives did not fare well in issues of child custody or property division.

The Marriage Law of 1980 strengthened the community property status of all goods acquired during a marriage (Ocko 1991). A new inheritance law passed in 1985 specified protection of the inheritance rights of daughters, including married ones (Davin 1988; Ocko 1991), although its actual effects on inheritance practices have not been studied.

Marriage itself, Jonathan Ocko (1991) argues, moved in the twentieth century from a form of family property first to a form of personal property in which a marriage "belonged" to the married couple even if the husband had greater rights than the wife, then (after 1949) to a form of social property in which the state had a primary stake. Tensions between the notions of personal and social property continue to shape state approaches to divorce (Diamant 2000b; P. Huang 2005).

*Birth Planning and the One-Child Family Policy*

Fertility rates for the early twentieth century have been estimated at five to six births per woman (Banister 1987). Missionaries decried female infanticide, but disagreed as to its prevalence (B. Lee 1981). The Republican penal code and other government regulations outlawed infanticide, but rural fieldwork reports from the 1930s often found lopsided sex ratios that pointed to preferential treatment of sons, if not direct infanticide of girls (B. Lee 1981). In periods of social upheaval, such as the Japanese invasion and the Civil War, demographic data suggest that female infanticide or neglect of girl babies rose (Banister 1987). The Marriage Law of 1950 reiterated the prohibition on infanticide (B. Lee 1981), and census data indicate that female infanticide and neglect decreased in the early years of the PRC (Banister 1987).

From the mid-1950s on, party-state planners mentioned population as an important area of policy-making, with an emphasis on health and welfare (Kane 1985; T. White 1994; Greenhalgh and Winckler 2005). In the 1950s, women within the party argued against an unalloyed pronatalist policy and for access to birth control and abortion (T. White 1994). Access to abortion was eased, although not without objection from health-care providers concerned about the strain on the medical system (Tien 1987). By the middle of the decade, the top party leadership, worried about rapid population growth, endorsed birth control, but this approach was soon transformed into a doctrine of state-controlled birth planning (Banister 1987; T. White 1994; Greenhalgh and Winckler 2005).

In the first two decades of the PRC, most state efforts in the countryside centered on improving women's reproductive health through the training of midwives (Davin 1975b, 1976; Banister 1987; J. Goldstein 1998), rather than on family planning. Fertility planning was encouraged but was generally voluntary, with decision making left to the family (Croll 1985b; Banister 1987). The rural health infrastructure set up in the 1960s during the Cultural Revolution made it possible for the first time to deliver IUDs, tubal ligations, and more rarely vasectomies to the rural population (Chen 1985; Banister 1987). Collectivization offered no particular economic incentive to limit family size (Davin 1985; Bianco and Hua 1988; for a somewhat different view, see Salaff 1973, 1985), but rural interviews suggest that birth control was greeted with relief by women exhausted by the demands of large families (Pasternak and Salaff 1993; Hershatter 2002, 2003, 2005a). By the 1970s, the government had begun a national effort to lower the birth rate via a policy of "later, longer, fewer," and the 1970s saw a dramatic

reduction in the birth rate, even prior to the one-child campaign (Parish and Whyte 1978; Chen 1985; Croll 1985b; Banister 1987; Tien 1987; Greenhalgh and Winckler 2005). But until the late 1970s, state-sponsored birth planning continued to be framed primarily in terms of women's liberation, health, and the education of children, rather than national survival (Potter 1985; Greenhalgh 1990).

In 1979, the Chinese government moved to the goal of one child per Han family (Croll 1985a; Davin 1985; Kane 1985, 1987; Banister 1987; Greenhalgh 1990; Greenhalgh and Winckler 2005), with more children allowed to non-Han families (Pasternak and Salaff 1993). The government argued that if drastic steps were not taken to limit fertility, the needs of a burgeoning population would not be met, national development strategy would be undermined, and terrible suffering would result (Potter 1985; Croll 1985a; Tien 1985, 1987; Bianco and Hua 1988; Potter and Potter 1990; Greenhalgh 2003). The policy was crucially shaped by government visions of "achieving wealth, modernity, and global power through selective absorption of Western science and technology" (Greenhalgh 2003: 164; see also Greenhalgh and Winckler 2005), in this case the development of a population science linked to politics. Birth planning was mentioned as a state concern and a citizen's duty in the 1978 and 1982 Constitutions, the 1980 Marriage Law, and the 1992 Law on the Protection of Rights and Interests of Women, but its implementation has been based on local laws and regulations rather than on a national population law (Tien 1987; Milwertz 1997). Fertility rates, which in 1971 had been 5.442, dropped by 1980 to 2.238 (P. Chen 1985; Banister 1987). By 1993, the national leadership was able to claim that the birth rate had fallen below replacement levels, to 1.9 births per woman (Greenhalgh, Zhu, and Li 1994; Greenhalgh 2001). By the mid-1990s it ranged from about 1.8 to 2.0 children per woman (Greenhalgh and Li 1995), and held steady at approximately 1.7 for the next decade (Hesketh, Li, and Zhu 2005). From the late 1970s on, abortion played an important role in this decline, although contraception and sterilization were arguably more important—abortion rates were below those of Eastern Europe (Tien 1987) and, as of the early 2000s, well below those of the United States (Hesketh, Li, and Zhu 2005). Some abortions were performed on unmarried women, who were not formal targets of the birth planning campaign and did not have regular access to birth control (Tien 1987).

The success of this policy in the cities has been attributed to several factors. The state could provide effective incentives and penalties in the urban environment (Croll 1985b; Tien 1987; Milwertz 1997). Urban families live in crowded housing conditions (Banister 1987; T. White 2003), rely on pen-

sions in addition to children for old-age support (Davis-Friedmann 1985; T. White 2003), and have devised mobility strategies relying on education and work connections rather than on extended family ties (Salaff 1973, 1985; Kane 1985, 1987; Croll 1985a, 1985b; Milwertz 1997). Urban women who work in family businesses (Gates 1993) and women more generally who find the rising costs and effort of raising children quite demanding (Milwertz 1997) have been quite explicit about their desire to limit childbearing. Many of them would prefer a less restrictive policy of two children, with one boy and one girl as an ideal configuration (Gates 1993; Milwertz 1997). Cecilia Milwertz (1997) finds that any given woman might express conflicting opinions, depending upon whether she felt herself to be speaking from her own perspective, that of her child, her family, or the nation. Yet overall, urban families are regarded by scholars as having made the “demographic shift” in which unlimited childbearing no longer improves chances for survival and upward mobility.

In the countryside, by contrast, the one-child policy collided with the re-emergence of the household as a fundamental unit of production; the dismantling of rudimentary collective welfare guarantees; the emergence of peasant households wealthy enough to pay hefty fines for excess births; and a general weakening of state control over peasant mobility, income, activities, and its own local branches (Wasserstrom 1984; Potter 1985; Croll 1985c; Davin 1985; Davis-Friedmann 1985; Dalsimer and Nisonoff 1987; Greenhalgh 1990, 1993; Potter and Potter 1990; T. White 2003). Since virilocality continued to be the dominant marriage pattern through collectivization and decollectivization, farming families had immediate practical reasons to value sons over daughters, who would leave the family and the community at marriage (Robinson 1985). With the weakening of the collective, families expected to rely almost exclusively upon their sons for old-age support, although the Marriage Law of 1980 held sons, daughters, and grandchildren alike responsible for care of the elderly (Potter 1985; Mu 1999). Potter (1985) suggests that peasants regarded not having enough sons for old-age support to be a moral as well as a practical failure, making the attainment of happiness impossible. In some areas, reform-era land contracting practices meant that when a daughter married out, her family lost her land allotment, further strengthening the preference for sons (Judd 1994; Bossen 2002).

