Halle Studies in the Anthropology of Eurasia

Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology

Care and Ageing in North-West China

Heila Sha

LIT

Care and Ageing in North-West China

A major emerging concern in China's great socio-economic transformation is how to take care of a rapidly ageing population. Traditions of filial piety and family obligation have been called into question by the One Child Policy and rural-urban migration, as well as by the challenges of successive social revolutions since the Communist Liberation of 1949. This study uses eldercare as a window through which to explore larger theoretical questions concerning the nature of Chinese patriarchy, modernization, urbanization, and individualization. It is set in the *bingtuan*, a paramilitary state organization in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region composed largely of migrants, and embedded within the growing anthropological literature on care and social support.

Concentrating on health, housing, and social status, Heila Sha [Saheira Haliel] investigates mechanisms of intergenerational support and their potential for conflict. She draws attention to changes in long-term care, remarriage dilemmas, and property tensions with adult children, and argues that eldercare has remained continuously rooted in values particular to the Chinese family, but that these values have been reinterpreted and renegotiated in response to changing conditions. The elderly themselves are active participants in the transformation of social support networks. Whereas children formerly had an absolute obligation to care for their elderly parents, the study reveals a shift to new eldercare patterns based on self-reliance, 'peer-ageing strategies', balanced reciprocity between the generations, and reduced gender bias. The material dimension of property arrangements and the emotional dimension of personal feelings are equally central. The state's pension system, accelerating socio-economic changes, and the life histories of successive waves of migrants combine to shape the patterns of care and the values underpinning them. Ethical dilemmas – like conflicts between filial piety and individual fulfilment or duty to one's spouse and children – are related to the ideological and institutional conditions of the Chinese 'reform socialist' political economy.

In the conclusion, Heila Sha takes up theoretical discussions of ageing and care from a broader anthropological perspective. Eldercare is one facet of a general insecurity or uncertainty that is socially constructed and continuously modified by socio-economic modernization. Care needs, expectations, and the extent to which they can be fulfilled are shaped by local environments, access to resources, and social relations involving interdependence between individuals, communities, and state agencies. Eldercare emerges through the agency of elderly individuals themselves in negotiation with multiple actors (intimate as well as institutional), in the course of practices that reflect self-interest, and through a range of moral ideologies.

Halle Studies in the Anthropology of Eurasia

General Editors:

Christoph Brumann, Kirsten Endres, Chris Hann, Burkhard Schnepel, Lale Yalçın-Heckmann

Volume 34

LIT

Heila Sha

Care and Ageing in North-West China

LIT

https://doi.org/10.52038/978-3643-90874-2

Made available under a CC BY-NC-ND 4. license.

Cover Photo: Elders are playing poker under the arbor of the square (Photo: Heila Sha [Saheira Haliel], 2012).

This work is a revised version of my dissertation manuscript, submitted to the Faculty of Philosophy I at Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg in 2015.

This book is printed on acid-free paper.

Bibliografische Information der Deutschen Nationalbibliothek
Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der Deutschen Nationalbibliografie; detaillierte bibliografische Daten sind im Internet über http://dnb.d-nb.de abrufbar.

ISBN 978-3-643-90874-2 (pb)
ISBN 978-3-643-95874-7 (PDF)

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

©LIT VERLAG Dr. W. Hopf
Berlin 2017
Fresnostr. 2
D-48159 Münster
Tel. +49 (0) 2 51-62 03 20
Fax +49 (0) 2 51-23 19 72
E-Mail: lit@lit-verlag.de
http://www.lit-verlag.de

LIT VERLAG GmbH & Co. KG Wien,
Zweigniederlassung Zürich 2017
Klosbachstr. 107
CH-8032 Zürich
Tel. +41 (0) 44-251 75 05
Fax +41 (0) 44-251 75 06
E-Mail: zuerich@lit-verlag.ch
http://www.lit-verlag.ch

Contents

	List of Illustrations	ix
	Acknowledgements	xi
	Note on Transliteration	xv
1	**Introduction**	**1**
	Ageing in China	4
	Modernization Theory and Ageing	6
	Filial Piety and the Inter-Generational Contract	7
	Modifying Modernization Theory in the Anthropology of Ageing	16
	Social Support, Security, and Care in Old Age	18
	Fieldwork in the *Bingtuan*	22
	Outline of Chapters	30
2	**The *Bingtuan* in Xinjiang: Place and People**	**33**
	Geography	34
	Population and Ethnic Composition	36
	Xinjiang before 1949	38
	The *Bingtuan*: From Emergence to Dissolution	43
	Outside the *Bingtuan*: Xinjiang in Maoist Times	46
	The *Bingtuan* since 1982	48
	Challenges and Opportunities in the Development of Xinjiang	55
3	**Tuan 143**	**63**
	Before Economic Reform (1949-1978)	64
	After Openness: On the Road to a Market Economy	69
	Workers, their Status, and Social Welfare	75
	Life in the Town	78
	Life in the Agricultural Units (*Liandui*)	82
	Individual Life Experiences	84
	Perceptions of Present Life	96
	Conclusion	99

4 Health and Self-Care 101

Diseases, Suffering, and Uncertainty 103
Health Promotion among *Bingtuan* Elderly 105
Why is Health Promotion so Important? 120
Conclusion 128

5 Urbanization, Housing, and Social Status 131

Desire for a *Loufang* 133
The Inconveniences of *Liandui* Life 134
Feeling Uncomfortable: Status Differentiation in the *Liandui* 141
Constrained Desires: Poor Elderly, Poor Children 144
Moving to a *Loufang* 150
Housing Policy and the *Loufang* Boom 153
Getting Housing in Town 157
Status and its Perception in Town 162
Conclusion 165

6 Inter-Generational Support and Conflict 167

Living Arrangements and Shifting Values 167
Beyond Housing: Other Forms of Inter-Generational Support 176
Persistent Gender Roles: 'Daughter is Good, but Son is Important' 185
Inter-Generational Conflicts 187
Renegotiating Filial Piety: Power and Care 191
Carrying the Bowl with Balance 195
Conclusion 198

7 Long-Term Care in the *Bingtuan* 201

In the Care of a Spouse 203
Calling on the Children to Care 206
Care with Love 215
Alternatives to Family Care 218
Past Relations and the Care Equation 220
Filial Ideals and Present Practical Realities 225
Conclusion 227

8 Late-Life Marriage and Cohabitation 229

Comparing Late-Life Marriage and Cohabitation in China and the West 230
On-the-Ground in the *Bingtuan* 231
Remarriage: Full of Uncertainty 233
Lawsuits: Partners, Children, and Property 243
Remarriage: Possibilities for Stability? 252
Cohabitation 255
Conclusion 258

9 Conclusion 261

Active Ageing and the Individualization of the Elderly 262
Inter-Generational Care: Interdependence, Reciprocity, and Negotiations 265
Beyond Filial Piety: Spouses, Peers, and Self-Care 272
Ageing in the Age of Neoliberalism 276

Appendix 277

Bibliography 283

Index 303

List of Illustrations

Maps

1 Location of the field site 36
2 Tuan 143 65

Plates

1 Entrance gate to Tuan 143 79
2 The south square 80
3 The north square 81
4 Exercise equipment on the square 110
5 Dancing on the square 111
6 Elders chatting in the neighbourhood (*xiaoqu*) 112
7 Playing mah-jong in the street 113
8 Part-time work trimming grapes 115
9 Old houses in the *liandui* 134
10 Milking shed in the *liandui* 136
11 Shop in the *liandui* 138
12 Elders in the *liandui* struggle with heavy snow in winter 139
13 Elderly 'left behind' in the *liandui* 140
14 *Xiaokangfang* 147
15 Elders take care of grandchildren 171
16 Elders help children with farming 172
17 Retired son takes care of mother 187

(all photographs by author, 2012–2013)

Tables

1 Population and age breakdown of Tuan 143 in 2011 64
2 Migration in Tuan 143 during 2011 76
3 *Loufang* ownership and living arrangements 160
4 Inter-generational living in Tuan 143 169
5 Do children give money to elders? 277
6 Which children give money? 277
7 Who buys things for elder? 278
8 Who cares for a sick elder? 279

9 To whom does an elder give money? 280
10 Property owned by elders 280
11 How do elders wish to divide inheritance? 281
12 Principles for distributing inheritance 282

Acknowledgements

Before beginning this project, it had been my long-term dream to study abroad, gain access to cutting-edge knowledge and theory, and strengthen the basis for my academic career. Prof. Chris Hann, Director of the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology (MPISA), offered me the opportunity to fulfil this dream, and words can hardly express my appreciation to him. During my years in Halle, Chris supervised my work. He and his wife, Ildikó Bellér-Hann, gave me invaluable comments and advice on writing. They also offered encouragement and validation, giving me the confidence to carry through the project and finish the dissertation, while Chris's strict timeframe helped me to manage my work, and finish the writing process more quickly than I expected. My gratitude to them both is immense.

Nor can I overstate my gratitude to MPISA, not just for financial support and the superb facilities that it provided, but also for intellectual stimulation. I benefited a great deal from the many lectures, seminars, colloquiums, and workshops organized by the institute. I am particularly grateful to my colleagues within the Department of Resilience and Transformation in Eurasia, and the research group, 'Social Support and Kinship in China and Vietnam'. All our talks and discussions were of great value, as were the several opportunities to present my work at the department's regular seminars. The critiques and comments I received were particularly useful.

It was Prof. Dan Smyer Yu of Yunnan Minzu University who informed me of the opportunity at MPISA, introduced me to Chris in a different context, and offered continual support and encouragement throughout the process. I would like to express my deep gratitude for his help. I also owe great debts to Dr. Gonçalo Santos and Dr. Xiujie Wu. Both of them played the role of second supervisor in the early stages of my research, giving me advice when I faced difficulties. My appreciation is heartfelt.

Special thanks go to my dearest friend and colleague Esther Horat, who was always ready to offer intellectual and emotional support at any time – not only reading, commenting upon and discussing each of my chapters – but also offering her generous and sincere support in the major and minor challenges of everyday life in Germany. Without her help, the stable life which is the precondition of writing would not have been possible. Her kindness warmed my heart and helped me overcome homesickness when I was far from my family.

In addition to those mentioned above, I particularly appreciate generous help and advice from professors Christoph Brumann, Kirsten Endres, and Dittmar Schorkowitz. I found great support from my closest colleagues

at MPISA: some on the other side of the doctorate – Chen Meixuan, David O'Kane, Liu Xiaoqian, Roberta Zavoretti – and some struggling alongside me – Miriam Franchina and Simon Schlegel.

No proper words could express my great gratitude to my dear friend Dr. Gordon Ramsey, who has read each piece of my work in detail with great patience, offering comments and advice and confirming every step of my progress. Such support has been important in establishing my confidence and enabling me to make further progress during the writing process. I am also grateful for his support in language improvement and his continual encouragement. A big thank-you is also due to my colleague Dr. Minh Nguyen, for reading every chapter of my work, patiently discussing each, and recommending readings which broadened my view and helped me develop a reflective and self-critical approach to my work. I also appreciate the comments and support I received from Prof. Li Zhang of the University of California, Prof. Wang Jianxin from Lanzhou University, Dr. des. Madlen Kobi from the University of Bern, Prof. Sawut Pawan from Xinjiang University and my colleague Ioan-Mihai Popa from the Department of Law and Anthropology at MPISA. I would also like to express particular gratitude to my close friends, Dr. Zhao Yizhen, and Mao Jianwei, who have accompanied me emotionally, helping to restore my spirit whenever I felt frustrated during the research.

Field research for this dissertation would not have been possible without the support of many people. I want to thank Dr. Gonçalo Santos once again: his help was essential in making connections with local scholars, and his comments on my field reports opened new directions in my research. Prof. Yang Shengmin and Prof. Ding Hong at the School of Ethnology and Sociology, Minzu University of China, and Prof. Wang Jianxin at Lanzhou University, helped me with administrative matters and important connections. Prof. Liu Gongnan, Dean of Law at Shihezi University, helped arrange my affiliation with his university. Both Prof. Liu Gongnan and Assistant Prof. Cui Weifeng from Shihezi University helped me to arrange important connections with my field site. I particularly appreciate Prof. Cui Weifeng, who was always ready to offer help in any difficulties I came across in the field, and whose practical care for my personal security, and introductions to students who were prepared to offer assistance, greatly facilitated my work.

Field research in Tuan 143 would never have been possible without people's willingness to talk to me, share their stories, and allow me to participate in their lives so that I might understand their experience in the *bingtuan* at a deeper level. I was touched by those who treated me as their own daughter, inviting me for meals and offering support when I needed it in daily life. I also feel grateful to Tuan leaders at different levels, particularly

the community leaders, who supported my research and engaged in discussions from which I benefitted greatly. I thank my two assistants, one from Shihezi University and the other from Tuan 143. I do not name them here at their request, but their generous help whenever it was needed is greatly appreciated.

The dissertation that I drafted on return from the field was much improved in the process of examination. Special thanks are due to Prof. Susanne Brandtstädter from Cologne University who served as my external examiner for her sharp comments, critiques, and suggestions on how to improve my theoretical reflections, particularly on the theme of care. As I readied the manuscript for publication, Prof. Charles Stafford of the London School of Economics generously agreed to meet and discuss how to best make a 'book' out of the thesis. Finally, the work of bringing the dissertation into publication required the technical skills of several individuals: Jutta Turner provided the maps; Jennifer Cash undertook the editing; and Berit Westwood managed the layout and formatting.

Most importantly, this work would never have been completed without the support of my extended family. From the deepness of my heart, I appreciate my sisters and brothers for their understanding and support for my research. My brothers came to visit me in the field, one after another, bringing warm clothes and other necessities for surviving the winter. I am also grateful for the understanding of my sweet nephews and nieces, patiently waiting for my return. My relatives in Germany hosted me warmly several times, offering emotional support to make my stay in Germany feel like home.

To all these people, and many others who have supported and accompanied me during my research, I feel wholeheartedly grateful. Without their help and company, this dissertation would not exist. It is to them that I owe the accomplishment of this project, a project which has opened my mind and changed my view of society and life.

Note on Transliteration

Chinese terms and expressions are given in pinyin for the ease of readers who do not read Chinese characters. In a very few instances, I have rendered the characters without pinyin. This is because the subtlety of character choice is important but nearly impossible (and too distracting from the argument) to explain in English.

Chapter 1
Introduction

This book presents an ethnographic exploration of practices and ideologies of eldercare in Tuan 143 of the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (XPCC)[1], a community in China's north-western province of Xinjiang. The XPCC – also known as the *bingtuan* or 'the Corps' – is a paramilitary state organization. Its population is comprised largely of ethnic Han migrants who came to Xinjiang, mostly through state-organized migration programmes, in several waves since the 1949 Communist Revolution.

In exploring the discourses and actions of the elderly, their relatives, and the state on the subject of eldercare, the work will uncover the ways in which macro-level economic and social transformations are manifest in, and sometimes driven by, the material and emotional realities of ordinary Chinese people. Such realities include individual experience and the relationships of family and community. This work, therefore, contributes to understanding inter-generational relations and elder-support in China. But the book is not meant to comment only on China. More generally, this Chinese case is meant to contribute to anthropological research on ageing, particularly by bringing in the themes of social support and care, at a time of rapid and dramatic global social change. Furthermore, it brings an anthropological perspective to interdisciplinary studies of China's contemporary transformations that will be relevant to a broad academic readership.

It is widely agreed that China is a society undergoing transformation on a massive scale and at an extraordinarily rapid pace. The 'modernizing' impetus of the 1949 Communist Revolution has been compounded, amplified, and in some ways dramatically altered by a series of further shifts in policy and power over the succeeding decades. The major shifts include Mao's collectivist Great Leap Forward (1958-61) and Cultural Revolution

[1] *Tuan* means regiment, but it is usually translated as 'regimental farm' in the XPCC. The local inflections of military terminology will be explained further in subsequent sections and chapters.

(1966-76), then Deng-Xiaoping's market-oriented Open Door Policy (1978) and Family Planning Policy (One Child Policy) (1980). Since the 1980s, under Deng and his successors, China has become the fastest growing of the world's major economies; at the same time, it has become the world's fastest ageing society (Leung 1997; Croll 2006b; Guan 2008; Chou 2011; Liu 2014). Two of the most significant consequences of this transformation are large-scale internal migration, particularly of the young (Lee and Xiao 1998; Zhao and Chen 2008; Liu 2014); and simultaneous changes in long-established values, ideologies and practices of filial piety, and care for the elderly (Murphy 2002; Zhan and Montgomery 2003; Zhao and Chen 2008; Liu 2014).[2]

The transformation in elderly care is a particular point of focus for policymakers, scholars, and the general public. Government-sponsored media frequently report disturbing instances of neglect or abuse of elders, yet such reports are paralleled by equally frequent and apparently contradictory images of elderly people singing, dancing, or playing games while enjoying a rewarding and apparently carefree retirement. The media also seek to encourage respect and care for the elderly through such means as the song 'Visit Home Regularly' (*chang huijia kankan*), which was first performed at the National Spring Festival Concert in 1999 and has since become a popular and frequently broadcast tune. A number of scholars have focused on changing practices of eldercare. Some evaluate change positively (e.g. Whyte 1997, 2003a and Zhang 2017), but others see change as a sign of crisis (Guo 2001; Yan 2003b; Ikels 2004a). Such changing practices have been linked to larger theoretical questions concerning the nature of Chinese patriarchy, modernization, urbanization, and individualization. I too explore these topics within the *bingtuan*. As might be expected, some of the patterns witnessed elsewhere in China are more pronounced within this special administrative unit.

The *bingtuan* is a unique institution in China. With its military structure and heritage, location in a frontier region, and long association with migration, the *bingtuan* is expected to play a main role in border defence, economic development, and political stability. It unifies party, government, military, and enterprise roles, and it operates independently from the provincial government of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR). Though the *bingtuan* dropped its overt militarist goals in the early 1990s, and is now most active in the agricultural and food-processing sectors, it remains under the direct supervision of the central government in Beijing.

[2] In this work, 'the elderly' and 'elders' refer to people 60 years of age or older – following the official categorization in China.

At first glance, the particularity of the *bingtuan* might seem to make it a poor representative of either rural or urban communities in China. Yet it is precisely the XPCC's history which makes it a useful window onto contemporary socio-economic transformations. As a product of the revolution, XPCC's structure, history, and even the consciousness of its members tracks the development of communism in China. In particular, the XPCC connects the history of migration in China with other aspects of social and economic transformation. Many of the XPCC's founding members were soldiers in the nationalist Kuomintang Army. Most are now dead, but the presence of those who are still alive bears witness to duelling visions of a modern China in the early twentieth century. Later members, drawn through migration, point to the importance of internal migration before 1978 in communist China's early efforts at modernization. Like the rest of the country, XPCC also has experienced the transformative effects of market reforms since 1978, including at the level of demographics. Nearly a quarter of its population is now over 60. Yet little ethnographic research has been done on the XPCC, despite its capacity to illuminate the underlying nature and practical and ideological effects of China's socio-economic transformations. I therefore conducted one year of fieldwork in the *bingtuan*'s regimental farm Tuan 143. As detailed in the following chapters, I explored the uncertainties that elders faced during migration and after settlement; the ways they mobilize kin and other social relations for material and emotional support; and how practices, ideas, and models of help and care have changed over time.

Like Croll (2006b) and Zhang (2017), I found that the traditional culture of filial piety is being transformed but not destroyed. As does Croll, I stress that metaphors of 'erosion' which may appear in media, popular discourse, and even sociological analysis poorly capture actual dynamics. It is more accurate to speak simply and concretely of a renegotiation and reinterpretation of the inter-generational contract; changing gender roles; the replacement of generational hierarchy by generational interdependence; and changes in the conception of filiality. Accordingly, I demonstrate that key elements of Yan's (2009) 'individualization' thesis for China's youth are also valid for the elderly in the *bingtuan*. According to Yan, individualization involves a re-formation of the self marked by individual (rather than family, kin, or other forms of corporate) identity; these are associated with increased desire, the pursuit of individual interests, happiness, and personal development. Yan attributes individualization to both Maoist socialist practice and economic reform, but sees it as affecting primarily youth. What my data point out, however, is that due to the pension system and other benefits, the majority of *bingtuan* elderly have established a new

independent lifestyle and developed strategies to cope with the uncertainties that arise in old age. For both young and old, changes in the inter-generational contract come about through the interaction of state-systems, kinship networks and social relations, and traditional ideologies, obligations, and market mechanisms. Similar dynamic views of change appear in the comprehensive approach to social support put forward by legal anthropologists Franz and Keebet von Benda-Beckmann (2007), and in the work of anthropologists who view care as multi-dimensional (e.g. Alber and Drotbohm 2015; Thelen 2015).

Ageing in China

It is well documented that China is experiencing population ageing before it has achieved the status of a 'highly developed country' (Ikels 2006: 392; Giles, Wang and Cai 2012: 142; Gordon et al. 2008: 59). According to international standards, a society may be described as ageing if persons over 60 comprise 10 per cent of the population, or those aged over 65 comprise 7 per cent.[3] In 2014, the number of people in China who were 60 or over had reached 212.42 million, comprising 15.5 per cent of the total population. It is estimated that by 2053, this number will exceed 487 million, constituting 35 per cent of the population (Liu 2014: 305). Lee Hock Guan summed up a widespread view that this massive demographic transition may be attributed to 'huge advances made in the areas of health care knowledge, technologies and services, as well as control of perinatal and infant mortality, a decline in birth rates, improvements in nutrition, basic health care and control of many infectious diseases' (2008: xi).

From a policy perspective, a pressing question arises as to who will take care of this expanding elderly population. As Martin King Whyte noted, 'there is no comprehensive system of support for the elderly in China, with families expected to bear much or most of the burden' (1997: 2). China's tradition of filial piety and family obligation is well known, and often provides a point of contrast for the patterns of family life in Western societies. The question that China is normally seen to face is whether filial piety and obligation can ensure care for the elderly when the population is ageing so quickly and the youth are pursuing geographic mobility in such high numbers. Both changes would seem to threaten the ability to fulfil the mutual obligations of responsibility in the traditional inter-generational contract, and perhaps even the sense of obligation itself.

[3] 'Fast ageing population in China', China National Committee on Ageing. http://www.cncaprc.gov.cn/contents/37/69715.html, last accessed 15 February 2015.

The problem has multiple dimensions. Government restrictions on the number of children leave increasingly fewer young people to bear the burden of caring for increasingly more old people. Ikels refers to this as the 'speculative nightmare scenario' of the '8-4-2 family'; after three generations of the One Child Policy, one couple would be left to 'assume responsibility for four parents and eight grandparents' (Ikels 2006: 392). Differential access to welfare, paid work, and benefits in rural and urban areas also impacts the care of the elderly. Two-thirds of the ageing population live in rural areas where there is little state welfare provision; since the 1990s, the young who would have cared for them in past generations have left as labour migrants (Liu 2014: 305). The elderly can hope that the young will return or find ways to meet their obligations across the new distances, but there is also widespread fear that 'modernization or urbanization, migration, new consumer aspirations and the introduction of new Western values have emphasized individual rather than collective familial interests and thus eroded filial obligations' (Croll 2006b: 474). Indeed, as Croll points out (2006b: 476-77), families have become smaller as nuclear households and conjugal families have become more common, and conjugal and child-centred bonds have become more important than those of extended kin. Adults direct increasing resources to children as the costs of raising children increase; as parents help with the costs of education, housing, and marriage, few resources are left to spend on older generations in the family (Croll 2006b: 477).

At first glance, China seems to present a classic case of a steady decline in the social status and care for the elderly, long predicted by modernization theory. Indeed, for decades, the anthropology of ageing in China and elsewhere has asked whether modernization necessarily leads to a decline in the status of elders and to a reduction in family obligations towards and support for the elderly.

In the following section, I therefore engage with debates in modernization theory. Like others before me, I find the models too simple: the loss of control over some forms of property (including knowledge) by elders (whether by state-led, market-led, or technology-led modernization) has not been met with an equivalent loss of social status, as expressed through 'care' or 'respect'. Over time, the balance of property, power, and care have been dynamic. The state has stepped in at various points, families have re-arranged the relations between individuals and society, and elders have fought hard to (re)gain property, power, and care. Moreover, care and respect have social and emotional dimensions that are not captured well by the mechanical view of modernization theory. For this reason, I introduce the life-course perspective and anthropological approaches to social support and

care to compensate for the limitations of existing debates concerning Chinese eldercare. These perspectives allow more complex and comprehensive understandings because they relate the intimate level of relations, affections, obligations, and values to macro-level social, historical, and cultural changes that have been brought about largely by the actions of states and institutions.

Modernization Theory and Ageing

'Ageing' can to refer to the entire life process, from birth to death, but it more frequently refers – as it does here – to the process of growing 'old', or to 'the aged'. For anthropologists, ageing is both a process of physical deterioration and a culturally constructed life-stage (Kertzer and Keith 1984: 20; Spencer 1990: 3; Amoss and Harrell 1991: 2; Sokolovsky 1997: 2). More frequently, anthropologists have focused on the socio-cultural meanings of ageing, including roles, status or prestige, and treatment; or on norms and values, and their changes over time (see Fry 1980: 3, 9; Kertzer and Keith 1984: 24).

One of the dominant approaches within the anthropology of ageing has been provided by modernization theory (Goode 1963; Cowgill and Holmes 1972). Modernization theory assumed that with industrialization and urbanization, the authority and status of elders would decline. First, with the shift from agriculture to industry, land – which provided the economic base for gerontocracy – would no longer be the only source of income. Migration from rural to urban areas would enable the young to seek jobs and to live an economically independent life. Second, with the spread of modern education, elders' knowledge would no longer be necessary for the younger generation; moreover, it would not help them to resolve the problems of modern urban society. Third, modernization would stimulate the expansion of the nuclear family. The stress on the conjugal bond and the nuclear family would weaken patrilineal kinship ties and increase an emphasis on bilateral kin ties. As a result, sons and daughters would come to be valued equally.

Modernization theory has been critiqued for many reasons. In particular, it is simplistic: 'it idealizes the situation of the elderly in the past; … it overgeneralizes by failing to differentiate among the elderly, for example, the well-to-do versus the poor, the healthy versus the infirm, those with kin versus those without; men versus women; and … it fails to take into account the multi-dimensional nature of the concept of status' (Ikels 2004a:12, citing the objections of Maxwell and Silverman 1970; Press and McKool 1972; Glasnock and Feinman 1981; Nydegger 1983; Kertzer and Lalett 1995). Modernization theory also fails to account for the possibility that the surplus produced by modern states may strengthen the position of

older people in the form of pensions and medical benefits (Foner 1984: 199; Davis-Friedmann 1991: 387-88; Ikels 2004a: 12; Ikels 2006). Nor does it foresee the possibility that cultural values and local custom (Cohen 1984: 236-37; Foner 1984: 212-13), as well as long-term parent-child bonds (Amoss and Harrell 1991: 20), may guarantee the security of the elderly even if they lose their familial authority. More importantly, much empirical data (including cross-cultural surveys) show that the elderly actively work to preserve, advance, or fortify their position (Fry 1980: 13; Cohen 1984: 244; Spencer 1990; Amoss and Harrell 1991).

Despite decades of academic critique, modernization theory continues to pervade popular and official discourses. In 'one form or another', the theory 'continues to lie behind and guide most of the research on aging in China' (Ikels 2006: 388). It finds its clearest expression in the attention given to the traditional model of filial piety and evidence that the inter-generational contract expressed in this model has been changing during the twentieth century.

Filial Piety and the Inter-Generational Contract

In all pre-modern societies, the family rather than the state was responsible for supporting the elderly (Whyte 2003a: 4). In China, this family obligation was deeply rooted in the traditional Confucian norm known as 'filial piety', which was identified as 'the foundation of virtue and the root of civilization' (Stacey 1983: 30). According to Ikels (2004a: 2-3), the most fundamental meaning of the concept of filial piety is illustrated by the character *xiao* 孝. The character *xiao* is composed from two other characters: the character 老 (*lao*) rests on top of the character 子 (*zi*), meaning that the 'elder' is on top of the 'son'. This placement conveys multiple meanings, of which the officially preferred one is that the old are supported by the younger generation. It could also be understood as the young being burdened by the old or even as the young being oppressed by the old. The placement of these characters can also be seen as representing filial piety as the continuation of the family line, that is, the father produces the son. Thus, in the classics and in popular thought, support, subordination or obedience, and continuing the family line constitute the essence of filial piety.

Embedded in the patriarchal, patrilineal, and patrilocal family system central to Confucianism, filial piety corresponded with rigid principles of power between genders and generations. Within this system, men officially dominated women and the old dominated the young (Stacey 1983: 31; also Johnson 1985). The ideal family structure was an extended joint household and the eldest male of the family was the patriarch and head of the

household (*chia chang*). The head had authority over family members and the family budget, estate, and economy, and he acted as the family's formal representative to the outside world (Cohen 1976, 2005; Stacey 1983; Whyte 2003a: 5). Children were subordinate to their parents, and had an absolute duty to provide support for their elderly parents, showing reciprocity for their upbringing (Stacey 1983; Davis-Friedmann 1991: 47-48; Harrell 1991; Davis and Harrell 1993; Chen 2003; Ikels 2004b). The strong patrilineal bias of the Confucian kinship system dictated a pattern in which only sons continued the family line. As members of the patriline, sons were obliged to offer both material and emotional support to parents. Daughters, on the other hand, married out, and their obligations were transferred to their husbands' parents, though important ritual obligations to their own parents remained (Davis-Friedmann 1991; Harrell 1991: 47-48; Ikels 1993; Whyte 1997; Fang and Whyte 2003; Yuan and Whyte 2003). Thus, Confucian ideology emphasized the importance of producing male heirs, and the non-production of such an heir was considered 'unfilial' (Stacey 1983: 32).

The Confucian notion of filial piety seems to bolster the core assumption that, in past times, older people enjoyed respect, authority, and power in both society and the family. It is difficult to gauge the degree to which this was so. It is generally difficult to generalize past family patterns that did exist because of the considerable diversity within China and the absence of survey research in earlier decades and centuries (Whyte 1992: 20; also 2003a: 4). In practice, it is clear that 'filial piety [was] conditioned and shaped by local circumstances of history, economics, social organization and demography and by personal circumstances of wealth, gender, and family configuration' (Ikels 2004a: 2; also 2006: 388). Nonetheless, the basic outline of family organization and authority suggested by Confucianism are valid. An ideology of filial piety was widespread (Croll 2006b: 473). And, the common structural and normative features of kinship and family that can be located across China 'include a patrilineally oriented and male-centered arrangement of marriage, authority, and social and economic roles' (Cohen 2005: 42; see also Johnson 1985: 8-9).

In imperial China, Confucian norms were consistent with the agriculturally-based politico-economic system. They were accepted by rulers and enshrined in law, and they formed the fundamental ethical and social basis for centuries. In the early twentieth century, 'local society was still shaped in important ways by late imperial culture, although in the context of obvious and rapid cultural change' (Cohen 2005: 5). Anthropologists have documented the legacy of traditional Chinese family life and the patriarchal-patrilineal-patrilocal configuration of family patterns through the early

twentieth century (Fei 1939; Yang 1945; Lin 1948; Ebrey and Watson 1986).[4]

In the first decades of the twentieth century, Confucian morals and traditional customs were challenged by both domestic evolutions and foreign influences. At home, Confucianism came under attack by young intellectuals particularly during the May Fourth Period.[5] But it was the Communist Revolution that brought real change to the family.

The great transformation following the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) removed the economic and political bases of the traditional family system (Davis-Friedmann 1991; Davis and Harrell 1993; Whyte 1997; Guo 2001; Wang et al. 2003; Yan 2003b). Viewed through the prism of modernization theory, subsequent generations could have been expected to 'care' increasingly little about their elderly parents. In reality, the changes have been more complex, with state policies working both to strengthen and to weaken traditional values and relations of the family.

The socialist transformation of 1955-57 deprived families of property, including land and enterprises. This undermined parents' bargaining power, as family property no longer guaranteed the livelihood of future generations. Instead, the introduction of the commune system in rural areas and collectivized workplaces in urban areas rendered children reliant on the state. Moreover, a propaganda assault on Confucian norms as 'feudal' sought to redirect individual loyalty away from the kinship group and towards the party-state. The simultaneous introduction of a marriage law intended to replace the 'feudal patriarchal system' with egalitarian partnerships also served to weaken parents' authority and children's familial obligations (Parish and Whyte 1978; Whyte 1997, 2003a; Ikels 2004a, 2006). Finally, the introduction of a pension system in urban areas reduced the need for support from children (Whyte 2003a: 11).

The Maoist transformation had unintended consequences, however, which reinforced inter-generational obligations and Confucian family support systems (Davis-Friedmann 1991; Davis and Harrell 1993; Whyte 1997, 2003b; Ikels 2004a, 2006). Severe restrictions on migration compelled

[4] For an overview of Chinese kinship studies, see Santos (2006).

[5] The May Fourth Movement was an anti-imperialist cultural and political movement that grew out of student protests in Beijing (beginning 4 May 1919) against the government's weak response to the Treaty of Versailles, under which Japan received territories in Shandong which had been surrendered by Germany after the Siege of Tsingtao. These demonstrations sparked national protests and marked the upsurge of Chinese nationalism, a shift towards political mobilization and away from cultural activities, and a move towards a populist base rather than intellectual elites. Many political and social leaders of the next decades emerged during this time. The movement is sometimes equated with the whole period of 1915-21, also called the New Culture Movement.

children to remain in their place of birth, meaning that they remained available to assist their ageing parents (Parish and Whyte 1978; Whyte 1997, 2003a; Ikels 2006). Urban housing shortages encouraged married children to co-reside with parents. Other party practices, such as allowing one child to stay in the city while others were sent to the countryside, or encouraging work-units to provide jobs for the children of their workers, all facilitated mutual aid between generations (Sher 1984; Davis-Friedmann 1991; Davis and Harrell 1993; Whyte 2003a). Furthermore, during times of heightened political insecurity, such as the Cultural Revolution, family ties became the most reliable and secure means through which to protect individuals from political threats (Whyte 1997: 24). Marriage laws in 1950 and 1980 also emphasized the legal obligation of children to support their ageing parents (Whyte 1997: 21).

Economic Reform and Elderly Support

The post-Maoist economic reforms that began in 1978 ushered in a new social era. The introduction of liberal economic policies, the One Child Policy, and decollectivization, alongside the influences of rapid urbanization and globalization, brought further transformations to Chinese family life. Research since the 1980s has suggested significantly different outcomes of change in rural and urban contexts because of vast differences in socio-economic development, household size, family structure, living arrangements for the elderly, and welfare systems. Yet, in both rural and urban China, the inter-generational contract is being reinterpreted.

In rural areas of China, most elderly have no pension and tend to rely on their children for food, shelter, clothes, and daily necessities (Shi 2009; Zhan and Luo 2012). A number of researchers have shown the declining status of the elderly in rural contexts by examining their living conditions (Yan 2003b; Miller 2004; Wang 2004; Zhang 2004a). This research shows that extended families have dissolved increasingly into conjugal or nuclear families since the early 1980s, and that conjugal ties are increasingly valued over lineal ties (Cohen 1992; Yan 2003b; Wang 2004). Elderly in rural areas are shifting from co-residence with sons to independent living, citing the unfilial attitudes of sons and daughters-in-law and problems experienced in co-residence (Goldstein, Ku and Ikels 1990: 127-28; Miller 2004: 34-52; Zhang 2004a: 68-79). Other elderly, who still live with their sons, report being overwhelmed by housework and mental stress, and some studies report that elders are abused and sometimes abandoned by younger family members (e.g. Yan 2003a). In some cases, the elderly have even turned to the law for redress (Guo 2001). Furthermore, the privatization of the healthcare system has resulted in a situation where most of China's rural

residents must pay the full cost of medical care, placing an additional financial burden on the elderly and their families (Li and Tracy 1999; Zimmer and Kwong 2003). Elders whose children have migrated find themselves more burdened by farm work, housework, and childcare; as a result, 'some enterprising elderly refused to be victims [and took off] for the cities themselves' (Murphy 2002: 64). One assessment of the reason for changes such as these is that the logic of inter-generational exchange has changed: while the elderly still expect that the young care for the old as an unconditional exchange for their upbringing, the young understand their obligation to reciprocate as being conditional on their available material resources (Guo 2001).

Within the urban context, however, an entirely different picture emerges. The urban elderly are normally entitled to pensions, and they are more likely to lead an independent life (Sher 1984; Unger 1993; Leung 1997; Wang, Xiao and Zhan 2003; Whyte 2003a; Zimmer and Kwong 2003). Inter-generational relationships tend to be regarded positively among urban residents. Ageing parents generally receive satisfactory assistance from children when they are in need (Unger 1993; Logan and Bian 2003; Whyte 2003a; Zimmer and Kwong 2003; Ikels 2004b). They maintain close relationships involving mutual dependence (Unger 1993: 40-43, Bian et al. 1998: 122; Yan et al. 2003: 162; Yuan and Whyte 2003: 46). Whyte (2003c) attributes positive inter-generational relations in urban areas to the Maoist-era Marriage Law[6], housing shortages, bureaucratic job assignments that limit geographic mobility, the 'rehabilitation' of Confucianism in the post-Maoist period, and the wide availability of old age pensions. Nevertheless, some weakening in inter-generational relations is sensed in that children's financial support to urban parents is seen as increasingly optional rather than obligatory (Logan and Bian 2003: 98; Wang, Xiao and Zhan 2003: 81; Yu and Zhu 2009: 183).

The Bingtuan*: Between Rural and Urban*

The *bingtuan* case shows more complex results than those that have been presented in most of the literature for either rural or urban contexts. In this book, I argue that filial piety is not being eroded, but reinterpreted and renegotiated. The elderly too emphasize self-reliance and peer-based strategies for ageing; they too are concerned that inter-generational reci-

[6] The Marriage Law emphasized that women's rights were equal to those of men, banned marriage by proxy (and thus guaranteed free choice of a marriage partner for both men and women), and regulated the legalization of marriages. It thus marked a radical departure from traditional marriage patterns.

procity be balanced and consider what might be called the 'situation' of various family members in assessing each person's responsibility to contribute. Eldercare is no simple matter of exchange; it is embedded in complex webs of family relations, and involves people in varied socio-economic situations and forms of self-interest. Nonetheless, among all the complex factors affecting eldercare, my research identified two as most crucial: emotional attachment and property.[7]

The *bingtuan* does not fit easily into either urban or rural categories. It is a combination of both, a bridge between rural and urban. The *bingtuan* originated as a large state farm with a military structure. Agriculture remains the basis of economic development in the *bingtuan* and residents are widely recognized as having a strong rural identity as *nongchangren* (regimental farm people). At the same time, because the *bingtuan* is regarded as an enterprise, most of its current and former employees are entitled to pension and healthcare benefits. Moreover, the *bingtuan* is experiencing large population movements from agricultural units to newly-built towns – the regimental centres – mainly as a result of state urbanization policy.

Access to pensions and the new urbanization have significant impacts on patterns of elder-care. On the one hand, pensions and other benefits make elders' lives more secure, and make it possible for the elderly to continue to support their children. Ongoing support from elders creates short-term reciprocity between the generations, benefits inter-generational relations, and builds mutual support. In recent years, flats in the multi-storey buildings of urban areas have become the most desirable form of housing, and most elderly now seek to move in to one (see chapter 5). Although the elderly prefer to live independently, the desire for a *loufang* combined with the privatization of the housing market make it difficult for most to reconcile their desires. As a result, housing has become the main form of inter-generational support, not just in terms of financial support, but also through living arrangements. In particular, many elderly exchange childcare for accommodation. On the other hand, new tensions have emerged regarding the distribution of pensions. Should money be saved for the future security of the elderly, or used to support children? Such issues can provoke resource conflicts not only between the young and the elderly, but between different offspring who may perceive their treatment or that of their parents as unfair. Thus, envy and resentment can come into play, along with accusations of 'stinginess' (*koumen*). Such tensions tend to be more serious within households in which parents co-reside with children. Inheritance of properties can also become contentious.

[7] See Zhang (2017) for another view on the importance of property in relation to eldercare.

My findings therefore, are in partial accord with Whyte's (2003c) emphasis on the positive nature of urban inter-generational relations. But they more clearly speak to the widespread reinterpretation of filial piety across both rural and urban contexts; and to Yan's (2009) assessment concerning the 'individualization' of China. Whyte overlooks the facts that not all urban elderly are entitled to a pension, and that pensions vary in accordance with previous employment; thus, urban elderly are not in universally advantageous positions vis-à-vis their children (Unger 1993: 46-47; Ikels 2006: 394-95).

In both urban and rural areas, the cultivation of personal networks, known as *guanxi*, are essential for circumventing the apparent arbitrariness of the bureaucratic system in protecting and providing livelihoods. The strongest of these networks always have been based on kinship. New uncertainties introduced by market reforms may have reinforced the necessity for such networks. In the *bingtuan*, as in most parts of China, the insecure job market, together with the privatization of housing, health insurance, and education, means that the younger generation faces multiple forms of uncertainty. In this situation, family ties remain the most reliable source of support for the younger generation. The elderly too, in the *bingtuan* as in urban areas, face related uncertainties with the privatization of housing, increasingly restrictive healthcare coverage, and inadequate public support. In the *bingtuan* then, all factors identified by previous researchers are evident. Hence, recent socio-economic transformation has created new challenges that encourage interdependence and mutual aid between generations.

In general, transformation of the intergenerational contract in rural areas is taken as a sign of the gradual collapse of filial piety under the forces of modernity. As filial piety is eroded, individualism replaces it. First socialist revolution and later market reform are both seen as contributing to the erosion of filial piety (e.g. Guo 2001; Yan 2003b; Miller 2004; Wang 2004; Zhang 2004a). Moreover, as Yan (2009) pointed out, both forms of change increased individualization within Chinese society. Perhaps unintentionally, Maoist campaigns caused a rise in awareness of individual identity and rights as they shifted the individual's loyalty from the family to the collective and state. In the reform era and particularly since the 1990s, the retreat of the party-state from social life and the promotion of consumerism have created more social space for individual citizens. As a result, the pursuit of individual interests and happiness, independence, choice, and intimacy gradually became a new family ideal (Yan 2009: xxiv). The new centrality of the horizontal conjugal tie marks 'a structural transformation of domestic life in both ideology and institutional arrange-

ment' (Yan 2009: 79). Though individualization might appear to have been chosen by individuals, Davis and Harrell (1993: 5) and Yan (2009: 777) both found state power and policies to have been the generators of China's transformed society, and Guo (2001) attributed most responsibility for the empowerment of younger women and the relative disempowerment of the elderly to the state and new market economy.

These observations all apply to the *bingtuan* where the rise in youth-power generally, and of young women's power in particular, influences gendered aspects of inter-generational care and the well-being of the elderly. The traditionally problematic relationship between co-residing mothers and daughters-in-law has become even more sensitive with increased individualization. Despite these tensions, however, most *bingtuan* families are able to maintain good relations and live peaceful lives. The 'ultimate collapse' of filial piety predicted by so many studies of rural settings has not materialized here. Why not? In addition to the positive role played by the *bingtuan*'s 'urban' features, there are three additional factors to consider: enduring family obligations, emotional ties, and the individualization of the elderly themselves.

As for the third of these factors, it is important to note that the *bingtuan* elderly are not passive victims of modern transformation. They too have established new values and lifestyles in response to changing social circumstances. I show in the following chapters how they actively engage in self-care activities, justified by the popular discourse that they should not be a 'burden' to their children; how they actively build relations with both old and new neighbours to extend their social support networks; and how they use social relations to cope with loneliness and the absence of support from their children. For example, some elderly now remarry or cohabit with a domestic partner in their later years. I also show the preference of elderly for independent living arrangements, which they see as giving them free space and more equal status while promoting harmonious inter-generational interaction. Similar dynamics have been observed elsewhere in China (Thogersen and Ni 2008: 22; Pei and Tang 2012: 72), where co-residence is not a precondition of filiality and where living independently is becoming a socially accepted alternative for the elderly.

Such arrangements are not without their moral and emotional dilemmas, which I also explore. In short, traditional family obligations still guide expectations for care by the elderly and care provision by the younger generation. Practical situations, particularly related to migration or a lack of economic resources, create challenges for ensuring the long-term care of the elderly. Long-term care places a significant burden on younger families, and creates moral dilemmas for adult children in regard to the competing

demands of their jobs, their conjugal family, and their parents. Moreover, care is not only motivated by traditional norms. It also relies on emotional ties. The recognition of both the normative and emotional dimensions of care has been almost entirely missing from the discussion of eldercare in China. I therefore show how emotional commitments are central in shaping eldercare practice, and how they are crucial to ensuring the availability of care. Emotional ties operate in inter-generational support (but also conflict), and in relation to the care given to and by spouses and live-in partners.

Shifting Gender Roles

Changing gender roles have become a central focus of concern in the assessment of changes in elderly care and in the inter-generational contract. The concern for gender is motivated both by the predictions of modernization theory for increasing gender equality and by the specificities of China's strong patrilineal ties and obligations (Whyte and Xu 2003: 167). The results show both continuity and change in traditional patterns in urban and rural areas of China. Preference for sons over daughters is still strong, particularly in regard to living arrangements (Davis 1993: 61-62; Ikels 1993: 322; Bian, Logan and Bian 1998: 115-16; Yuan and Whyte 2003: 37; Pimentel and Liu 2004: 834; Zhang 2004b: 1242-44; Yu and Zhu 2009: 181). Parents continue to invest more in the weddings and new houses of sons than in those of daughters (Croll 2006b: 477; Zhang 2007: 685). In rural areas, parents expect financial support in lieu of a pension from their sons but not from daughters (Miller 2004: 50). This expectation for primary support from sons still holds, even when parents invest in their daughters' education (Obendiek 2011). Interestingly, Obendiek points out that the (voluntary) physical care provided by daughters is preferred to the (expected) care of daughters-in-law because of the emotional attachment between parents and daughters. Yet future co-residence with a daughter during old age remains almost unthinkable across most of China.

Although the preferences of parents remain 'traditional', research documents significant increases in support received by the elderly from their married daughters. Married daughters offer more support than do married sons in terms of visiting, showing respect, and offering financial, instrumental, and physical support (Davis and Harrell 1993; Leung 1997; Chen and Adamchak 1999; Cooney and Di 1999; Whyte 2003a; Zhan and Montgomery 2003; Shi 2009; Yu and Zhu 2009; Xiong 2011). Even when daughters are unable to contribute monetarily, which is often the case in rural areas (Obendiek 2011; Liu 2014), or when similar monetary amounts are contributed by sons and daughters (Whyte and Xu 2003), married daughters are more likely to offer physical care, help with domestic chores,

and give gifts-in-kind (Whyte and Xu 2003; Obendiek 2011; Liu 2014). Obendiek (2011: 32) further observes that a 'sister's support for her brother's higher education is often interpreted as the former fulfilling her obligation [to her parents]'. The hope in such an arrangement is that an educated brother will provide better care for his ageing parents than if he had not been educated. My research is consistent with these widespread trends. To use the local expression, 'daughter is good but son is important' (*ya tou hao, dan erzi geng zhongyao*).

Scholars such as Shi (2009: 358) and Whyte (2003b: 21) have suggested that changes in the gendered aspects of filial piety are symptomatic of overall shifts in inter-generational relationships and weakening patrilineal traditions. The continued preference for sons, despite the perception of daughters as more filial, is explained as a result of the incompleteness of Maoist reforms to achieve gender equality and of continued male bias in state policies and the job-market (Stacey 1983; Johnson 1985; Jacka 1997). It has also been suggested that the increasing role of married daughters in supporting the elderly results from renegotiation and reinterpretation of the inter-generational contract at an individual level (Croll 2006b; Shi 2009).

In this book, I will reveal a more complex picture of changes in gender roles and their impacts on eldercare. Rather than simply comparing the support offered by daughters and sons, I use both qualitative and quantitative data to show the dilemmas of gendered expectations of support. I show how a 'good daughter' may simultaneously be a 'bad daughter-in-law'. I show how the rising power of young wives places husbands on the horns of a dilemma, as they struggle to be both a good husband and a good son. And I show how the 'good daughter' may be seen as a 'trouble maker' even within her natal family, if her efforts to help are seen as unwanted interference by her brothers and their wives. Though daughters are more filial generally than sons in the *bingtuan*, my informants resist generalizations about gender and elderly care. They invoke the saying, 'five fingers are not the same length' (*wuge zhitou buyiyang chang*): in other words, some daughters are more filial than others, and the same is true of sons. Degrees of manifest filiality have both practical and emotional reasons which can be revealed by close ethnographic observation.

Modifying Modernization Theory in the Anthropology of Ageing

As modernization theory predicted, conjugal ties are valued increasingly over extended family ties and the status of elders is declining in relation to the increasing power of daughters-in-law. But such changes do not necessarily lead to the poor treatment of the elderly, who remain active

participants in shaping their own lifestyles and relationships. Family ties are still strong in the *bingtuan*, and both young and old have reinterpreted the concept of filial piety, developing more flexible care patterns through inter-generational negotiation and reciprocity.

As an alternative to the broad sweeps of modernization theory, I employ a life-course perspective. Life-course perspectives hold central the importance of normative age structuring and age stratification as they enable the study of people's lives, structural contexts, and social change. Approaches based on the life-course insist that attention to age is critical for social analysis because 'most societies use chronological age formally and informally to structure the experiences, roles, and statuses of individuals' (Fuller-Iglesias, Smith and Antonucci 2009: 6; see also Riley 1987; Dannefer and Uhlenberg 1999). Members of an age-cohort, as defined by Norman B. Ryder (1965) as a group of people born within the same time period, often have similar life-courses. The group ages together, and thus collectively experiences historical events in ways distinct from other age-cohorts. As David I. Kertzer and Jennie Keith (1984: 8) asserted, the 'aging process [can] not be separated from social, cultural, and historical changes that surround it'.

Life-course perspectives emphasize that societal and individual experience are linked through the family and its network of shared relationships (Elder 1998). Individuals are active agents who not only mediate the effect of social structure but also make decisions and set goals that shape social structure. The ability to make specific choices, however, depends on opportunities and constraints. Families and individuals modify their expectations and behaviour in response to changes in either needs or resources (Elder 1974). Importantly, past experience can affect significantly expectations and choices made later in life. In this way, 'transformations' interact with 'transitions' in people's daily lives. That is, large-scale, radical, and dramatic changes at the local, national, or global level interact with social and psychological development (Lynch and Danely 2013).

In this work, the life-course perspective enables me to examine how historical, cultural, and social transformations have impacted the values and behaviours of elders; influenced eldercare practices; and shaped current care relations. Transformations such as socialist reform, market reform, and urbanization have affected the age-cohorts in the *bingtuan*. So too have organizational transformations within the *bingtuan* itself. I approach these transformations by presenting the migration and life history of each age-cohort, and describing the transformation of social support networks from the early stage of migration to current care relations.

The interaction between transformations and transitions among older age-cohorts in the *bingtuan* could be expected to be particularly pronounced. Those who are now elderly all left their hometowns for this remote frontier region. Their lives in the *bingtuan* were shaped less by traditional kinship networks and particular local customs than those of their counterparts elsewhere in China. In contrast, they identify strongly with the socialist state because – from their arrival at a young age – it was the *bingtuan* that provided (or withheld) wages, food, accommodation, clothes, as well as a sense of purpose and meaning.

In general, the older cohorts trace a series of high and low points in their lives at which they experienced particular forms of difficulty. During the collectivist period, life was secure but work was hard. With the onset of reforms, decollectivization, the decline of agriculture, and the demise of the wage system, life became a struggle for most. Entering old age, pensions and other benefits have brought a renewed sense of security. This security, together with improved living conditions resulting from urbanization, has produced widespread feelings of happiness and contentment. Nevertheless, the elderly are disturbed by emerging status distinctions between agriculture units and the urban centre. Their concern for housing and its meanings is a product of past relations and preceding socio-economic situations in the *bingtuan*.

Social Support, Security, and Care in Old Age

My research among the elderly in the *bingtuan* has convinced me that the dynamics of ageing, even in relation to state policy, cannot be fully captured even by an adjusted form of modernization theory. For this reason, I turn also to the anthropology of social support and security.

Social support and security are important precisely because of the great amount of insecurity that elderly often experience. Recent research, particularly on the global south, has focused on the risks and uncertainties faced by the elderly (Thelen, Thiemann and Roth 2014; Drotbohm 2015; Thelen 2015). Risk and uncertainty also characterize the contemporary experience of the elderly in China.[8] Likewise, *bingtuan* elderly face risk and uncertainty. But because they were migrants to XPCC, risk and uncertainty are not new experiences for them. As Williams and Balaz (2012: 168) pointed out, 'migration is seen as informed by risk and uncertainty, and to generate or ameliorate risks and uncertainty …. Risk and uncertainty are

[8] The terms 'risk' and 'uncertainty' are often paired, but distinguished. Frank Knight's (1964) distinction of 'risk' as measurable, and 'uncertainty' as incalculable has been widely accepted by social scientists, and I apply it in this work.

pervasive, although to different degrees, in all forms of migration … and at different stages of the migration cycle'. In China, the state has played a dominant role in mediating the risks and uncertainties of internal migration. The state has been able to increase risks by removing migrants from their support networks and by sending them to remote frontier regions, but the state also has been able to ameliorate risks by providing work opportunities, wages, and pensions.

Uncertainty, as an awareness of the future as incalculable, was a significant part of the life experience of those I encountered in my fieldwork. Uncertainty shaped their perceptions and actions in meaningful ways. It is worth investigating, therefore, the kinds of uncertainties elders faced across their lifetimes – during migration and after settlement – and how they are now mobilizing networks and institutional and private resources to cope with new uncertainties. By investigating individual experience and efforts to obtain support, we can see not only the interaction of individuals and their families with structural socio-economic changes at the macro-level, but also how care takes place in the intimate relations of daily life.

In considering social support and care, sociological and psychological works have applied functional, structural or institutional, and interactional approaches.[9] In contrast, anthropological approaches have focused on 'mutuality' (Schlecker and Fleischer 2013) and 'purposive action' (Benda-Beckmann and Benda-Beckmann 2000, 2007; Read and Thelen 2007). Markus Schlecker and Friederike Fleischer suggested that the 'very condition for support as mutuality' is 'adherence to a common moral code, the sharing of values, the maintenance of solidarity and the perpetuation of communities' (2013: 1). The 'purposive action' approach sees support as an effort to cope with insecurity through risk reduction and alleviation. Franz and Keebet von Benda-Beckmann (2007: 36), for example, defined 'social security' as including the efforts of individuals and groups to overcome insecurities including those of food and water, shelter, physical and mental healthcare, education, and income, in ways that do not assign responsibility for such contingencies to individuals alone. Helena Obendiek (2011: 19) conflated the Benda-Beckman's conception of social security with her own definition of 'social support'.[10] Broadly defined as 'the giving and the receiving of help between human beings', she noted, '"social support"

[9] For summaries of sociological and psychological approaches, see Brownell and Shumaker (1984) and Yuen-Tsang (1997).

[10] Obendiek noted that the difference between 'social security' and 'social support' could be reduced to 'a matter of semantic emphasis only'. 'While the former focuses on the goal of the transaction, namely the achievement of security, the latter emphasizes the quality of the transaction, its condition of provision against need' (2011: 19).

relates to the core human condition'; 'supportive relationships are central to human survival and well-being' (2011: 19).

The terms 'social security' and 'social support' are multi-referential. For example, Franz and Keebet von Benda-Beckmann analyzed social security in terms of five layers. One layer is that of 'cultural and religious ideals and ideologies', because 'ideas about social security may be expressed in different ways' (Benda-Beckmann and Benda-Beckmann 2007: 37). A second layer takes in 'the scope of the more concrete normative constructions of rights and obligations at the level of institutional provision'; social security at this level typically falls short of the ideals of the first layer. A third layer is comprised of the 'actual social relationships between recipients and providers of social security'. A fourth layer includes 'the social practices in which social security ideals and institutionalized rights and obligations are met'; in this layer, 'resources are converted into actual fulfillment of needs'. The final layer comprises 'the social and economic consequences' of the other four layers. As evident from this outline of the layers of social security, it is clear that the concept is not confined to particular institutions or policies. Rather, 'it includes the full range of social security mechanisms, from state provided social security, to traditional and new local modes, family and neighborhood, and a variety of secular and religiously based forms of social security, and market mechanisms' (Benda-Beckmann and Benda-Beckmann 2007: 6). Moreover, it 'bring[s] together conditions, practices, relationships, institutions and more general cultural and ideological notions' (Benda-Beckmann and Benda-Beckmann 2007: 6-7). The Benda-Beckmanns' approach thus parallels my efforts with the life-course perspective to capture individual and group expectations and experiences as they change with large-scale societal transformations.

As for care itself, the topic has received the attention of a wide range of disciplines, but specifically from feminist perspectives that have focused on the gendered aspects and social inequalities of both paid and unpaid care work (e.g. Thomas 1993; Folbre 1994; Kittay 1999; England 2005; Reay 2005; Ungerson 2005; Lynch 2007). Such studies emphasize that these inequalities are not merely a matter of domestic ethics, but that they point to public and political ethics of care (Tronto 2009). The inequalities of care in neoliberal contexts have been well documented (Engster 2007; Tronto 2009, 2013; Glenn 2010), and a 'global care chain' is discernible (Hochschild 2000). However, 'alongside this emphasis on the value of care for moral and political theory, the feminist ethics of care also sheds important light on care as a social, emotional and relational practice' (Rogers 2013: 146). Further, the formulae of 'caring for' and 'caring about' reflects a dual meaning for 'care': 'care about implies affection and perhaps a sense of psychological

responsibility, whereas caring for encompasses both the performance or supervision of concrete tasks and a sense of psychological responsibility' (Hooyman and Gonyea 1999: 151, cited in Rogers 2013: 133).

As with social security and support, care can be approached from multiple dimensions. The social and economic relations surrounding care point to the often fuzzy boundaries between 'intimate' and 'monetarized' spheres of human interaction (Boris and Parrenas 2010), and attention to care can help an analyst obviate the public-private binary (Thelen 2015: 499; see also Wouters 1989).

For this work, I particularly take inspiration from a volume edited by Erdmute Alber and Heike Drotbohm, *Anthropological Perspectives on Care-Work, Kinship and the Life-Course* (2015). The contributors to this volume overwhelmingly interpreted care in terms of work, kinship, and the life-course. On the one hand, they were concerned to facilitate empirical and conceptual distinctions between the different activities that typically are labelled as 'care'. On the other hand, they diverged from dominant approaches in that they stressed the dimensions of the duality, social relations, and emotions associated with care, linking its study more closely to anthropological kinship studies. Women's domestic work is not only unpaid labour, but also a form of kin obligation; as an obligation, 'care' work is established in long-term relations of reciprocity during the life-course (Alber and Drotbohm 2015: 2; see also Han 2012: 21). Care practice is associated with the maintenance or dissolution of kinship ties, and is therefore a social practice through which kinship ties are created and sustained (Leinaweaver 2015; Lidola 2015; see also Carsten 2000, 2004).

Caring practices, relations, and identities shift over life-course phases (Bowlby et al. 2010; Weller, Zontini and McCarthy 2013: 160). The rights and obligations of care vary according to condition and circumstance, and they change over time; so too do people's expectations, kinship roles, care practices, and strategies (Boris and Parrenas 2010; Drotbohm 2015; Leinaweaver 2015; Thelen 2015). Care is the outcome of 'negotiated commitments' (Drotbohm 2015: 110; Skornia 2015: 46), and elderly people actively build and re-build social networks in their quest for care (Liebelt 2015: 29). These activities, moreover, occur within a context that is different from what the elderly would have expected when they were younger: the distribution of care obligations to state, market, and family have shifted, particularly with the ageing of society (Fine 2007; Thelen 2015). More than unpaid labour, daily care practices are moral, embodied, and embedded within particular social and institutional contexts (Mol et al. 2010; Han 2012: 22; Alber and Drotbohm 2015; Buch 2015: 282).

In the *bingtuan* the practices of care in later life involve not just gender relations, but a wide range of relations. Relations between spouses and partners are important; so too are inter- and intra-generational relations within the family. But, involvements with the community and the state, encounters with bureaucratic institutions, and relations with countryside and town, are all important for care practices in the lives of ordinary people. Obligation, affection, and the moral aspects of care all matter, and all have changed over time. As argued by Tatjana Thelen, care is a processual mechanism for overcoming social insecurity. As a dimension of social security, care 'connects a giving and receiving side in practices aimed to satisfy socially recognized needs' (2015: 509).

Elderly care involves not only the relation between care provider and receiver, nor is it circumscribed by the kinds of care needed and delivered. Elderly care also involves the transmission and transformation of resources; the interconnections of caring relationships and institutions; and the practices in which all these ideas, resources, and relationships meet to determine the process and outcomes of care. Resources for elderly care include material and immaterial aspects. Material resources include food, shelter, clothes, medicine, and money. Immaterial resources include emotional support, affection, traditional values and moral obligations, and the time devoted to care. My analysis of elderly care, then, is embedded in the theorizing of social support and care more generally. These approaches and concepts will be applied to my ethnographic data, collected in the context of a society undergoing rapid social transformation.

Fieldwork in the *Bingtuan*

Field research was carried out between September 2012 and October 2013 in an XPCC regimental farm: Tuan 143. The choice of a regimental farm as field site resulted both from my interest in migration and because XPCC was a site where the ageing of China's population was particularly salient. Having grown up in a region of Xinjiang close to an XPCC regimental farm, I was familiar with *bingtuan* life. To avoid the complexity that would have been introduced by studying in an area where my family still lives, however, I decided to undertake my fieldwork in a different *tuan*. By collaborating with Shihezi University, one of the two universities in XPCC, I was able to arrange access to Tuan 143. With its headquarters only 17 kilometres from Shihezi, I was also able to access the resources offered by Shihezi University during my fieldwork.

Having attended a Chinese school in Xinjiang, I am fluent in Mandarin, my own native language (Kazakh), and some other Turkic

languages, including Uyghur.[11] I was therefore well prepared linguistically to carry out research in multicultural Xinjiang. My entry to the field, however, was not without problems. Even with permission from senior officials in Shihezi, local Corps officials were reluctant to accept me. Local leaders are often suspicious of researchers, fearing that like journalists, they may expose negative aspects of the region. My identity as a member of Xinjiang's Kazakh ethnic minority also became an issue (see chapter 2). Officials felt that I should do research on the Kazakh community under XUAR's jurisdiction (in what is referred to locally as Difang), rather than in the *bingtuan*, which was Han dominated. After explaining my research with the help of Shihezi University, I finally received permission to undertake long-term research, but my physical entry to the Corps was further delayed. Because I had requested to live with a local family, a local official was assigned by the regimental leader to find me a place to live. After three weeks, my repeated calls met only with delay, so I suggested that I should make my own living arrangements, to which the regimental leader agreed. Again, with the help of Shihezi University, I moved into the dormitory of the local primary school on 15 September 2013, and began fieldwork.

My main fieldwork was divided into two parts. Three months (October – December 2012) were spent in two villages (*liandui*).[12] The following nine months (January – October 2013) were spent in Huayuan Zhen (Garden Town), more commonly known as Tuanbu (lit. regimental headquarters).[13] Before setting off for the *liandui*, I spent two weeks in Tuanbu collecting basic data from local officials, the police station, and district community offices; talking to people in the street and students at school; and participating in gymnastic dancing with the elderly population. In these two weeks, I gained a general overview of Tuan 143. It was based on these data that I decided to spend time in two *liandui*. Local officials disagreed with my interest, however, saying that there were few people left in the *liandui*, and it would be better for me to do research in Tuanbu. I suspected they were discouraging me from investigating the *liandui* due to their poor conditions; these had been described by a taxi driver who drove me to the *liandui* for preliminary checks. The two *liandui* I chose were close

[11] My dissertation and some early publications based on this research appeared under my Kazakh name, Saheira Haliel.

[12] *Liandui* means military company, but in the XPCC the term refers to villages where occupants are primarily concerned with agricultural production. Because of their role as production or work units, the *liandui* are sometimes referred to as units (*danwei*). Sometimes I use the term 'company' to stress the military heritage of these locales; more often, I use the term *liandui* to distinguish these XPCC units from other villages under XUAR jurisdiction.

[13] In the context of recent urbanization, Tuanbu is also simply 'town', distinct from the rural *liandui* and *yingbu*.

to each other and were large by local standards. One was Han dominated, and the other was composed mainly of minority ethnic groups. I included the latter in my research both to enable comparison between Han and ethnic minority practice, and because this helped to overcome the objections of local leaders who felt I should be researching ethnic minorities. In the final analysis, the comparative dimension has not been of central concern.

On 1 October, I moved in with a Kazakh family in the minority *liandui* through arrangements made by local officials. There were both advantages and disadvantages to this arrangement. As a Kazakh, I felt at home with the couple who hosted me; and I did learn much about *liandui* life. The husband was Deputy Leader of the *liandui*, and he facilitated my research by introducing me to local elderly families. However, the couple were only in their fifties, and I had wanted to live with older people. Moreover, the house was located more than a kilometre from the centre of the *liandui*, which made me feel disconnected from the daily life of the *liandui* and unable to make necessary observations. After three weeks, I moved in with a Dongxiang family closer to the *liandui* centre. I learned that indeed there were few elderly left in the *liandui*: most had either moved to town permanently, or were preparing to spend the winter with adult children in various cities. I counted 26 elderly in the *liandui* at the beginning of my fieldwork, but after two months, the number had dwindled to 17. During this two-month period, I interviewed elders about their life history and current situations. They often passed the time chatting in the square where I joined them. I also engaged in conversation with younger members of the unit, visiting milking sheds and cotton fields to learn about their lives.[14]

During my stay, several elderly people died. I attended their Islamic funerals, taking photos and videos with the permission of the families. My presence at these events made everyone aware that there was an outsider in the *liandui*, but nobody understood what I was doing, or what was meant by 'fieldwork research' (*tianye diaocha*). I even had difficulties explaining that I was writing a 'thesis' (*lunwen*), because people had never heard this term. As a result, people interpreted my role according to their own experience, using terms such as internship (*shixi*), journalist (*jizhe*), or government emissary (*gongzuozu*).[15]

Initially, people were reluctant to talk to me, but I devoted most of my days to 'hanging out' with them. Eventually, we talked and then they told me about their concerns and the inconveniences of living in the *liandui* after so

[14] These milking sites were located in fields and used simple equipment. People chose the closest one and took their cows for milking twice per day.

[15] *Gongzuozu* was the term used during the Cultural Revolution to describe those people sent by higher officials to investigate life in rural regions.

many people had moved to town. I learned about past experiences and family issues, and I was able to observe the connections between the elderly, their nearby children, and neighbours. After two months, when the inhabitants of only seventeen elderly households remained in the *liandui*, I too decided it was time to leave. The regimental leaders suggested that I move back to town before the harsh winter made conditions in the *liandui* too severe, but I first wanted to explore the neighbouring and predominantly Han *liandui*.

With the help of local officials, I moved to the neighbouring *liandui* on 9 December, where I stayed with a family of the Hui ethnic minority. According to the data I received from the District Community Office, there were about 50 registered households in the *liandui* that included elderly inhabitants. I printed out the list of names of the elderly, and asked the local shopkeeper about their addresses. Taking the paper from me, she immediately marked 'x' against a series of names, telling me that they were no longer living there, having moved to town temporarily or permanently. Later I discovered there were about 13 households with an elderly member that remained in the *liandui*, and most of the elderly who remained were Christian widows.[16] Again, people were initially reluctant to talk to me, but after one of the local administrative staff took me around, introducing me to elderly households one by one, people started to accept me. I interviewed and had leisurely conversations with elders, with some of their children, and with other middle-aged people; and I was also allowed to join Christian religious gatherings.

Despite some differences due to the ethnic composition of the two *liandui*, I discovered that they shared much in terms of daily experience. The harsh weather and difficult life conditions helped me to understand the impacts of urbanization on *liandui* life, and the strong desire of the elderly to move to town. The winter came early in 2012. The first snow fell on 7 November. It was very deep, almost to my knees. Every few days thereafter, there was a heavy snowfall and the temperature dropped to minus 34°C. Shovelling snow was part of my duties in the household. Even though I had grown up in Xinjiang and was used to harsh weather, I had never experienced such severe cold, resulting from my field site's location 'at the mouth of the wind' (*fengkou*). Even worse, I found that unlike my home

[16] Religion is a very sensitive topic in Xinjiang, and I did not insist on lengthy explanations concerning personal religious affiliations. Christians in the *liandui*, however, are generally relatively recent converts; Christianity spread from the city of Shihezi to agricultural farms. Village leaders do not mind the participation of elderly in religious activities, as they see no opposition to society with it. However, in the town, the elderly were cautious about open participation in religious gatherings of any denomination.

community, most local people had only two meals a day, and they only lit the stove for cooking. The rest of the time, they dressed very warmly and drank hot water to save coal. I often missed these brief periods of warmth in the elderly's houses, and my hands cramped so severely from the cold I could barely take notes from our conversations. I contributed money to the households with which I lived to buy coal, but felt helpless towards my other informants. My brothers brought me the warmest clothes they could find in Urumqi, but they were still not warm enough for the harsh weather.

I realized that the health condition of the elderly also was a challenge to my research. Although some would have liked to talk, they could not hear me clearly, and in other cases I had difficulty hearing their age-softened voices or understanding their accents. In some cases, their memory had faded. More worryingly, most of the elderly had high blood pressure or heart disease, and I realized that when I interviewed them alone I might face a medical emergency for which I was not prepared. I therefore decided to make short interviews and visit often. The same concerns and method applied to all 14 months of my research.

At the end of the year, I moved to town, deciding that it would constitute my primary field site. With the help of community leaders, I moved in with a 78-year-old Han woman named Wu nainai.[17] She was an organizer of the West Community Elders Club (WCC), one of two elders clubs in town. Wu nainai's work facilitated my research by enabling me to meet people through the club. In winter, the WCC organized gymnastics twice a day (nine o'clock in the morning and four o'clock in the afternoon), and the other club, the East Community Elders Club (ECC), organized dancing in the afternoon at a local ballroom. The remainder of the time, the elderly escaped the cold by talking and playing moneyless versions of mah-jong or poker at the Elders Club Room shared by both clubs.[18] I followed Wu nainai to observe all the WCC events, including their preparation of a performance for the Spring Festival, and also visited the ECC and the Elders

[17] I have changed the names of all informants. In most cases, I have provided only one name – a surname – which is more appropriate than a given name in the Chinese context. In several cases, I have followed the Chinese convention of adding terms to signal respect or endearment: *nainai* (grandmother), *lao* (old), or *xiao* (little) – to reflect how the individual was referred to by others. The two exceptions where I provide surname and first name occur in chapter 7 in the extended discussion of negotiations among the Liu and Ding families concerning the care of an elderly member. Finally, it bears mention that women retain their own surname after marriage.

[18] They played without money because gambling is illegal. Others played with small change, as described in subsequent chapters.

Club Room to talk to people.[19] Gradually, some informants became friends and I often spent time with them. Despite her initial misgivings about me, Wu nainai was an open and easy-going person, and she shared much information about the club with me. My stay with Wu nainai was always meant to be temporary. Shortly before Spring Festival, she went to celebrate the New Year with her son in Shihezi and I had to move again. Finally, I found a place with a Hui widow who lived alone, and this became my permanent accommodation until I left.

Research before and shortly after the Spring Festival mostly involved leisurely talks, as I tried to get to know as many people as possible, and to lay the ground for further research. Before the festival, I was called to the District Community Office to help enter household information over a period of two weeks. I worked as a normal worker from nine o'clock in the morning until six o'clock in the evening. At first, I felt this was a waste of my time, but I could not refuse the work because the leader had made it very clear that 'we have helped you, so now it is time for you to help us'. Later, however, I benefited from the trust I established by this work. The district community leaders treated me more like an insider, and I was able to learn about the life of the administrative staff during conversation and while spending time together after work. In fact, I discovered my new landlady through this network.

From March until June, I did intensive interviewing and participant-observation based on the relationships I had established in the earlier two months. My main focus was on 46 households, almost half living in the same neighbourhood (*xiaoqu*) as me, particularly in the same and neighbouring buildings. The other half were people whom I had met soon after moving to town; they were distributed in other districts. I collected as much information as possible about these 46 households; 5 of them produced key informants. To adjust to the life of the elderly, I changed my daily schedule to make it consistent with theirs. During this period, I spent much time at the local hospital because many of my informants stayed there. The doctors and nurses also supported my work by introducing me to patients. Because doctors are highly respected, my new informants seemed to be more supportive than people I knew before, and some of them introduced me to their friends later. After Spring Festival, I worked irregularly for the Justice Office, and the interesting cases I encountered there inspired me to investigate similar issues elsewhere in the community.

[19] Many of the members of the performance group were middle-aged ladies. I made friends with some of them too, and they became a source for me to understand the life of middle-aged people in the *tuan*.