The disturbing results of these conflicting pressures and desires have been well-documented in a substantial body of scholarship. Local state authorities, required to meet birth planning quotas mandated at higher levels, intermittently adopted draconian and coercive measures—fines,

late-term abortions, sterilization, insertion and monitoring of IUDs—to enforce birth planning goals (Potter 1985; Croll 1985a; Davin 1985; Banister 1987; Bianco and Hua 1988; Potter and Potter 1990; Greenhalgh 1994; Greenhalgh and Winckler 2005). In rural areas, enforcement initially fell to the women's team leaders, although party and local government leaders increasingly participated in birth planning committees, a sign of the importance that the state attached to this campaign (Davin 1985). In the early years of the one-child policy, some cadres responsible for birth planning were targets of community retaliation (Wasserstrom 1984; Banister 1987; Bianco and Hua 1988; Greenhalgh and Winckler 2005). Women fled their local areas to conceal pregnancies, and families as well as local officials underreported births (Banister 1987; Greenhalgh 1994; T. White 2003). Women were also subjected to spousal and family abuse for giving birth to girl children (Wasserstrom 1984; Croll 1985c; Tien 1985; Anagnost 1988; Honig and Hershatter 1988; Bianco and Hua 1988; Gilmartin 1990), leading to a belated but energetic state attempt to educate rural masses both about who carries the Y chromosome and about the legal rights of women and children (Wasserstrom 1984; Croll, Davin, and Kane 1985; Tien 1985; Anagnost 1988; Honig and Hershatter 1988; Croll 1994, 1995).

Other peasant reactions to the policy included refusal to pay fines, bribery of officials, and refusal to contracept, generally by removing IUDs (Wasserstrom 1984; Bianco and Hua 1988; Davin 1990; Greenhalgh 1993, 1994; Greenhalgh and Li 1995; Bossen 2002). They also included formal and informal adopting out of girls, or what Greenhalgh and her colleagues call "the feminization of adoption" (Greenhalgh 1994; Greenhalgh, Zhu, and Li 1994; K. Johnson 2004), abandonment (K. Johnson 1993, 1996, 2004; K. Johnson, Huang, and Wang 1998), and female infanticide or selective neglect (Banister 1987; Hom 1992; Croll 1994). Research in Guangdong, however, suggests that female infanticide was regarded as immoral and uncivilized, something that happened in "remote areas" (Potter 1985; Potter and Potter 1990). By the 1990s ultrasound followed by sex-selective abortion had become the preferred strategy to ensure that families would be able to try again for a son (Greenhalgh, Zhu, and Li 1994; Greenhalgh and Li 1995; Chu 2001; Eckholm 2002; T. White 2003; Hesketh, Li, and Zhu 2005; Greenhalgh and Winckler 2005). In the past few years, farmers have also begun to use the courts to appeal excessive enforcement of the policy (T. White 2003).

Since the advent of the one-child campaign, national and regional population statistics show disturbing imbalances in reported sex ratios at birth. In the 1953 and 1964 censuses, prior to the birth planning campaigns, the

ratio was close to “normal,” conventionally set at 106:100 (K. Johnson 1993). But by 1989, it was 113:100 and in 2000 117:100 (Greenhalgh and Li 1995; Eckholm 2002; see also Banister 1987). The imbalance characterizes both urban and rural China (Hesketh, Li, and Zhu 2005), but is often much higher in rural counties and in certain provinces: in 2000 a ratio of more than 120:100 was reported in Guangdong, Guangxi, Hunan, Hubei, Shaanxi, and Anhui, with Hainan Island reporting a rate of 135.7:100 (Eckholm 2002). The sex ratio for second-order births was 151.9:100 in 2000 (T. White 2003). By the mid-1990s, so-called missing girls were estimated to total more than 1 million per year (K. Johnson 1996, 2004); Croll mentions a total estimate of the missing as 40 million (1995: 164; see also Croll 2000).

Official pronouncements generally represented these facts as a sign of backwardness or remnants of feudal thinking among the rural masses, with little attention to the ways in which rural reform policies directly contributed to these patterns or the broader issues of how “cultural values” are made and remade under shifting historical circumstances (Wasserstrom 1984; Anagnost 1988; Honig and Hershatter 1988; K. Johnson 1993; Greenhalgh and Li 1995). Such backwardness then became the target of local campaigns aimed at both stopping the violence and reinforcing the birth planning quotas (Anagnost 1988).

Abandonment of female infants has been estimated at several hundreds of thousands yearly, and is associated with high mortality rates (K. Johnson 1993, 1996; K. Johnson, Huang, and Wang 1998). In Hunan and Hubei, infant abandonment, reportedly common prior to 1949, has reemerged (K. Johnson 1993, 1996, 2004). In Hunan alone, 16,000 abandoned children, 92 percent of them girls, were brought to civil affairs offices from 1986 to 1990. Kay Ann Johnson, Banghan Huang, and Liyao Wang (1998) found that in 237 families who had abandoned children, almost 90 percent of those abandoned were girls; the small number of abandoned boys were often ill or disabled. Second and third daughters with no brothers were the most likely to be abandoned; families usually did not abandon the first girl born to them, and many left children at the doorsteps of people who might be likely to adopt them.

Kay Ann Johnson (1996) argues that local cadres, faced with conflicting pressure from higher levels of government and their local communities, monitored family size rather than births, ignoring or sometimes even abetting abandonment that took unwanted children out of their jurisdiction. Welfare centers and orphanages, meanwhile, were inadequate in number and quality to deal with the rising number of foundlings. Legal adoption procedures were so cumbersome—partly because state authorities wanted

to block informal adoptions as a way of getting rid of daughters—that many families gave up the effort. When state authorities discussed infant abandonment, they generally proposed punishing the parents for violation of birth planning quotas, rather than attending to the ways in which birth planning itself contributed to the problem, considering the immediate interests of abandoned children, or easing restrictions on adoption. The 1992 adoption law, for instance, allowed only childless couples over the age of 35 to adopt, and families who already had children could be fined for adopting informally, as though they had produced an over-quota birth. The rate of official adoptions nationally remained low, and informal adoptions predominated in spite of the penalties. Difficulties in obtaining household registrations for adopted children meant that the (mostly female) children who survived abandonment and were adopted did not have full legal protection or access to social services. Nevertheless, many abandoned girls were apparently informally adopted, partly in order to provide families who already had sons with a desired daughter as well (K. Johnson 1996, 2004; K. Johnson, Huang, and Wang 1998). In 1998 a revised adoption law was passed, lowering the age of prospective adoptive parents to thirty and removing the requirement that they be childless if adopting abandoned children (Families with Children from China 1999; K. Johnson 2004).