From June to October, I mainly engaged in random-sample surveying, while continuing to conduct semi-structured interviews and participant-observation. Since many elderly preferred to be outside when it became warmer after April, most of my questionnaires were administered on the square or on various streets. The questionnaire was designed to take 30 minutes, but sometimes, the elderly had something interesting to tell me. I found it difficult to interrupt their stories, and then I had to come back to them a second time. Although refusal to participate in surveys was frequent, many of the elderly were cooperative, perhaps because I gave a gift to each informant I interviewed. I collected 196 questionnaires, 12 of which were incomplete, leaving an effective total number of 184.

I also taught English for primary school students for 40 minutes every evening in summer on a voluntary basis. I benefited from this experience, because both old and young became open to me, even inviting me to attend their family activities, such as birthday parties and barbecues. In general, my research went smoothly through a combination of varied methods. It is important to note, however, that my research was marked in significant ways by my own perceived identity as someone from the Xinjiang region, and as a young woman.

My identity as a person from Xinjiang benefited my research to some extent. A common response when I introduced myself was ‘so, you are from Difang?’. People often commented on my hometown, saying things such as ‘Well, Changji is a nice place. It used to be smaller than our Shihezi. Nowadays it seems to be developing very fast’. From their responses to my origins, I was surprised by the strength of *bingtuan* identity, and that the *bingtuan* seemed to be in competition with other parts of Xinjiang, at least in the minds of my informants. Sometimes I used this propensity to compare the *bingtuan* and Difang to my advantage. People frequently said, ‘*yatou* (young girl), you don’t know that the *bingtuan* is completely different’. Hearing such an assertion, I would adopt an attitude of naïve interest and encourage them to tell me more.

My physical appearance gave away my identity as an ethnic minority. Ethnic Kazakh (like myself) and other Turkic-speaking peoples including Uyghurs, typically have different skin colour, eye shape, or hair texture from Han Chinese. The well-known tensions between Uyghurs and Han Chinese in Xinjiang mean that identifiable minorities are likely to be considered ‘trouble makers’. The most significant challenge was finding a place to live. Nobody wanted to live with a stranger, and my perceived strangeness was exacerbated by my assumed minority and religious statuses. The Kazakh are classified as a ‘Muslim minority’, and people often rejected me with the response: ‘we have different food habits, we cannot live together’. In the

liandui it was relatively easy to find families with whom I could live. When I moved to town, however, life became extremely difficult. Even the street community leaders found it difficult to place me, and it took the WCC secretary some effort to persuade Wu nainai to accept me until I found another place.[20]

Wu nainai was clearly distrustful of me at the beginning. Luckily, her children visited and satisfied themselves that I was an appropriate person to live with their mother. They encouraged her to accept our cultural differences and we were able to build a warm relationship. After I left Wu nainai's house at Spring Festival to live with a Hui family, I continued to visit her, and was able to maintain a good relationship.

The long-term differences in food habits between Han and minorities present challenges to eating and socializing together. If I expressed reluctance to eat with Han Chinese people, I missed opportunities for interaction and could cause offence, suspicion, and distrust. My research made progress in other ways, yet my identity as an 'insider' of the region created further obstacles, leading to longer periods of distrust and more refusal than other researchers might experience. Slowly, I became used to various refusals. It was impossible to know to what extent they might have reflected ethnic prejudice, and to what extent a more general fear of strangers. Certainly adult children urged their elderly parents never to admit strangers to their house. The frequently occurring interethnic violence in the region became another obstacle: fear sometimes constrained me from leaving home, particularly in the evenings.

As a young woman, I had to pay attention to my security in regard to gender as well. In Xinjiang, unaccompanied young women face the possibility of unwanted advances from men of all ages. Thus, as my informants included both young and old men, I took care to interact with them in socially safe settings. Most elderly men preferred to spend their time outside, which enabled me to interact easily with them during daylight hours. Younger men, however, were busy with work and only available in the evenings. I therefore met with younger men in public places during weekend days, and when I visited them at home, I was accompanied by my male assistant, a student from Shihezi University.[21]

---

[20] Under our initial agreement, Wu Nanai was given the task of finding me alternate housing because – as club leader – she knew many elderly. In the end, I found new accommodation myself through other connections.

[21] My assistant was a Masters student in philosophy at Shihezi University. Originally from Hunan Province, he could understand and speak some southern Chinese dialects, including Hubei, Hunan, and Sichuan. At the beginning, he was my language assistant because sometimes I found it difficult to understand the strong accents of the elderly. Later, he helped

Amidst these challenges, I found friendship, sympathy, and support from many of the elders. The shopkeeper from whom I regularly bought gifts often gave me his lowest price. And community leaders helped me to solve many problems. This widespread support enabled me to overcome the challenges described above and to complete my research.

Outline of Chapters

In this introduction, I have outlined the work undertaken, explained the socio-economic context in which the research was conducted, and discussed the changing nature of eldercare and the gendered aspects of inter-generational relationships in contemporary China. I have discussed my theoretical approach, and have explained the development of my methodology and the problems I had to overcome in the fieldwork process, including those related to my position as a young, female, and locally-born and raised researcher.

In Chapter 2, I introduce the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) and the institution of the XPCC. A general description of geography, population, and ethnic composition is followed by a brief history of Xinjiang's long-term relationships with China prior to the 1949 Communist Revolution. I then describe the *bingtuan*'s establishment and role, and show how the socio-political and economic situation of Xinjiang has impacted the XPCC's organization and relationship to the central government.

I present the specific local context of fieldwork in chapter 3. First, I introduce Tuan 143 in detail, including physical environment, migration history, current population and ethnic composition, and socio-economic development. I provide a particular focus on recent processes of urbanization within this *tuan*. I describe the newly shaped town and the two *liandui* where I conducted field research as examples of more general changes. I go on to present individual migration histories, showing how history has been lived in the XPCC, and how people perceive their present situations. This chapter therefore provides the basic ethnographic data on experiences with uncertainty that is central to discussing care and social security across the life-course.

Chapters 4 and 5 detail the current concerns of the elderly: health and housing. Chapter 4 examines elders' greatest concern – health – with a focus on self-care activities. Elders worry that poor health may prevent them from enjoying a 'good life'; they do not accept the inevitability of disease, and

---

me with interviewing, although not necessarily in dialect, because the XPCC's second and subsequent generations speak Mandarin, albeit with a mild Henan accent.

actively resist bodily frailty in a variety of ways. Health promotion practices are also a strategy that the *bingtuan* elderly adopt to gain social support by emphasizing self-reliance and interdependence among peers. Such efforts at 'self-care' reflect changing patterns in the care of the elderly from their own perspective. Parallel to individualization among China's youth, we can speak also of 'the individualism of the elderly'.

Chapter 5 looks at elders' concern with housing and its connection with social status. The desire to own a *loufang* (multi-storey flat) in town is motivated by the better living conditions in urban areas, and by the perceived lower status of those 'left behind' in rural areas. I show how individual destinies are largely determined by government policies and macro-economics on one hand, and by personal histories on the other. I consider the ways that support from adult children can facilitate the transition from rural to urban living. This chapter foregrounds inter-generational support, which is further explored in chapter 6.

In chapters 6, 7, and 8, I go 'inside the house' and investigate the relationships, support practices, and ideas connected to intimate spaces. Approaching these issues from three different angles – inter-generational support and conflict, long-term care, and late-life marriage and cohabitation – I show how traditional norms and practices related to elderly care have changed.

Chapter 6 discusses issues of inter-generational support and conflict, presenting a general picture of family life in the *bingtuan* for the active elderly. I show how new forms of reciprocity have developed around housing and childcare; examine gendered ideologies and practices; and show how material sources of support may also be sources of inter-generational conflict. Chapter 7 turns the focus to more debilitated elders, considering long-term care in the *bingtuan* and showing how family members negotiate between traditional norms and the difficulties of real situations in a transformed socio-economic environment. I show that these complexities result in diversity in family decision-making and caregiving practices, as past and present moral ideas and structural constraints interact in various ways leading to a range of consequences. I argue that family care for disabled elderly is determined more by practical constraints than by traditional norms. Finally, I suggest that the challenges to family care posed by socio-economic transformation make it necessary to improve the state welfare system and bring in a formal care service in the *bingtuan*.

Chapter 8 considers how elders challenge traditional ideologies through the new trends of late-life marriage and cohabitation. I show that this is both a response to a changing society and an active strategy which contributes to this change. I examine the problems elders face in forming and

maintaining such relationships, and the factors contributing to success or failure.

The conclusion redresses the apparent centrality of filial piety to the problems of ageing and care in twenty-first century China. I conclude that changes in inter-generational relations do not spell the end of family-based care. But, these changes do dramatize the insecurities and uncertainties associated with ageing. Neither in China nor elsewhere, should eldercare be taken for granted as the natural outcome of power balances, exchange and reciprocity, or values between generations. Instead, eldercare is secured only through the ongoing negotiation (between generations and with the state as an intermediary) of moral ethics, emotions and relationships, material considerations and practical realities.

Chapter 2
The *Bingtuan* in Xinjiang: Place and People

Tuan 143 is located in the northern part of Xinjiang. It is one of the regimental farms of Division 8 of the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (the *bingtuan*). In order to better understand my specific field site, this chapter will describe the geographical, historical, socio-political, and economic background of the *bingtuan* and of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR), within which it is located.

The *bingtuan* is a unique organization within the People's Republic of China. Although quasi-military in origin, it serves primarily economic functions, and also has significant governmental responsibilities, generally operating independently of the XUAR in which it is located.[22] The XPCC has administrative authority over several towns as well as many rural settlements. It has its own administrative structure, fulfilling governmental functions such as healthcare and education for areas under its jurisdiction (State Council 2014). The XPCC's economic plan is directly supervised by the central government in Beijing, and it also has its own public security and judicial organs including armed police forces and prosecutors (Seymour 2000; State Council 2014).

Being rooted in imperial forms of 'military-agricultural border defence' (*tunken shubian*), the XPCC was founded by Wang Zhen in 1954 by order of Mao Zedong. The stated goals of the XPCC are to develop frontier regions, promote economic development, ensure social stability and ethnic harmony, and consolidate border defence. In its 60-year history, the XPCC has built farms, towns, and cities, and provided land and work for disbanded military units. By the end of 2013, the XPCC had a population of 2,701,400, accounting for 11.9 per cent of Xinjiang's total population (State Council 2014).

[22] It is often described as a 'party-government-army-enterprise unit' (*dang zheng jun qi yiti*).

Geography

The *Bingtuan* is distributed within 13 prefectures of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. The total area controlled by XPCC amounts to 743,000 square kilometres, accounting for 4.47 per cent of Xinjiang's land. It shares the same geographical and climatic characteristics and similar natural resources with the rest of Xinjiang.

Xinjiang is located in China's north-west. Its boundaries coincide with longitudes 73°40'E/-96°23'E and latitudes 34°25'N/-49°10'N, and circumscribe an area of some 1,664,900 square kilometres – one-sixth of China's total landmass. As a hinterland of Eurasia, Xinjiang borders eight countries; running from north-east to south-west these are Mongolia, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India. Xinjiang's international borders are the longest in China, totalling 5,600 kilometres, and the region boasts the largest number of international Chinese ports. Within China, Xinjiang is bordered to the east by the provinces of Qinghai and Gansu, and to the south by Tibet. Lying on the ancient Silk Road, the region still serves as an important continental link between China, Central Asia, and the West. Geographically, Xinjiang is two time zones west of Beijing; the rail distance from Beijing to the regional capital, Urumqi, is 3,800 kilometres. Officially, however, Xinjiang is in the same time zone as the rest of China: Beijing Time (UTC+8).

The geographic features of Xinjiang are characterized as 'three mountains holding two basins' (*sanshan bao liangpen*). The three mountains are those of the Altai range in the north-east, forming the border with Mongolia; the central Tianshan range which runs east-west, dividing Xinjiang into northern (Beijiang) and southern (Nanjiang) regions; and the Kunlun range to the south, which divides Xinjiang from the Tibetan Plateau. Between Altai and Tianshan lies the Zungharian Basin which constitutes the northern half of the province.[23] China's second largest desert – the Guerbantonggute Desert – occupies the centre of the basin, but most of the basin is grassland. The north-western Yili Valley is particularly rich in pastures and also supports agriculture. XPCC Divisions 4, 5, 9, and 10 are distributed in the north-western part of northern Xinjiang. Alluvial plains characterize the southern part of the basin, and it is here that XPCC Divisions 6, 7, 8, 12, and the Construction Division are stationed. The north-eastern Turfan Depression contains the salt lake Ayding Kol, which marks the lowest point of elevation in China, at 154 metres below sea-level. Surrounded by desert, the temperature in Turfan can rise to 50ºC in summer yet ample mountain run-off water makes agriculture possible in Turfan and

[23] The Zungharian Basin is sometimes also spelled Jungharian or Dzungarian.

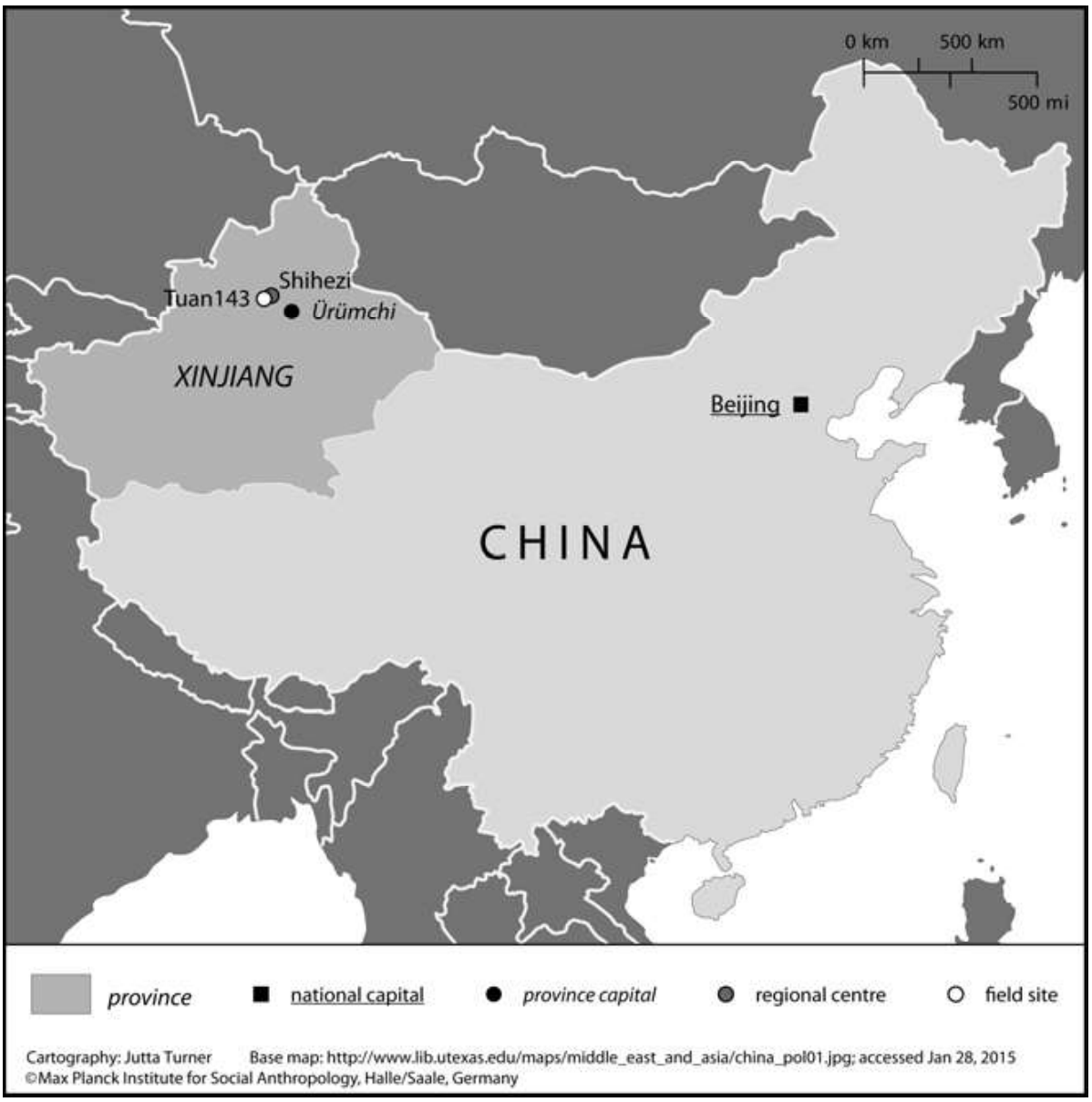
surrounding oases. The farms of XPCC Division 13 are distributed in the eastern parts of Xinjiang. For centuries farmers in the Turfan area have relied also on underground canals called *karez* to channel mountain run-off, and water their fields with little evaporation. Turfan is connected to the interior provinces of China by the Gansu Corridor.

The southern half of Xinjiang is known as Nanjiang. Here, between Tianshan and Kunlunshan, lies the Tarim Basin which is dominated by the vast Taklamakan Desert. Covering 327,000 square kilometres, the Taklamakan is China's largest desert. Around the Tarim Basin stretches a chain of oases, some spring-fed, others supported by mountain run-off. These oases are suitable for agriculture and have facilitated trade for more than two millennia, as they comprise the central stretches of the historic Silk Road. Today, XPCC Divisions 1, 2, 3, and 14 are distributed across the oases of the Tarim Basin. The final area of note in Xinjiang is the south-western Pamir Plateau, which has the reputation of being 'the roof of the world' because it stands at a height of 4,000-7,700 metres. The area is populated only by small numbers of Tajik herdsmen who live in the valleys.

Xinjiang is rich in natural resources. It has abundant oil reserves and China's largest natural gas field, which respectively account for 30 per cent of China's land oil resources and 34 per cent of land gas resources (Baidu 2014). Kunlun jade is the most famous jade in China and abroad. Other resources such as coal, iron, tungsten, molybdenum, copper, lead, zinc, silver, gold, timber, and fur are also found in quantity. Facilities for extracting these resources date only to the Maoist period, as 'systematic exploitation of these potential riches by China began on a large scale only after 1949' (McMillen 1981: 66). The *bingtuan* had an important role in developing resource extraction, and continues to have privileged access to most natural resources in its respective regions.

The *bingtuan* has to cope with Xinjiang's challenging climate. The region suffers from a chronic shortage of water and occasional natural disasters. It has been described by geographers as part of the dry 'dead heart of Asia' (*yazhou siwang zhongxin*), with insufficient and unevenly distributed annual precipitation of 150-200 millimetres in Beijiang and less than 100 millimetres in Nanjiang (Ministry of Commerce Department 2007). Xinjiang has a temperate continental climate, with long and extremely cold winters, short and burning hot summers, and greatly variable spring and autumn seasons. Dangerous weather conditions are common, particularly during the harsh winters. The more remote communities in the mountains, such as Altai, are often cut off by heavy snowfalls and have to be supplied by regional government helicopters. In summer, melting snow from the mountains can flood agricultural areas on the plains. Earthquakes are

frequent too, especially in the mountainous border areas. Although most quakes are mild, they occasionally threaten lives and the livelihood of whole communities. Michael Dillon observed that 'all of these geographical features, in particular Xinjiang's isolation, the chronic shortage of water and the problems that local communities have encountered in making a living from difficult land have all had, and continue to have, a profound influence on the region's history and its economic and social development today' (2004: 7).



Map 1. Location of the field site.

Population and Ethnic Composition

As Dillon wrote, 'Xinjiang is a frontier region … on the crossroads between the Chinese, Turkic and Russian worlds' (Dillon 2004: 24). Historically,

Xinxiang has been a place of multi-ethnic and multicultural encounters and is recognized as one of the most complex zones of cultural interaction on earth (Starr 2004: 6). At the time when the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) took power, over 90 per cent of Xinjiang's population was ethnically non-Han. The most significant non-Han ethnic groups included Uyghur, Kazakhs, Tajiks, Hui, Kyrgyz, Uzbeks, Mongols, Daurs, Khalkhas, Manchus, Xibos, and Russians. Most of these groups were Muslim, and the vast majority spoke Turkic languages and used the Arabic script. It is significant that many of them are ethnically kin with the peoples of Central Asia (McMillen 1981: 67).

Xinjiang's total population and ethnic composition has changed dramatically since the 1940s. In 1941, the total population was estimated to be 3.73 million, among which the Uyghur are said to have accounted for 80 per cent, Kazakhs for 8.7 per cent, Han for 5 per cent, and Hui for 2.5 per cent (Toops 2004: 245). From the 1950s until the mid-1960s, the state sponsored large-scale migration of cadres, students, and workers into Xinjiang, and stationed there a large contingent of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) along with many demobilized troops. Many people from each of these groups entered the *bingtuan* with its establishment in 1954. The *bingtuan* also recruited both volunteers and criminal prisoners during its early years. The Great Leap Forward, which corresponded with three years of famine, was another period of massive Han influx into Xinjiang. It is reported that in 1959 alone, 800,000 migrants entered Xinjiang (Toops 2004: 246). During the Cultural Revolution, many peasants and those who were labelled as being of 'bad class' background escaped to Xinjiang where household registration was relatively easy. Despite the absence of any official programme of migration during this period, by 1967 nearly one million had arrived. After the Cultural Revolution, many migrants returned to their hometowns, but with the introduction of the Open Door Policy, a new floating population came to Xinjiang seeking jobs. Much of this floating population was not registered. According to the 1982 census, the population was 46 per cent Uyghur, 40 per cent Han, 7 per cent Kazakh, and 1.4 percent Kyrgyz. These changes in ratio have been explained in terms of substantial Han migration from elsewhere in China, and it has been assumed that the fertility of the Uyghur population was considerably higher than that of the Han. Since the mid-1990s, the state has implemented a range of policies to develop Xinjiang rapidly, which attaracts new migrants (Toops 2004: 245-47).[24] According to data from the 2011 census, the Han population in Xinjiang is

[24] Detailed information regarding the historical demography of Xinjiang, population growth in the twentieth century, ethnic composition and geographic distribution, and migration are provided by Toops (2004).

8.7 million and accounts for 40.1 per cent of the entire population of Xinjiang, while non-Han groups account for 59.9 per cent, with a population of 13 million (Bureau of Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region 2012). In other words, since 1941 the Han population of Xinjiang has increased by 46 times, mostly as a result of migration from other provinces.

Han migration to Xinjiang is closely entwined with the establishment and development of the XPCC. At the time of its establishment, the total population of XPCC was 175,000, and fewer than 10 per cent of the members were non-Han (McMillen 1981: 69). By the end of 2010, the population of the *bingtuan* was 2.6 million, comprising 12.3 per cent of the XUAR's overall population. The population of non-Han ethnic groups within XPCC had risen to 14.5 per cent (*Bingtuan Daily* 2011).

Xinjiang before 1949

The historical roots of XPCC have been traced back far beyond the establishment of the PRC. It is seen as descending from the Han Dynasty, when troops were stationed in Xinjiang to reclaim wasteland and defend frontiers (State Council 2014). As such, XPCC's history must take into account Xinjiang's long-term relationships with China prior to the 1949 Communist Revolution.

According to Chinese historiography, Xinjiang was historically called *Xiyu,* meaning the western region of China. A Chinese presence was first established in the region under the West Han Dynasty (202 BCE – 8 CE) through the figure of Zhang Qian who led a group of Han (the so-called *Zhangqian chushi Xiyu*) to the region in 139-126 BCE in an effort to secure allies against enemies from the North Xiongnu. At that time, according to Zhang Qian's reports, the province was inhabited by a range of ethnic groups, including the Sairen, Rouzhi, Wuxun, and the strongest group – the nomadic Xiongnu (Li 2003; Ma 2006). Over the following two centuries, the Han launched a military challenge to the dominance of the Xiongnu, and although they sometimes suffered reverses, the Han gradually secured their victories and established military farms known as *tuntian*. Some small *tuntian* were established as early as 101 BCE, but the model became more clearly developed after 60 BCE. The farms enabled Han garrisons to become self-sufficient, eliminating dependence upon unreliable shipments of grain from the Chinese interior (Fang 1997; Ma 2006).

The presence of Han settlers implied not only new power relations, but also encouraged an exchange of goods between East and West over what would later be named 'the Silk Road' (Millward 2009). During the following 300 years, China's power in the Tarim Basin decreased, due to political and military destabilization. However, trade as well as diplomatic and religious

relationships remained important and were even extended to India and a region known in Old Persian as Soghdiana (Millward 2009). During this period of the East Han Dynasty (25-220 CE), Buddhism was introduced to the region (Ma 2006; Millward 2007). In 64 CE, the emperor sent 12 envoys to India; they returned in 67 CE and began to translate Buddhist works into Chinese.

From the mid-fourth century CE Chinese power was challenged by new nomad groups that arose from the ruins of the Xiongnu Empire, and China only re-established control of the area during the Tang Dynasty in the eighth century (McMillen 1979). Having resumed control, China again consolidated its position by instituting large-scale agricultural garrisons (*tuntian*). Tang control did not last long, and from the late eighth through the thirteenth centuries, there were struggles for dominance between Tibet and various nomadic groups including the Uyghur.[25] This period of conflict was brought to an end when, in the thirteenth century, the entire area was subsumed into a Mongol empire which ruled over pastoralist and agrarian areas from Iran to China (Millward 2007: 40).

With the rise and expansion of Arab power and Islamic religion in the seventh century, Islam spread into China, and Qarakhandids became the first state in Xinjiang to convert to Islam in the early eleventh century (Ma 2006; Zhong 2009). In the fourteenth century, Mongol power waned, most of its leaders slowly converting to Islam. Under the mandate of Mongol leaders, the oases' population became overwhelmingly Muslim and linguistically adapted to Turko-Mongolian (McMillen 1979). By the end of the sixteenth century, groups identified as Uyghur, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, and Uzbek had emerged (Millward 2007: 41).

In the early seventeenth century, Zunghar, the confederation of Qirat Mongols, formed a steppe empire north of the Tianshan Mountains, in the region since known as Zungharia. This empire gradually gained strength and seized the Tarim Basin oases in 1678-1680. It was not until 1755, after the Qing Empire (established by the Manchus in 1644) had consolidated its rule throughout China proper, that it was strong enough to wipe out the Zunghars. The Qing suppressed rebellions by the Uyghur Khoja brothers who attempted to establish independent rule in the Tarim Basin, and

[25] The tribes known by the term Uyghur were part of a confederation of many tribes called Tiele in the Chinese record. They originated from the Mongolian core lands of the Orkhon River Valley. They spoke and wrote a language virtually identical to that of the Turks before them. They were not Muslim but Buddhist. They and other Turkic migrants to the Turfan Basin composed some, but not all, of the modern Uyghurs' genetic makeup. In 744, a Uyghur empire based in central Mongolia was established, extending into north-western China, parts of Zungharia, and at times as far west as Ferghana. This empire also provided military aid to the Tang against Tibet (Li 2003; Ma 2006; Millward 2007).

reasserted their control over Xinjiang in 1759 (McMillen 1979). The Qing Empire renamed this region Xiyu Xinjiang (lit. new territory).

The empire employed the hierarchical Qing banner system to create an overarching administration. A military governor based in Yining held ultimate authority over all Xinjiang. At the local level, the Qing managed the ethnically diverse region through multiple administrative and legal systems: the nomadic groups were formed into companies in scattered parts of Xinjiang and governed by rulers known as *jasak*s. The north-eastern cities of Hami and Turfan were also included in the *jasak* system. In southern Xinjiang, the Qing adopted existing administrative titles and governed through local officials known as *beg*s. In some regions of Zungharia where Han and Hui farmers and merchants were established, such as Urumqi and Barkol, the Qing established Chinese-style administrations of prefectures and circuits similar to those in the inland counties. Through these complex and multi-layered administrative systems, the Qing permitted a degree of local autonomy while maintaining a monopoly on military force. Particularly in the southern oases, the Qing seldom intervened in local society, and local government remained in the hands of Muslim elites who were in charge of taxes, trade, and justice. Qing military forces were distributed unequally across Xinjiang, with four times as many troops based in Zungharia (northern Xinjiang), as in southern Xinjiang (Fang 1997; Millward 2007: 97-101).

The most significant socio-economic policy implemented by the Qing Empire was agricultural development along the older model of the state military farm (*tuntian*). The *tuntian* of the Qing period reached an unprecedented extent of development. The new state farms were extensively established: both in northern Xinjiang, as well as in some cities in the Tarim Basin. Various categories of *tuntian* were established too. *Juntian* were farms worked by soldiers on the old model, but there were also *mintian,* worked by Han and Hui civilians; *huitian*, worked by local Uyghurs; and *fantian,* worked by criminals exiled to Xinjiang from other provinces of China. A Yili-based state farm became the most important grain base. The organization and management of these state farms were implemented strictly under the supervision of different levels of administrative hierarchy. Thus, the large-scale and long-term Qing *tuntian* guaranteed the rule of the empire in the region, and eventually served as a model for the XPCC (Zhao 1991; Fang 1997; Ma 2006; Millward 2007).

Qing rule in Xinjiang was relatively stable for its first hundred years. There was some conflict with Khoja revanchists supported by Khoqand, a Central Asian power centred in the Ferghana Valley west of Kashgar. But the Qing faced no resistance from the local Uyghur population or from the

Tarim Basin as a whole until the 1850s. In the second half of the nineteenth century conflicts did develop. Most significantly, the Tungan or Hui Rebellion against the Qing in Qinghai, Ningxia, and Gansu provinces in 1862 also embroiled Xinjiang. In Xinjiang, the rebels – who included Tungan and Turkic Muslims – took the opportunity to invade Khoqand in 1865. Their principal leader, Yakoub Beg, conquered Kashgar and controlled all of southern Xinjiang by 1871 when he took Urumqi. He established his *orda* (camp or court) in Kashgar and pursued a strict Islamist policy. The Chinese general, Zuo Zongtang, reconquered the rebel-controlled areas by 1878 (Li 2003; Millward 2007).

During the second half of the nineteenth century, Xinjiang also faced threats from Western powers. The expansion of the Russian Empire threatened the Xinjiang border and also brought about an increasing British concern for the security of India. After the 1840 Opium War in which China's declining Manchu Dynasty was defeated by the British, Western countries took advantage of the Qing Empire's preoccupation with the Taiping Tianguo peasant uprising to force a number of 'unequal treaties' on China. Russia obtained diplomatic, commercial, and territorial concessions in Xinjiang and occupied the region around Yili in 1871. In the south, Britain actively supported Yakoub Beg's rebellion with the intention of creating a puppet regime. Zuo Zongtang reconquered Xinjiang for the Manchu during the 1870s, and Yili was returned to Chinese sovereignty in 1881 by the Treaty of St. Petersburg. In 1884, Xinjiang was given the status of a Chinese province, and control of the provincial regime came largely into the hands of the families of the military and civilian officials who had accompanied Zuo Zongtang from the province of Hunan. Until the revolution of 1911, Xinjiang was ruled by bureaucrats from this group (McMillen 1979; Li 2003: 133-37).

The revolution of 1911 overthrew the Qing Empire, and China entered an era of warlord rule. While warlords held sway over the whole country until the establishment of the Kuomintang regime in Nanjing in 1928, they reigned over Xinjiang until 1949 when the PRC was founded. Each of the warlords maintained his own military forces, collected taxes, maintained separate diplomatic relations with Russia, and formed loyal, Han-dominated administrations in which native leaders continued to handle affairs at the local levels. When warlord Jin Shuren took power in 1928, his policies of increasing tax, empowering the military, and replacing native officials with Han Chinese, combined with inflation and corruption to cause strong dissatisfaction among Xinjiang's non-Han groups. In February 1931, the forced marriage of a Uyghur girl from Hami to a Han official sparked a Uyghur rebellion against Jin's government which developed into the

restoration movement of Hami Wang, and gradually spread into other parts of Xinjiang. The rebellion was assisted in the name of Muslim solidarity by the forces of Ma Zhongying, the Hui warlord who ruled Gansu Province. In 1933, the East Turkistan Republic (ETR) was established in the city of Hotan in southern Xinjiang by Uyghur leaders, but Ma Zhongying destroyed the fledgling state the following year. Also in 1933, Jin was replaced as ruler of Xinjiang by Sheng Shicai, who finally crushed Ma Zhongying and the rebellion in 1937 with Soviet assistance (Li 2003; Ma 2006; Millward 2007).

The influence of the Soviet Union in Xinjiang had steadily increased from the establishment of the Soviet state in 1917. During the 1930s, the Soviets established the Soviet-Xinjiang trading company Sovsintorg, and built five Soviet consulates in the area. In return for their aid in suppressing Ma Zhongying's revolt, Sheng gave the Soviets exploration rights to the region's mineral and petroleum resources, and a monopoly over Xinjiang's export trade. Sheng also implemented several political and socio-economic reforms that were outwardly liberal and progressive. Yet, when it seemed as if Russia would be defeated by Hitler's invading forces in late 1942, Sheng swung away from the Soviets, and declared his alliance with the Kuomintang government in Chongqing, precipitating a Soviet withdrawal from Xinjiang. In 1943, the Three Districts Revolution was started by Kazakhs in the area around Altai, and they were joined by other Turkic Muslims. An independent East Turkistan Republic was again proclaimed in the districts of Yili, Tacheng, and Altai. In 1944, the Kuomintang replaced Sheng with Wu Zhongxin. Throughout the course of the revolution, the Soviets again supported the rebels with weapons, equipment, supplies, and troops, and were again allowed to explore some of the richest natural resources in northern Xinjiang. Furthermore, the Soviet consulate was reopened and Russian traders and scientists slowly moved into the rebel-held areas. The Soviet Union thus re-established its political and economic foothold in Xinjiang, though eventually the Three Districts' leaders split into pro-Soviet and pro-Kuomintang factions (McMillen 1979; Li 2003; Ma 2006; Millward 2007).

In 1949, when the People's Liberation Army secured victory over the Kuomintang in central China and headed towards Xinjiang, the Kuomintang general Tao Zhiyue resisted a Soviet request to declare Xinjiang independent. He surrendered peacefully on 25 September before the PLA arrived. On 1 October, the People's Republic of China was formally established, and on 12 October the PLA entered Xinjiang and occupied both the northern and southern parts of the province under the leadership of Wang Zhen and Wang Enmao. At the same time, all troops in the province including Turkic troops of the former Yili National Army and the majority

of the Kuomintang troops under Tao Zhiyue were reorganized, re-educated, and incorporated into the PLA (McMillen 1981: 68). The province was designated an 'autonomous region' in 1955, but its status vis-à-vis China's central government has remained problematic ever since.

The *Bingtuan*: From Emergence to Dissolution[26]

After taking control of Xinjiang, the Chinese Communist Party established a new institution which would have a major influence on future developments within the province: the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps. In this section, I will first describe the *bingtuan*'s establishment and role. Then, I will show how Xinjiang's socio-political and economic situation has impacted the XPCC's organization and relationship to central government. Finally, I discuss the ways in which the XPCC has influenced further developments in Xinjiang.

Foundation (1949-1954)

Having occupied Xinjiang, the PLA faced significant challenges which the *bingtuan* was meant to resolve. The most urgent issue was food shortage. There were 170,000 soldiers in Xinjiang, who needed nearly 100,000 tonnes of grain per year. After years of conflict, Xinjiang was unable to meet such demand. The PLA had to consider whether to transport grain from Beijing or the Soviet Union. Either choice would be expensive – 8-10 times the normal price – and it was more than the new government could afford.

The complex socio-political relationships between different ethnic groups in Xinjiang posed another challenge. The establishment of the East Turkistan Republic had strengthened the ethnic identity of Turkic-speaking minorities. At the same time, corrupt Kuomintang governance in Xinjiang and the long period of conflict had created hostility between ethnic groups, particularly between Turkic-speaking minorities and Han Chinese. As a result, the PLA faced scattered resistance from local minorities, particularly from the remnants of the ETR under Osman Batur in the northern Kazakh area. Although Osman Batur was executed in early 1951, resistance continued until 1954. In Khotan and Lop counties in southern Xinjiang, resistance among Uyghurs led by Abdimit in the early to mid-1950s was eventually suppressed. There were also riots in southern Xinjiang, Turfan, and Gullja which were reported to be connected to Abdimit's group (see also Dillon 2004; Ma 2006; Millward 2007).

[26] The source for this section is Fang (1997), unless otherwise specified.

A third concern was the continuing Soviet influence in Xinjiang. Many ethnic groups were present on both sides of the border. The neighbouring areas of the Soviet Union were also more industrialized than Xinjiang. As even core areas of China had little industrial development, the new government certainly did not have the ability to compete with the Soviets for the population's favour in Xinjiang, and feared for the security of the border (Jiang 1997). By 1950, the CCP began to turn to the *tuntian* system previously used by the Han, Tang, and Qing dynasties to stabilize and develop Xinjiang, to strengthen security on the frontier, and to integrate Xinjiang into the new republic. Troops would be stationed in Xinjiang on military-agricultural state farms with the aim of reclaiming wasteland, supplying their own grain, and defending the frontiers.

Initially, the army participated in non-military forms of work without undergoing formal reorganization. In 1950, the troops were divided into two groups; one group retained military responsibilities, while the other group (numbering some 110,000 soldiers) were ordered to participate in production and construction activities under Mao Zedong's 5 December 1949 directive to 'return the army to a working force' (McMillen 1981). By 1954, 34 farms and 9 pastures had been constructed, with a total cultivated area of 77,260 acres. The grain harvest amounted to 71,800 tonnes, achieving the goal of self-sufficiency. The army participated in other aspects of local development as well. From 1951-52, for example, the PLA established large and medium-sized industries. In 1952, these industries were then handed over to local government.

In 1953, the army underwent further reorganization to facilitate agricultural and economic development in Xinjiang. Following a directive from the central government, the Xinjiang Military Region reorganized the army into two sections: a Department of Defence and a Department of Production. The 2nd, 5th, 6th, and 22nd Army Corps were transferred to civil work. This reorganization of army regiments laid the foundation for the formal establishment of XPCC.

State Farm Period (1954-1957)

From 1954, the whole country underwent large-scale economic development. At this point, it was decided to establish a special organization (i.e. the *bingtuan*) to facilitate the transfer of soldiers into production duties. Many soldiers did not wish to leave the army because they would lose army benefits, and it was considered that others would have preferred to return home instead of remaining in Xinjiang once they were no longer soldiers. Thus they received a new and favourable status as 'state worker' (*zhigong*). Political Commissar Wang Enmao and Military Commander Wang Zhen

secured permission from Mao Zedong to establish the Xinjiang Military District Production and Construction Corps (XMD PCC). On 7 October 1954 the Central Committee ordered approximately 104,000 PLA officers and men in Xinjiang to be transferred immediately to civil jobs in the new *bingtuan* (Seymour 2000). From this time, the cultivated farms gradually became official state farms managed by staff and workers (*zhigong*), and the self-sufficient army production units became a state corporation. During the period from 1954-57, the number of state farms grew to 59, and each farm implemented enterprise management, paying wages to workers. During this period, the former soldiers in XPCC were joined by demobilized soldiers, prisoners, and civilian Han, all hailing from other provinces. The population of XPCC grew from 175,400 to 311,500 in just three years. The *bingtuan* engaged in agricultural and industrial construction, and became central to the CCP's modernization project in Xinjiang (McMillen 1981). In January 1957, the XPCC was detached from the army, and became a state farm under the dual leadership of the national Agriculture Department and Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region.

Development (1958-1966)

The years 1958-66, were declared a 'developmental phase' (*fazhan jieduan*) in the XPCC. By the end of this period, there were 137 farms cultivating 808,000 hectares, including 60,000 hectares of newly reclaimed wasteland. During the same period, there was significant industrialization and creation of infrastructure in the province, including the construction of the Jiuquan Steelworks in Gansu, the Karakoram Highway to Pakistan, and numerous small factories producing hydro-electric power, cement, fertilizer, and refined sugar, among other products.

Population growth was another significant feature of this period. To overcome an initial labour shortage, many young peasants, students, and workers were persuaded to migrate to Xinjiang and join the frontier movement by the government's 'Go West' propaganda and by the absence of local jobs (Seymour 2000). The *bingtuan* also absorbed massive numbers of Han during the famine years of the Great Leap Forward, as well as large numbers displaced by the Cultural Revolution. By the end of this period, the population in the *bingtuan* numbered 1,485,000, having risen as a proportion of the total population of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region from 5.58 per cent to 16.39 per cent.

Cultural Revolution and the Dissolution of the Bingtuan *(1966-1975)*

From May 1966, the *bingtuan* participated in Mao Zedong's Cultural Revolution. The campaign's concern with class struggle became part of everyday practice. Under the Cultural Revolution, the population was divided into the 'exploited' (those who had been oppressed before the Communist Revolution) and the 'exploiters' (those who had held power or property), and the former were mobilized by the state to monitor and struggle against the latter (Yan 2009: 85). Many leaders, administrators, and intellectuals were attacked physically or psychologically, some were killed, and others committed suicide under the pressures. In the *bingtuan*, memories of this time are very painful. Everyone participated in the campaign, and no one worked on the farm. In the absence of other kinds of 'exploiters', it was previous leaders, especially transferred Kuomintang soldiers, who were criticized and punished. The *bingtuan* was thrown into chaos, the economy came almost to a standstill, and many of those who had migrated to Xinjiang returned to their home cities (Seymour 2000: 177).

During the Cultural Revolution, 11 Production and Construction Corps and 3 Construction Divisions were established in 18 other provinces throughout China. These other *bingtuan*, however, were unprofitable and unwieldy; they suffered serious financial deficits, becoming a burden on the country. Between 1972 and 1975 all the *bingtuan* were disbanded, one by one. The Xinjiang *bingtuan* was allowed to exist longer than most because of its frontier-guarding role, but in all other respects it too was a failure (Seymour 2000: 179). On 25 March 1975, the central government formally dissolved the XPCC, and the Agriculture Department took charge of state farms.

Outside the *Bingtuan*: Xinjiang in Maoist Times

During the period after the CCP took control of Xinjiang, it adopted a policy of working with existing leaders including minority cadres. Class and ideological diversity was initially accepted, but gradually the CCP recruited non-Han members and used them to replace existing leaders (McMillen 1979; Millward 2007). The CCP borrowed Stalin's model of socialist development in ethnic areas, by defining Xinjiang as an autonomous region and placing members of recognized minorities at each level of government. Military force, however, remained in the hands of the *bingtuan*. Simultaneously, it implemented land reform and a collectivization programme, redistributing land from landlords to poorer people, and encouraging mutual aid and collective work. Although collectivization pleased some, it en-

countered strong resistance from others, including Islamic institutional landholders and so-called local despots (*difang haoqiang*) in Uyghur areas, as well as nomads whose pastoral way of life was incompatible with collective organization. As a result, the pace of reform was much slower than in other Chinese regions, and the state was forced to rethink its strategy. Nomads were eventually enticed into the cooperative programme by the introduction of permanent settlements and scientific animal husbandry techniques, and by 1958, 72 per cent of nomads had joined the cooperative programme. Islam posed a significant challenge to Communism in social, legal, ideological, and political spheres. Although slowly undermining the autonomy of southern Xinjiang's Islamic establishment, the CCP showed tolerance for prayer halls and Islamic education (Millward 2007: 241-49). These moderate policies changed around 1956, however, when the state shifted to radical leftist policies that would continue for twenty years. Political campaigns throughout China including the Anti-Rightist Rectification Campaign (1957), Great Leap Forward, and Cultural Revolution, created economic, political, and military chaos in Xinjiang as elsewhere. Yet in Xinjiang the particular geographic, historical, and ethnic factors, together with the complex relationship between the CCP and the Soviet Union, made the effects different from those in core regions of China. In both the Anti-Rightist Campaign and the Cultural Revolution, those with past connections to the ETR or the Soviet Union were attacked as 'local nationalists', while Islam and other aspects of local culture were attacked as backward and feudal. During the Great Leap Forward, aggressive and extensive collectivization in northern Xinjiang from 1959-61 undermined clan-based social organization, and forced many nomads into agriculture or industry, causing strong disaffection, particularly among Kazakh herdsmen (Millward 2007: 261-63). Intense anti-Chinese propaganda from Soviet sources increased tensions, and thousands of people from Yili and Tacheng districts fled to Soviet territory in 1962, taking livestock and goods with them.[27] Ultimately, *bingtuan* militia working with the PLA sealed the border and repressed resistance. Subsequently, the *bingtuan* once again took up the agricultural, pastoral and forestry work of the abandoned communes and over the next four years established fifty-three state farms along the Soviet border in Yili, Bortale, Tarbaghatai, and Altai districts (Fang 1997; Li 2003; Ma 2006; Millward 2007).

Most non-Han people in Xinjiang, like most Chinese throughout the country, responded to the fear associated with the Cultural Revolution by

[27] A Western source noted other possible sources for increasing ethnic tension: new migrants in the *bingtuan*; the forced transfer of nomad-used pasture to agriculture; and grain requisitions in time of famine that favoured Han over Uyghur areas (Millward 2007: 263).

focusing on their own livelihoods in hope of avoiding the political storms. Small Uyghur groups, however, sought to take advantage of the chaos to establish an independent republic (Millward 2007: 274). They established the East Turkistan People's Revolutionary Party (ETPR) in 1967 in Urumqi and Kashgar, later developed branch organizations in other places, and even had members working in departments of the Autonomous Region's government.[28] ETPR robbed banks, shops, and grain stores to fund its activities, before launching a rebellion in Megit in August of 1969. The rebellion was suppressed and the organization crushed by the early 1970s (Dillon 2004; Zhong 2009).

Following the dissolution of the *bingtuan* in 1975, the XPCC's ability to defend the border, suppress ethnic unrest, and develop Xinjiang's economy was significantly weakened. In 1979 and 1980, thousands of migrants originally from Shanghai gathered in Qasu and occupied the local Party Committee Administrative Office for over 50 days, demanding to be sent back to their hometowns. Subsequently, they were joined by other migrants in staging a 100-day hunger strike. Widespread support for these demands weakened the border-settlement policy, which was also threatened by ethnic conflicts and independence activism (Millward 2007: 279-81).

The relaxation of political and religious control in the late 1970s allowed international Pan-Islamic and Pan-Turkic ideologies to generate increased religious enthusiasm and nationalism particularly in southern Xinjiang. In 1980-81, ethnic conflict erupted in many parts of Xinjiang, particularly in Kashgar and Aksu, where there was yet another attempt to establish an independent East Turkistan Islamic Republic and drive out Han Chinese, creating more fear among Han migrants. Moreover, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1978 was perceived as a renewed threat to the border (Jiang 1997: 99-105). The Chinese government responded to this series of challenges by reforming the XPCC on 3 December 1981.

The *Bingtuan* since 1982

The restoration of the *bingtuan* coincided with the introduction of China's Open Door Policy. Since 1982, the *bingtuan* has benefited from a new international political and economic environment as well as from domestic development policies and programmes in Xinjiang. Moreover, the dis-integration of the Soviet Union in 1991 transformed the border from a site of

[28] The party may have been formed by individuals on both sides of the Chinese-Soviet border or by Uyghurs based in the Soviet Union; it was also possible that Soviet intelligence was involved, given difficult relations between China and the Soviet Union (Dillon 2004: 57). According to Chinese sources, the ETPR's later activities were supported through weapons and funds supplied by Soviet intelligence (Zhong 2009).

military threat to one of economic opportunity, as the independent Central Asian states formed trading links with Xinjiang to the benefit of the *bingtuan*.

The *bingtuan* benefited directly from the Open Door Policy. It implemented the Enterprise Contract Responsibility System and focused its efforts on economic development. In March 1990, the *bingtuan* was taken out of the remit of XUAR and placed under the direct control of the Chinese central government. In 1997, the *bingtuan* was given the status of 'China Xinjiang Group' (*zhongguo xinjian jituan gongsi*), and has since enjoyed the preferential treatment reserved for large enterprises. In 2000, the government launched the 'Open up the West' campaign. The campaign is meant to develop Xinjiang and other western provinces and regions that together comprise 60 per cent of China's territory, but are inhabited by only 25 per cent of its population (Millward 2007: 298). The development of the west should narrow the gap created by regional development policies that have favoured China's coastal areas since 1978 (Goodman 2004: 317; Holbig 2004: 335). The campaign has involved both direct state investments and incentives to encourage investment by Chinese and foreign firms in the underdeveloped regions (Millward 2007: 298-99).

The XPCC benefited significantly from this increased government investment, and more industry and infrastructure was built in the *bingtuan*. On 17-19 May 2010, the central government organized a high-level meeting in Beijing regarding the development of Xinjiang. In the meeting, urbanization, industrialization, and agricultural modernization (referred to as *sanhua* or the three *hua*) were identified as the XPCC's development orientation. In this meeting, the central government officially stated that policy support for the autonomous region applied also to the Corps, and that policies for poverty-stricken areas and for partner assistance would also apply to division and regimental farms in the same areas. Since then, the three *hua* have become central to rapid development within the *bingtuan*.[29] Simultaneously, the *bingtuan* settlements have expanded since the 1990s, as labourers from other provinces have come to harvest cotton and other cash crops and to join development programmes within the campaign (Cliff 2009). This series of organizational changes meant that by 1999, the *bingtuan* 'had been gradually promoted to the same bureaucratic status as the XUAR government' (Cliff 2009: 83). I will now examine the XPCC's organization, practices, and development for the three decades beginning in the 1980s.

[29] See Xinjiang's official website, http://www.ts.cn/special/zyxjgzzth/node_79030.htm and http://xj.xinhuanet.com/zt/2010xjzth/. Last accessed 18 December 2014.

Political, Economic, and Management System

I have shown how the XPCC developed as a special institution which unified party, government, military, and enterprise roles. As a result of its military origins, it is organized in a structure of corps (*bingtuan*), divisions (*shi*), regiments (*tuan*), battalions (*ying*), and companies (*liandui*); all civil leaders have corresponding military titles. Yet, beneath this militarized form, XPCC functions as a large state-owned enterprise (i.e. the China Xinjiang Group), and engages in agriculture, industry, transport, building, and commerce. It also assumes the economic tasks assigned to it by the central government. Unlike most business enterprises, the XPCC has governmental and administrative roles in regard to the population within the Corps. The *bingtuan* has established party organizations at each level of the Corps, and has its own administrative and judicial organs. Moreover, the *bingtuan* remains an effective paramilitary entity, and boasts armed militia units which continue to play a significant role in border defence and internal security. However, due to its nature as an enterprise, the *bingtuan* has to pay tax to the regional government. The particularities of the XPCC have been summarized as follows: '[it] is a military, but without pay, it is a government, but it has to pay taxes, it is a corporation, but it has its own society, [and] its farmers join the labour union' (Bao 2010: 237).

The political system, particularly the relationship between XPCC and XUAR, has changed since 1990. Before 1990, XPCC was under the jurisdiction of XUAR and the Agriculture Department. In party, administrative, and judicial issues XPCC was subordinate to XUAR. It was also subject to XUAR economic development plans, in which its crucial role was recognized. As an enterprise, however, XPCC's business, including production and construction plan, financial affairs, investment, supplies, and wages came under the Agriculture Department. Complicating lines of responsibility further, in its military role, XPCC was subordinate to the Urumqi Military Region (Jiang 1997: 238).

Such complicated structures of governance caused practical problems that hindered XPCC's development. Specifically, the profits that XPCC generated as an enterprise were not sufficient to cover its governmental and military responsibilities or to comply with state directives regarding wages and social insurance. This financial shortfall was exacerbated because – unlike other agricultural areas of China that received government subsidies – the *bingtuan* paid local enterprise taxes to XUAR and received no subsidies. As a result, the XPCC needed direct financial support from central government to sustain its activities, but applications for such support had to be channelled through XUAR's government, resulting in long delays and inadequate responses (Guo 2008: 2; Bao 2010: 80).

In order to overcome these problems, the relationships between XPCC, XUAR, and the central government were significantly changed in 1990. From this time, XPCC reported directly to Beijing, and the socio-economic development of XPCC was incorporated in the central government's state plan. XPCC also gained access to all the preferential policies from which XUAR benefitted, and received a subsidy for the tax it paid to XUAR. As a result, XPCC's power has significantly increased, and its relationship with central government is equal to that of XUAR (Jiang 1997: 241).

The XPCC consists of 14 divisions subdivided into 176 regiments (*tuan*), which are further subdivided into battalions (*ying*), and companies (*liandui*). To date, the *bingtuan* has built one medium-sized and six county-level cities. The governments of these cities are incorporated into the structures of the division that controls them.[30] To reduce the administrative levels within the Corps, the XPCC has been combining neighbouring regiments into 'central regiments' since 2002. The headquarters of a central regiment is effectively a small town. Old regiments maintain their titles and identities, but exist as a community within a central regiment. At the time of my fieldwork, the mergers had yielded a total of 33 central regiments (each in a small town), and 105 normal regiments.

The XPCC operates a top-down model of leadership and vertical management, but different levels tend to emphasize certain roles. This model is known as 'government from above, enterprise from below' (*shangzheng xiaqi*). Corps and division headquarters mainly undertake governmental and leadership roles; regiments function as enterprises; and companies function as production units which are grouped into battalions.[31] Since many residents live in the companies, the *liandui* function also as regional villages, shouldering social functions such as public safety, the regulation of disputes, and birth control, in addition to their production role (Bao 2010: 95).

The source of wages for managers at each level is different. The managers of the top two levels – corps and division – belong to state institutions, so their wages and social insurance are paid by the central state. At regimental level, only schools and hospitals are fully recognized as state institutions. All other managers, including heads of regiments and companies, fall largely under the enterprise system. Their wages, therefore, are dependent on regimental profits. The situation is made more complex,

[30] For example, headquarters is the same entity as city government, the political commissar is the the committee secretary, and the commander is the mayor.

[31] In Tuan 143, there are seven production units (*liandui*) in each battalion (*ying*). Today, battalions have lost their role in organizing production, and are officially known as residential communities. Nevertheless, they are still widely referred to as *ying.*

however, by the fact that the central state offers financial support for 20 institutional positions in each regiment. Because it is difficult to specify which 20 individuals should benefit, this state financial support is distributed among all managers (Bao 2010: 95). Many managers are transferred to the division level before retirement, ensuring that they will receive institutional benefits following retirement.

The *bingtuan*'s officially registered staff and workers (*zhigong*), including those engaged in agriculture, have 70 per cent of their social insurance paid by the Corps, and following retirement, are entitled to a pension and health insurance. They usually also enjoy free medical checks organized by the Corps and subsidies for medicine. Village farmers in Xinjiang are less privileged, and they do not enjoy medical subsidies or pensions when they retire. Since registration as a *zhigong* is strictly controlled, many residents of XPCC are excluded from this system, particularly new migrants.

The economic and administrative systems of the Corps are different from those of XUAR. As a state-owned enterprise, the *bingtuan* economic system partly belongs to the planned economy, particularly in terms of agriculture. The top two levels are responsible for the general plan including what crops to plant. Each regiment (*tuan*) then distributes tasks to companies (*liandui*), and specifies how much crop (e.g. cotton, tomatoes, or corn) each should produce according to its land and human resources.

The *liandui* sign contracts with their *zhigong* concerning the production quotas. *Zhigong* have some ability to choose the crops, but their activities must be coordinated so that the *liandui* and *tuan* meet their targets. Also, most land has been designated for certain crops to facilitate large-scale mechanized operations. During the whole process of production, the Corps assists *zhigong* by providing unified management for irrigation, pest-control, and mechanized ploughing and harvesting. Moreover, the Corps has implemented a policy of 'unified purchase and unified sale'.[32] The Corps is responsible for purchasing bulk quantities of agricultural materials such as seeds, fertilizer, and pesticides, and of infrastructural materials such as irrigation piping; it also distributes these materials to its employees. The Corps consolidates its employees' harvests, paying them less than market price, and selling in bulk to other enterprises (Jiang 1997; Bao 2010). The situation of *bingtuan* farmers is significantly different, then, from other agricultural areas in Xinjiang where farmers decide what to plant, take care

[32] Some divisions have loosened the policy for purchasing agricultural materials, allowing farmers to buy seeds or pesticides from the market. Some farmers still prefer to buy from the Corps, which guarantees quality, even though it charges higher than market price (Bao 2010: 101).

of the whole production process, and sell their products at market price without any limitations.

This planned economy and management system is criticized from two standpoints. First, it discourages initiative from *zhigong* who have to rely on the Corps for each element of the production process and who lack market awareness. Second, it significantly increases management costs, putting the Corps' financial sustainability under pressure. The Corps' central sources of income have been the rents paid by farmers for land and the profits from the bulk sale of produce. Many *zhigong*, finding themselves under serious financial pressure, have given up their land. This results in large areas of unplanted land and reduces both the labour force and the Corps' income (Peng 2008: 21; Bao 2010: 103). Since 2006, therefore, the state has introduced policies to reduce the burden on farmers, offering subsidies for grain, seeds, and agricultural machinery and reducing rents.[33] These policies have had some success in stemming the outflow of *zhigong*, but at the cost of financial pressure on the Corps. As a result, many regiments run at a deficit and have to rely on state funding (Bao 2010: 103).

Economic and Social Development

Economic development is the primary focus for the *bingtuan* of the early 2000s. The primary economic activity of the XPCC remains agriculture, and the region produces cotton, fruit, vegetables, vegetable oils, and sugar beet. Some 40 per cent of China's cotton is grown on *bingtuan* farms, making XPCC the country's largest producer. XPCC is also responsible for a quarter of the world's tomato paste (China Daily 2005). XPCC has introduced advanced production technologies such as drip irrigation, and continues to build large-scale mechanized farms. Some of its experimental techniques have been applied on a large scale across Xinjiang and China.

The XPCC has gradually formed an industrial system that primarily produces textiles, food, and agricultural machinery, but also encompasses coal mining, chemical engineering, and the production of iron, steel, building materials, electricity, and machinery. The XPCC has established many publicly-traded subsidiary companies, and is also involved in a variety of tertiary industries, including trade, distribution, real estate, tourism, construction, and even insurance. By the end of 2013, the proportional contribution of the three sectors (agriculture-industry-tertiary) to XUAR's

[33] http://www.nkj.moa.gov.cn/dongtai/201006/t20100606_1535933.htm. Last accessed 20 December 2014.

economy was 29.4 per cent, 42.1 per cent, and 28.5 per cent.[34] The total output value of XPCC in 2013 was RMB 149,987 billion (approximately equal to US$ 23 billion – 220 times the value of output in 1954). Since 1981 when the XPCC was reinstated, the value of its output has increased 22.9 times with an annual growth of 10.4 per cent (State Council 2014: 5-6). Moreover, as the China Xinjiang Group, the *bingtuan* is expanding into the international market for agricultural machinery in Central Asia and Europe. By 2014, it had established economic and trade relations with more than 160 countries and regions, and engaged in economic and technological co-operation with more than 20 countries and regions (State Council 2014: 8).

Since the 1990s, urbanization has been a central focus of activity for the Corps. XPCC has already built-up one city – Shihezi – which is the second largest in XUAR. The Corps' urbanization process can be divided into three stages. In the first stage (1992-2000), the Corps established five towns: Alar, Shumuk, Wujiaqu, Beitun, and Beiquan. By 2002, XPCC had invested RMB 1.8 billion in these five towns (Bai 2008: 84). The second stage (2000-10), coincided with a new stage in the 'Open up the West' campaign: Operate Farms and Manage Towns (*jingying tuanchang guanli chengzhen*). In 2001, XPCC established Bingtuan Urbanization Leadership, and in 2003 started a new project with support from the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) focused on developing 38 small towns in the Corps. In December 2005, XPCC launched a project to urbanize 31 regiments by merging them into larger units (Bai 2008: 84). By 2006, the urbanization rate in the XPCC had risen to 42 per cent. The XPCC also planned to build four districts and six zones by 2015. The four districts were to include the central part of northern Xinjiang and the north-western, eastern, and southern parts of southern Xinjiang. The six zones included Urumqi-Shihezi, Aksu, Turfan-Hami, Kuitun-Kelamayi, Kashkar-Khortan, and Yili-Tacheng-Bortala (Zhu and Zhang 2004: 24). This plan was further facilitated by the third stage of urbanization, which commenced in 2010 when central government convened the Xinjiang Work Forum in Beijing. In the conference, at which the three *hua* (*sanhua*)[35] were established as the development focus of XUAR and XPCC, the project 'Counterpart Support' (*duikou zhiyuan*) was also initiated, in which 19 eastern provinces of China were designated to support 12 regions of Xinjiang and 12 divisions of XPCC. Following this conference, the development of XPCC entered a new

[34] Official website of the XPCC, http://www.xjbt.gov.cn/gk/tjxx/gmjj/255173.htm. Last accessed 15 December 2014.

[35] Agricultural modernization (*nongye xiandaihua*), industrialization (*gongyehua*), and urbanization (*chengzhenhua*).

era, rapidly increasing investment in urbanization.[36] By 2013, XPCC's urbanization rate had reached 62.3 per cent (State Council 2014: 6). Plans call for the development of 16 cities by 2020, 4 of them in southern Xinjiang.[37]

With the development of the economy and rapid urbanization, incomes and housing conditions have significantly improved. In 2013, the per capita disposable income of XPCC's urban residents was RMB 23,138; the per capita net income of households engaged in farming and animal husbandry was RMB 14,313; and the average salary of employed workers was RMB 43,000.[38] [39] The XPCC has invested a total of RMB 4.78 billion in recent years in improving living conditions, including the construction of indemnificatory housing[40], transforming urban shanty towns, and completing rural housing projects.[41] More than 70 per cent of workers have moved into new housing (State Council 2014).

The XPCC has established a complete education system from pre-school through university, implementing basic nine-year compulsory education and eliminating illiteracy among young and middle-aged people. The *bingtuan* currently has two universities: Shihezi University and Tarim University. The XPCC has made efforts to develop science and technology projects. It now has 18 science and technology research institutions, such as the Academy of Land Reclamation Sciences, and it has also built 14 key labs in different fields, 40 technical centres for enterprises, and 24 engineering research centres (State Council 2014). The XPCC has its own official newspaper, the *Bingtuan Daily*, as well as television stations at both the corps and division levels.

Challenges and Opportunities in the Development of Xinjiang

The XPCC has been highly successful in terms of socio-economic development and continues to develop rapidly. Nevertheless, there is a range of concerns related to development in Xinjiang, including demographic changes, ecology, ethnic relations, minority access to education,

---

[36] Official government website, http://news.ts.cn/content/2010-03/31/content_4879926_2.htm. Last accessed 10 December 2014.

[37] Government website, http://news.ifeng.com/a/20141009/42160161_0.shtml. Last accessed 21 December 2014.

[38] 1 RMB = .15 USD.

[39] Official government website, http://www.xjbt.gov.cn/gk/tjxx/gmjj/255134.htm. Last accessed 22 December 2014.

[40] Indemnificatory housing is the opposite of commercial housing. It is offered by the state to low income households, with fixed prices for sale or rental.

[41] http://www.xjbt.gov.cn/gk/tjxx/gmjj/255167.htm. Last accessed 22 December 2014.

employment, and income. In this section I will briefly describe the overall situation of Xinjiang since the introduction of the Open Door Policy, with a particular focus on the most significant issues. These issues, in turn, indicate how the state has gone about promoting development within XPCC in the 2000s, in the context of complex relations between development and stability.

Like XPCC, the Xinjiang region has been experiencing great socio-economic transformations as a result of state policy. During the 'Open up the West' campaign, large quantities of state funding poured into Xinjiang. Xinjiang's portion of the 'Open up the West' funds comes to RMB 900 billion; most was 'earmarked for major projects, including a rail-link from Kashgar to Kyrgyzstan, regional highway construction, telecommunications, water conservancy, environmental rehabilitation, agricultural expansion and especially the exploration, extraction, processing and delivery of energy resources' (Millward 2007: 299). As a result, infrastructure has been improved greatly. After the 2010 Xinjiang Work Forum, this development process was promoted further, with a focus on developing southern Xinjiang and establishing its main city, Kashgar, as a special economic zone. Moreover, with the improvement of railway infrastructure, the travel time between Beijing and Xinjiang has been reduced by half (from 72 hours to 36 hours). A further reduction to 15 hours was planned by 2015; this goal has not yet been met (some say the delay is due to safety concerns), but the trip has been shortened further.

Large-scale investment and rapid development has attracted significant migration into the region. And in contrast to the 1940s, Xinjiang has become a comparatively desirable place to live. Large numbers of migrants have come to pick cotton, Xinjiang's primary cash crop, while others have come to work on infrastructure and construction projects. Furthermore, the state arranged for people who had experienced natural disasters in other provinces to settle in Xinjiang, particularly in XPCC. Some foreign observers have concluded that one effect of the migration related to the 'Open up the West' campaign is that Xinjiang has become more thoroughly integrated into China through demographic means (Becquelin 2000: 74-76, 2004: 372-74; Millward 2007: 308; Cliff 2009: 86). Such authors have criticized the XPCC for facilitating the settlement of Han migrants since its establishment, and blamed it for its contribution to major demographic changes (McMillen 1981: 75; Seymour 2000: 172; Becquelin 2004: 367-68; Cliff 2009: 93).

While the standard of living of Xinjiang people has improved greatly since the campaign, there is an increasing income gap between Han Chinese and local minorities (Wu and Song 2014). This gap is largely due to urban-

rural differences. Most Han migrants work in well-paid jobs and live in the urban areas of northern Xinjiang, which is much more developed than southern Xinjiang, while minorities live mainly in rural areas, engaging in agriculture or nomadic herding (Wiemer 2004: 177). Before the Cultural Revolution, some forms of higher education in indigenous languages brought a guarantee of lifetime employment. Since the reform, such affirmative action has been reduced (Hann 2013: 184-85). Consequently, minorities, particularly those who cannot speak Chinese, are vulnerable to unemployment in the new market-oriented economy (Benson 2004: 198). This vulnerability is exacerbated by the influx of new migrants, who are perceived as squeezing locals out of the job market (Becquelin 2000: 85; Benson 2004: 213; Millward 2007: 350-51).

As elsewhere, education in Xinjiang is important in shaping both labour market outcomes and social identities (Hann 2013: 184). The Chinese government has made great efforts in improving the education of children of all ethnic groups since 1949 by investing heavily in the education system (Benson 2004: 191). In 1986, the state stipulated nine years of compulsory education, including six years of primary school and three of middle school. Although the enrolment of minority students in middle school is lower than that of Han Chinese, the primary school system covers all ethnic groups.[42] The state also aimed to improve the numbers of minority students at university with a preferential policy that allowed minority students to enter university with a lower minimum grade than Han students. Yet the increase in university fees since the 1990s has become a burden to both Han and minority families (Benson 2004: 209). In hopes of finding better jobs, increasing numbers of minorities choose to send their children to Chinese schools in the cities. This process has been facilitated by the state educational and language policy since the 'Open up the West' campaign. Since 2000, the state has implemented a bilingual education (*shuangyu jiaoyu*) policy[43], and an inland high school policy (*neidi gaozhong*) was

[42] There are two school systems in Xinjiang: *minzu* schools teach in minority languages (mainly Uyghur and Kazakh); Chinese schools teach in Mandarin. Many minority students drop out of middle school. Linda Benson (2004: 197-98) argued that this was because increasing fees since the 1980s were beyond the means of many rural families.

[43] In 1980, new textbooks were introduced in *minzu* schools, and Mandarin was taught as a second language from the third grade, with further instruction late in middle school and university. In 2002, Xinjiang University began using only Mandarin for textbooks and instruction, except in Chaghatay classes. In 2004, Mandarin as a primary or sole language of instruction was spread to elementary and middle schools (Schluessel 2007).

introduced in 1999.[44] As a result many *minzu* schools in Han-dominant northern cities and nearby areas closed as their student numbers declined.[45] With the merging of minority and Han schools in Xinjiang's major cities in 2005, many *minzu* schools disappeared from these cities (Schluessel 2007: 260). Since 2012, the state has aimed also to popularize bilingual kindergartens in rural areas, and particularly in southern Xinjiang.[46] It is expected that these policies will be good for the modernization of the country, the improvement of the 'quality' (*suzhi*) of minorities, and for the students' own individual development (Ma 2007: 22). Some foreign scholars report doubts, concerns and worries that the next generation will lose their own cultures and that the education policy is part of an assimilation strategy (Schluessel 2007; Hann 2013: 204).

Indeed there are challenges to be met. Educational capital is not equally accessible to all minority students because of regional inequalities within Xinjiang. Particularly in rural areas of southern Xinjiang where Uyghurs greatly outnumber Han, there are reports of a serious shortage of bilingual teachers in general, and of competent ones in particular[47], leading to a low quality of bilingual education (Schluessel 2007; Anatulla 2009: 103). As a result, many students end up without sufficient language skills (or indeed other formal skills) required in the labour market and become 'easy targets for various hostile forces', which is to say they are like to support (at least tacitly) ethnic activists, Islamic extremists, or other forces that are opposed to the central government (Zhang 2011: 172). Minority rural youth who have had little exposure to Mandarin remain effectively excluded from all segments of the labour market (Hann 2013: 193-94). To the extent that 'Open up the West' has not achieved its final aim of more equal participation in the labour market, it can be said to have increased inequality within a booming economy. It may be that these inequalities have been a prime cause of interethnic violence since the mid-1990s (Hann 2013: 189).

---

[44] This involves the recruitment of minority students, including Uyghurs and Kazakhs, mainly from poor rural backgrounds, to special classes in large cities of inner China where they are expected to benefit from intimate association with local Han students (Hann 2013: 195).

[45] For example, in my hometown, my brother was the first ethnic Kazakh to attend Chinese school in 1989 in the neighbouring *bingtuan*. Many Kazakh students followed his example, and the Kazakh school was closed in 2005 due to the limited numbers of students still attending.

[46] http://www.tianshannet.com (16.12.2014).

[47] It is reported that 87 per cent of bilingual teachers are from minorities, most of whom used to teach in their native language and were redeployed to teach in Mandarin after one or two years of language training. http://news.sina.com.cn/c/2014-08-04/180630628732.shtml. Last accessed 16 December 2014.

Another challenge for the *bingtuan* and the Xinjiang region concerns the ecological changes that have accompanied development. Since the mid-twentieth century, land has been claimed for agriculture on a vast scale in the establishment of state farms. These projects have been justified by the ideas that nature needed to be conquered and that increasing prosperity justified further expansion (Millward 2007: 313). Xinjiang, however, is a highly vulnerable natural environment with minimum precipitation. Its agricultural development depended on channelling irrigation water from the streams flowing out of the mountains that ring Xinjiang's basins. This intensified agricultural and urban use which, along with evaporation from irrigation channels and flooded fields, has increased the speed of water consumption, well before it arrives in the lower reaches of the Tarim. As a result, fields on the outskirts of oases have become desiccated, degraded, and eventually abandoned. Because abandoned land is easily eroded, sandstorms have harmed property, crops, and livestock (Becquelin 2000: 84 [Chen 1998: 5], 2004: 317; Toops 2004: 269-75; Millward 2007: 315-18). The tension between the modernization project and limited water supply is exacerbated by Xinjiang's increasing population (both through natural reproduction at high birthrates and through in-migration), rate of economic development, and the heavy water demands of the rapidly expanding industries in construction, transport, oil, and gas (Toops 2004: 272).

The Chinese government and public became aware of the environmental issues in the 1990s. Since the mid-2000s, the government has made efforts to reduce the environmental damage in a number of ways, including water transfer schemes, a tree-planting campaign, and water-efficient irrigation. Meanwhile, Chinese geographers, hydrologists, ecologists, and commentators have tracked the state of Xinjiang's environment, pointing out the tension between exploitation and protection, and advocating sustainable development (Becquelin 2000: 83). Public discussions regarding the environmental issue have become heated, especially online, as both ethnic minority and Han people have asserted that the result of the 'Open up the West' campaign is that less efficient enterprises have moved to Xinjiang and worsened the natural environment with water and air pollution.

The greatest concern within Xinjiang in the 2000s, however, has been its political stability. As described above, Uyghur separatism has been a factor in the region since the establishment of the PRC. Since the introduction of market reforms, and particularly with the independence of Central Asian countries, Uyghur separatist activities have risen significantly. Uyghur separatism has become more organized through branches in the region and more internationalized with Uyghurs outside China who actively

seek to attract international attention. Uyghur separatism tends to be closely connected with extreme Islamic beliefs, and under the banner of Holy War, it has adopted terrorist tactics (Zhong 2009: 154-57). In 1997, the Ghulja violence during Spring Festival resulted in 7 people reported killed, more than 200 injured, and dozens of buses and shops destroyed. Such events have become more common and more violent in subsequent years. Among these, the 7/5 Riots in 2009 were labelled a 'watershed' by Zhong Minhe: '197 people died and more than 1000 were injured, whilst shops and transport were also burnt in the regional capital, Urumqi. The World Uyghur Congress (WUC) headed by Ribiya, claimed responsibility' (Zhong 2009: 158-60). Following these riots, incidents and attacks have become more frequent and more random. It was not until similar attacks took place outside Xinjiang, however, that they became a major concern elsewhere in China. The '10/28' car bombs in front of Beijing Tiananmen Jinmen Bridge in 2013, and the Kunming train station violence on 1 March 2014, for example, caused panic and fear all over China.