As third-order births became less common, second-order births were the most vulnerable to sex selection (Chu, 2001; Hesketh, Li, and Zhu 2005). In an unnamed county in central China in 2000, Junhong Chu (2001) found that almost half of pregnant women used ultrasounds to determine the sex of the fetus, usually in the second trimester or later, and 92 percent of all families who already had a daughter opted for an abortion if they learned that a fetus was female. This may not be atypical, since by that time ultrasound-B machines were common in county and township hospitals, family planning stations, and private clinics. Technically illegal, the practice of using ultrasound for sex determination is almost impossible to regulate, and skewed sex ratios have spread along with ultrasound machines from coastal to inland provinces. While most of the women surveyed felt that sex-selective abortion was unfair to girls, they did not regard it as immoral, arguing that life begins at birth (Chu 2001). As Susan Greenhalgh puts it, “The politics of gender had not so much eased as been pushed back into the period before birth” (Greenhalgh and Winckler 2005: 216–217).

Population policy was not determined exclusively at the center, nor was it impervious to wider changes set in motion by the economic reforms (Bianco and Hua 1988; Greenhalgh 1990, 1993; Greenhalgh and Winckler 2005). Over the course of the 1980s and into the early twenty-first cen-

ture, state birth-planning goals were modified repeatedly, with initiatives taken by different levels of government at different moments (Banister 1987; Davin 1990; Potter and Potter 1990; Croll 1994; Greenhalgh 1994; Greenhalgh and Winckler 2005). Susan Greenhalgh and Edwin Winckler (2005) have characterized these changes as follows: A Maoist approach combining central planning and periodic intensive campaigns was, paradoxically, only fully applied to birth planning in the era of Deng Xiaoping. Under Jiang Zemin, and particularly from 1993 to 2003, the government continued to try to manage population growth, but increasingly turned to law rather than direct intervention as the preferred means. Since Hu Jintao's accession to power in 2003, the emphasis has been on coercion rather than rewards, and on social policies intended to decrease reliance on children for old-age security.

Behind these changes lay a complex process of political negotiation with the rural population. Even during an initial period of coercive enforcement and local resistance from 1979 to 1983—when women were pressured into coerced abortions and tubal ligations, while families who proceeded with an out-of-plan pregnancy had their houses sealed—the conditions under which a family could have a second child were steadily expanded. The period from 1984 to 1987 was one of negotiation and state accommodation in which two children were permitted—sometimes more children were allowed if both were girls—in an effort to enable each family to have a son. When fertility surged in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the policy tightened. At some points, families with only one child, if it was a son, were not permitted to try again, while families with a daughter could attempt to have a son after four years. The major change was not in rules but in consistency of enforcement (Davin 1990; Greenhalgh 1990, 2001; Greenhalgh, Zhu, and Li 1994; Greenhalgh and Li 1995; Greenhalgh and Winckler 2005). Not until 2002 was a national Population and Family Planning Law put into effect (T. White 2003).

By the early 1990s, state practices were much more refined than the coercive roundups of a decade earlier, giving more attention to women's health and reproductive choice. In Shaanxi, party secretaries were brought into birth planning work; provincial funds enabled better pay for birth planning cadres, with pay tied to performance. These cadres established Birth Planning Associations (*jihua shengyu xiehui*), with monthly study sessions. For families with two or more children, sterilization and IUD insertion were linked to regular gynecological exams and carried on at predictable intervals. Localities began to offer old-age pensions for couples with two daughters. Families who refused to pay fines for second or third

births outside the plan found their “excess” children ineligible for crop land or housing land at marriage until the fines were paid. At the same time, the development and diversification of the rural economy in wealthier areas and a rise in per capita income decreased the pressure to have more sons and increased the emphasis on educating children to take advantage of new economic opportunities (Greenhalgh, Zhu, and Li 1994). In addition, wealth opened up options for families who did decide to have more children. In 2000, one study in central China found that couples with a girl could buy a second-birth permit for 4,000 yuan. Couples with a boy, while officially not allowed a second child, could often pay the local government about 12,000 yuan to register a second child after he or she was born (Chu 2001).

In the course of the 1980s and 1990s, then, a policy that had begun as gender neutral—one child per family—became deeply inflected by gender preference: a son for as many families as possible (Davin 1990; Greenhalgh and Li 1995; T. White 2003; Greenhalgh and Winckler 2005). Resistance was gender specific as well: when the policy was enforced more strictly, the sex ratio of reported births became more unbalanced. Boys were also breastfed longer, prefiguring a pattern of discrimination against girls “in cultural attention, social investment, and economic opportunity” (Greenhalgh and Li 1995: 633)—one which echoes, disturbingly, the practices common before 1949 (Croll 1985a). In short, sex ratios, adoption, and breastfeeding, which had been relatively gender neutral in the first decades of the PRC, all became active sites of gender discrimination during the reform period.

Susan Greenhalgh and Jiali Li (1995) point to a lack of nuanced attention paid to these matters among demographers, using the China case to call for a feminist demography and attention to reproduction as social and political rather than “natural” and private. Likewise, Sharon Hom suggests that female infanticide must be understood not as a private and proscribed act of violence, but as part of a systemic devaluation of female life that also includes forced abortion, abuse of wives who bear daughters, and giving male offspring preferred access to food. She terms this “social femicide” (1992: 260).

How many children a woman should bear and the disposition of an individual pregnancy have not been understood in Chinese discussions as a woman’s individual reproductive choice or as a religious issue but, rather, as a matter that affects and is legitimately affected by the family and the state (Potter 1985; M. Wolf 1985; Potter and Potter 1990; Greenhalgh 1994; Wong 1997). Whereas earlier writing on this topic presented rural women as caught between the conflicting demands of the family for more children and the state for fewer (M. Wolf 1985), recent scholarship (see, for

example, Greenhalgh and Li 1995; Milwertz 1997) suggests that the major conflict is between the party-state and society as a whole, with women generally aligned with their families. This does not mean, however, that women have no opinions on the matter. Greenhalgh and others have argued that the reproductive desires of village women are not driven by an undifferentiated cultural preference for more offspring, but are finely calibrated to create a family whose gender and age structure will satisfy a mix of practical and affective needs: old-age support, income maximization, and emotional intimacy. The rising costs of raising children, bringing in brides for sons, and building houses for sons and their families all constrained the desire for many children in the reform-era countryside (Greenhalgh 1994; Greenhalgh and Li 1995; Mu 1999; Chu 2001). Junhong Chu (2001) suggests that since ultrasound and sex selection allow families to have a son with fewer births, desire for large families has waned. In central Shaanxi, Greenhalgh and Li found that 86 percent of the nearly 1,000 women they surveyed wanted two children: a boy to carry on the family line, support his parents in their old age, and bring in income through his labor, and a girl (though this was a weaker preference) to provide company and affection (Greenhalgh and Li 1995; see also Greenhalgh 1993; K. Johnson, Huang, and Wang 1998; K. Johnson 2004). Adoptive families gave similar reasons, seeking girls to provide emotional connections rather than to become daughters-in-law or household servants, as was often the case in female adoptions before 1949 (K. Johnson, Huang, and Wang 1998; K. Johnson 2004). Some interviewees implied that multiple sons would only fall to fighting over who was responsible for parental support. Unfilial behavior of all sorts, including economic neglect, was a frequent complaint of aging parents, as was divisive behavior by daughters-in-law (Greenhalgh, Zhu, and Li 1994; Greenhalgh and Li 1995; Hershatter 2005a). At the same time, a rise in intravillage marriage has made daughters physically and emotionally more available, although their material obligations to parents are fewer than those of sons.

After 1994, when China participated in the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo, and 1995, when it hosted the Fourth World Conference on Women (Hershatter, Honig, and Rofel 1996; Z. Wang 1997), the grounds for discussion of population policy within China shifted somewhat. The State Birth Planning Commission began to raise questions about women's health. Researchers in various quarters, while declaring support for the state's determination to limit population growth, voiced increasing criticisms of the deleterious effects of the birth planning program on girls and women, the burden that it placed on women to pre-

vent pregnancy, and the need to improve educational access and women's status as an integral part of birth planning (Wong 1997; T. White 2003). Population researchers suggested a need for improved reproductive knowledge and contraception supply for a growing population of unmarried and sexually active women migrant workers (Z. Zheng et al. 2001). With central government support, various localities experimented with improving the quality of care, an initiative that reduced coercion, improved compliance and sex ratios, and was eventually more widely adopted in the early 2000s with the policy known as Comprehensive Reform. In 2004, Shanghai officially promulgated a two-child rule, although the national government has so far declined to adopt this change more broadly. Meanwhile the Hu Jintao administration has undertaken policy initiatives to support elderly couples who had only one child and to address the sex ratio imbalance (Greenhalgh and Winckler 2005).

In general, like official state discourse, these critics paid more attention to the effects on adult women, which were certainly serious, than to the question of the "missing girls," for which demographic data were not widely reported in China (Greenhalgh 2001). Official publications also contained detailed discussions about the coming marriage crunch for men caused by the shortage of women and about the rise in trafficking of women to compensate for local shortages of brides (Honig and Hershatter 1988; Chu 2001). Most critics appeared to share the state's assumptions that the one-child policy is the only alternative to no policy at all; alternative birth planning policies are little discussed (Greenhalgh 2001).

Tensions in the state apparatus compounded the state's inability to put women's welfare at the center of the birth planning problem. Officials of the All-China Women's Federation mistrusted the State Birth Planning Commission, and were unwilling to assist in a policy that they felt did not represent women's interests (Greenhalgh 2001). At the same time, local women's cadres in rural areas were stuck with the unenviable, psychologically difficult, and sometimes dangerous task of enforcing state birth planning targets (Anagnost 1997)—an arrangement troubling to individual cadres and much resented by the Women's Federation (Potter 1985; Greenhalgh 2001). No government agency was willing or able to take up all aspects of women's reproductive health, especially when that health was itself threatened by the birth planning policy (Greenhalgh 2001).

Outside of Han-dominant areas, state policy moved from no limits on minority births to mandating a limit of two births in urban areas and three in rural areas. Little systematic research has been done on the intersection of state birth-planning policy and local practices in minority areas. One

survey of rural Tibet in the 1990s indicates that birth quotas have not been effectively enforced but that rising costs and shrinking land per capita have led many rural families to begin voluntary contraception, although women indicate that they want three or four children if the family can afford it (M. Goldstein et al. 2002).

The valorization of scientific and technical know-how as a sign of modernity has contributed to a telling anomaly: in a nation where the official goal is to limit births to one per family, test-tube babies are celebrated and urban women who do not conceive can find themselves under tremendous pressure to undergo expensive fertility treatments. Handwerker (1995a, 1995b, 1998), in a 1990 ethnographic study of infertile women in Beijing, finds that the demographic surveys conducted in conjunction with the family planning campaign help to create a powerful norm—the fertile woman—from which infertile women deviate. Motherhood remains normative, the defining characteristic of adult womanhood. Childless couples observe that families with one child are eligible for various rewards not available to the childless; one woman told Lisa Handwerker, “the one-child policy is really the ‘you must have one-child policy’” (1998: 183). Since 1985, infertility clinics have been established in many hospitals. Male infertility, while acknowledged, is considered shameful and women often protect their husbands by concealing it. Female infertility, in contrast, is scrutinized and often blamed on the woman herself, who may be castigated for her previous sexual history or for pursuing her studies rather than reproduction (Handwerker 1998). Handwerker points out that “the focus on women, not men, perpetuates the idea that the ability and will to reproduce and maintain the integrity of the family and the nation is vested in women” (1995b: 378).

## SEXUALITY AND GENDER DIFFERENCE

The works and themes surveyed in this section are far more fragmentary than those treating marriage and families, a circumstance that reflects both habits of scholarship and the availability of sources. Writings about bodies and sexuality draw on the ethnographic, the medical, the nationalistic, and the analysis of a substantial array of writings we might call “anxiety literature,” which discuss practices that are no longer acceptable (footbinding) and persons (woman students, homosexuals, prostitutes) whose actions redefine or threaten to disrupt current social arrangements. Writings about gender difference and its relationship to domestic and undomesticated femininity are largely framed by the concerns of the reform era, although a closer look reveals continuities between the Mao years and the reforms.

### *Bodies and Sexuality*

Dorothy Ko has argued in a major recent study of footbinding (2005) that scholars have understood the practice entirely through the agitation against it that began in the late nineteenth century and lasted well into the twentieth. Treating it as emblem and cause of China's weakness and ills, reformers inside and outside the Qing, Republican, and PRC governments sought its abolition in the name of national strength and modernity. Ko asks, instead, that we start from the premise "that footbinding was an embodied experience, a reality to a select group of women from the twelfth to the twentieth centuries" (1), and that we regard it as an ongoing process central to the creation of meanings of gender that changed across time. Although much of her discussion involves earlier periods and is beyond the scope of this review, she begins her exploration with the end of footbinding in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. She examines the category of "natural feet," introduced by missionaries and taken up by reformers in the 1890s, which helped to "introduce a view of the body as a machine"(5) whose optimal functioning was required of each national citizen. Footbinding then became the Other of modernity, a shameful remnant that had to be overcome in order for a healthy nation to emerge. Women's agency was to be relocated from the daily rebinding of feet to the single heroic act of unwrapping the bindings and striding forth into the world. And yet, as Ko meticulously documents for Shanxi province, the natural foot campaign, pursued as government policy in rural Republican China, met resistance from family patriarchs and village women alike, prompting public sympathy for women harassed by government bureaucrats. During the 1930s, Yao Lingxi, a man of letters living in the treaty port of Tianjin, assembled and published an encyclopedia of footbinding, including photographs, travel accounts, changing fashions in footwear and bindings, poems, letters, songs, memoirs, and interviews. This marked footbinding's final transformation from a woman's daily bodily practice to an object of connoisseurship and obsession by male editors and readers.