Such public violence has generated instability and anxiety in Xinjiang, along with international (and internet-driven) attention. It has produced also a shift in state policy towards the region. Since the end of the twentieth century, particularly after the Gulja events, the Chinese government has focused on improving the living standards of local minorities through development as the solution to Xinjiang's security. Development projects have been promoted, but the state has maintained what foreign observers assess as a strict policy on religious practice and publication concerning Xinjiang and minorities (Millward 2007: 345). Minorities, particularly Uyghurs, have found themselves disproportionately targeted by new security measures.

As James A. Millward has described it, interethnic tension '[has] emerged more often in mundane ways than in open acts of protest or oppression, but it [has] remained palpable nonetheless' (2007: 348). After the 7/5 Riots, public attitude towards minorities in Xinjiang changed. Uyghurs were already connected with terrorism, and it was common to hear from Han Chinese that 'Uyghurs are trouble makers' and 'it is better to keep away from them'. Since 7/5, many have now become afraid of Uyghurs.

There is no doubt that the development and stability of Xinjiang is both a main concern and a major challenge for the Chinese government. After each occurrence of serious violence, the state has tended to implement a new development project in Xinjiang. These projects are powerful engines, changing the landscape, and bringing modernization to the region. Many benefit. Yet ironically, each development project feeds the propaganda of Uyghur separatists. Development brings demographic and ecological

changes, job and income inequality, and shifting policies toward education, language, and religion. These changes provide separatists with justification for their ongoing opposition to China. The state's severe security measures bring comfort to many, but the special scrutiny of Xinjiang's Turkic speakers, and specifically of Uyghurs, at airports, on public transportation, and in hotels attracts international attention as an abuse of human rights. It also further alienates the scrutinized minorities who are concerned already about the loss of their ethnic culture and the natural environment.

The insecurity, tense political atmosphere, and increasingly fractious ethnic relations make life unpleasant for all Xinjiang people, whether minorities or Han Chinese. It is hard to argue, therefore, that such problems are simply the price of otherwise desirable development. As high-profile discussions continue concerning the relations between development and stability, many scholars have started appealing to China's government to engage in 'participant-development' with minorities rather than focusing on economic growth in terms of GDP exclusively.[48]

Against this background, the XPCC enjoys mostly the beneficial aspects of development. Because XPCC has an active role in border defence, local stability, and the repression of violence, it has maintained and strengthened its privileged relationship with the state. And, it has benefitted from the central government's belief that development is an appropriate answer to unrest. Discourse in government reports, the media, and academia have called for government to 'catch the historical opportunity to prompt development of the XPCC'.[49] Indeed, XPCC has enjoyed huge state funding for accelerating development.

[48] http://news.ifeng.com/exclusive/lecture/dongtai/detail_2014_04/15/35776477_0.shtml. Last accessed 19 December 2014.

[49] Examples of such discourses are easily found. For example, Bingtuan Ribao, 14 June 2014 (http://bt.xinhuanet.com/2014-06/14/c_1111137546.htm); Bingtuan Jianshe, 2010, No.11, http://www.chinaqw.com/node2/node116/node446/xj/143/jh.htm, http://news.cntv.cn/2014/10/05/VIDE1412479080091907.shtml. Last accessed 20 December 2014).

Chapter 3
Tuan 143

This chapter introduces my field site, detailing its geography, administration, development before and after economic reform, population composition, social insurance system, and the relation between town and *liandui*. Following this introduction to Tuan 143, I will show how history has been lived by people and how people perceive their current lives.

Tuan 143 is stationed in the southern part of the Zungharian Basin. It is bounded by the city of Shihezi (the headquarters of Division 8) in the east, the regional town of Shawan in the west, the region of Wulanwusu Xiang in the north, and the Nanshan area of Tianshan in the south. The total area controlled by the *tuan* is 1,620 square kilometres, including 220,000 *mu* of cultivated fields and 800,000 *mu* of natural pastures.[50]

Tuan 143 operates as a large-scale state-owned modern farm with three branch farms: Huaqiao Farm, Ziniquan Farm, and Shinan Farm. The *tuan* includes 99 administrative units, among which are 32 farming units, 6 livestock units, 46 enterprises, 5 schools, 3 hospitals, 7 community units, 1 radio station, and 1 television station. By 2012, the resident population was 40,000, with another 20,000 classified as 'floating population', making a total of 60,000.[51] The ethnic minority population numbers 3,840, amounting to 7.6 per cent of the total. The total number of *zhigong* is 8,874, and retired *zhigong* number 11,609. In the past, *bingtuan* residents mainly lived in the agricultural units (*liandui*), however, with the urbanization of recent years, 75 per cent of the population has moved to town. The *liandui* and town remain closely connected, however, because most of the population engages

[50] Approximately 6 *mu* equal one acre.

[51] Local administration provided me with a figure of 40,000 for the registered population, and only 10,000 for the floating population. Higher numbers appear in the administrative report to the Survey Group of the central government's civil service (2011), which indicates that the floating population is 20,000. For the sake of data consistency throughout this work, I have used the figures provided by local administration.

in farming and moves back and forth between units and town following the agricultural calendar.

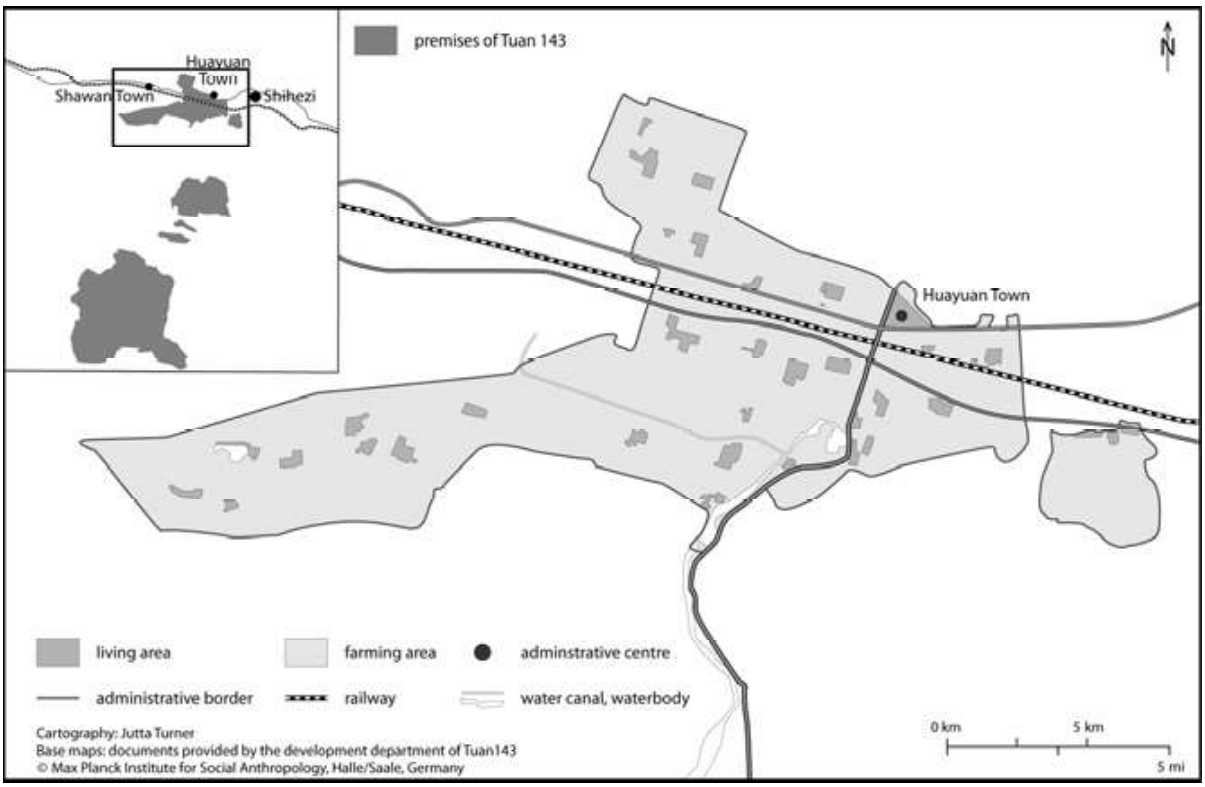
Total population (long-term residents)	**Male** **Female**	**Age under 18**	**Age: 18-35**	**Age: 35-60**	**Age over 60**
32013	16261 (50.8%) 15752 (49.2%)	4295	5210	15458	7050

Table 1. Population and age breakdown of Tuan 143 in 2011 (data from local police station).

Before Economic Reform (1949-1978)[52]

Tuan 143 had its origins in the Kuomintang Army, which was reorganized by the PLA in the town of Manasi as Tuan 77. On 25 March 1950, Tuan 77 was ordered to enter the Wulanwusu Xiang area of Shawan town and reclaim land, following Mao's order that 'the army engage in production and construction to relieve the burden of the state'. The regiment, numbering 2,099 soldiers, followed orders and began to open new land for cultivation, even though the weather was still cold. Life was harsh. The *tuan* suffered from inadequate food supplies and had only basic equipment such as *kantouman*[53], shovels, and man-powered ploughs. With great effort, the *tuan* claimed 170 *mu* for cultivation in the first year. Simultaneously, under instructions from Chairman Mao to do 'more good things for local minorities', in the first half of 1950, the *tuan* also helped nearby Difang villages by digging irrigation channels, constructing houses, and offering free medical services. One *liandui* donated over 100 *mu* of the new land to residents in the surrounding Difang. In return, local residents taught the regiment how to plant and irrigate, lent them agricultural equipment, and helped them farm. The *tuan* also made a significant contribution to building Shihezi during the winters of 1950-52, cutting and carrying wood from the southern mountain of Nanshan over a distance of 100 kilometres, in temperatures of minus 38ºC.

[52] All materials in this section come from Wang, Y. (2006), unless I make other references.
[53] A simple digging tool similar to a hoe.



Map 2. Tuan 143.

In 1950-52, troops from Tuan 77 were sent to suppress rebellions in neighbouring mountainous areas, but the majority remained engaged in production. In the early years, too, some soldiers deserted to escape the harsh conditions; those who were found were re-educated to be loyal to the Communist Party and its instructions, and were then returned to work.

The population of the *tuan* increased through various mechanisms. In 1953, 254 prisoners exiled from Henan arrived; they were later joined by a further 1,929 prisoners from other provinces who had undergone re-education. My informants remember that prisoners worked in special groups that were monitored especially closely; they were subject to nightly re-education and only gradually integrated into the general population that had no criminal background. On 18 June 1953, Division 8 was redesignated from a Military Corps to a Production Corps. On 5 December 1954, when the establishment of XPCC was officially announced, Tuan 77 was redesignated Tuan 23, and this name was used until 1 September 1969 when it was yet again redesignated as Tuan 143.

In the first four years of its existence, from 1950-54, the *tuan* overcame the initial problems it faced. With its strength raised to 3,793, it reclaimed 56,700 *mu* of land and reached self-sufficiency in grain. These achievements were assisted by new equipment: 10 tractors from the USSR in 1952, followed by combine-harvesters and other machinery. The Soviet

Union sent experts to give technical advice too. The *tuan* also raised 21,676 animals for food.

It soon became clear, however, that the *tuan* suffered from an absence of women. The *tuan* therefore encouraged married soldiers to bring their wives to Xinjiang; single soldiers were encouraged to contact their home-towns and arrange marriages through family connections. The costs of transport were reimbursed and work was provided for arriving wives. A more significant source of women in the early stage came in the form of the so-called Border Support Youth (*zhibian qingnian*) – young men and women who came to offer their labour to support China's borders. Some 800 women arrived from Shandong Province alone between 1952 and 1954.

From 1949-54, the *tuan* focused on education. On the one hand, it launched the Eliminate Illiteracy Movement (*saomang yundong*), teaching soldiers to learn Chinese characters after work. On the other hand, it established the first primary school in August 1950 to educate the children of those soldiers' whose families rejoined them from other regions. By 1954, there were 3 teachers and 45 pupils.

The years 1954-57 were designated 'the development stage' of the XPCC. The *tuan* received more Border Support Youth during 1956, with 987 coming from Henan Province, 44 from Guangdong Province, and 26 from Shanghai. During the mid-1950s, the *tuan* also received prisoners from Sichuan, Henan, and Shanghai. Meanwhile, *zhigong* were encouraged to bring their families, relatives, and friends from their hometowns to work in the Corps. By the end of 1957, the total population of the *tuan* had risen to 8,379 (Cai and Wang 2011). With the increase in population and labour, the *tuan* constructed a water reservoir, and negotiated with the regional town, Shawan, to acquire more cultivable land in 1956. Beginning in 1955, the *tuan* also engaged in planting trees for shelter, including fruit trees.

Living conditions were improved during this period. In the early stage, all residents lived in simple houses dug into the ground, known as *diwozi*. In 1952, the *tuan* established a Building Team, which built offices, restaurants, and shops for each unit and later, single-storey residential houses (*pingfang*). By the end of 1957, official data recorded that 95 per cent of residents had moved into *pingfang.* My informants added that *pingfang* were not built so quickly in the *liandui*, and calculated that the majority of the total population did not live in such houses until 1966. Industrial development commenced with the establishment of a processing factory and a food factory in 1956 and 1957, and in the 1960s – a machine-repair factory and a coal mine. In the early 1950s, there was only one shop in the *tuan*, but by the end of 1956 it had established a branch in four battalions and employed 90 staff.

The years 1958-66 saw massive development in the *tuan*. The population continued to increase with new migrants, Border Support Youth, transferred soldiers, and refugees fleeing three years of natural disasters (1959-61). By June 1966, the population had reached 29,966, and 56.3 per cent were employed as *zhigong*. Most came from the provinces of Jiangsu, Hubei, and Gansu.[54] With more labour, agricultural development entered a new stage, bringing more land under cultivation and establishing more reservoirs. The *tuan* engaged in agricultural mechanization, bringing in 115 tractors, 40 combines, and 11 trucks by 1962. The Agricultural Tractor Unit (*nongji lian*) expanded, and the *tuan* also introduced specialized livestock breeds, including horses, cattle, sheep, and pigs, while continuing to focus on education and to develop agricultural expertise. The *tuan* founded an agricultural university in 1958 which remained open until 1966. In these eight years, it trained thousands of personnel. By 1962, there were four kindergartens and 20 primary and middle schools with a total of 4,762 students and 282 teachers. The medical service also expanded, with five battalions establishing clinics and each *liandui* being allocated a doctor by 1966. The *tuan* hospital was established in 1961.

The Corps introduced a fixed wage system in 1954, and the management adapted both quota and reward systems. The wages of managers were higher than those of ordinary *zhigong*, and among *zhigong* there were slight differences between those who were sponsored by the government (Border Support Youth and transferred soldiers) and those who came voluntarily (including refugees).The members of each *liandui* were divided into working groups with specific tasks. Working times were marked by a whistle. The military legacy and demands for efficiency meant that people rarely ate at home: *zhigong* ate breakfast and dinner in a canteen, and lunches were sent to the field; their children ate at kindergarten. Only a very few families, mostly those that included elderly members, prepared food at home. During work, there was intense competition between members, groups, and units; winners were rewarded with extra food or clothes. Work groups held meetings every night after work, summarizing and evaluating the day's tasks. Promotions, wages, and the distribution of materials were all

[54] On 29 August 1959, 345 Border Support Youth came from Jiangsu; they were joined by 20 more in September. In May 1960, around 800 Border Support Youth came from Hubei and 200 from Jiangsu. In January 1961, 712 farmers were transferred from Construction Corps 1; in February and March, 3,500 workers came from another state farm, the Gansu Shandan Ranch. Over the next few years, the total numbers of Shanghai Border Support Youth numbered 263; there were 225 from Hubei and Wuhan, and 44 from Tianjing. Transferred soldiers from Nanjing Military Region (1963 and 1965) numbered 826; 50 came from Shenyang Military Region (1965), and 200 from Beijing Military Region (1966). Workers transferred from Shihezi factories to farming in the Corps numbered 300 (Wang 2006: 52).

passed through group or unit meetings. As a result, not only was the work heavy and hard, but the hours were extremely long.

Outside work, entertainment was an important part of *bingtuan* life. By 1956, the soldiers could watch movies once or twice a month through the Movie Group, and they could watch military entertainment performances once or twice a year. Later, the *tuan* established entertainment clubs in each *liandui*, which engaged in varied activities including composing and teaching songs, organizing dance performances and parties, reading newspapers, propagating good deeds, organizing workplace competitions, and designing posters to advertise the qualities of the 'moral worker' (*mofan gongren*). Performers deemed to be of the highest quality were selected to perform in art shows organized by the military, the division level, or occasionally the unit. Later, some of these performers became part-time arts workers. By 1965, the number of movie projectors in the *tuan* had increased to five, and movies provided the main source of entertainment, particularly for the young. During the Cultural Revolution, however, all these forms of entertainment were discouraged.

The *tuan* gave up its military role when it became a Production Unit. After the Yita Event in 1962, in which residents of Yili, in Tacheng District, fled across the border to the Soviet Union, the *tuan* was instructed to re-establish an armed militia, organized into two battalions. Members remained full-time production workers and were considered an 'advanced group' due to the high quality of their work. But they engaged in military training during their free time.

The *tuan* was subject to countrywide political campaigns sponsored by the central government. In 1957, members received daily ideological education in rightist opposition (*fanyou yundong*) to capitalist ideology. In 1962-65, they received socialist education (*shejiao yundong*).[55] To some degree, these campaigns played a role in constraining or eliminating bureaucracy and corruption, but they also created perceptions of uncertainty, fear, and injustice. Yet greater damage was caused by the ten-year-long Cultural Revolution. In May 1966, the *tuan* established a *wenge xiaozu* (Cultural Revolution Leadership Group) as instructed by XPCC. Shortly thereafter classes were interrupted at all schools to engage in *nao geming*: the attack on teachers and all those 'born within a bad class'. Red Guards from inland came to the Corps, spreading the ideology of Cultural

[55] This was aimed at spreading socialist ideology and opposing capitalist thought and practice. All organizations and leaders were required to be ideologically pure; and the entire society was required to participate in the 'Five Antis': anti-corruption and theft, anti-speculation, anti-extravagance, anti-separatism, and anti-bureaucracy. Many leaders were investigated in both city and countryside.

Revolution, and the Red Guard established in the *tuan* sent members to meet Chairman Mao in Beijing. Many leaders of the *tuan*, particularly those who were former members of the Kuomintang Army, were suspended and attacked. My informants remember that attacks on leaders were motivated by resentment for their strict work disciplines, but those who had been Kuomintang were particularly vulnerable because they could be labelled as 'remnants' of the Communist Party's enemy. Everyone was engaged in the campaign and the central activities each day involved the wearing of badges portraying Chairman Mao, learning Chairman Mao's quotations by heart, reporting to a picture of Chairman Mao in the morning for instructions, and dancing the 'loyal dance' in the evening. With their enthusiastic participation in the campaign, no one worked. Crops failed and the supply of goods dried up as farming and other productive activities were largely abandoned. In April 1975, the XPCC was disbanded and the *tuan* became subject to the Shihezi District of the XUAR.

After Openness: On the Road to a Market Economy[56]

With the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1976, and the beginning of the Open Door Policy (Openness) in 1978, order returned to society. After 1978, many miscarriages of justice which had occurred during the Cultural Revolution were corrected, and the *bingtuan* returned its focus to economic development. During the following 35 years, a great transformation took place in the Corps. The economic management system has slowly shifted from a planned economy towards a market economy. At the time of my fieldwork, it was not possible to speak of the market reforms as having produced unrestrained capitalism: the Corps remained based on state-owned farms.

Economic reform has brought other changes in its wake. From the late 1980s until the early 2000s, household income for those engaged in agriculture was very low, and many gave up their land and migrated to urban areas, leaving the Corps facing a labour shortage. The expansion of private industry offered non-agricultural opportunities for local residents. With the adoption of new policies and techniques since the early 2000s, agriculture slowly recovered, attracting many former residents to return to the Corps. Nevertheless, extensive urbanization continued within the Corps, especially since the 2010 Xinjiang Work Forum. In town, there have been improvements in social insurance, education, and health and medical services. Since 2010, the boom in new housing has drawn increasing

[56] Unless otherwise indicated, the sources for this section are Wang, Y. (2006) and my own interviews.

numbers of people into town. The *liandui*, however, have been depopulated, becoming quiet and lonely places for those who remain.

Economy and Agricultural Development

Agriculture is the economic base of the Corps. The *bingtuan* produces cotton, wheat, corn, tomatoes, grapes, peaches, and chilies. Tuan 143 is named the 'Hometown of the Peach', 'Hometown of the Chili', and 'National Agro-Processing Business Base'. In recent years, the *tuan* identified four primary crops according to colour: white (cotton), red (tomato), green (fruits and vegetables generally), and yellow (corn).[57] Moreover, unlike in Difang or anywhere else in China, agriculture in the Corps is supported thoroughly by technology and specialists in agro-technology. Some 512 agricultural technology workers are in the Corps' employ[58], and in 2012, even 90 per cent of the cotton crop was machine-harvested.[59]

Although the Corps remains a state farm, it has adopted a series of economic reforms to adapt to the new market-oriented economy. The reforms have focused on adjusting the relationship of three business entities: the regiment, the production unit, and the individual. The tendency has been to shift more rights and responsibilities to the individual, but the land continues to belong to the Corps. The Corps plans what to plant; allocates land to specific products; and sets targets for yields. In this respect, it continues to operate as part of a planned economy.

The first attempt to introduce Contract Responsibility to the Corps was in 1978, when the system of Group Contract, which lasted until 1982, was introduced. The regiment formulated a plan and distributed tasks to each battalion, which in turn allocated them to *liandui*. The regiment provided all production materials, and people worked in groups as before. Each group, however, was now responsible for a particular area of land. Rather than working to the whistle, as previously, they were able to organize their own working times. Profits would be returned to each *liandui* in cash. In Tuan 143, 50 per cent of the profits were distributed to *zhigong*, 30 per cent was reinvested in production, and 20 per cent was set aside for social welfare.

---

[57] In 2011, among 220,000 *mu* of agricultural land, 120,000 *mu* was used for cotton, 25,000 *mu* for tomatoes, 25,000 *mu* for corn, 10,000 *mu* for peaches, 1,000 *mu* for wheat, 5,000 *mu* for grapes, and 20,000 *mu* for fruit, vegetables, and other small crops.

[58] 师市2012年团场经济发展综合研讨会143团汇报材料 (Synthesis Workshop of Division Eight Regarding Socio-Economic Development: Report from Tuan 143), 17 August 2012, p. 4.

[59] 一四三团经济社会发展汇报材料 (Report on Socio-Economic Development of Tuan 143), 31 March 2012, p. 2.

Zhigong still received wages, but the hierarchy system was abolished. Wages were evaluated instead by the hours worked. The quality and quantity of work, and the evaluation process, were controlled within each unit. With the slow recovery of the economy after the chaos of the Cultural Revolution, 55 of the 60 production units of Tuan 143 produced a profit in 1982.

In the second stage of reform, from January 1983-2000, Individual Contracts were introduced. In 1983, Tuan 143 held the First Staff and Workers Congress, in which Contract Responsibility was extended to each household, and the wage system was abolished altogether. Beginning in 1984, each household signed an annual contract with the *liandui* concerning its intended production. The *tuan* formulated the production plans and distributed production materials. Contracting households did not lay out money for any part of the production cycle, but they were required to submit to the *liandui* which further calculated the quantity of materials used by each household and its respective yield. The *liandui* announced dates and quotas for crop submission in local media; such procedures did not exist in Difang villages. The Corps had rules for distributing profit to the various levels of regiment, unit, and individual.[60] The process was far from transparent, however, and a household rarely knew what quantity of materials it had used or the respective costs. In practice, most money was distributed to the regiment and the unit, while many households went into debt.

By the 1990s, many young people in Tuan 143 abandoned farming. Large areas of land were left fallow. During the same period, many temporary migrants came from regions inland for the lucrative work of picking cotton and slowly settled in the *tuan*, some signing contracts for land. The *tuan* also addressed its labour shortage by helping to resettle those who had experienced natural disaster in other provinces of China. Yet agriculture remained in crisis. From 1983-87, the *tuan* also had encouraged the establishment of 'family farms' (*jiatingshi nongchang*), which operated in parallel to the large state farm with its household outsourcing. Some households signed a contract to rent large areas of land for several years, either for arable or livestock farming. Some families were initially able to generate a high income on such farms, but they also fell victim to the lack of transparency in the system, and gradually closed.

The third stage of reform was implemented from 2000-06. In 2000, the Corps introduced a new policy by which individuals paid for land and materials, the 'two fees self-pay' (*liangfei zili*) system. This policy broke

[60] In Tuan 143, income from sales in a profitable unit was distributed in a ratio of '6:2:2'; that is, the *tuan* took 60 per cent, and the unit and individual each took 20 per cent. In normal units, the proportion was 5:3:2; and in impoverished units, it was divided between the unit and the individual in a rate of 5:5 (Wang, Y. 2006: 97-98).

with the previous system of planning and control by the Corps. Although individuals were still required to plant certain products and submit them to the Corps[61], this system was significantly more transparent. *Zhigong* paid less for land than others. Meanwhile, in 2000, all agricultural machines were re-evaluated and sold to individuals.

From the early 1990s, the required crop types were reduced, allowing individual households some flexibility in their planting decisions. This empowered households to plant crops for local markets in addition to engaging with large-scale crops, such as cotton, as required by the Corps. Household decisions, however, required negotiation with *liandui* managers – who had come to control land allocation through other reforms – because the land had been organized to suit certain crops and the use of large farm machinery. Planting crops other than those required by the Corps brought certain risks. First, those who would do so needed to research the market for their intended crop. Second, it was not always certain that a household would receive the needed land; they had to apply, and the *liandui* distributed land according to the priorities of the *tuan*. Third, the weather added another element of unpredictability (Jiang 1997).

Such high levels of risk led many more households to give up farming. Also, because land distribution remained in the hands of *liandui* managers, certain forms of corruption developed, with bribery and favouritism believed to be widespread by young and old alike. *Liandui* managers themselves felt constrained in their actions by the continued role of the *tuan* in overall planning. If they failed to produce their allocation of crops or otherwise misgauged the market, they risked having their wages cut or being removed from their posts. Such were the dilemmas of planned agricultural production at the time of my fieldwork.

Despite such dilemmas, it can be said generally that by 2006 farming started to become profitable as a result of further policies and the application of new technologies. First, the land was distributed to individuals in 2006. Each *zhigong* was awarded 35 *mu* of 'identity land' (*shenfendi*), called as such because it was available only to those with *zhigong* status.The rental price of identity land was lower than that of commercial land, which was rented to non-*zhigong*.[62] Second, also in 2006, the state launched a

[61] 'Submit' in this context means selling to the Corps at below-market prices.

[62] There are three types of land in the Corps. The first is identity land for *zhigong*. Each worker is assigned a minimum and maximum land quota; rental of the land is contracted with the Corps at a certain price which normally lasts until retirement. The second type is free land; this is assigned to households for housing and horticultural production. Of this, each *zhigong* has 2-3 *mu*. Third is economic land, which is more expensive than identity land, but it may be contracted to anyone, for both short- and long- terms (Bao 2010: 99-100). The standard price of identity land is 217 RMB per *mu* per year while commercial land is 375 RMB per *mu* per

nationwide preference policy for agriculture, reducing land tax and offering subsidies for certain crops and agricultural machinery. In the Corps, for instance, those who plant cotton received an annual subsidy of RMB 380 per *mu*. These policies re-stimulated the farming economy to some degree. Furthermore, also since 2006, the Corps has applied new technology such as drip irrigation, precision sowing technology, and machine-transport technology. Cotton-picking machines have been improved as well with clean-processing technology that raises the quality to that of hand-picked cotton. This technology reduced the costs of farming and some who had migrated returned to farm, while some small farmers applied for more land so that they could benefit from the new machinery which is effective only on large fields.

The Corps still operates as a planned economy and farmers are still required to submit cotton and tomatoes to the Corps. In comparison to the 1990s, farmers have greater power to negotiate the production of other crops. The Corps continues to offer production materials, as in the past, but the farmer is now free to buy on the open market if he prefers. These changes have made farming a more viable livelihood, but weather and market fluctuations mean that it is still plagued by uncertainty. Furthermore, as a result of long-term planting of the same crop on the same land, the soil has degraded and yields have fallen. An increase in pests has raised the costs of growing cotton, meaning that even with the state subsidy, incomes are low. The requirement to submit to XPCC, however, means that farmers cannot abandon cotton production.

Industry

With the introduction of Openness, private enterprises were started in the Corps. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, several private factories were established in Tuan 143, including an aluminium refinery, feed factory, plastic factory, and paint factory. Many of these closed after a short period, however, being poorly managed and unable to find a market. During 1992-2000, several businesses grew to become key enterprises within the *tuan*, including the privately owned construction and installation units, and state-owned processing factory, which still play central roles. After 2001, the *tuan* privatized some state-owned enterprises that were in deficit. As a result, new enterprises grew to create income and job opportunities for local people,

---

year, though it may vary somewhat due to land quality. In 2011, of 222,600 *mu* of agricultural land, 168,100 *mu* was identity land, and 54,500 *mu* was commercial land. The ratio changes annually depending on the number of *zhigong* who contract land (Report on Socio-Economic Development of Tuan 143, 31 March 2012: 4-5).

including Red Stone Cement, the Tianxin machinery factory, and Huayuan Ruye. Huayuan Ruye is the processing company for the best-selling milk in the Corps; it is registered in Shihezi, and recognized as a key industry within XPCC. By the end of 2011, there were 47 industrial enterprises, many located in the New Industry Garden. The garden was founded in response to XPCC's goal of industrialization after 2010. It is 3,000 *mu* in size and designed to attract investment to environmentally-sustainable industry. By the end of 2011, 15 investment companies from other provinces had invested there with projects in the manufacture of cotton textiles, chemicals, and building materials, as well as in construction, commerce, and trade (Wang 2012).

Recent Urbanization

Housing has been a central focus of urbanization policies that can be traced to at least the late 1980s. In June 1988, the *tuan* stopped offering free housing to *zhigong* and privatized the existing stock. In the privatization process, the value of all houses inhabited by *zhigong* was assessed, while the *zhigong* themselves were assigned housing licenses which entitled the holder to purchase a newly privatized house. Normally, the privatized houses were sold to their current inhabitants. To *zhigong* who had no house, the *tuan* deeded free land with the requirement that the new owner build his own house (Wang 2006).

In the late 1990s, the *tuan* turned its attention to urbanization per se, allocating huge amounts of money to basic infrastructure and construction in Tuanbu, as well as to other projects that would improve living conditions. By 2009, 55 new residential buildings had been built. They drew residents mainly from people already living in the town. After the 2010 Xinjiang Work Conference, urbanization intensified greatly in the Leapfrog Development Stage. After 2010, mass construction in Tuanbu (and other *bingtuan* towns) combined with other policies affecting education and social services to draw population in large numbers away from the *liandui*.

In the mid-2000s, however, huge quantities of money were also invested in the *liandui*. In 2004-06, for example, the *tuan* invested heavily in *liandui* infrastructure: administrative offices, local streets and main roads, squares, exercise equipment, and entertainment rooms (including elderly clubs and ballrooms), public toilets, and transportation stations. In 2006, the *tuan* implemented the Welfare Housing Policy (*xiaokangfang zhengce*) in the *liandui*. *Zhigong* were encouraged to demolish their old houses and build new ones, for which the Corps paid 50 per cent of the cost. Many people invested all their money in building a new house during this period. No one

anticipated that the parallel construction boom in Tuanbu would pull many people out of the *liandui* in a few short years.

As the focus of urbanization shifted exclusively to the towns after 2010, people found it hard to evaluate. While town living was desirable, the investments in the *liandui* seemed to be a waste of resources by both the *tuan* and individual households.

Workers, their Status, and Social Welfare

The population of Tuan 143 has fluctuated as a result of in- and out-migration. As described above, the first generation came mainly from the provinces of Henan, Gansu, Sichuan, Hubei, and Jiangsu. Many, including Border Support Youth, transferred soldiers, and prisoners came as a result of state-organized migration, but approximately half of the population came voluntarily. Voluntary migrants came to join family members or *laoxiang* (people from the same hometown) already in the Corps. When the Shanghai Border Support Youth in southern Xinjiang demanded to go home in 1980, however, it had a major impact on the composition of the Corps. In the period immediately following the protests, 95 per cent of the Border Support Youth of Tuan 143 returned to their original hometown (Wang 2006).

In the 1960s and 1970s, the state encouraged population growth through reproduction, with the thinking that more population equalled more labour. This ideology resulted in a baby boom in the Corps, with an average of about 5 children per family. The introduction of the One Child Policy in 1982 curtailed population growth, with an average of one or two children in each family.

Many in the second and subsequent generations migrated out to urban areas such as Shihezi, and other regional or provincial cities. The urban construction boom of the 2000s has accelerated out-migration, and many households, including young and old, have moved on to Shihezi. According to my survey and observations, the first generation born in XPCC – in the mid-1950s and thus in their 50s at the time of fieldwork – largely remained. Around 75 per cent were still in the *tuan* at the time of my research. In subsequent age-cohorts, out-migration increased. Among those in their 40s, some 30-40 per cent were living in the *tuan*; but very few individuals in their 30s were to be found. In terms of gender, more women than men have left the *tuan*, often through marriage. The population has been replenished mainly by new migrants, and mainly from inland regions, from the 1990s. According to my survey, around half of those who are aged 35-45 have married new migrants.

Migrated in (269)			**Migrated out (703)**		
From XUAR	From other provinces	From Shihezi	To XUAR	To other province	To Shihezi
113	134	22	255	128	320

Table 2. Migration in Tuan 143 during 2011 (data from local police station).

Migration patterns in and out of the *bingtuan* are related to the privileged *zhigong* status. Over time, gaining the status has required qualification; it is not a transmissible or inheritable status. To be a *zhigong* in the *bingtuan*, one must have a university degree, have been a *Komsomolets*, or at least be a party member. Sometimes the children of *zhigon*g apply for the status, and are refused because they lack the requisite credentials. On the one hand, the emphasis on credentials is justified because of the high-level of development in the *bingtuan*'s agricultural sector. On the other hand, it creates a push-factor for *zhigong* children who do not qualify for the status. An obvious option for such individuals is to pursue contract farming, but because they are not entitled to identity land, farming is perceived as prohibitively expensive, and labour migration to other urban areas is often more desirable.

At the time of research, the *tuan* thus faced a labour crisis from three directions. On one side, there was an overall labour shortage. The number of registered *zhigong* was 8,874 – only 14.79 per cent of the population of 60,000 under *tuan* management. Of these, perhaps only half were engaged actively in agriculture.[63] From another direction, labour quality outside of the ranks of the *zhigong* is generally low. Most Difang labourers are educated only through primary, or at most, junior middle school; new migrants from poor areas of other provinces also have little education.[64] The *tuan* thus lacks the highly-skilled technical workers that its developed agricultural and industrial sectors need. From yet another direction, the *tuan* faces pressure to create new jobs for the current population at a medium-skill level in

[63] Nearly half of registered *zhigong* do not farm for a variety of reasons (see Group 18, 2011). They retain their status for the entitlements of social insurance, and they rent out their land to others.

[64] Low levels of education can be attributed first to the Cultural Revolution. When university entrance exams reopened after reform, few youth were prepared to sit for them. Indeed, the Corps was in disorder. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, crime increased massively in Tuan 143, including theft, robbery, rape, fraud, assault, and murder. The crime figures over the three years at the turn of the decade exceeded the total crime numbers for the previous thirty years, and 80 per cent was attributed to youths or school children engaged in gang crime. Even children not involved in crime found it difficult to study: many young women were afraid to go out alone, even to school. In January 1982, the *tuan* started to crack down on crime, jailing many (Wang, Y. 2006: 89), but according to my informants, schools remained places where fighting was more common than learning until 1987.

manufacturing and services because agricultural work, especially below the highest skills level, is no longer attractive.

Social welfare including health insurance is closely connected with the division of labour and official identities. In the Corps, the working age population is divided into *zhigong* and non-*zhigong*, while the retired are divided into *laojiu*, retired *zhigong*, and *wuqigong*. People in different categories enjoy different benefits. Normally, serving *zhigong* need to pay 30 per cent of their social insurance, the rest being paid by the Corps. They enjoy free health checks organized by the Corps each year, 80 per cent reimbursement for medical services, and a monthly subsidy of RMB 30 for medicine. They also enjoy subsidies for housing and cheaper land as mentioned above. Others do not enjoy all these benefits. They need to pay the full amount of social insurance for at least 15 years in order to be entitled to a pension and health insurance when they reach retirement age. The amount of the pension varies, however, depending upon the kind of social insurance chosen.

The pension system in the *bingtuan* started in the mid-1980s as the original members of the Corps began to age. Because the *bingtuan* is recognized as an enterprise, all employees receive city residents' welfare and the retirement age is set at 50 for women and 60 for men. Initially, pensions from the *bingtuan* were very low, but since 2005, the pension has been raised seven times due to new state policies, although differing according to employment category. *Laojiu*, the former Kuomintang soldiers who were the earliest recruits to the *bingtuan*[65], enjoy the highest pensions and the best social welfare benefits. Their pension is RMB 3,500-4,000 per month, with retired cadres getting more than normal *laojiu*. They enjoy 100 per cent coverage for health insurance, plus extra coverage for nursing fees. *Zhigong* are the largest group of the retired population, including both men and women. Some came to the *bingtuan* in state-organized migration, while some migrated voluntarily. For *zhigong*, the pension is around RMB 2,200-2,800 based on their service time. They enjoy 90 per cent reimbursement of health insurance in the local hospital, and 85 per cent of the hospital fees if they are treated in Shihezi. Among *zhigong*, teachers and doctors started receiving a higher pension (about RMB 4,000) in recent years because schools and hospitals were categorized as institutional organizations. The third group, *wuqigong* (5/7 Workers)[66], composed entirely of women, was

[65] Few remained alive at the time of my fieldwork – only about 120.

[66] 5/7 refers to the date of 7 May 1966, on which Mao wrote expressing support for Lin Biao's ideas to improve army production. Mao asserted that the army is a 'big school' that must learn politics, focus on *wenhua* (education), and engage in farming and manufacturing to be self-supporting. He extended the idea to the whole country, insisting that 'the whole

isolated from the *bingtuan* pension system for many years. After long-term petitioning, they began to receive a financial subsidy of around 960-1,200RMB per month in 2010, with increased allowances for the oldest; 85 per cent of their health insurance is covered, but only for services received at the local hospital. If it is necessary to transfer to a larger hospital, a letter of proof from the local hospital is required. Almost all elders in the *bingtuan*, then, are covered by the pension system to some extent.

Life in the Town[67]

With urbanization, Tuanbu grew to be a small town, 3 square kilometres in area and with a population of around 20,000.[68] The town is the political, economic, and cultural centre of Tuan 143, and is expected to grow to cover a total urban area of 27 square kilometres. The central office, schools, hospitals, post offices, banks, and industry are all located in the town. The central administrative office is located on the town's axis. To the north and south of the axis are two squares. The south square, covering 37,000 square metres, was built in 1995; the north square, covering 36,000 square metres, was built in 2010. With fitness equipment, trees, chairs, and kiosks, the two squares are centres for recreation and entertainment. The town has four streets and seven roads. There are two community residents' committees, which administer 22 neighbourhoods (*xiaoqu*). There are one middle school, one primary school, and five kindergartens in the town. It also has a hospital, a Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, 3 community healthcare stations, 392 shops and restaurants, and 1 industrial park which hosts 19 enterprises (some private and some state-owned). At the time of writing, the town has 240 multi-storey buildings. The Property Management Centre

---

society' is a big school: students, farmers, workers, and soldiers must learn from each other and reach the goal of establishing a self-sufficient society, in opposition to bourgeois commerce. *Wuqidui* (5/7 Groups) were formed on many state farms to accommodate the hundreds of thousands of urban youth who were encouraged to go to the countryside and support agriculture. In the *bingtuan*, *wuqidui* were established in 1969 and dissolved in 1985. Because there was a labour surplus during this period, many female *zhigong*, particularly those with more children, were persuaded to relinquish their *zhigong* position and to accept work as a *wuqigong*. Their work remained agricultural, but on smaller land plots and with lighter labour requirements that were said to be more suitable to women. They were considered more suitable because women had less physical strength than men and greater responsibility for childcare, family affairs, and household concerns.

[67] Unless otherwise noted, the data in this section mainly comes from Wang 2012.

[68] As noted above, the total population of Tuan 143 is around 60,000, including its registered and floating population. This figure includes the population of the *liandui*. The *tuan* has announced that its urban population has reached 75 per cent, but because not all who are registered are currently in residence, the real town population seemed less than the figure would suggest.

counts 87 employees who are in charge of heating, water supply, sewage, sanitation, planting (trees, flowers, and grass), and town cleaning.

Plate 1. Entrance gate to Tuan 143.

The *tuan* has paid attention to education. As mentioned previously, in 2006, the *tuan* began merging schools in the *liandui* and *ying* with schools in town. The number of middle school students is 1,694, and the primary school has 1,568. There are 278 teachers between the two schools. Every year, the enrolment rate at the high school is around 58 per cent, and some 210 students take the college entrance exams, the highest proportion among the farms in Division 8. At the time of fieldwork, the *tuan* was investing large sums of money towards the improvement of the schools. Both primary school and middle school are multi-storey buildings with advanced equipment.[69] The schools have a dormitory and restaurant, both staffed mainly by teachers who were laid-off with the school merging.

[69] In 1986, the first multi-storey middle school was built and several high schools were merged into one. In 2000, a multi-storey building was completed for the primary school, as were improvements on the dormitory of the primary and middle schools.

The hospital is an essential body within the *tuan*, particularly for the elderly. It employs 106 staff, and offers health services for about 20,000 people in the area. The Centre for Disease Control and Prevention offers free annual medical examinations for children, elders, and *zhigong*.

Plate 2. The south square.

The town is well serviced by transport networks, since both the northern Xinjiang highway and railway, connecting east to west, pass through the town. There are two buses daily to the provincial capital of Urumqi, 28 buses to Shihezi, and 40 small buses to the *liandui*.

The *tuan* has made efforts to develop tourism. Taoyuan Ecological Tourism Zone, 3 kilometres from town, is one of two tourist attractions. It was established by a private company concerned with peach production. Each year it holds 3 festivals – Peach Blossom Festival, Lotus Flower Festival, and Peach Festival, receiving about 580,000 visitors in total. The flower market is another centre for tourism inside the *tuan*. It is the largest flower market in northern Xinjiang, and uses advanced technology from France to plant flowers in thermostatic chambers. Its annual turnover is RMB 1,500,000 and it receives around 100,000 visitors.

Plate 3. The north square.

Life in town is perceived as convenient and lively. It is reported that by the end of 2011, the average annual income of residents was RMB 24,000, which is 24 times the average income before Openness (Wang 2012). Since most residents had recently moved to town from the *liandui*, they often compared urban with rural life. The conveniences of urban life that stood out for them included stable heating, the proximity of the hospital, and other services. Moreover, they found urban life to be lively; the Elderly Club organizes entertainments on the square from spring until the end of autumn, and the square itself is full of people – mainly elderly – chatting, dancing, singing, exercising, taking care of grandchildren, or playing mah-jong and poker. Most young people who are still in the Corps move to rural units to farm in spring and return to town after harvest. The whole summer period in town, therefore, is dominated by the elderly and children. Moreover, large bazaars are held on the 1st, 11th, 21st, and 31st of each month. Peddlers from neighbouring towns come to sell different products in the street, including clothes, foods, small household articles, and agricultural products. People from the *liandui* or neighbouring villages come for the bazaar, and the town takes on a festive atmosphere. In winter, it is quieter due to cold weather and frequent heavy snow. People often visit new or old neighbours,

however, and the elderly continue to exercise and enjoy other entertainments in the elderly clubs. It is also common to see both young and old playing poker under the awning of the main market.

Life in the Agricultural Units (*Liandui*)

Most units or *liandui* in the Corps engage in farming. Just as the *bingtuan* has military, economic, and social functions, a *liandui* too is simultaneously a paramilitary organization, an economic production unit, and a residential village. *Liandui* were formerly administered by the battalions (*ying*), and now fall under the jurisdiction of 'residential communities' (*shequ*). Locals, however, continue to refer to their membership in *ying*. Currently, 38 *liandui* are managed by five residential communities. The distances from town to these *liandui* differ. The nearest is within a few kilometres of town, but the farthest is more than 30 kilometres away. There are also slight differences in the local standard of living based on the quality of land and production. Of the 38 *liandui*, 32 specialize in arable farming and 6 (which have no arable land) are devoted to raising livestock. In general, most residents in the *liandui* combine arable and livestock farming, though arable is more important overall. I spent three months in Liandui A and Liandui B, which may be seen as the median in terms of standard of living. I will take these two *liandui* as examples to draw a general picture of the units.

These two *liandui* are adjacent to each other, within easy reach of the town (so long as one has reliable transport), and are bordered by local villages. The registered population of each *liandui* is about 800 people, but their ethnic compositions differ. Liandui A's ethnic majority is Hui (60 per cent), while Liandui B is a Han village with very small minority representation. There are 7 managers in each *liandui*; *zhigong* currently make up less than 20 per cent of the population; retired *zhigong* comprise around 20 per cent, and *wuqigong* around 5 per cent. Other than children, the remainder of the population is comprised either of recent migrants or second-generation *bingtuan* residents who gave up their *zhigong* identity and land in the late 1980s. With urbanization, however, much of the population has either moved to town or migrated elsewhere in search of jobs. During my fieldwork, there were fewer than 50 households present in each *liandui* during winter, about one-third of which included elderly members.

Both *liandui* mainly engage in farming on around 10,000 *mu* of agricultural land each, producing mainly cotton and corn. The tending of livestock (cows and pigs), is an important sideline. It is more important in Liandui A which includes many Hui and Kazakh herders. *Zhigong* earn around RMB 34,000 per year – an extraordinary salary when the average

income of the whole population (including their earnings) amounts to only RMB 7, 000 per year.

With many people having moved to the town, life in the *liandui* has become more inconvenient. Access to water, transport, shopping, and doctors are all difficult. The villagers use pipe water, which comes once a day, from eleven o'clock in the morning until one o'clock in the afternoon. However, due to the reduction in population, the main pipe easily becomes frozen in winter, forcing people to melt snow for water. Normally, there are four buses between the *liandui* and town each day. Each community has a bus which services all its *liandui*. The buses do not run on fixed schedules. Because there are fewer people in the *liandui*, the bus drivers wait patiently and circle through each *liandui* to pick up passengers. Journey times can be long, therefore, as much time may be spent waiting in the *liandui* itself. Sometimes, the drivers have commitments at home, in which case there is no bus. There is also no bus between the Corps and the local region. Since the local regional town, Shawan, is closer and larger than the Corps town, people in these two *liandui* often go to Shawan by motorbike or taxi; or, they walk two kilometres to the main road to catch the bus that runs between the local villages and the town. In winter, therefore, transport is particularly inconvenient to both towns.

As for shopping, there are two shops in each *liandui*. The shop proprietors themselves live in town, and they employ new migrants to take care of the shops. The shops offer basic food and daily necessities, generally poorer in both quality and quantity, and slightly more expensive than their equivalents in town. Peddlers from the town or local region sometimes visit to sell fruits and vegetables or other food like rice, flour, and oil. Only meat is cheaper than that in the town, because villagers often kill their animals and sell it on the square.

Medical care is also a point of concern. In general, every two *liandui* share one doctor. The doctors are supposed to visit each of their assigned *liandui* at least once every two days, but they live in town or in Shihezi, and actually visit less frequently.

Life in the *liandui* is monotonous in winter due to the small number of people left there. People take care of their animals, visit each other, and play poker or mah-jong. Alternately, they stay at home and watch TV. Some gather at shops to play poker. For some of the elderly, religious practice is a significant part of their life. In Liandui A, where many are Muslim, there is a newly decorated mosque, but daily prayers attract fewer than ten each day. The mosque also organizes funerals and prayers at festivals, which are the main activities that draw together Muslims in the *tuan*. In Liandui B, the 'left behind' elderly are mainly *wuqigong* widows, 80 per cent of whom are

Christian. They gather twice a week and pray in two different groups; they also celebrate Christmas and New Year together by making dumplings.[70]

Ethnic relationships within the *liandui* are normally cordial. But there are gaps between Kazakhs and other ethnic groups, and between Hui people from Henan Province and those from other western regions. Since Kazakhs in the *liandui* are mainly engaged with livestock, they live on the periphery. Many of the elderly Kazakhs could not speak Chinese, even though they had lived in the Corps for around 50 years. Their social networks are largely limited to Kazakh families and they offer each other support when needed. The younger generation speaks good Chinese and their children play with Han and Hui children. Sometimes, Kazakh families invite Han or Hui with whom they have good relationships to weddings or festival celebrations, but such invitations cannot be reciprocated easily by Han on account of Muslim food taboos.

One might expect more communication between the Kazakh and Hui because they are both Muslim. Differences in language and customs, however, make close social relations rare between the two groups. Moreover, there are differences between the Hui themselves. Some are from the western regions and are relatively strict in their religious observances; they often deny that the other Hui, from Henan, are 'real' Hui. Henan Hui are not as strict about their observance of Islam and very few of them have profound religious knowledge. They never pray and few of them do *niansuo*[71]; they also intermarry with Han Chinese. Like other Muslims, however, they do not eat pork; and they do join the activities in the mosque. These two groups of Hui often do not visit each other, even if they are next door neighbours. However, I also noticed that not all Hui from the western region are strict in religion, particularly the second generation. Many of them (including the children of the seven elderly who often pray at the mosque) do not pray, and many have married Han. It appears that, like the Henan Hui, they are becoming increasingly secularized, with Islamic activities limited to mosque attendance and the performance of *niansuo* at home.

Individual Life Experiences

Having introduced the Corps, I now seek to give voice to individuals, showing how people perceive their life in the past and today. Although Han migration to Xinjiang has been discussed through statistical data and as a

[70] Many elderly celebrate Chinese New Year on the lunar calendar, and do not observe the solar New Year.

[71] In this custom, observed by many Muslims on an annual basis, a family invites an imam to read the Quran for its deceased on a festival or memorial day.

large-scale historical process, little has been done from a qualitative perspective (Joniak-Luthi 2013: 155). Anthropologist Agniezska Joniak-Luthi was the first to apply such a perspective to a *bingtuan*. She documented individual cases of Han migration to a *bingtuan* city of southern Xinjiang, and argued that Han migrants are not a homogeneous category of participants in state schemes to control the region. Rather, migrants follow their own strategies when the situation permits, and are better seen as comprising a fragmented category characterized by differentiation and flexible identity. I agree with Joniak-Luthi's emphasis on individual strategies and identities, but it should not be ignored that state policy in Xinjiang has played a key role in attracting migrants at various times.

Joniak-Luthi showed the internal complexity of the migrant population's identities and motivations. Her understanding of early migration during the Maoist period relied mainly on interviews with the children of the early migrants. In contrast, I focus on the stories of those aged over 60 from their own perspective. My aim is to document more than the original motivation for migration, and to focus on how life has been lived in the Corps. I am more interested in the uncertainties that migrants faced and how they mobilized kinship and other social networks to deal with these uncertainties. Consistent with Joniak-Luthi's categorization, I also follow the logic of public discourse in the Corps, and divide the elderly into two generations according to the period of their migration. The first generation includes those who arrived during the first three decades of communist rule: Kuomintang soldiers, Border Support Youth, demobilized soldiers, prisoners, and those who came voluntarily with the help of their relatives and *laoxiang*.[72] Of those who are still alive, most arrived in the Corps as teenagers or young adults not past their thirties. Most, and particularly the men, registered as *zhigong*. Some younger ones even went to *bingtuan* schools before being allocated jobs. Despite diverse origins and experiences, they have many common memories of Maoist times and Deng's later reform, and often talk proudly about their life as the first generation of *bingtuan* members.

The second migrant generation were those who came after market reform, referred to by Joniak-Luthi (2013: 158) as 'profit-driven migrants'. During this period, state-encouraged migration ceased and most migrants came as a result of personal networks. Since the 2000s, some elderly came to provide childcare for adult children who had previously migrated. Most of the elderly in the *bingtuan*, however, come from the first generation. The

[72] Joniak-Luthi's division of the earlier migrants included *laobalu* (former PLA soldiers), Border Support Youth, qualified personnel, and politicized educated youth. My division is slightly different based on the composition of the local population where I worked.

first generation is thus the main focus throughout this book, but in the next section, I will offer a comparison between the experiences and attitudes of the two elderly generations. In general, the first generation tended to see their past lives as harder than more recent migrants, but perceptions of the past varied based on differences in age, gender, migration time, original hometown, and working status. Of all these elements gender and work status – as *laojiu*, *zhigong*, or *wuqigong* – play the major roles in shaping both the perception of the past and the conceptualization of the present.

Laojiu: A Firm Believer in the Communist Party

The *laojiu*, or former Kuomintang soldiers, who were the first recruits to the *bingtuan* were forced to leave their natal families as teenagers. They experienced both 'old' and 'new' society. Growing up under the Kuomintang and serving in its army, they not only witnessed the establishment of the PRC's new society, but also experienced the transition in their own identity – from Kuomintang soldiers to Communist Party members. Furthermore, they experienced the hardship of production and construction activities in the early stage of the *bingtuan*. Later, most were given leadership positions, but were then among those who suffered most during the Cultural Revolution. Today, they quote the Chinese saying 'happiness comes after bitterness' (*kujin ganlai*), because they now enjoy the highest pensions and the best of the social welfare system in the *bingtuan*. They have lived their whole adult lives in collective formations, and their connections to their natal families and hometowns largely have been severed. Their lives have centred on the organization, and their values and experiences are deeply influenced by the *bingtuan*, much more than by family. Few are still alive, and among them even fewer are able to communicate. Fortunately, I met one *laojiu* who is still healthy – Zhan. His experience introduces us to the life of this group in the *bingtuan*.

Zhan, 89, was born into a poor family in a small village of Gansu Province. At 17 he was conscripted as a Kuomintang soldier. He spent eight years in the Kuomintang Army, enduring harsh training and beating by officers. In 1944, he was sent to Xinjiang with other Kuomintang soldiers to confront the Communist Party and the Three Districts Revolution. Zhan remembers that the soldiers suffered from severe cold, but attempted escapes were punished severely. Zhan's assignment included border raids, adding the risk of violent death to the hardships of the weather and Kuomintang discipline.

After the Kuomintang Army was incorporated into the PLA in 1949, Zhan and other Kuomintang soldiers received six months of ideological re-education before they crossed the river to reclaim land. In 1950, Zhan led 15

soldiers to the new production site – they had 10 days to prepare accommodation and food in harsh conditions for the 136 soldiers who were to follow them. Over the years that followed, they reclaimed land by digging out trees; they dug primitive *diwozi*; and they learned to plant crops and raise animals. During the first five years (1950-55), the *bingtuan* was still formally an army unit, and the living reflected that status. Food, clothes, and equipment were supplied by the army, and the soldier-workers received army allowances which were banked and could only be accessed on request. Everything – food, accommodation, and tools – were all in short supply; the hours were long; and life remained hard. Although some soldiers deserted, Zhan never considered it. He had committed himself fully to the Communist Party. Like most in the Corps at the time, Zhan faced the problem of finding a partner. When the first women arrived from Hunan in 1952, they were 'allocated' to officers, but by 1954, when women from Shandong arrived, Zhan had risen to a management position, and was able to attract the leader of one of the groups of women. They married in 1957 and had six children.

Zhan explained how life became desperate in 1959 with the onset of nationwide famine. Rationing was implemented, and constant hunger became people's main concern. By the mid-1960s, Zhan's salary supported eight family members, and they lived in severe poverty. Zhan's wife raised chickens and exchanged eggs for other food. Sometimes, her godmother (*ganma*) from a neighbouring village brought food[73]; at other times, they lived on vegetables thrown away by others.

In the early 1960s, the government shifted Zhan several times between production management and ideological work. Both types of work required considerable travel by bicycle within the district, and he was often absent from home. He was absent even at the birth of his second daughter. His wife was alone with their two-year-old daughter when the labour pains struck, so she knocked on the door of their neighbour, who was a nurse, and delivered the baby with her help. Zhan only arrived home three days later. Three months afterwards, the family moved into a *diwozi* in the unit built with the help of friends. Recalling those experiences, Zhan felt neighbours and friends had been their strongest supports in life.

The hardest times for Zhan started in 1964. This was the time of the Shejiao Movement, and the Cultural Revolution followed shortly. Zhan was accused of a range of offences ranging from demanding too much work from his men to failing to display a portrait of Chairman Mao. He was punished by a range of humiliations: being forced to rise early to clean toilets; being

[73] *Ganma* is a term of address that recognizes a close but informal kin-like relation. My use of 'godmother' throughout the work is a gloss of this term because it signifies someone who is 'like a mother'.

beaten with twigs by children; and walking through the *liandui* with a bucket on his head. Zhan's wife was isolated socially, and his children were bullied until 1975. Nevertheless, Zhan was supported by his wife and a few close friends. Speaking of more than a decade of hardship, he said: 'I've firmly believed in the Communist Party, and I believed everything would be cleared up sooner or later'. Zhan felt his faith was justified when the Cultural Revolution ended and they were restored to their previous positions.

Zhan retired in 1984 but continued to volunteer for the Communist Party. At the time of our interviews, he and his wife lived in a *loufang*; they had good pensions, and their children had work. He summed up his life with the observation that 'the first 25 years in the old society were full of misery, but the last 28 years have been sweeter than honey!'. Zhan's only regret was that he had lost contact with his siblings after his mother's death in 1960.

Border Support Youth: 'We Were Cheated!'

To facilitate the permanent settlement of soldiers in Xinjiang, the government recruited hundreds of thousands of female migrants from Hunan and Shandong between 1952 and 1954. Initially recruited as soldiers, the women expected to serve a few years in Xinjiang and then return home. Most, however, were forced into marriage; they were, as they said, 'allocated to leaders' (*fengei lingdao*). A girl's superior would call her to the leaders' office, point out one of the leaders and ask the girl if she would like to marry him. If she expressed reluctance, the girl would be persuaded and sometimes threatened, so that few dared to refuse. Those who refused were punished, and if they tried to escape, they were confined in cellars if caught. In the best case, a girl might bargain to accept a different husband from the one initially proposed to her. Such women enjoyed military benefits during the early years in the *bingtuan*, and they were categorized as *zhigong* once demobilized from military service. In the 1960s, however, many were persuaded to give up the relatively prestigious *zhigong* status for that of *wuqigong*.

Zhan's wife was one of these women. Mu was 85 at the time of my fieldwork. She is ethnically Hui, and was originally from Jinan City in Shandong Province. She migrated in 1954. At home, she had held part-time jobs; she knew nothing about Xinjiang when XPCC recruited young people in Jinan in the early 1950s. The propaganda aimed at recruiting female labour, and depicted the life standards in Xinjiang as very good, characterized by 'high multi-storey buildings, light, and telephone' (*loushang louxia*, *diandeng dianhua*). Her father had died, and as she was the oldest in the family, she decided to 'join the army' to reduce the burden at home.

Mu and her 90 comrades were happy when they left home. They were well treated on the month-long journey, but on arrival, they were shocked by the poverty of Urumqi and the extent of the Gobi in the Shihezi area. On being given *diwozi* in which to live, they protested. They cried, refused to eat, and demanded to be sent home. But there was no escape, and they were forced to adapt. Mu was prevented from establishing links with local Muslims, and compelled to marry Zhan, who promised not to eat pork at home. She sent money home until she was prevented by hardship from doing so. She managed to visit her sick mother in 1973, but had to return before her mother died two months later. She still regretted her absence at her mother's death, and several later visits to her hometown had not assuaged the feelings of loss.

Initially, Mu had *zhigong* status, but was persuaded to relinquish this for the more flexible work arrangements of a *wuqigong*. In practice, the *wuqigong* status proved to be much more poorly paid. Today, Mu is satisfied with her living conditions, and her marriage worked out well. But she still resents having been cheated, tricked into migration, and persuaded to become a *wuqigong*. When Zhan joked: 'multi-storey buildings, light and phone, these all came true, didn't they?' she responded: 'Come on, we had all these in Jinan before I was born!' Mu is happy that one of her daughters has returned to Jinan. If Zhan dies first, she hopes to return there herself. Having never lost her Muslim identity or her yearning for her hometown, Mu hopes to die in Jinan and to receive an Islamic funeral.

Even Border Support Youth (like Mu) who feel cheated, or demobilized soldiers (like Zhang) who had few options but to remain, perceive the stable salary that they received as *zhigong* in the *bingtuan* as better than what they would have received at home. Regardless of how they arrived in the *bingtuan* or their subsequent status, the first generation fared relatively well, and most held the position of *zhigong*. The *zhigong* category includes people with various migration backgrounds and both genders. The majority worked in farms, but a minority (and among those the more educated) were allocated factory work; a very few became secretaries or other kinds of administrative workers after farming for a few years; and doctors and teachers also held this status. Below, I focus on the experiences of representative individuals from the two largest sub-groups of *zhigong*: farmers and factory workers.

Zhao: Life on the Farm

Zhao, now 73, arrived in the Corps with the Border Support Youth in 1956 at the age of 17. Originally from a poor family in Henan Province, he remembers childhood during the Civil War between the Kuomintang and

Communist Party (1945-49) as a time of little to eat or wear. Following the celebrations of the PRC's establishment, he heard state recruitment propaganda for XPCC and was excited to join the army and contribute to the new socialist state. Arriving in Xinjiang with big dreams and confidence in the state, Zhao was shocked by the hardship he experienced. He told me of endless hard work, strict discipline, frozen bread in winter, and water shortages in summer. Zhao's bitterness was increased by the harsh policy of inter-group competition in which the most successful were rewarded with more food, and the endless meetings in the evenings, which left little free time.

Despite this hardship, Zhao was satisfied with communist society. Adequate clothes were provided by the state, accommodation was free, eventually he received a house (*pingfang*), the food was cheap and adequate – at least until the famine –, and they had received high quality free healthcare. In short, Zhao's life had been hard, but it was not plagued by uncertainty. In his words: 'We did not need to worry about anything in life, but followed the order of the leaders and worked on specific tasks each day'. Moreover, *zhigong* were aware that their life was not as tough as that of the *laojiu*. Moreover, although they were separated from their natal families, workmates became as close as family. He observed that, 'the leaders really cared about the people', and that group members were united and took care of each other. Zhao was nostalgic for past social relations.

Zhao's wife was a member of the Border Support Youth, but their 1960 marriage was consensual. Before having children, he could afford to send money to his natal family, and also helped some family members move to the *tuan*. This support ended after he had five children, and had to devote his money to their education. During the late 1960s, Zhao's parents stayed with him for two years helping with childcare, but they returned to their inland homeland because they did not like Xinjiang and 'dead leaves return to the root of their tree' (*luoye guigen*). Zhao felt proud of his financial contributions, but regretted that he was not able to visit his parents when they were dying.

With the implementation of market reform and the extension of the Contract Responsibility System to households in the early 1980s, Zhao's life was disrupted. He lost his regular salary, and like many others, he signed a contract for land and turned to raising livestock. Zhao remembered the oppressive nature of the *bingtuan* economic system at the time, and that his income was only sufficient for the essentials of food and clothing. Yet he managed to pay university fees for one son, and another got a scholarship. When Zhao's wife became ill in 1988, he was forced to borrow money from the unit to pay for her treatment, but they were still unable to afford food at

the hospital. One of their sons took food to his mother, and she received some food from other patients too. Zhao's wife retired in 1990, and Zhao himself retired in 2000. By special arrangement, Zhao's unit leaders agreed to debit money from his pension so that he could retire even without having paid off his debts in full. After retirement, the couple continued to raise livestock, and in 2006, invested their savings in building a *xiaokangfang* (welfare house). Their two sons had very highly paid jobs and in 2012, the couple bought a *loufang* (multi-storey flat) with the help of all their children, and moved to town, enjoying their time with old friends in the *tuan*.

Zhao's story is representative of many *zhigong* in the Corps. They left home as youths and experienced both physical hardship and social security during the Maoist period. They regarded the Corps as their home, their leaders as family heads, and their colleagues as family members who offered support when it was needed. They enjoyed the communal aspects of collective life, and were also able to offer some financial support to their parents and siblings. Market reform destroyed this sense of security, and brought renewed economic hardship. Only after retirement did their lives improve – their pensions were raised seven times in a period of five years. After more than half a century living in the Corps, their relationships with their original hometown and family were weakened or broken, especially after the death of parents or siblings. The lack of horizontal kin relations would appear to make these elderly especially dependent on their children for support in old age. Yet, for most, the old friends with whom they experienced all the 'wind and rain' have become their inseparable companions.

Qi: From the Bingtuan *Child to the* Bingtuan *Businessman*

Qi, now 66, is representative of four important groups: those whose family migrated voluntarily to the Corps during the famine period; those who came as youths and went through the *bingtuan* school system; factory workers; and those who profited from market reform.

Qi arrived in Xinjiang from Gansu Province in 1960, aged 13. His memories of Gansu are of famine: eating bark, roots, and even soil as people around them, including his grandmother, died of hunger. Some of his family members escaped to Xinjiang, and sent back milk powder and money. Others attempted to do so, but were turned back by military checkpoints.

Qi and his father moved first. They initially stayed in the small *diwozi* of Qi's married older brother. Qi's father was too old to register as a *zhigong*, and found less well-paid work. The following year, Qi's mother arrived with the family's two youngest sons, and the family were allocated their own *diwozi* and a small ration of food. They remained, however, reliant

on relatives for full support. Qi's mother found low-paid work as a child-carer for *zhigong*, but the family still struggled to secure the essentials of life. Qi started school in the Corps in 1961, for which his parents had to pay RMB 2. Unable to afford to live in school accommodation, Qi hitchhiked to school each day, struggling to concentrate during the late afternoon as hunger mounted. Qi remembered on Children's Day in 1962, each student was given a small lollipop, which he described as no bigger than a sheep dropping, but it was sweet, and made him feel like the happiest child in the world.

Qi started farming in 1966, moving to the machine repair factory in 1969. His wages initially went towards paying off his parents' debts. This was the period of the Cultural Revolution, in which food production was dropping, and hunger remained part of Qi's memory of his early working years. Factory work was hard and the atmosphere could be repressive, but it was preferable to farming. The day started early with the loyalty dance, and work was followed by meetings which included singing songs in praise of Chairman Mao. Seeing people around him attacked, Qi had little trust for anyone except his own family. In the same year that he began factory work, 1969, Qi married a woman who had arrived the year previously from Sichuan Province. Qi's wife worked as a *wuqigong*; she did the same work as *zhigong* but earned less. Initially, the young couple were housed in a vacant office in the factory. Later, they were allocated a small house. They had no wedding ceremony and no furniture, and Qi's wife's salary was so low that they had to borrow food from *laoxiang* after the births of their two children. Qi's wife had no help with childcare, and she took care of her children during work breaks. When one of the children was hospitalized in the late 1970s, they had to depend on other patients for food. Qi recalled feeling guilty that he could not offer candy to his own children when they saw others who were enjoying it.

With market reform in the early 1980s, the factory became unprofitable and work was cut. Qi and his wife sought part-time work in neighbouring towns. In 1986, Qi's wife opened a small shop. In 1989, Qi left the factory, borrowed money from friends, bought a car, and started his own business transporting vegetables and coal. Having escaped from the hardship, poverty, and repressive atmosphere of the factory, he felt he had boundless energy and worked day and night, often making more money in a day than he had made in a month of factory work. Qi drove until 2005, often accompanied by his wife, and then shifted his energies to helping her with her shop, which grew considerably in size. Throughout this period, he maintained his *zhigong* identity by paying management fees annually to the factory, and in the early 2000s, he and other former factory workers were

allocated 10 *mu* of land which they were required to farm. Qi farmed the land for three years, before contracting the work out to others. 'But for Openness', he said, 'we would still be poor'. Qi's two children both have well-paid jobs in cities, and the couple own two *loufang*, thanks to the compensation they received for the demolition of their old house and first shop. Now retired with pensions, they still run a shop to keep themselves occupied.

Qi's entire family migrated to Xinjiang, so while has no connection with his hometown, he has maintained relationships with his natal family. Following their father's death and until their mother's death in 1985, Qi and his siblings cared for their mother in turns. Although they are geographically dispersed, the siblings maintain contact by phone, and gather every year at Spring Festival. In particular, Qi and his younger siblings remember with gratitude the help they received from their older siblings during the famine period, and pass this gratitude on to their nieces and nephews.

Bingtuan *Women before Openness*

Without women, it is said, the *bingtuan* could not still exist. Women are 'half the sky' (*banbiantian*); they have contributed to production and development in the *bingtuan*, but they are most recognized for their role in social reproduction. Women were key to the establishment of stable households, transforming a transient militarized population into a settled society. They gave birth to and raised children, ensuring the organization's social reproduction. Women's experience in the *bingtuan* has been as diverse as that of men, but, following local discourse, I will consider four categories: *zhigong, wuqigong,* the wives of *laojiu*, and babysitters (*baomu*).

Women recount their efforts to reconcile the competing roles of *zhigong* and mother as the most painful experience of their lives. During Maoist times, they recounted that a *zhigong* received 58 days birth leave and was offered a supplement of 40 eggs (1 per day) during *yuezi* (lit. 'sitting month', but actually a bit longer). The nutrition was inadequate and returning to work after only two months put most under pressure. It was easier for those able to bring relatives to the Corps, but most struggled between work and children. Although there was a kindergarten in the unit, not all women could afford to put all their children in it. The harsh work and strict rules in the Corps stressed them physically and mentally. To avoid being late for work, they often needed to rise early to take children to kindergarten. In the evening, they needed to pick up their children when the kindergarten closed. Most had experienced finding their children sleeping in front of their doors when they came home late from work. Those with small babies brought them to the evening meeting, which often lasted until

midnight. Women were responsible for their family's washing, cleaning, and mending, and they were always the last in the family to sleep. Being very young when they migrated to the *bingtuan*, women of the first generation claimed they had no experience of childcare, and some said they were reduced to tears by the pressure. Having experienced disappointment, loneliness, and homesickness when they arrived in the *bingtuan*, life became even more painful when they had a baby and no family close to support them. Yet, they sought to bring home what they called the 'tough style' (*qianghan de fengge*) of their work. Women were determined to be strong and independent, and they supported each other as best they could. Young mothers, for example, learned to make baby clothes from their neighbours and *laoxiang.* Because they were compelled to work the land alone if their husbands were sick, mutual support known as *huangong* (exchanging labour) was also vital.

The second largest group of women was composed of *wuqigong*. More flexible hours were supposed to enable *wuqigong* to care for children, but they felt compelled to work as many hours as possible because the wages were so low (only RMB 1 per day) and because they received a smaller food ration than *zhigong*. My informant Cui was a *wuqigong*. The doctor had excused her from work during menstruation because of the severe cramps she experienced, but she just 'put the note in her pocket' and continued to work despite the terrible belly pains. Her family of five children often faced hardship, but she was helped by her *laoxiang* neighbours. Like most *wuqigong*, Cui could not afford to send children to kindergarten. Her older children took care of the younger ones, and she came hurriedly home to breastfeed during breaks. She worried about leaving her children alone while she and her husband worked because accidents were common; children were often burned from hot water or the stove. Later, when her children lived in school accommodation, she could afford only RMB 2 for her children's meals, while others had RMB 15 per month. When they came home at weekends, she sent them back with salted vegetables, so that they could save some money at school. The costs of education proved too high, and her first two sons were forced to quit school early and to begin work in 1968. Only the youngest daughter finished technical college, and then only with the help of two brothers. When the youngest daughter took work in the mid-1980s, the family's financial burden gradually decreased.

Most *wuqigong* were dissatisfied because they had contributed to the *bingtuan*'s development alongside *zhigong* but had earned less. Even in the 2000s, their lives are impacted by the differences between the two worker categories (see chapter 5). Most *wuqigong*, including Cui, could send little money to their natal families or hometowns, and regretted their inability to

fulfil the requirements of filial piety. When Cui was able to send RMB 30 to her mother, her mother cherished it so much she was reluctant to spend it. On a visit home in the 1970s, Cui gave RMB 20 to her younger brother, and remembered how he showed off, because even RMB 2 was big money in her hometown. She also never forgot her mother holding her and crying when she left. When she revisited home a few years later, her mother had died and there was only 'a pile of earth' by which to remember her.