Changes in the discourses of human reproduction during the same period were less dramatic. In the imperial era, medical practitioners held reproducing couples and women in particular to standards of moderation and restraint intended to produce healthy offspring (Dikötter 1998; Furth 1999). Women were blamed for birth defects. In the Republican period, social criticism, medical texts, and fiction "maintained earlier preoccupations with reproduction, health, and family continuity while adding the question of what sorts of sexual behavior were appropriate to a modern

society" (Hershatter 1996: 80). During the New Culture movement, the scientific study of sexuality was promoted as a modern area of inquiry, giving particular attention to disease and danger. New biologizing discourses, many of them developed by male feminists, reinforced a gender hierarchy in which women were seen as less evolved and intelligent than men. Normatively understood as passive respondents to male sexual activity, they were regarded as dangerous if sexually assertive. Weakened by menstruation, pregnancy, and menopause, prone to hysteria, women were nevertheless held more responsible than men for the reproductive realm (Dikötter 1995).

Republican-era biomedical writers reinforced the importance of fetal education, in which a pregnant woman was exhorted to avoid excitation or acts of imagination in order to produce a healthy child (Dikötter 1995, 1998). Thinkers across the political spectrum joined their counterparts in many other parts of the world in linking eugenics to the future of the race and the nation (Dikötter 1998; Barlow 2004, 2005; Sakamoto 2004). They assigned women substantial responsibility not only for the perpetuation of the family but also for the very survival of China. Frank Dikötter sees the contemporary concern with population quality in the PRC and the 1995 law intended to limit "inferior" births as a continuation of these trends (Dikötter 1998; see also Banister 1987).

Ethnographic work suggests a continuing association among women, reproduction, and danger. Emily Ahern (1975) describes the power and pollution associated with the blood of menstruation and childbirth, as well as the practices of purification and avoidance that contain it. In her more recent work, based on field observations in Taiwan, she suggests that women see birth, death, and the relationship between them in a specifically gendered way, regarding childbirth as closely conjoined to and containing the possibility of death. Funeral rituals performed by women, she notes, sometimes incorporate cloth also used in baby carriers (Martin 1988).

In cities before 1949, transient male foreigners, literati, sojourning merchants, and the working poor sought sexual services in a highly segmented market, and the varieties of working conditions make the unifying label "prostitution" of limited descriptive use. Nevertheless, prostitution was a powerful theme in Republican narratives about modernity. While intellectuals linked prostitution to social disorder, cultural backwardness, and national weakness, popular writings narrated a devolution from the cultured nineteenth-century courtesan (X. Ye 1999; Henriot 1994, 1997; V. Ho 1993; Yingjin Zhang 1999b; C. Yeh 2005) to the diseased streetwalker who worked the streets of Shanghai, Canton, and other expanding cities

(Gronewold 1984; Hershatter 1989, 1991, 1992a, 1993, 1994, 1997; Henriot 1992, 1994, 1996, 1997; V. Ho 1993; Yingjin Zhang 1999b). Such accounts may well be more useful as indicators of elite male anxiety—individual, social, and national—than as accurate renderings of prostitution, but they do convey a sense of the variety of motivations, arrangements, social standing, and regulatory constraints of women in the sex trades. They also delineate the status preoccupation of urban men: guidebooks described how men should conduct themselves properly to avoid humiliation in courtesan houses, thereby demonstrating their masculine urbanity in a changing world where social arrangements were not fixed (V. Ho 1993; Hershatter 1997; C. Yeh 1998, 2005). Individual courtesans sometimes played significant political roles by virtue of their connections with powerful men (Dong 2005). Under Guomindang law, prostitution was not illegal (P. Huang 2001a: 183), and taxes on prostitution provided revenues for local state-building in many provinces (V. Ho 1993; Remick 2003). Regulating prostitution, however, or better yet eliminating it, became a sign of national recovery and a goal of successive Chinese governments, from various warlord regimes through the Guomindang and the Communists, who came closer to achieving it than their predecessors (Hershatter 1992b, 1992c, 1996, 1997; Henriot 1988, 1995, 1997).

By the mid-1990s, prostitution once again had become a frequent topic in journalism, sexology (D. Liu et al. 1997), sociology, criminology (R. Jiang 1997; Dongchen District 1997; Ouyang 1997; Dazhong Wang 1997; C. Qian 1997; Yanshang Zhang 1997; Jeffreys 2004a, 2004b), and popular literature (Yongshan Li 1997; Niu 1997), with cautionary tales of abduction and victimization alternating with stories about the high income, upward mobility, and excitement enticing women into sex work (X. Xu 1996; Hershatter 1997; V. Ho 1998–99; Evans 1997, 2000, 2003). Prostitution also became a regular, if less often discussed, feature of rural life (Friedman 2000, 2006; Yuen, Law, and Ho 2004). State attempts to detain and reeducate prostitutes (and occasionally customers) were intermittent and ineffectual (Ruan 1991; Hershatter 1997), although they produced a new web of regulations and procedures, some aimed at preventing state officials from patronizing sex workers (Jeffreys 1997a, 2004a). Some authors see the growth of prostitution as a challenge to repressive state authority (Ruan 1991; V. Ho 1998–99). Others argue that the state has responded in a flexible fashion to the need to delineate new forms of prostitution while regulating new social spaces, and that the police apparatus itself has been transformed in the process (Jeffreys 1997a, 2004a). Whereas some call attention to the relative absence of a discourse of sex work or prostitutes' rights in public dis-

cussion (Hershatter 1997), others question whether transnational feminist categories such as these are appropriately applied to contemporary China (Jeffreys 2004a, 2004b).

Research on prostitution extends to minority regions as well. In the rural Tai minority area of Xishuangbanna, Yunnan, Han prostitutes from Sichuan and Guizhou work in disguised brothels including “karaoke bars, hair salons, barbershops, massage parlors, saunas, and bars” (Hyde 2001: 147). Many of them dress like Tai women in order to enhance their erotic allure to visiting Han businessmen who are seeking an exoticized and ethnicized rural idyll even as they pursue an urban, modern pleasure: sex as a consumer good. This is not the only situation in which minority women are eroticized. The Mosuo, based in Yunnan and Sichuan, have achieved notoriety as a “country of women.” Christine Mathieu (1999) describes Han views of Mosuo sexuality, with its matrilineality and serial sexual liaisons, as simultaneously alluring, dirty, and primitive. Eileen Walsh (2005) explores Mosuo engagement with ethnic tourism. She suggests that Mosuo participate in but also reshape the commodification of their culture, in a situation where “tourism has reified culture as a gendered consumable” (451). Louisa Schein, in her study of the Miao (1997, 2000), notes that in the 1980s cosmopolitan Han Chinese engaged in “internal orientalism,” othering minorities as exotic, erotic, irreducibly rural, and prototypically female, and in the process defining Han men as modern urban subjects. Schein (2000: 285) warns that “for the feminine to be called up again and again where peasant minorities were concerned only reinforced that femininity stood unquestioned as the inferior rank in a vertical social ordering.” Cherlene Makley (2002: 579) comments that the “‘erotics of the exotic’ on the Sino-Tibetan frontier” has been accompanied by a heightened concern with “containing, regulating, and objectifying female sexuality above all,” and that Tibetan women carry a “disproportionate burden” (616) of maintaining community morality in a period of accelerating change.