The third group of women are the wives of the *laojiu*. As workers, such women include both *wuqigong* and *zhigong*, but the conditions of their marriages also lend a particular cast to their life experiences. Often forced or deceived into marriage, many had stories of suffering. Lu's story is typical:

> Lu was 19 in 1957 when she married her husband, a *laojiu*, who was 34. Life in her hometown in Sichuan Province had been marked by poverty and hunger. Like most girls, she had no school education. She had worked alongside her parents on the farm. One morning, her mother told her to dress well because a special guest was coming. When he arrived, she realized she was to be 'matched'. Despite two weeks of resistance, she was eventually forced to agree because her parents had accepted money from the man, who had a good salary. She had little in common with her older husband. He beat her if they argued, and he felt jealous if she was late returning home from work or spoke to other men. Lu blamed this on his early life in the Kuomintang Army, where he was trained in 'a very rude way', and was unable to communicate effectively. The domestic violence made life a nightmare for four years. Then, Lu was able to bring her family to the same unit of the Corps. This gave her some protection, and gradually, the violence stopped.

Domestic violence was a common problem for the wives of *laojiu*. But, according to Lu, the hardest part of being a *laojiu*'s wife was neither the early period of rough treatment, nor the persecution of the Cultural Revolution. It came in the period after the death of their older husbands. The Corps provided a widow's allowance, but it was insufficient. Lu was luckier than many because she had retained her *zhigong* status and salary, and because her parents were nearby to help with childcare. For those who accepted the *wuqigong* status, life was often much harder after their husband's death. When the *wuqidui* were disbanded in the early 1980s, they became entirely dependent on casual labour. As a result, many of their children had to quit school early in order to work and provide for the family.

The final group of *bingtuan* women to consider are those known as *baomu*. These were teenage girls mobilized from their hometowns by *zhigong* already established in the Corps to help with childcare. Now in their

sixties, some received education in the *bingtuan*, while others did not. Many felt they had been treated badly by the older relatives who brought them to Xinjiang. Tao's story is typical:

Tao came to the Corps in 1972 when she was 18. She came from an affluent family, but during the land reform in the early 1950s, their property – including land, stocks, and a large courtyard with many houses – was distributed to poorer people. Tao's family was forced to move from a large house to a leaky pigsty in the corner of the courtyard. During the Cultural Revolution, her family was labelled as being of 'bad class' and persecuted, and her father was subjected to repeated attacks. Her mother told Tao that but for her children, she would have killed herself. This deeply affected Tao, who resolved to leave such a 'devil place' (*guidifang*). When Tao's maternal aunt in Shihezi sent RMB 60 and an offer for Tao to come and care for the aunt's four children, Tao took the opportunity. In Shihezi, she found a heavy workload. She had care of the four children, and was responsible for the cooking, washing, and collection of firewood. The work was made harder because she had a poor relationship with her aunt. Tao would escape from conflict with her aunt by running outside without eating; she cried alone because she had no friends to whom she could talk. She did not dare tell her mother of her unhappiness because all her letters home passed through her aunt's hands.

In 1974, Tao started school in the Corps, and after a year, she was allocated to Tuan 141, two hours from Shihezi, as a farm labourer. No family visited her there. In 1980, she married and moved to Tuan 143. She told me that if she had received support from her aunt's family, she would not have moved so far from Shihezi. Tao experienced further hardship on the farm, particularly during the reform era, when all farmers suffered. She was able to send her son and daughter to university, but unable to support them there, so they had to support themselves by tutoring. Despite the hardship she experienced, Tao is happy she came to Xinjiang, because both she and her husband now have *zhigong* status, and both her son and daughter have stable jobs in the Corps. She helps care for her mother-in-law, former *wuqigong* Cui (see above), and is able to send some money to her parents in Sichuan, who have no pension.

Perceptions of Present Life

In summary, the experience of the first generation of *bingtuan* migrants was diverse. All, however, perceived the past, particularly the Maoist period, as a time of hardship, but also one of less uncertainty. The reforms associated with Openness freed workers from military discipline, but many experienced insecure incomes with the abolition of the salary system. They experienced

poverty anew, marked by their inability to support their children's education. Yet some found opportunities in the market economy, and actively raised their income in various ways. How then, do they perceive life today? I will give an overview of their narratives, and compare them with those of the second generation of elderly who arrived after Openness was introduced.

Most of the first generation of *bingtuan* residents have retired and have moved to town, where almost all expressed the same feeling: 'It is paradise nowadays compared to the past!' In conversation, there are four dominant themes through which this contentment is expressed: their gratitude to the Communist Party and the state; the security of having a pension; their superior condition in comparison to elders outside the *bingtuan* or new migrants; and the pleasantness of life in a *loufang*. Feelings about the *loufang* are covered in chapter 5, but the other themes are discussed below. One element of discontent is expressed, however, in a desire for 'equality' (*pingdeng*), which many feel they lack.

Appreciation for the Party and the State

'Thanks to the Communist Party and good policy, we have a good life nowadays!' This was the most repeated expression during my research. One elder continued: 'If you look at Chinese history, there is no dynasty, no other government that treated elders as well as the Communist Party'. Elders also have a saying: 'More sons are not as good as our only son, the Communist Party, because it always put money into our cards at the end of each month'.[74] Initially, I was suspicious of such expressions. I wondered if my informants only said them because they believed I was a government emissary, but after a year's fieldwork, it was clear that these feelings were genuine. Moreover, elders expressed their appreciation for the Communist Party in concrete ways, by composing poems, donating money, making embroidered gifts for the town office, or volunteering.

Appreciation for the state derives primarily from the receipt of a pension which creates security for *bingtuan* elderly. Elders claim: 'We can buy anything we need and eat anything we want. We don't need to look at the face of our children anymore'. Their newly found affluence also gives them cause for pride. Every time I stayed for a meal, Zhan opened the refrigerator and exclaimed, 'Look, we have a full fridge: chicken, fish, lamb, and beef. Feel free to choose!' Zhan and his wife always have two or three dishes for each meal, and the shopkeeper Qi enjoys tasting almost all the foods in his shop.

---

[74] Zaiduo de erzi meiyou gongchandang zhe yige erzi hao, dao yuedi jiu ba gongzi dadao kashang. 再多的儿子没有共产党这一个儿子好，到月底就把钱打到卡上。

One of the most exciting moments for the elderly is withdrawing their pension at the end of each month. Elders queue at banks for up to two hours to withdraw their cash, then they immediately re-deposit most or even all of it into an interest-bearing account. Any delay causes discontent at the bank 'eating' (*chidiao*) their interest. The elders derived real pleasure from the physical handling of their cash. After withdrawing money, each would count it carefully with a happy smile on his face. The excitement was captured by one elder who said: 'I don't need to work anymore nowadays: I get more than 2,000 each month for free. Isn't it great?'

When *bingtuan* elders talk about their satisfaction with life, they always compare themselves with elderly from the local area, inland China, and new migrants: 'Look, those elderly from Gongshe [a local village] are so miserable: they only get RMB 75 per month. What can they buy with it? Not even enough for one bag of flour. We are better-off only thanks to our pension'. Some elderly even show a sense of superiority. They say things like, 'Well, when we worked hard in the past, some people could not bear it and escaped to Gongshe, look at their life now'. When I saw some elderly from the neighbouring local village coming to sell vegetables or fruits in summer, some bowed their heads when I questioned them, admitting that they received only RMB 75 each month, but refusing to talk more. Similarly, *bingtuan* elderly often compared themselves with elderly inland. One said, for example, 'When I visited my hometown last year, I saw the elderly were still working on the land. I felt sorry for them'.

Yet, the most direct targets for comparison are those around them: elders who migrated to the Corps after economic reform. There is no official data to show how many of today's elderly arrived in the Corps since the reform period began, but it is clear that it was difficult for them to obtain *zhigong* status. Of those who came in the 1980s and 1990s, some have managed only to receive the *wuqigong* subsidy. Recent elderly migrants, many of whom followed their children to Xinjiang, struggle to survive on a minimal income. Some do arduous work such as picking cotton, rather than relaxing like *bingtuan* elderly, who are noticeably more affluent. As a result, newcomers do not socialize with the oldtimers, and the social circles remain largely distinct. Nevertheless, they remain in the Corps because life in their hometowns was even harder. *Bingtuan* elderly, in making this comparison, firmly believe that they deserve their current pension benefits, often claiming that the new migrants knew nothing of the hardships they experienced in the past.

Desire for Equality

Although almost all of the elders in the *bingtuan* feel themselves to have money, the existing pension system leads to some dissatisfaction. *Wuqigong* are unhappy about their situation and feel that having done the same work as *zhigong* they should enjoy the same benefits. Qi's wife was one of several representatives who had visited higher officials in Urumqi from 2001 until 2010, appealing for equal rights. Like other *wuqigong*, she complained:

> We worked even harder than *zhigong* in the past and earned less. That was fine. But why not treat us equally now? Before we petitioned and got the *wuqigong* allowance, we had nothing, and could not even see a doctor if we were sick. Look at us now, the *zhigong* pension is still twice ours. They can go to any hospital they want, but we can't. They get a coal allowance, we don't. Most importantly, it hurts our self-esteem. It seems like *zhigong* are superior to us!

Such discourses are common among former *wuqigong*, but some *zhigong* are also dissatisfied with their position. They complain that doctors and teachers get higher salaries, despite working no harder than them. I jokingly asked one elder who always said he had more money than he could spend, why he was dissatisfied. He replied: 'It's a different issue: it is about dignity, about how the Corps assesses our job! At least we should be treated equally!'

In recent years, preferential policies have been introduced for some groups such as disabled people or military veterans. While this has satisfied some, it has created further resentment among those left out. Some have self-organized into pressure groups which are sometimes in conflict with each other. However it is expressed, the desire for equality is a pervasive theme among elders in the Corps today.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have introduced my field site, and presented individual life experiences in the past and the perceptions of present life conveyed by local elderly. Social, political, and economic transformations have impacts on individual life histories, practices, and ideas, and on the relationships between individuals and kin, neighbourhood, unit, and state. These experiences, ideas, and relationships vary based on differences in gender, status, and generation.

The first generation of residents in the *bingtuan* were influenced deeply by the state in both past and present. From the moment of their arrival in the *bingtuan*, the unit, as an agency of the state, became their new home, providing house, food, job, and salary. As they settled in, almost every

aspect of their lives was directly affected by the political and economic system of the *bingtuan*. During the Maoist period, poor living conditions and harsh discipline were the main concern of most, despite the strong sense of security based on the social welfare system. After the dismantling of collectivism, however, unstable incomes and reduced social insurance put them under pressure. While some perceive the Maoist period as better than that of market reform, others benefited from Openness and appreciate the freedoms it brought. Today, once again, elders receive care from the state directly through the pension and other forms of welfare, enjoying a high quality of life compared to the past. Nevertheless, the widespread demand for equality is deeply rooted in the egalitarian ideology formed during long-term collectivization in the past.

Relations to kin among *bingtuan* elderly vary. Many were able to bring family members to the Corps, and were even supported and encouraged by the state in doing so, but at least half of the population has no natal relatives in Xinjiang. Such individuals have relied on social relations within their unit or on other social networks, such as those of neighbours and *laoxiang*. Few of the older generation were able to care for their own parents when they were still alive. Instead, they sent money and visited when they could. Connections with hometowns were attenuated by their parents' deaths. Among the second generation of migrants, there are relatively few elderly, and these do not enjoy the economic independence and freedom of the *bingtuan*'s first generation because they lack access to pensions and other social services. The situations of offspring of the first generation are also diverse, as will be explored in the following chapters.

Chapter 4
Health and Self-Care

Ill health is undoubtedly one of the major difficulties associated with ageing. Modern medicine and new technologies have effectively brought acute disease under control, leaving chronic ailments and the infirmities of old age as the most widespread debilitators of the human body (Boyer 1980: 198; Buch 2015: 278). According to statistics from the Chinese Academy of Social Science, China has effectively controlled infectious disease. Chronic disease is the leading cause of death in China, accounting for 80 per cent of the total mortality rate. In 2008, 64.5 per cent of elders (i.e. people above age 65) had at least one chronic disease, and most had several. In large cities, 97.6 per cent of the elderly have chronic disease; in the most remote areas, 38.7 per cent do (Zheng 2011: 5).[75] In Tuan 143, the local hospital's annual medical checks of the elderly indicate that about 85 per cent of elders have chronic diseases. In particular, heart disease, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and high blood sugar are very common.

For most *bingtuan* elders, the threat of disease resulting from ageing is the most uncertain element in their lives. None of their other material comforts can compensate for ill health, and many complain that they cannot completely enjoy 'such a good life' due to their poor health. Many elders told me that they are living by the day, not by the year. As they often said: 'Who knows what will happen tomorrow? It is hard to say whether we will wear the same shoes we wore today or not!' Elders do not pessimistically accept disease. They focus on eating well, drinking well, sleeping well, and playing well. Indeed, in their daily life, taking care of their body and health is the main concern of the *bingtuan* elderly. In this chapter, by describing the health promotion activities of elders, I show the ways that elders actively resist bodily frailty. I also contrast the behaviour of *bingtuan* elders with eldercare norms to show how traditional eldercare values have been modified and redefined.

[75] Zheng provides no explanation of the starkly different rates of disease among rural and urban populations.

China has been well known for its family values. At the core of these values are the Confucian norms of filial piety. Traditionally, children, particularly sons, have an absolute obligation to offer support to their parents in old age. In chapter 1, I discussed the extensive literature regarding the ways these traditional values have changed over the last six decades. The connection between health and these changing values has not been a major focal point.

'Taking care of one's health' has appeared, however, as one among many indicators that elders are adapting a more independent lifestyle. Ikels (1997), for example, noted that elders in Guangzhou believe that it is an elder's responsibility to stay healthy, to engage in moderate exercise, to eat appropriate foods, and to observe other preventive health measures. Based on research in Baoding, Martin King Whyte's group found that most elderly believed that they could count on their own income and that they should lead an independent life in old age (Wang, Xiao and Zhan 2003: 62). Based on her recent research in both rural and urban China, Zhang (2017) further pointed out that filial practices are reinterpreted among Chinese families of both older and younger generations, emphasizing inter-generational independence and interdependence. The dominant discourse among the elderly is 'not to become a burden' on their children and they believe that the best way for them to achieve this goal is to keep healthy and active as long as possible.

My own work builds upon this body of research, to show the changing values and strategies of *bingtuan* elderly concerning old-age support from the perspective of 'health'. Unlike the large cities in which most research has been done on the elderly has been conducted, the *bingtuan* only started its urbanization process a few years ago. Most of the resident elders also only moved to the central regiment's small town recently, and some are only resident in the winter months. These differences impact the organization of social networks, as well as the elderly's living conditions, but they do not seem to change the basic dynamic in relations between the elderly and their children, or the importance of social benefits to the elderly's evaluation of their circumstances. Here too, many of the younger generations are absent from their parents' daily lives: they have either migrated to large cities or stayed in the *liandui*. As in other parts of China too, reduced family size, the uncertainty of farming and the job market, and the financial burden of raising their own children, all make it difficult for adult children to fulfil the traditional obligations of filial piety.

Bingtuan elderly do not dwell on the theme of filial piety. They like to talk, instead, of what I also witnessed in their daily lives: how they have established a new independent lifestyle, and how they have developed

strategies to cope with uncertainties. *Bingtuan* elderly emphasize their own responsibilities or obligations to their children, much more than their children's' obligations to them. 'Keeping healthy' is one such obligation, and the elderly actively engage in health promotion activities. Such activities also serve to enlarge social support networks among peers, and thus help the elderly to gain social support outside the family. Therefore, in this chapter, I use the term 'self-care' to show how the elderly both recognize and respond to changes they do not fully control.

Diseases, Suffering, and Uncertainty

When I asked my informants what being old meant to them[76], the most direct and frequent response was that being old means the decline of the physical body and the 'company' (*zuobaner*; lit. accompaniment) of diseases. In the Corps, even elders who appeared healthy were suffering from various diseases. Whenever I admired the leisured lifestyle which went with old age, they replied, 'If you could not sleep well or eat well like us, you would stop admiring'. They often showed me how many boxes of medicines they had, and detailed how much money they spent on medicine each year. It did not matter that their health insurance covered most of their medical expenses; it was the sheer outlay that they wanted to emphasize, and the proportion of the medicine they took to everything else they consumed. Elders had as much medicine as food, so they said.

In wry moments, elders claimed to be the biggest champions of the hospital and health industry. And indeed, when I visited the local hospital, I found that the chronic wards were always full of elders. They loved to tell me of their 'escapes from the mouth of death' (*silitaosheng*). Elders referred to diseases as their 'closest company', even though they did not like them. Most elders had to spend time in hospital two or three times each year.

The physical fragility and sickness of ageing is a personal experience, but it also brings uncertainty and fear for family members. Two examples will suffice:

Case 1: My 73-year-old landlady Li was a retired *zhigong* with a pension. Li's husband died two years ago; she lived in a *loufang* purchased by her son. In addition to her one son, Li had five daughters. The oldest daughter lived in the same town, and Li ate three meals a day at her daughter's home. A friend had warned me that I took risks by living with a single elder, but I could not really fathom what they would be. On the first night that I stayed with Li, I began to see both the hopes and fears that were entangled with my stay.

[76] I asked, '*shenme shi lao*?' And, '*bianlao yiweizhe shenme*?'

Li was very enthusiastic about my company at the beginning. The night I moved in, she was very happy, and talked at length about the benefits of having a companion: she had felt lonely, now she had found someone who could talk to her at night. As she continued to express her happiness, a sense of the macabre crept in. If she died accidently, said Li, now at least someone could inform her family. In the past, she had always reminded her daughter to come and visit her if she did not answer the phone because it might be the 'sign of her death' (*deng tui*). She continued to tell me that she had survived a heart attack, so she had to take a heart pill every day. She just hoped, she said, that she could survive this year; then it might be better. Why, 'this year?' I asked, and Li reminded me that the ages of 73 and 84 are threshold years. If one passed this threshold, then all would be well for the ensuing years till the next threshold. Because Li was 73, she was a little nervous.

As time passed, I realized that Li suffered not only from heart disease, but also from diabetes, arthritis, scapulohumeral periarthritis, and back problems. These were common to most elders. Li's diet was restricted severely because of the diabetes. Avoiding certain foods, particularly her favourite dish, was difficult, but she had learned to discipline her eating and she took daily insulin injections. Li followed the recommended regimens not just for her own sake, but for that of her family. She regretted having been unable to spend Spring Festival with her family when she was hospitalized for high blood sugar. When she had a serious fall shortly after that, her back problems were so severe she had to stay with her children for some time. Li said that when she was young, she never had understood why elders bent their backs to walk. Now, she completely understood. But the most miserable thing for her was the pain in her shoulders and knees; this prevented her from sleeping well. She had taken various medicines to reduce the pain, but they only provided temporary relief and never a cure. Sometimes, Li woke up at midnight and had to beat the painful parts of her body with a medicine stick or massage herself. Because Li was unable to sleep well at night, she slept a lot during the day. I was told by her family and neighbours that once she had almost ignited the whole building because she had fallen asleep with a pot on the stove. Her son and daughter felt that the more she aged, the more they had to worry about her. During my stay with Li, I became partly responsible for her in the family's eyes; if her son and daughter could not contact her, they called me.

Case 2: Mu, the wife of Zhan whom I mentioned in the previous chapter, was 85 years old. Mu was hard of hearing and suffered from heart disease, diabetes, and cirrhosis of the liver. She stayed in hospital twice during my fieldwork. The second time, when she was in the emergency

room, the doctor informed her family that there was little chance of her survival. She did survive, but was even weaker than before. Mu had to walk very slowly, and stayed in her room. The whole winter, she did not go out. In spring and summer, she sat in front of their building, unable to move further. She could do little housework because she could have a heart attack if she moved her left hand too vigourously; even sweeping the floor was too much. Usually, Mu's daughter came to help with the housework and to give Mu her insulin injections. Sometimes, in warm weather, her daughter would take her around in a wheelchair. However, Mu said sometimes she wanted to cry as a result of difficulties in communicating with people due to her limited hearing and movement. Her husband told me that when he went dancing or to play chess, he dared not stay away as long as before, since a heart attack could threaten his wife's life anytime. Zhan's daughter also worried about her mother and came to check on her several times each day. She said that sometimes when she received a phone call from her father, her heart beat very fast, and she was afraid that it was bad news. She even told her friends and colleagues not to call her after midnight, as she would be scared to pick up the phone lest it be bad news about her mother.

During my year of fieldwork, I came to share in this atmosphere of small hopes against great fears. Gradually, I came to understand the elders' sense of living by the day. They always asked each other, 'Who knows what will happen in the next moment?' Health was a perpetual source of insecurity. The elderly feared that they might die at any minute.

Death for them is highly unpredictable. They know that disease is powerful enough to take their lives at any time, despite their valiant struggles to keep it at bay. Because they live in a community with large numbers of other elderly, such fears have frequent confirmation in the personally known and socially reported deaths.

Health Promotion among *Bingtuan* Elderly

Bingtuan elderly show a strong consciousness of personal healthcare and actively engage in a range of healthcare practices beyond those of taking medicine and undergoing hospital treatments. Research has shown that health behaviours in China are influenced by traditional ideas of health improvement, especially when people reach old age (Liu and Zhang 2004). Such behaviours are not simply 'traditional' because current social, political, and economic conditions also encourage their adaptation. In this section, I want to show how elders actively engage in health promotion activities and how they use different opportunities to adjust to ageing life.

Food and Health

Food appears as significant in many domains of Chinese culture, and not least in connection to health, illness, and healing.[77] Food was central to Chinese health practices from the earliest times (Anderson 1988), and medicinal cooking and diet have long been used to prevent or heal illness, and to maintain or enhance health (Simoons 1991; Farquhar 1994).

Bingtuan elderly believe deeply in the role of food in preventing disease. They pay a great deal of attention to nutrition, and everyone seems to be an expert on food. I was even surprised to discover that a dustman with whom I spoke had some knowledge of food and health. He explained to me that – because the heart loves red, the liver prefers sweet, and the kidney likes sour – one should eat mixed grains. This is preferable even to always eating one kind of grain of the highest quality, he explained, because limiting oneself to only a part of the available spectrum of foods will result in disease. The dustman was not unusual in his level of knowledge or opinions on food and health: most *bingtuan* elderly also know what is healthy and what is not. They know what kind of food is helpful, and for what kind of diseases. They even know how to cook the same food in different ways to cure different diseases. At different seasons, they 'prefer' specific foods.

Wu nainai, my first landlady in town, began my education in the health benefits and dangers of food. Wu nainai was 78, but it was hard to tell her age from her face or behaviour. She looked younger and was always full of energy. The first morning at her place, seeing I was having *nang* (bread typical to Xinjiang) and tea for breakfast, Wu nainai's first reaction was a surprised question: 'You ate only these? How simple it is!' Then she showed me her breakfast, and my impression was 'How rich it is!'[78] She cooked

[77] The significance of food in Chinese culture has seemed disproportionately greater than in many others, 'leading many to characterize the Chinese as having a food-centered culture' (Simoons 1991: 14).

[78] My breakfast was traditional for the Kazakh diet, which for all ages rarely consists of more than milk tea, *nang*, and perhaps butter. I therefore report the mutual shock of our first encounter of each other's eating habits to indicate how my attention was first drawn to the topic of food among the elderly. In fact, the contrast between the eating habits of younger and older Han Chinese is not quite so stark, as Han generally insist on a regular diet of three daily meals, each based on several dishes of meat and vegetables. In the context of Xinjiang, the contrast between ethnic foodways is an important one that gains much social commentary. For example, Kazakh meals are often simple and based on meat and *palau* (a rice dish) or *naren* (noodles) with very few vegetables. Kazakh people too discourage each other from placing food as an important topic of conversation with various sayings. The difference that would be seen between the eating habits and interest in food of younger and older ethnic Han

mushrooms, warmed *momo* (Chinese bread), and prepared soya bean milk. She explained to me that the mushrooms helped prevent high blood cholesterol, the bean milk was high in nutrition, and warm *momo* was much tastier than my hard *nang*. When she showed me alternative foods she often ate for breakfast, I was surprised to see that she was very 'modern' in her tastes. She ate oatmeal, walnut powder, black sesame seeds, peanut powder, and other things that were not part of Han foodways until recently. She opened one box after another, explaining the function of each powder. She kept emphasizing the importance of breakfast, and strongly suggested that I should change my habits. I also ate simply at lunch and supper time, but Wu nainai always took time to cook very carefully. Usually, she had two dishes for lunch – one meat and one vegetable. She loved to cook fish, believing that it was good for the brain. For supper, she had light dishes, such as soup with green vegetables and handmade noodles, or rice or bean gruel which she regarded as good for the stomach. My habit of cooking a large amount and warming it up for the next meal to save time disturbed her, and she took time to educate me regarding the negative effects of this habit. I was surprised when she gave me a detailed scientific explanation of how our stomachs work, including warnings concerning the relationship between food, cancer, and other diseases. Later I discovered that she had learned this information from newspapers and from a health programme (her favourite TV show). She kept newspaper clippings containing health advice she regarded as valuable, and stuck them to the refrigerator.

Frederick J. Simoons (1991: 13) has cited the Chinese scholar Lin Yutang as observing that the Chinese consider eating to be one of the rare joys of living, and as claiming that the Chinese therefore are more devoted to eating than to religion or to the pursuit of knowledge. Such claims certainly ring true for the *bingtuan* elderly. For them, each meal is carefully planned and much time is invested in cooking; each meal includes at least two dishes in which the balance of nutrition, flavour, and colour has been considered fully. Preferences vary because this is a migrant community, and many people have retained food traditions from their hometowns. For example, people from northern China prefer flour, whereas people from the south are more likely to have rice; people from Sichuan and Hunan provinces like pepper, while people from Shanghai and Jiangsu provinces prefer sweet dishes. But several types of meat (pork, mutton, beef, and chicken), fish, vegetables (including greens), black fungus, and tofu – are widely regarded as essential foods for everyday life. Several other foods, like gruels, and

---

is thus one of degree, more than of kind; in this respect, the elderly are less interested in taste and more interested in health benefits.

particularly those made with different beans, are favourites of *bingtuan* elderly because they are recommended to combat certain diseases.

Such traditional knowledge may be disseminated through modern media, specifically in the form of healthcare programmes. At the same time, some aspects of traditional food culture in China are gradually changing as a result of growing health consciousness. Milk for example, has been central traditionally only to the diet of nomadic peoples such as Kazakhs and Mongols. New health knowledge, however, has promoted the value of milk which is now recognized and accepted by most Chinese. No longer seen as representative of minority identity, milk is now regarded as a part of a healthy, modern lifestyle. Many *bingtuan* people, particularly elders, have accepted this idea and, indeed, have developed a strong preference for milk. Milk is even now a common gift to bring when visiting elders. Similarly, nuts and dried fruits (e.g. walnuts, red dates, apricots) used to be regarded as food typical of minority ethnic groups such as Uyghur or Kazakhs. *Bingtuan* elders, however, have become enthusiastic consumers of these foods. Even Western foods, such as oatmeal, have become common on their tables.

Food security is as important as nutrition for *bingtuan* elderly. Dissatisfied with the growing food pollution in China, most *bingtuan* elders attempt to reduce the associated health risks as much as possible. Most elderly have gardens in their old unit, and prefer to plant their own vegetables. When they produce more than they can eat, some elders share with neighbours or friends; others sell their surplus in the market, where they are in high demand by office workers. In winter, elders buy vegetables from the market. In the past, they would have been content with cabbage, potatoes, and salted (i.e. preserved) vegetables, but now they prefer fresh ones. No one, they claim, makes salted vegetables anymore because they are considered to cause cancer.

The right kinds of food are important, but so too is eating each meal on time and eating in moderation. Elders follow traditional principles, therefore, such as ‘eat well for breakfast, eat full for lunch, and eat less for supper’ (*zao chi hao, wu chi bao, wan chi shao*). One of my informants who lived upstairs from me, kindly brought me two boiled eggs each morning to emphasize the importance of breakfast. She even attributed her husband’s longevity (he was 80) to the role of breakfast. Her husband himself said that he believed in nothing but food. In his view, ‘everything else’ (religions and formal belief systems) was illusory; only food was real. In daily practice, this appears to be the guiding principle for all *bingtuan* elderly. In order to keep healthy, elders make good use of the richness of traditional food culture, and are open to all new foods that modern society may make available.

Exercise and Entertainment

'Life is movement' (*shengming zaiyu yundong*) is a prevalent traditional slogan in China. Its utterance encourages people to exercise, and modern media uses it to promote knowledge of healthcare and exercise. Elders learned many exercises from TV health programmes, which generally follow the principles of Chinese Traditional Medicine. They learned ways to clap their hands, and to massage the hands and feet at acupuncture points. Many elders knew the name and the role of acupuncture points on the body; when they did not feel well, they knew which one they should massage for particular results. They learned that feet were the most important part of the body. Most elders developed a habit of soaking their feet in hot water and then massaging them every night before sleeping. The market has been quick to respond to their health concerns, and products such as electronic foot-soaping buckets, massage drugs, and maps of acupuncture points are all readily available.

The fitness equipment on the public square and in the *xiaoqu* was popular with elders. Particularly in summer, this equipment was always occupied. Elders had to queue, and sometimes they quarrelled with each other if they were kept waiting too long. Sometimes, elders could be seen trying to break their record on some particular piece of equipment; other times, they could be seen competing on equipment such as the horizontal bars. The most popular form of exercise in the Corps is 'walking the circle' (*zhuanquan*) – that is, walking around the town's central ring. Hundreds of elders walk this circuit twice daily – every morning and evening after their meal – and always in the same direction. The first time I saw this seeming parade of people, I assumed there was a special event underway, but a woman told me that the elders were 'just walking'. But this walk is important: instead of greeting each other with the standard Chinese greeting, 'have you already eaten?' (*ni chi le ma*?), *bingtuan* elders greet each other with 'how many circles have you walked?' (*ni zhuan le jiquan le*?). The more they have walked, the prouder they are. They even joke that walking circles is equivalent to earning money (*zhuanquan dengyu zhuanqian*), because as long as they keep themselves alive, they will have a pension from the government.

Plate 4. Exercise equipment on the square.

Furthermore, a variety of entertainments are recognized by the *bingtuan* elderly as helpful to both physical and mental health. From spring to autumn, the square bustled with life, filled with elders doing Taichi and gymnastic dancing, playing instruments, and singing. In the winter, dancing moved inside to the two elderly clubs, where it was the most popular of many activities. Inside or out, gymnastic dancing took place twice daily (once in the morning and again in the evening), and it was approached as an obligatory part of daily life by those who danced. Even when it was held outside, elders looked for other members of their club, lining up together by the hundreds to move slowly to varied genres of music. Even younger people might join in the evening gymnastic dancing on the square dance which lasts until ten o'clock. Some elders do not join in the dancing, but sit in the banks of trees that line the square, playing poker or mah-jong, chess, or other games. There are many mah-jong shops along the street and, particularly in the afternoon, crowds of elderly gather outside them to play on rented boards. Some people have their own mah-jong sets, and invite friends to play with them at home; others take their boards out to play on the square. As the games proceed in a lively fashion, others sit and watch.

Plate 5. Dancing on the square.

There are many elders who do not join the activities, but just sit, watch, chat, and enjoy the atmosphere. Women tend to gather on the left side of the square, and men on the right side. People usually come to the same place every day, often with the same people, to sit and talk, until the end of the music. Men often discussed political issues. Everyone seemed prepared to engage in committed arguments, which sometimes became fierce because no one wanted to concede defeat or 'lose face', and it was inevitable that some people went home angry or upset. Women, on the other side of the square, preferred to gossip in a low voice, on topics such as family issues or old neighbours; even a passerby could become a target. I asked many of them why they habitually returned to the same side of the square. They always answered that they knew each other and had 'common words' (*you hua shuo*). Some men joked that they dared not 'play too much' (*xiawan*), otherwise, their wives would 'repair' them (*shoushi*, i.e. discipline them) when they got home. Women understood my question differently, and as being about the separation of women and men on the opposite sides of the square. They came always to the same side, they said, not because they held 'feudal attitudes' (*fengjian*), but because they were afraid of attracting gossip. The concentration of elders in town made social life more

complicated for them than in the countryside; ‘more people, more gossip’ (*renduo zuiza*), they explained. The new possibilities for dating, cohabitation, and remarriage (discussed in chapter 8), made social contact between men and women a sensitive issue, and socializing with the same gender was the safest way to avoid the ‘trouble’ of gossip.

Plate 6. Elders chatting in the neighbourhood (*xiaoqu*).

Some elders prefer staying in their own *xiaoqu* to chat, play poker and mahjong, or dance. Elders regarded leaving their houses and joining any of these groups or activities as healthy, and they referred to it as ‘play’ (*wan*). From their point of view, it was a good way to spend one’s leisure time, as well as to avoid dementia. In late autumn, when it was getting cold, most activities shifted into the Elderly Activity Centre in the basement beneath the radio stations. The dancing moved to the ballroom in the basement of the Huayuan Hotel, and had a participation fee of RMB 10 per month. When I first started my research in the town, most elders were dissatisfied with the winter arrangements. They considered the old Elderly Activity Centre too small for exercising, and both the centre and the ballroom were potentially unsafe because of poor fire prevention measures. Within six months a new elderly

centre for the West Community Club was established, and one for the East Community Club was under construction when I left the field.

Plate 7. Playing mah-jong in the street.

Part-Time Jobs

As long as their health permits, elders seek activity. In the *tuan*, it is very common for elders to return to the *liandui* in late spring, either to tend their gardens or to cook for their adult children's families. They claim that such activities keep them healthy and help to pass the time, and that they prefer the fresh air and peacefulness of the *liandui* to town. Sometimes the elders come and go several times over a season. Others do not really stay in the *liandui*, but still participate in part-time seasonal work, such as cutting grass in the field, transplanting cotton seedlings, picking cotton, tomatoes or chilies, or cutting grapes.[79]

Getting access to these part-time jobs is not easy because one needs to get up very early. Landowners book small buses in the *tuan* to collect workers; the driver is told how many labourers are needed and is paid their

[79] Those who pick cotton usually go to local villages that are not in the Corps because cotton grown inside the Corps is usually on large tracts and picked mechanically.

fare in advance. This simplifies the procedure of looking for work; one only needs to find the right bus, but one needs to be there earlier than others to be selected.

Since labour costs have been rapidly increasing in all areas of Xinjiang, one can earn a lot of money from part-time jobs. One of my informants (at 61), told me that she had done part-time jobs in recent years. Her husband had retired from farm work, and she too had free time because she had helped him previously. She earned about RMB 6,000 each year. I also heard stories that some people had bought a *loufang* by doing part-time jobs.

There are, however, dangers to undertaking such work, especially when one's body is already fragile. One of my informants told me that her old neighbour had earned a lot of money by picking cotton, and even had supported her son's purchase of a *loufang*. The neighbour had continued to work hard, hoping to buy another *loufang* for herself, but unfortunately, a lumbar disc protrusion sent her to bed. The money she had earned was not enough for her medical expenses and medicines. Most elders considered it unwise to sacrifice one's health for money, and carefully chose work that could be done temperately. For example, collecting grapes is recognized as the most suitable part-time job for elders.

During my fieldwork, I took part in elders' grape cutting activities as a participant-observer. One of the reasons this work was popular was because the vineyards were close to town (about 1.5 km), and elders could arrive easily by foot or by bicycle. More importantly, it was not strenuous work. The landowner employed middle-aged men to cut the grapes and bring them to the elders. The elders sat at the edge of the field, and trimmed bad and undersized grapes from the bunches. The clean bunches were then passed to other workers for packaging. The work time was eight hours, and lunch was provided by the landowner.

Money was not the only motivation for undertaking work. One of my informants, for example, was normally sickly. Her voice was low and she moved slowly; and it was her husband who normally cooked. But grape-picking was good for her, she said; it was good exercise – an easy job which made her feel alive and useful. When she stayed at home, she said, she always got sick. Her husband supported her work too. She had a stomach problem which meant that she could not eat the 'cold food' provided by the landowner. So her husband brought her a home-cooked meal, kept warm; he considered the daily outing to be good exercise for himself. I was surprised to see another man from our *xiaoqu*. He was 70 years old and considered to be very rich. When I asked him why he was working – hardly imagining that

he needed money – he responded, 'Well, anyway, I have nothing to do at home. Why not come out and do some exercise? We have lots of fun here'.

Plate 8. Part-time work trimming grapes.