As women’s education and companionate marriage became features of the modern ideal in Republican China, women’s nonmarital sexual activity, already regarded as a threat to patriarchal power, was criticized on new grounds. This was true not only with respect to prostitutes, but with sexual acts between women as well. Such acts were occasionally described in Republican-era erotic literature (Ruan 1991; Ruan and Bullough 1992). Examining May Fourth-era debates, Tze-lan Sang (2003; see also Damm 2005) finds the introduction of a neologism, “same-sex love” (*tongxing ai*), which emphasized emotional connection as well as erotic activity. Translations of Western sexological works contributed to a medicalization

of same-sex relations. In journals aimed at an urban middle-class readership, women's same-sex erotic activity was portrayed as abnormal and in need of regulation (like female sexuality more generally), although some writers defended intense affectionate attachments between young women. Writers of scientific treatises and fiction regarded same-sex relationships among students (both male and female) as situational rather than biologically determined. Sang notes that these authors expressed more anxiety over same-sex relations between women than men, fearing that increased independence combined with attraction to other women might induce some women not to marry.

Same-sex relationships were not mentioned in sources from the Mao years, at least not in those accessible at this writing. Scattered reportage about lesbian couples began to appear during the reform era, usually as a minor theme in investigations of male homosexual relationships. This material tended to portray lesbianism as a reaction to abuse or neglect by men or as a compensatory form of sexual contact adopted in the absence of male sexual partners (Ruan and Bullough 1992). Fictional works by Lin Bai and Chen Ran explored female homoeroticism (Sang 2003), while less positive treatments in journalistic literature represented lesbians as jealous, lascivious, violent, and generally incomprehensible (X. Xu 1996). An emergent urban network of lesbians centered on Beijing organized a conference in 1998 (He 2001) and began to publish a community newsletter (Sang 2003). Like gay men, they identify themselves as *tongzhi*, appropriating a term which meant "comrade" in the Mao years.

In urban reform-era China, new notions of masculinity and femininity have been marketed through the use of athletes and models. Susan Brownell introduces the term "body culture," including "daily practices of health, hygiene, fitness, beauty, dress, and decoration," as well as the means by which the body is trained and displayed to express a particular lifestyle (Brownell 2001: 124; 1995: 10). During the late imperial period, she notes, gender distinctions (among others) were established via dress, hairstyle, and footbinding. Late Qing reformers and revolutionaries, in agitating against footbinding, also advocated that women engage in physical education (Rankin 1975; Brownell 1995; H. Fan 1997; Yu 2005). Men, too, were exhorted by reformers to abandon older notions of sports as a lower-class activity, and to build up their physical strength as a means of strengthening the nation. This association of modern nationhood with physical fitness intensified during the Republican period (H. Fan 1997; Z. Wang 1999; Yu 2005), and by 1924 China's National Games included sports for women (Brownell 1995). In the Communist base areas in Jiangxi and Yan'an (H.

Fan 1997), and on into the PRC, body culture became more homogeneous (Brownell 1995), linked to military and (in the PRC) working-class ideal types. In the reform period, woman athletes continued to be trained, as they were under Mao, in a sports system that minimized gender difference and produced athletes meant to embody a homogeneous vision of the nation (Brownell 1999, 2001). Because Chinese women athletes have done better than men in international competitions, however, they hold a special place in reform-era Chinese nationalism, even though Brownell (1999) characterizes popular nationalism in China as predominantly about the redemption and strengthening of masculinity. Woman, who in the late Qing and early Republic symbolized China's weakness, became in the 1980s a source of redemption from those earlier humiliations and from the recent Cultural Revolution travails as well. When the Chinese women's volleyball team won the World Cup in 1981, letters from the public praised them for overcoming extreme hardship to gain a victory that helped to vitiolate China's national humiliation. Popular responses called this a victory, not for women or even for Chinese women, but for China (Brownell 1995, 1999).

Although the question of women in sports is not framed in gender-specific terms, the success of women athletes is linked in the popular press to women's ability to "eat bitterness," a sign of female virtue and industriousness in revolutionary discourse as well. Where sports commentators see female virtue, however, Brownell (1995, 1999) sees a social logic wherein women, particularly rural women, regard sports as a rare means of social mobility. Hoping that prominence in a sport will make them more desirable marriage partners, women athletes are concerned not to let their skin become too dark or to injure their reproductive health by training during their menstrual periods. Brownell argues that in comparison to American woman athletes, they are less subject to questions about their sexuality (Brownell 1995).

Like athletes, women fashion models are meant to demonstrate that China has arrived in transnational culture, in this case by performing haute couture femininity—and height (5'11" and taller is preferred). Chinese runway models present themselves either as "Western" (expressive, exuberant) or "traditional Oriental" (melancholy, nonthreatening). The contrasting rules for gendered self-presentation of athletes and models notwithstanding, Brownell (1998–99, 2000, 2001; see also Finnane 2005a) sees nationalist rhetoric emanating from sports contests and supermodel competitions alike. She warns (1998–99) that new forms of patriarchy are emerging through the deployment of these women's bodies, even as the athletes and models themselves experience their new opportunities as liberating.

By the turn of the twenty-first century, new venues for socializing—

including discos, social dance clubs, and the Internet—provided opportunities for “sexual play” free of permanent relationships, in which flirtation and sexual activity might be understood within a narrative of romantic love but were assumed not to lead to marriage (Farrer 2000, 2002; Farrer and Sun 2003). James Farrer (2000) exempts karaoke bars from this characterization, because they were often used to build long-term business relationships. He finds that in discos young single men and women honed their skills of self-display and desirability, while in social dance halls middle-aged employees in the state sector enjoyed small intimacies and discreet erotic pleasure, up to and including pre- and extramarital affairs.

In a study of “the rhetoric of sexuality of everyday social interactions” (2002: 3) among young unmarried nonmigrant heterosexual men and women in Shanghai during the 1990s, Farrer describes a rapidly changing and elaborate sexual culture, encompassing not only what people do, but the stories they tell about themselves, their desires, and their motives. He finds that young people designate certain acts as “play” and therefore exempt from the requirements of everyday morality. In contrast to breathless journalistic accounts of contemporary Shanghai, which generally mention the past only as a foil for a globalized present, Farrer notes “a layering of multiple historical ‘modernities’” (2002: 10) in Shanghai, encompassing the colonial and socialist pasts as well as the current moment. He argues that Shanghai’s emergent sexual culture must be understood in the context of the market economy, in which the stories Shanghai residents tell about sexual choices, the role of money, inequality, and leisure-time activities are used (much as they were in the 1920s and 1930s; see Hershatter 1997) “to mark moral and social boundaries in a newly forming market society” (2002: 12).

### *Domestic and Undomesticated Femininity*

During the Mao years, state pronouncements on the question of women emphasized the obligation of and opportunity for all women to contribute to society. The quintessential slogans were “women hold up half the sky” and Mao’s pronouncement, “Times have changed. Whatever men comrades can do, women comrades can do.” Much scholarship about the collective era has suggested that serious problems were elided by these formulations. The norm for achievement in work and politics was the unmarked male (Honig and Hershatter 1988; Dai 1995). The norm in urban dress was the cadre suit, except during the clothing reform campaign of 1955–56, which differentiated appropriate clothing by gender and urban/rural location (Finnane 2003). Accounts describing the years between 1949 and 1976 focus on the

state's promotion of gender similarity, with some subtle differences in dress (T. Chen 2003b). Croll (1995) argues that the Mao-era approach to gender neglected the specificities of women's bodies and their social experiences as daughters and wives, denying women the very language in which to express the gender inequality in their daily lives. The emphasis was on men as the norm in revolutionary models, while women were capable of attaining modelhood if they exhibited sufficient revolutionary zeal (see also Chen 2003a). This argument, however, is necessarily limited by its sources, juxtaposing government rhetoric from the Mao years extolling gender equality with 1980s memoirs and fiction in which women turn a critical eye on the Maoist past.

Women's domestic labor was rendered invisible, and time spent performing it made women less able to rise to supervisory positions in the cities or earn equal workpoints in the countryside. This gender gap was informally acknowledged but not articulated as a social or political problem (Diamond 1975; Davin 1976; Parish and Whyte 1978; Andors 1983; M. Wolf 1985; Hershatter 2002). At the same time, women were clearly expected to take primary responsibility for maintaining a thrifty household, raising children, helping others, promoting public health, and studying—goals recognized by the "Five Good" campaigns in Women's Federation documents during the 1950s and 1960s (Hemmel and Sindbjerg 1984).

Except for a brief period in the mid-1950s (Davin 1975a, 1976), to be a housewife was not a glorified revolutionary role. Wang Zheng recalls the distaste she and her student friends felt in 1978 when they were given special movie tickets for International Women's Day. To be categorized—or, as we might say, interpellated—as a woman was associated with being a "house woman," or housewife. To young urban women raised in the PRC, this was a far less acceptable identity than that of youth, woman student, woman worker, or woman scientist, all of whom could participate fully in socialist construction (Z. Wang 2001). Many young women recall these images as enabling the transgression of gender boundaries, and regard them as a positive legacy of their childhood under Mao (Z. Wang 2001; Zhong, Wang, and Bai 2001). Housewife was a residual category, named as a mobilization target by the state but carrying no revolutionary cachet.

Sexuality and sexual behavior were no longer discussed as practices in need of modernization, as they had been during the Republican period; modernity was to be measured in the realms of production rather than reproduction (Hershatter 1996). Sexual difference in official discourse was narrowly construed, confined to scientific writing and marriage manuals that emphasized the male as initiator of sexual activity and the female as

passive respondent (Evans 1997), a formulation entirely compatible with older notions of male-female complementarity. Therein lies a paradox: women performed many tasks that had been the preserve of men, but in the sexual and domestic realms, gender difference continued to be a foundational assumption. Harriet Evans (1995, 1997, 2002) has argued persuasively that throughout the revolutionary and reform periods, female gender was portrayed as an effect of sexual difference, “defined by a series of innate and essential characteristics associated with certain responses, needs, and capacities that naturally make women wives and mothers” (2002: 336; see also Jankowiak 2002). Side by side with the repeated campaigns of the 1950s to raise the status of women, grant them equal rights in marriage, and mobilize them for socialist construction through labor outside the home, important assumptions about “woman’s nature” remained unquestioned in a time of rapid social and economic change. The same might be said about the recent period of economic reforms. Indeed, such unquestioned assumptions may have facilitated change in both periods by reassuring Chinese people that the world was not, in important respects, being turned upside down.

The explicit articulation of gender difference, never easily discussed in the lexicon of class, certainly lessened during the Cultural Revolution era. Little has been said, or written, about gender difference as perceived by those who lived it in the revolutionary era, although memoirs by former girl Red Guards, written years later from an expatriate vantage point, provide intriguing clues that their psychic lives, sexual desires, and sense of gender difference were far too complex to be contained by the strictures of public discourse (A. Min 1995; R. Yang 1997; Z. Wang 2001; see also Hershatter 1996; Honig 2000, 2003). Many women remember their years as “sent-down youth” in the countryside as a time of experimentation and adventure, albeit perilous and fraught with sexual vulnerability (M. Young 1989; Honig 2000, 2003; Lin 2003). Rae Yang’s description (1997) of her dream life during her rural sojourn provides a rich account of inchoate (and not-so-inchoate) sexual yearnings. Wang Zheng’s memories of secretly reading Victorian novels and identifying with the heroines, as well as her pleasure in covering her body with a gray plastic raincoat on her way to go swimming, suggest that physical modesty served as a form of gender identity and that “Victorian gender discourse . . . blended well with communist sexual mores” (Z. Wang 2001). Mores often diverged from practice, however, as substantial numbers of pregnancies, abortions, and out-of-wedlock births were recorded among sent-down youth in some locales (Honig 2003).

In the 1980s, one of the many charges leveled at Mao (often by party-

state authorities) was that he had ignored "human nature," which was understood to be an irreducible set of behaviors knowable through scientific investigation. Popular and scholarly periodicals alike discussed the biology of sex difference, criticizing Maoist policies for having held women to male standards, ignoring women's particular characteristics and needs (Honig and Hershatter 1988). Work arrangements in factories and fields were criticized for taking insufficient account of women's menstrual cycles, bodily strength, and primary responsibility for domestic tasks, also assumed to be natural. The high-achieving "Iron Girls," with their manic work schedules and acrobatics on high-voltage power lines, became objects of national satire (Honig and Hershatter 1988; Honig 2000). Protective labor regulations were issued in 1988, calling attention to the special needs of women during menstruation, pregnancy, and lactation, and mandating that units with large numbers of women workers provide for these needs and for childcare (Croll 1995). Although such benefits were not implemented by autonomous employers, this "biologization" of women workers contributed to the growing unwillingness of work units to hire or retain married women during the reform period (Woo 1994).

Emerging notions of femininity emphasized gender difference, sexual appeal to men, and motherhood. Many factors contributed to this shift: commodification and shifting labor markets (J. Zang 2005), popular reaction to the state-sponsored feminism of the Mao era, and the state's withdrawal from regulation of both family relations and work, even as it has intensified its regulation of birth planning. Lisa Rofel (1999b) suggests that the intense attention to marking and marketing gender difference was both a critique of a failed Maoism and an assertion that "natural" gender roles had to be recognized in order for China to reach modernity. Among ethnicized minorities as well as among the Han, consumption and the commodification of bodies themselves came to signify the modern (Gillette 2000a, 2000b; Makley 2002; Walsh 2005).

In the reform era, adornment was presented as a natural female desire, with its necessary commodities to be supplied by an expanding consumer market (Honig and Hershatter 1988; Xiaoping Li 1998; Hooper 1999; Gillette 2000a, 2000b; Evans 2001; Farquhar 2002; Finnane 2005a; Friedman 2006). Over more than two decades of reform, the female body was reconfigured as alluring, vulnerable, dependent, and inferior (Hooper 1984; Honig and Hershatter 1988; M. Young 1989; Jankowiak 1993; Croll 1995; Xiaoping Li 1998; M. Yang 1999a; Z. Wang 2001; Evans 2000, 2002), characterizations that echo Republican-era sexual discourse (Dikötter 1995). For young women born and brought up in the reform era, fashion and beauty (includ-

ing, by the 1990s, variable hair color) became arenas for newly permitted self-expression and experimentation with fantasies of self. To be fashionable, Evans suggests, meant to be “Western” (2001; see also Xiaoping Li 1998; Finnane 2005a), although localized fashions such as exposed short nylon stockings (Chew 2003), fashions adapted from other Asian locations, and reinvented Chinese traditions were also prominent. White skin and large breasts were featured as desirable attributes in product advertising, the former associated with modesty and self-protection from the sun and coarsening influences more generally, the latter explicitly linked both to nature and to “prosperity and civilization” (Johansson 1998–99: 75).

It is important not to overstate the break between Maoist and reform-era representations of femininity. In both periods, women were regarded as responsive and dependent in their sexuality (Evans 1997, 2000), and sexuality was discussed in a variety of contexts—mostly unofficial during the Cultural Revolution, but nonetheless important (Honig 2003). The topics and range of representations are far more diverse in the market reform period than in socialism’s early years. Yet writings from both periods assume that gender is an effect of sexual difference, and since sexual difference is seen to be determined by immutable scientific verities, gender characteristics and the sexual behavior associated with them are not candidates for social change. In both periods, the experience of marriage and motherhood has been near universal, and even with the proliferation of erotic images and venues for sexual activity, reproduction remains central to most discussions of women’s sexuality in the press, advertisements, medicine, and educational materials, as well as in what we know about rural conversations (Friedman 2000). In both periods, domestic labor and the maintenance of family have been women’s responsibility, defined not as work but rather as a burden (Jacka 1997). Prescriptive writings of the Maoist period assigned wives responsibility for conjugal and family harmony and for supporting their husbands, even as they themselves were exhorted to enter a wider work and political arena. Women were assumed to have a particular affinity for the domestic and emotional labor of maintaining a household. Although state propaganda anticipated a future in which housework would be socialized, and experimental gestures were made in that direction during the Great Leap Forward, until the revolution came to fruition, housework was to be primarily women’s responsibility (Evans 2002; Manning 2005).

But while women under Mao were supposed to do all this while also maintaining their concern with the world beyond the home, in the reform era, both “housewife” and “mother” were reconfigured as central roles for women. The increased availability of domestic consumer goods such

as washing machines and processed foods was presented as a benefit to women in individual family units (Robinson 1985; Davin 1989; Hooper 1999); collectivized or community facilities to lighten the domestic workload were not even marginally on the public agenda, although local investment in childcare centers may have increased somewhat (Robinson 1985; Croll 1985c). Domestic space was represented in advertising, fiction, television, and the press as an enhanced rather than residual realm coordinated by a discerning female consumer (Yang 1999b). The history of the bourgeois Shanghai family of the Republican period was rediscovered and partially valorized (W. Yeh 2005). The phrase “virtuous wife and good mother,” which had circulated in the early twentieth century (Borthwick 1985), enjoyed a resurgence (M. Wolf 1985; Honig and Hershatter 1988; Beaver, Hou, and Wang 1995; Milwertz 1997), as did the notion that women were primarily responsible for the healthy development and moral education of children (Robinson 1985; Croll 1985c; Davin 1989; Jacka 1990, 1997; Greenhalgh and Winckler 2005).

In the late 1980s, the northern village of Daqiu Zhuang briefly gained notoriety when it made women’s return to full-time housework a linchpin of village economic development strategy (Jacka 1990; Beaver, Hou, and Wang 1995). A popular TV soap opera aired in 1991, “Yearnings,” featured a character who gained a serious national following because of her selfless attempts to sacrifice for an uncaring husband and a disabled adoptive child (Rofel 1994b; Evans 2002). Milwertz (1997: 122) points out that urban women have responded to the one-child policy by pursuing the “cultivation of the perfect only child,” one who is given every possible educational, extracurricular, and material advantage, guided and supervised by a dedicated and anxious mother. In this context, she suggests, urban women continued to build a “uterine family,” this time to secure care in old age rather than an improved position with husbands and in-laws. Suzanne Gottschang (2001: 90) points to “conflicting ideals of motherhood” wherein companies market infant formula to new mothers by appealing to their desire to be sexually attractive, “scientific,” and modern, while a state campaign for infant health uses similar images to encourage women to breastfeed.

In the early 1980s, the Chinese press began to report cases of violence against women. Public discussion of such violence should to be understood in the context of the commodification of social relationships, on the one hand, and the strengthening of normative domestic roles for women on the other. Whether the actual incidence of violence was on the rise or whether it was being more fully reported and recognized as a problem is not clear (Whyte 2000). Violence has been directed at married women fulfilling

normative gender roles as wives (M. Liu 2002; X. Wang 2004; McDougall 2005), particularly if they have married far from home (Davin 1997, 1999) or failed to produce male children (Honig and Hershatter 1988; Gilmartin 1990). Sometimes, as mentioned earlier, such incidents were categorized (or misrecognized) as feudal remnants which caused families to abuse women who gave birth to girls (Anagnost 1988). Alternatively, they were framed as illustrations of women's legal rights, in which wife beating, interference with women's marriage choice, female infanticide, and rape were condemned (Honig and Hershatter 1988; Gilmartin 1990; Croll 1994; Hershatter 1997). Self-directed violence of the most extreme sort—suicide—has emerged in recent mental-health studies as a profoundly gendered phenomenon. In contrast to international patterns, suicides in China among women far outnumber those of men (Phillips, Li, and Zhang 2002a; Pearson and Liu 2002; M. Liu 2002), and the suicide rate among young rural women in the 1990s was 66 percent higher than that of their rural male counterparts. Researchers attribute many of the suicides and attempted suicides not to mental illness or economic difficulties but rather to impulsive decisions made in the aftermath of spousal or family conflicts, often involving a physically abusive husband, with the added factor of readily available lethal pesticides (Phillips, Li, and Zhang 2002a, 2002b; Pearson and Liu 2002; M. Liu 2002; Pearson et al. 2002). As in earlier periods, anger, the desire for revenge on family members, and the ability to assert a powerful demand for justice, albeit posthumously, appear to remain potent motivations for suicide among rural women (Pearson and Liu 2002; M. Liu 2002).

In spite of such abundant evidence that home was not always a haven from danger, another theme in reporting on violence against women was the dictum not to stray too far from the protection of domestic life. Cautionary tales warned women to beware of abduction, stay out of prostitution, and protect themselves against rape, illustrating these points by recounting the gruesome misfortunes of victims. In Lijiang during the late 1990s, women taxi drivers (unusual elsewhere in China) became the subject of stories about death and dismemberment, and more generally about danger, immorality, and ambiguously sexed or intractably smelly bodies. Emily Chao (2003) suggests that these tales, which incorporated older notions of female pollution, fox spirits, and witchcraft, expressed anxiety about "women out of place," reinforcing through talk the boundaries between respectable and licentious women, between rural migrants (the drivers) and urban dwellers, and between unregulated entrepreneurs and the more constrained and indignant state sector employees. Evans (1997) points out that public discussions of trafficking, prostitution, pornography, rape, adul-

tery, and homosexuality all portray women who engage in unapproved and undomesticated behavior as victims or as depraved, reinforcing the narrow range of subject positions that constitute normative female sexuality.

The valorization of gender difference in the reform era underscores the ongoing romance with science that has been an enduring feature of efforts to define a Chinese modernity in the twentieth century. Yet outside China, scientific theorizing about gender has shifted dramatically in recent decades, while the questioning of foundational scientific truths has become a quintessential sign of the postmodern. It remains to be seen how or whether these developments will inflect Chinese discourses on gender and sexuality, which are increasingly engaged in transnational conversations.