Like these two informants, most elders perceived the work as 'exercise' and aimed to improve their health. Many elders were motived to earn pocket money too, at least enough to play mah-jong in winter. As one informant said: 'Rather than sitting in the *xiaoqu*, it was more exciting to sit here because every minute is worth money. Also we will feel more comfortable when we play mah-jong in winter'. A few women said that they had borrowed a lot of money to buy a *loufang*, and wanted to make up the financial gap.

In any case, most elders seemed to enjoy the work very much. They were cutting, talking, making jokes, and socializing, particularly at lunch time. However, later in the afternoon, the work slowed. Everyone was tired and felt back pain. Nonetheless, when the time came for being paid, excitement was again evident. Pay was distributed in stages; first the landowner gave the money to the one or several people who were seen as responsible for having gathered the workers; then these 'agents' redistributed

the wages to the workers. While the 'agents' waited for the landowner, ordinary workers gathered up the rejected grapes.

Everyone eventually left with money and grapes. Grapes were shared with neighbours at home and sometimes used to make wine. The next day, some would continue to work while others would take a break; they had to inform the landowner of their further availability at the end of each day. On the following day, if there were no more grapes in the owner's field, they would go to other fields. Landlords communicated with each other, both directly and through neighbours and friends. The composition of work groups changed daily as some joined, others left, and groups merged or splintered.

Part-time jobs were not just opportunities to earn small, or substantial, amounts of money. It took work to get such work: there were always more potential labourers than there was work. Elders needed social networks to gain access to jobs, and they also had to make special efforts to rise early, travel, and make various arrangements concerning daily food preparation and eating. But the benefits of work were multiple: improved physical health; opportunities for sociability; immediate pleasures, happiness, and senses of satisfaction and usefulness; and the promise of future pleasure with friends in the winter.

Health Products

The strong awareness of healthcare among the elderly, and the availability of a stable income in the pension, seemed to open a new market for health product companies in the *bingtuan*. In order to improve their health condition, many elders turned to health products. Some products are controversial. For example, activities at the Huayuan Hotel are staged monthly or bi-monthly in all but the winter months by different health product companies. The products on sale include medicine, and also 'special cups', 'advanced blankets', 'advanced dispensers', and similar such products. The promotions are held in the basement of the Huayuan Hotel, which can accommodate about 400 people. It starts early, at six o'clock in the morning, and only elders are allowed to enter. Each promotion lasts several days; they begin with free give-aways, but often end with elders complaining that they have been cheated. Yet, they return to similar promotions.

Noticing this pattern, I was curious about what motivated the elders to return to the promotions that seemed to disappoint them. What are the sales strategies of these companies? Who goes, who does not? Who buys products, who does not? And why?

My attempts at participant-observation were frustrated on several occasions when I failed to gain access to the hotel. I succeeded in entering only once, with the help of an elderly man who lied to the doorman that I was his goddaughter. After taking just one photograph, however, I was approached by an angry young man who asked me to delete the picture and surrender the camera. Following my attempts to explain, he demanded that I either obey his orders or leave immediately, so I surrendered my camera.

The promotion began with a speech that lasted 20 minutes. It focused on the importance of keeping healthy and some tips for preventing disease. It sounded very reasonable and persuasive. During the speech, the man who had taken my camera and a young girl walked up and down either side of the stage, looking into the audience. As the speech ended, we were told that we would get our free gifts outside the door. Those who had paid a RMB 100 deposit the day before were asked to stay inside. Assuming that we would come back to our seats again, I followed the others to get the gift, a pair of socks. We were then told that the event was over for us, and we were not allowed to re-enter. More than half of the elders dispersed, and the others loitered nearby. I recovered my camera and waited on the other side of the road for the event to end. Half an hour later, the remaining elders emerged with a 'health blanket' which had cost them RMB 500.

Why had they bought these blankets? Well, they believed the seller's claims: firstly, that it had a function of magnetotherapy, automatically massaging the body and curing joint and back pain, and secondly that they were getting it for half the market price. Those who paid the RMB 100 deposit and did not buy the product did not get their money back. Instead they were offered a magnetization cup which they were told could help reduce blood pressure. Most elders were persuaded that the cup would be effective because the price marked on it was RMB 299. My landlady had taken the cup, but she told me not tell her daughter. The daughter was strongly opposed to her mother's purchase of any products at these promotions, and they had argued about it on several occasions.

The dynamics in my landlady's family were not unusual. Most children opposed their parents' attendance at this kind of activity, but elders attended nonetheless. The elderly defended their choice to attend, firstly, on the principle that they could get free gifts; secondly, that they could gain some knowledge regarding healthcare; and thirdly, that they could buy the high-tech products on offer at cheaper than market prices and without the need to travel to large cities. When asked whether the product worked as well as they were promised, answers were vague. Elders argued that if they did not buy and try, they would never know. Even though it was a risk, in the case of their health, it was worth investing early with a little money, rather

than having to spend more and suffer more in the future. In fact, their explanations were exactly the same as those I had heard from the seller. My observations suggested that another attraction for elders was the great respect they were shown by the sellers. The sellers spoke very politely to the elders, expressing concern about their health in a way which their children did not. Elders were easily touched by the sellers' words. They believed them to be good people, and this assessment gave them faith in the products.

Not all elders buy the products offered at the promotional events. The ones who did tended to be those who had no financial burden, such as retired *zhigong*, whose children were financially well-off. Widows and widowers with no children living nearby also felt free to buy whatever they wanted. It was those whose children lived nearby who hesitated to purchase because of the potential for conflict.

One promotional event led to particularly heated discussion among elders. As usual, this event offered lots of free gifts. The first day, a bronze medal of Chairman Mao was distributed. Elders were told that it had a collectable value and would be worth a lot of money in future. The second day, a small envelope containing RMB 0.99 was given out. It was said to be blessed by the Buddha and needed to be hung from a high position at home. My landlady placed hers over the doorbell. The third day promised a gift of RMB 1,000 for those who submitted RMB 500 on the day before. Some elders were so excited that they submitted the RMB 500; they were returned RMB 1,000 as promised. Others regretted hesitating and missing out on this good fortune. The offer of the fourth day was lost to me. But on the last day, all elders were allocated a red scarf which they were told was made of very expensive wool. And they finally learned the main focus of the week's event: water purifiers.

My informants reported that the speaker claimed that he had studied and worked in the United States for a long time and had invented many things. Having made a great deal of money from his patents, he had become a Buddhist, and now wanted to benefit others. Bringing one of his inventions – the water purifier – to elders was part of this effort. The salesman spoke of the importance of having healthy water, and demonstrated his product by purifying the dirty black water which had been used to wash a mop. All the elders seemed convinced, and many bought it without hesitation. During those four days, the salesman had talked much about his own experience, referring to all the elders as his 'godfathers' and 'godmothers'. He even encouraged them to give him a kiss or hug which would bring them good luck in the future. Elders who had been at the event described the scene vividly: crazy people, kissing and hugging the salesman.

Some of our neighbours did not go to the event on the final day. While it was going on, they laughed at those who did as having 'no brain' (*meinaozi*). They thought their neighbours had been fooled by a sales strategy, and that the salesman's identity and product were doubtful. As heated discussion in the residential area continued, some elders returned from the event with their new water purifiers. Lao Hua, who lives in the neighbouring building, was one of them. As he approached the door to his buildings, neighbours called him to come over so they could see the water purifier. Instead of praising it, the elders launched ironic jokes at Lao Hua observing, for instance, that now Lao Hua could save water very well by recycling dirty water, even his urine could be purified. Lao Hua left unhappily, but the discussion went on. Some of the neighbours had been cheated at similar promotional activities, and had determined to never go again. Like the children of many elders, they had come to believe that the salespeople were sophisticated swindlers who targeted illiterate or vulnerable people.

In discussion, elders often opined that the government should act to stop such activities to reduce the uncertainties faced by elders within modern society. It was not clear to me how these companies got access to the *tuan*, nor which administrative departments were responsible for them. My difficulty in attending the events and the sensitivity of the topic dissuaded me from seeking interviews from the salespeople or, indeed, from any organizers. No one seemed to know, but everyone – old and young – discussed the issue every time there was a similar event in the *tuan*. Some said that elders had raised the issue with the *tuan*, but they had been told that this was a market economic era, and that the Corps was open to any legal economic activities. These events were apparently as legal as any other sales activities, such as selling clothes or food at the bazaar. Moreover, elders were free to make their own decisions to attend, and no one forced them to buy.

In short, the health consciousness of *bingtuan* elders was so strong that it opened a market to the health product sellers. It is doubtful that these products delivered what they promised, but the sellers' strategies were successful enough to continue pulling money from some elders' pockets. Some elders laughed at those who were cheated, with comments such as: 'for little gift, lose big deficit' (*weile xiaopianyi, chi dakui*). Others complained: 'too many liars and too many traps, just for money and worthless vanity, which would never have been possible in Chairman Mao's time'. And some, even if they complained, continued to buy.

Why is Health Promotion so Important?

Health promotion among the elderly is a worldwide phenomenon, but there are some particular factors in the *bingtuan* which may account for the enthusiasm with which these activities are embraced, and for the extraordinary amount of time devoted to them. I never asked elders directly why this was so, but they constantly reminded me, directly or indirectly, of their motivations for keeping healthy. In particular, if I observed that it was good to take care of one's health, they would always take-up the theme and give me their reasons. Undoubtedly, the desire to avoid disease is the most important motivation. The elderly always said: 'Well, if we don't take good care of ourselves, who will suffer in the end? No one else. It's us!' However, there are four other points which were often repeated: money, family, fear, and peers.

Money

Perhaps as important as the desire to avoid disease, was the fear of spending money. One of my informants expressed a common view:

> You know, if we get sick, we have to go to hospital. But you don't know how 'black' (*hei*) the hospital is nowadays.[80] Even if they know that you do not have a big problem, they always check your whole body, from one machine to another. They just want to make more money, but they never consider whether our old body can bear it. In the end, they will give you lots of medicine, and spend lots of your money! You know we are illiterate, and we don't know [whether treatments will be helpful or not], so we just hand over our money obediently without complaint (*guai guai di*).

As mentioned above, most elders had to stay in hospital several times each year, and had to take medicine for chronic diseases every day. Although all retired *zhigong* have health insurance, this does not mean that the costs of all medicine will be reimbursed. Medicines are funded in two ways: public funds medicine and self-expense medicine. Sometimes, the elderly have to buy self-expense medicine on doctors' recommendations. For those who have small pensions, like *wuqigong*, this is a burden. Even those who do have money often feel reluctant to spend it on the hospital or pharmacy. Furthermore, hospital fees must be paid in advance, only being reimbursed later. When I first started my fieldwork, this was the issue most mentioned by elders, who regarded it as unfair and inhumane. The hospital refused

[80] The term 'black' refers to a lack of transparency in the correlation between systems of treatment and payment.

patients who could not pay in advance, and if one ran short of money in the middle of a hospital stay, the hospital ceased treatment. Many elders told me of unpleasant hospital experiences resulting from money issues.

It has been a long-debated topic in Chinese medical reform whether treatment or payment should come first. In recent years, some regions have introduced reforms requiring treatment to be administered before reimbursement is addressed. In the *bingtuan*, such a reform started just before I entered the field. Not all people, however, were aware of the new policy, and complaints were still frequent. One of my informants believed that his own experience must have played a role in initiating reform: he had needed a brain operation, but the hospital had refused to admit him due to his inability to pay in advance. Even though he had a health insurance card and begged them to accept reimbursement later, he was refused. Finally, his wife left him in the corridor and went to borrow money from friends. When she came back with the money, it was already midnight. Both of them were exhausted and hungry, and no hospital staff had come to ask him if he needed any help. After he was discharged following the operation, my informant has refused to leave immediately. He went instead to the reception desk and upbraided the doctors for their immoral and indifferent attitude; this, he told them, was the opposite of what was expected from a qualified doctor. 'So', he told me, 'I guess it played a role, you know. Last year when I went there again, the hospital had changed the policy. They accept patients first, then get reimbursement later'.

As one problem is solved for the elders, another arises. The health insurance card works only locally. If people are hospitalized elsewhere, even within the *bingtuan* system, the reimbursement process becomes complicated and time-consuming. One retired *zhigong* couple had immigrated from another *tuan* a few years previously. The husband had a serious pulmonary disease and had to rely on an oxygen machine for daily life, also needing to stay in hospital regularly each year. Each time, they had to send documentation to their previous unit and then wait for reimbursement. Hospital stays in Shihezi had cost them more than RMB 30,000 over the course of the year, but they had not received reimbursement for any of it; they had no money to pay for the hospital the next year. They had called their previous unit many times, but got no response. The couple was frustrated.

Why, they asked, was it not possible with modern technology to connect the health insurance system with any hospital by internet? Then, one's locally-issued health insurance card could be used throughout the whole country. At one point, the couple asked me to help them ask the local insurance department if there was any possibility of making such an

immediate connection between their health insurance and the local hospitals. The response from the health insurance department was not encouraging; there was 'still a long way to go', they answered, before achieving this goal. Since only two hospitals in Urumqi currently have links with the *bingtuan*, it is still very inconvenient for people to see a doctor outside their home region. This lack of transferability of insurance benefits has ripple effects. Some elders reflected that they were deterred from traveling, even to visit relatives, because they were afraid of becoming sick and having to stay in a distant hospital. To avoid the risks of spending money and the other hassles of securing medical care in distant places, they stayed in the *tuan*, and took care of their bodies as best they could.

'Money' figures often in the elderly's discussion of life quality, and it is often combined with their concern for health. Sometimes money and health are combined in negative assessments, as above. Sometimes, the combinations stress the more positive aspects of elderly life. The subject of pensions often draws out such positive reflections. For example, one informant told me, 'Look, how good life is now. When we lived in *diwozi* and pulled *palizi* (plows), we never thought that one day we would have a pension, that one day our life could be so good. So why not live one more day and enjoy more life? Anyway, we have the Communist Party who gives us money!'

This elder's comment suggests that elders may be motivated by the improvements in contemporary living conditions to live longer. As a generation who experienced hardship in the past, they often describe their current life as 'like a paradise' (*xiang tiantang*). Their pensions play a central role in this assessment. With the pension, they can buy medicine. But they can also buy anything else they want. Many extend the logical connections between the pension and their good health. If they stay healthy (and do not spend money on medicines), then they 'earn' more money. The elders have even created a saying: 'never mind [whether you] get more or less [pension], just be afraid of dying early' (*bupa nade shao, jiu pa zoude zao*). In other words, death ends one's 'career' and ability to make and amass money; with a smaller pension, one just earns more slowly. As we will see in subsequent chapters focused on family relations, the pension is not just the basis of a 'good life' for the elderly; it also helps them to secure support from their children. According to Zhang (2017), for middle-aged parents in both rural and urban contexts, financial independence is believed to be the best guarantee of future old-age support. For the *bingtuan* elderly, the combination of security and enjoyment attached to the financial independence that results from the pension motivates them to keep healthy and live longer.

Family

A strong sense of independence and obligation to family is one of the most important motivations for elders to stay healthy. Consistent with Zhang's (2017) findings, the dominant discourse regarding eldercare from *bingtuan* elderly themselves is 'not to become a burden' (*buyao chengwei fudan*). They often remarked that it was not easy for their children because the market economy is too competitive. They were afraid that if their children were absent from work, they would lose their jobs. Even if they became sick, therefore, they often did not inform their children. I met many elders in the hospital or in community clinics, who came alone for injections. When asked why they had not asked their children to accompany them, they always responded: 'I can move, why disturb them? Their lives are not easy'. Hu, whose case I present below, provided an example of this attitude.

The first time I met 69-year-old Hu was at hospital. Afterwards, I often saw her at the square, joining the gymnastic dancing. She and her husband were both retired *zhigong*. Hu used to work in a shop while her husband worked in a local bank, so they were economically comfortable and supported their children's higher education. They had three children, one son and one daughter working in Urumqi, and one daughter working in Australia. The couple sometimes lived in the *tuan*, and sometimes moved to Urumqi to take care of their grandchildren. Hu said that normally, if she did not feel well, she would go to the hospital accompanied only by her husband. She never told their children of her hospital stays, although she had a long-term heart condition, and the treatments were sometimes critical. Once she had to undergo heart bypass surgery at Urumqi. It was impossible to hide this from the two children who live there, but she exhorted them not to tell their sister in Australia, because she did not want her to worry too much and for her work to be affected. When the daughter in Australia found out, however, a few months later, the daughter was disturbed that she had not been told the truth. Crying over the phone, she told her mother that she would ask for leave from work and return home. Hu discouraged this idea, playing down her illness, but her daughter knew that heart bypass surgery was very dangerous, and insisted on visiting for a period. Though happy to see her daughter, Hu felt guilty about interrupting her daughter's work and tried to reimburse her flight. Her daughter refused to allow this, and made her promise never to hide anything about her health. Hu had the same view as most *bingtuan* elderly, that one should 'not be a burden to one's children'. Understanding the challenges faced by the younger generation, she tried her best to keep healthy and avoid disturbing them. She said that as long as they could move, she and her husband would live independently.

While the elderly were concerned about their children's situation, and sought to reduce their burden, some children felt that the elders were too independent. Children sometimes felt deprived of the opportunity to fulfil their obligations of filial piety. They reported that they worried more than they would have if they were allowed to help. Interestingly, 'worry' as well as the substitute forms of care on which their parents insisted might be seen equally as enforcing filial piety, albeit in unexpected forms. For example, Xiao Li, a doctor in the local hospital, was concerned by her 90-year-old father's independence. He refused to move to town and wanted to take care of himself in the *liandui*. Xiao Li and her sister often visited with food and clothes. But when he was sick, the father never let them know. Instead, he took a taxi to hospital where his *laojiu* identity meant he was entitled to full treatment.[81] Xiao Li and her sister were only informed after he had been in hospital. Xiao Li upbraided her father: what if something had gone wrong, she asked? – they would have lost the last chance to see him. Her father insisted that he did not want to disturb his children. People of his age, he maintained, will leave, sooner or later, to another world. He accepted this as natural, and he asked his children to think of it in the same way. He also often reminded his children that if he should become paralyzed or suffer from dementia, there was no need to keep him alive, because he did not want to be a burden. On the one hand, Xiao Li and her sister seemed to be freed from their obligations; but, their father's response also forced them to continue to check on him.

Not wanting to be a burden for one's children is a widely accepted norm, and Xiao Li's father is not the only person who spoke to his children in this way. During my visits to the hospital, many elders expressed similar feelings. Those who had been rescued from near death in the emergency room also told me how their children and spouse had never given up the hope of saving them. Such experiences of their family's devotion led them to realize that nothing was more important than their life and health. Having come so close to death, they said they cherished life and wanted to stay healthy, not just for themselves, but for their family. But they specifically cherished 'healthy life': some elders told me that they hoped to die of a heart attack because it was a fast and efficient way to die, and they would avoid becoming a burden to their children. In short, though Chinese culture emphasizes the obligation of children to elders, the elderly may maintain that they have a responsibility to stay healthy for their children. Therefore, they pay attention to self-care and seek to live independently as long as possible.

[81] As explained in the previous chapter, *laojiu* enjoy many preferential policies, including free healthcare.

Fear

Though they wish not to be a burden, the elderly fear the future. They hold tight to 'independence' to stave off what they fear. They are fearful that if they become bedridden, there will be no care available. They fear that their children may not be able or willing to take care of them. For elderly who have no (living) children, or no children living nearby, the problem of care is an acute source of worry. Even those who have willing children know that their children may not be able to care for them: they have the demands of jobs and childcare, but there are also the changing demographic and socio-economic realities to consider. Nor are there suitable alternatives to family care, such as an institutional care system. This probable lack of care is a strong incentive for the elderly to avoid becoming bedridden and to remain self-reliant as long as possible. I return to the themes of self-care and self-reliance in chapters 6 and 7.

Peers

Maintaining and building networks among peers has become both a motivation for and a consequence of health promotion activities. Most elders have no family company during the day, and turn to peers for companionship. They enjoy 'playing' together because it helps them to avoid loneliness. During play, however, they also exchange information (e.g. regarding healthcare or part-time jobs), express their own feelings (and vent negative emotions), discuss family issues, and broker exchanges of assistance (e.g. shopping or cooking). As they played, elders also forged important networks of social support with their peers. I was interested in exactly how they built these networks. What elements play the main role? With whom do they choose to play? Gender, common interests, and hobbies were important, but the most important factors binding *bingtuan* elders were the original units in which they had lived and the original hometowns from which they had migrated.

Most elders had moved to town only in recent years. Old neighbours with whom they had lived and worked in the same unit for about five decades were their first choice for playing. Particularly for those who had just moved to town, old neighbours who had moved earlier often played a role as guides, introducing places and activities in town. Sometimes, they visited each other at home, other times outside. Whenever and wherever they met, old neighbours always had much to tell each other: family issues, gossip about people from their unit, and past experiences were common topics. Among old neighbours, the closest relationships were with *laoxiang* because they had always played the main role in offering support. When they

moved to town, even neighbours who were not *l*ao*xiang* were considered among the most reliable source of social support because their relationships had been built up over years of living and working together.

Elders also built new relationships through daily contact. It was still considered easiest to start a new relationship with a *laoxiang*, so people from the same hometown would often club together. In our *xiaoqu* for example, most of the elderly residents who gathered in front of our building had originated in Sichuan. Those who gathered outside the building behind ours were originally from Henan. Henan elders from our building tended to gather with their own *laoxiang* at the rear of our building. Those from Gansu Province preferred to join the Sichuan group. Elders often seemed biased towards people from other provinces, but they never expressed animosities openly. Instead, such bias emerged in the form of humorous stereotypes – those from Henan might be called *dakucha* (big pants); those from Gansu were *yangyudanzi* (potatoes); those from Shanghai, *hanyazi* (landlubbers); and those from Hunan, *lazi* (chili). Even with stereotypes and the preference to remain with one's own, elders in *xiaoqu* had harmonious relationships with each other and felt a sense of 'we-ness' with others in the neighbourhood. They went shopping and walking together, and were enthusiastic about helping each other. During my stay, for example, the water and electricity were often temporarily cut. Advance notice was given on local television, but it nevertheless happened that some elders were out and unable to save water before it was cut, so neighbours saved water for each other. Sometimes, elders made sure their neighbours had been informed of the cuts by ringing up on the voice phone of the building's gate. Such interruptions to these essential services seemed to tie people more closely together.

Widows and widowers find that peer relationships are especially central to their daily lives. Wu nainai, for example, had two close friends who lived in the neighbouring building and came to offer her company every evening. One was her best friend Wang, who had been Wu nainai's subordinate in a work group. Wang was living with her son, and her relationship with her daughter-in-law was not warm. She preferred, therefore, to come to Wu nainai's place when her son and daughter-in-law returned from work. At Wu nainai's, the two women often just read together the journals and newspapers to which Wu nainai subscribed. The other woman, Zhang, was one of Wu nainai's *laoxiang*; she had also lived in the same unit as Wu nainai and Wang. Zhang was also a widow, but she lived alone. She came to watch television with Wu nainai. Wu nainai's friends in Shihezi sometimes called to ask her why she did not move to her son's house in Shihezi. She told me that she always replied that she had to take care of the Elderly Club, and moreover, that she had two good friends to accompany her every day.

She felt very satisfied with this independent life, and had no desire to go anywhere else. Normally, Wu nainai seemed to be closer to Wang, and they often went shopping or cooking together. However, one evening, their relationship was disturbed. Wu nainai's daughter-in-law came to visit, and they decided to play poker together with Wang and Zhang. Wang and Zhang argued throughout the game, and Wu nainai supported Zhang. In the end, Wang left angrily, declaring that Wu nainai was biased toward her *laoxiang*.

As it happened, I had been absent that evening. The next day, as she recounted the evening, Wu nainai told me with pride: 'You missed a good show last night. You didn't see how I educated these two old women (*lao taitai*). Both of them were tamed in the end'. Yet after this evening, Wang no longer came to visit Wu nainai. Every time I met her in the street, she said she was busy and had no time to talk. What could have kept her away, I wondered? Eventually I figured out that Wang was avoiding me because of my close relationship with Wu nainai. Equally, I learned that she did not want me to figure out that she had started a relationship with a man. But I did know that she had been dating someone, and that Wu nainai was strongly against it. Later, Zhang also found someone. She moved in with him, and stopped coming to Wu nainai's place in the evening. Wu nainai seemed depressed for a while. She told me that sometimes she felt very lonely, and wanted to cry in the evening. Still, she kept herself busy with work, spending most of her time in the square with other elders. Eventually she went inland to visit relatives and friends.

What is striking in this episode is that it reveals the intensity and fragility of peer relationships. On the one hand, the three women appeared to be inseparable. Yet, at least one (and probably both) of Wu nainai's friends were quick to trade-in the company of an old female neighbour for the more 'stable' domestic partnership they found with a man. In chapter 8, I return to the theme of the formation of new domestic partnerships. Here, I draw attention to the speed with which relationships and networks were re-shuffled. Despite her sadness, Wu nainai took an active course: she went out of her house to intensify social contacts in the square, and rekindled social connections with friends and relatives in other places. Still, Wu nainai was changed by her friends' departure; though active, she remained quieter and sadder without the company of Wang and Zhang. I suspect the change had something to do with the recognition that her friends valued her friendship less than a relationship with a man. The intensity of all social relationships though reflects the determination of the elderly to live each of their few remaining days with greater happiness.

Conclusion

The health promotion activities of *bingtuan* elderly show them to be in an ongoing process of active adjustment to their own physical deterioration and to the changing social environment. Like the elderly elsewhere, those in the *bingtuan*, 'like other human beings, are not passive actors in a system determined by outside influences but create the conditions of their own existence within the limits established by factors they cannot control…. [they] are constantly adapting to changing conditions, and constantly striving to shape events to serve their own goals' (Amoss 1991: 5). They do not know whether their children will be able to care for them, or if they will be willing to provide that care. They cannot be sure of the adequacy of the local medical and institutional care systems. They see that the possibilities of both family and institutional care are being reshaped by socio-economic transformations – over which they have little control. But they can, and do, undertake health promotion activities.

Health promotion activities are thus motivated by fears and the desire to control something of one's destiny. The state-sponsored pension system provides elders with money, and this they use as a key tool to 'create the conditions of their own existence'. 'Money' combines with 'health' in an intoxicating blend of excitement, quest for information, and fear. The elderly are afraid to 'spend-up' money on medicines and hospital stays. They value their pension money for the necessities it purchases, but also because it affords them to 'gamble' on the products touted at health promotion activities, and to play mah-jong through the winter months with their friends.

Social change creates uncertainties. In the *bingtuan*, it motivates elders to be active. As a result of their past experience of hardship and poverty, elders value their regular incomes and easy lives. They are determined to stay healthy and live 'one more day'. The intense engagement with health promotion activities among *bingtuan* elders is not a 'natural' consequence of ageing. It reveals how social policies can reshape individual behaviours.

During this complex interaction between social change and individual reaction, *bingtuan* elderly reshape their social values and strategies. First, they have changed their attitude towards filial piety. They no longer assign an 'absolute obligation' for children to support their elderly parents. Instead, they underscore their own responsibility to their children, and have formed a strong sense of independence and self-reliance. Second, they actively engage in health promotion activities, and try their best to maintain and create relationships with peers for social support and 'keeping healthy'. These newly developed ideas and lifestyles have relatively little association to traditional Chinese norms and practices concerning health and longevity,

despite promotional slogans to the contrary. These ideas make the experiences of 'being old' compatible with social change. As Zhang (2017) noted, the reinterpreted form of piety benefits both the elderly and their children: the elderly do not feel themselves to be abandoned or a burden, while the children can feel that it is acceptable to pursue their own career and life without strict obligations to their parents.

One might ask why the older generation has been willing to transform the obligations of filial piety in ways that 'free' their children to meet the challenges created by market reforms. One answer might focus on the elderly's own history of migration and their past experiences. Such an approach has already been suggested by Yan, who noted that the youth experience of grandparents and parents seemed to have had an impact on their current attitudes toward contemporary youth. He called this the 'long-term effects' of youth experience, explaining that 'each generation has undergone its own particular kind of "breakthrough" with respect to rural youth culture and in shaking the age-generation superiority' (Yan 2009: 127). From this perspective, the requirements of filial piety have been in transformation for quite some time: 'the next generation down the road has also enjoyed more youth autonomy and independence than its elder siblings. Consequently, when these youths became elder siblings and parents they demonstrated more tolerance toward the autonomy of the next generation' (Yan 2009: 127-28). For *bingtuan* elderly, this is particularly true. From a young age, their family ties were largely broken; they were mobilized to live away from their hometowns; and they were organized to work on collective farms under the leadership of the unit. Subsequently, the daily ideological education in the Corps and state-sponsored political campaigns further reduced the influence of kinship. The elderly in the *bingtuan* might have been more transformed into 'new socialist persons' than their counterparts who remained closer to home and natal families. At any rate, they are less committed to patrilineal ideas than their parents or their counterparts inland, and they have developed more independent characteristics. Facing changing social conditions, they show more understanding and tolerance toward the younger generation, and also actively change their own ideas and behaviours to adapt to the current situation.

To some extent, the self-care and 'peer-ageing strategies' adopted by *bingtuan* elderly are created by the state and appeals to the state. The Chinese government has long been seeking solutions to the challenge of its rapidly ageing population. Since the 1980s, ideas of 'healthy ageing' and 'active ageing' (in Chinese 'five old have')[82] have been widely accepted by

[82] After the first World Ageing Conference in 1982, China's National Committee on Ageing set its goal as '*lao you suo wei,lao you suo xue, lao you suo yang, lao you suo le, lao you suo*

both Chinese scholars and policy makers as a countermeasure to the effects of an ageing society. The central idea is to encourage the elderly to keep active and healthy, thereby reducing the burden for their care on both family members and the state. At the same time, this 'healthy ageing' framework highlights the obligation of the state to offer better welfare and equipment to meet the needs of the ageing population (Olson 1988; Li 2009; Du and Wang 2011; Miao 2012).

Such goals seem to have been achieved in the *bingtuan*. On the one hand, the elderly are entitled to modern welfare benefits, such as pension and health insurance. On the other hand, the centralization of the elderly to the town; the provision of 'elderly-friendly' space including the square, fitness equipment, and community clinic; and the support of the Elderly Club and elderly entertainments – all help the elderly to live healthy and independent lives. To a point, therefore, the party-state has played a central role in shaping individualism among the elderly, beyond the impact of the market economy. Moreover, *bingtuan* elderly prove that in response to a social environment, members of a given cohort can help to redefine patterns of behaviour, reshape social institutions, and alter attitudes and values (Foner 1984: 208).

At the beginning of my research, I was sceptical when the local official in charge of elderly affairs proudly told me that the *tuan* had reached the goal of 'five old have' (*wuge laoyou*). I was also highly doubtful when most elders responded to my questionnaire that they rarely felt lonely. My experience of widespread individualism among *bingtuan* elderly, however, and of their self-care and peer-ageing strategies, finally eliminated my doubts.

---

yi'. This means, 'the old are entitled to continue doing, to study, to be cared for, to enjoy themselves, and to receive medical care'.

Chapter 5
Urbanization, Housing, and Social Status

Bingtuan elderly have been drawn into the so-called storm of competitive urbanization of recent years, and their desire to move to town and to live in a *loufang* is much stronger than that of younger generations. Purchasing a *loufang* is expensive, and one wonders why they are in such high demand among the elderly whose incomes are fixed by pensions. How did *bingtuan* elderly afford a *loufang*? How did they mobilize kinship and other social support networks to achieve their housing goals? What were the key reasons that some elderly did not move to a *loufang*? In short, how has urbanization, in the specific area of housing, affected *bingtuan* people? In this chapter, I seek to answer these questions by telling the stories of people in both the *liandui* and the town, focusing on the most salient issues – housing and status. Processes of urbanization and change in housing practices were deeply influenced by state policy. The accompanying spatial changes have created social differentiation, particularly between people who live in *liandui* and those who move to town. Furthermore, among people within the town, there are perceived differences in status based on one's length of residence in a *loufang*, current house ownership, and other living arrangements.

Class and status have been the topics of much research. Marxists define social class by relations to the means of production, while Thorstein Veblen (2007 [1899]) focused on consumption, suggesting that status was acquired and demonstrated by having the tastes and financial capacity to engage in the 'conspicuous consumption' of luxury goods. Pierre Bourdieu (1984) also focused on consumption, showing how tastes in art, music, entertainment, food, furniture, or clothing mark social distinctions, and how a rise in class status requires not just more money, but the skills to spend it in appropriate ways. Consumption has also been important in analyses of class by Anthony Giddens (1973) and Daniel Miller (1998). Within China, new forms of socio-economic stratification have been a consequence of the Open Door economic reforms (Croll 2006a; Fleischer 2010: xvi; Zhang 2010). By developing domestic demand to fuel China's long-term growth, consumption

has been encouraged as a central aspect of Chinese life since the late 1990s (Croll 2006a; Fleischer 2010).

Many researchers have noted that social stratification often coincides with the use and allocation of space (Davis 1990; Lefebvre 1991). In Kunming, for example, Zhang analyzed how a new class was formed out of the middle class through the production of private housing and the consumption of new residential spaces (2010: 6). It is important to note that the term used for 'class' in recent scholarship is *jieceng*, and not the term *jieji* which was central to Maoist discourses on class and thus closely associated with the painful experiences of 'class struggle'. Zhang emphasized that the making of new middle classes was a process that extended beyond housing to incorporate also the cultivation of new lifestyles, mentalities, dispositions, and aspirations among the new inhabitants. The 'spatialization of class' (Zhang 2010: 14) in newly urbanized China reveals that class is, as historian E.P. Thompson long ago demonstrated, 'an ongoing process of "happening"' (Zhang and Ong 2008: 24; Zhang 2010: 7). Fleischer's research in suburban Beijing also concluded that 'lifestyle and location of residence have become markers of social class and status', and that sub-groups of urban residents 'have developed distinguishing values and behaviours' (Fleischer 2010: xii). Fleischer's work crossed the social gambit, as she interviewed affluent professionals, residents of old state-owned complexes, and migrant entrepreneurs. What she found to be more significant than the correlations of status and space was that citizens were gaining 'power in the negotiation of space' – something she regarded as 'a new phenomenon to China' (Fleischer 2010: xii).

What connections might we then see between social status and spatial changes among the *bingtuan* elders? I found no distinctively identifiable tastes, values, or lifestyles by which the elderly differentiate status among themselves. Nor did informants identify the presence of *jieceng* as something that one might belong to. If anything, elders felt that their pensions should make them equals, even if some had been bosses and others subordinates during their working lives. We cannot, therefore, speak of fully developed classes, each with a specific habitus (Fleischer 2010: 71). Nonetheless, elders did have a sense of differences in status which were likely to relate to wealth and consumption power in terms of housing and the consumer power of their children. As in other urban areas of China, 'income differentials, consumption power, [and] welfare, increasingly differentiate and distinguish the urban population', and – as elsewhere – these forms of distinction are translated 'into physical and spatial markers that underline and enforce present stratification processes' (Fleischer 2010: 111).

In the first section, I illustrate the impact of urbanization on the life of people in the *liandui*, and show their desire to move to a *loufang*. Though not always openly expressed, this desire seems to lurk within everyone. The second section discusses the reasons some are unable to purchase a *loufang*. The third section explores short-term strategies for living in a *loufang* by those who otherwise have been 'left behind' in the *liandui*. Finally, the fourth section illustrates the housing process in town and perceived changes of status.

Desire for a *Loufang*

On a bright morning in early September 2013, the elderly in our building and the neighbouring building came outside as usual. When my landlady's relative Lao Su arrived, one of the women asked her, 'Hey, how about the woman? Is she still living at your place?' Lao Su shook her head, and said 'Her son came to pick her up early this morning'. From the discussion that followed, I learned that the woman was one of Lao Su's old neighbours from the *liandui.* After falling out with her son, she had fled to Lao Su's home two nights previously. The old lady felt lonely because so many people had left the *liandui*. She had been pushing her son to buy her a flat in town, and her son complained that he could not afford it. Finally her daughter-in-law intervened, telling her that if she wanted to live in town, she could move herself. The daughter-in-law had thrown the old woman's bedding out of the house, and the old lady had sought the help of a younger man in the *liandui* to bring her to Lao Su's house.

The morning of the old lady's return was one of lively discussion among the elderly neighbours. Some felt the old lady was making unreasonable demands on her son, but others sympathized with her. They knew the inconvenience and loneliness of living in an increasingly depopulated *liandui*. Those who sympathized pointed out that the old lady was a *wuqigong*; that the rest of her children were in other regions of Xinjiang; and that all the other children were poor. This was the only son on whom she could rely. Lao Su herself considered that both the old lady and her son were at fault. When the son came to pick up his mother, she had urged both to consider the other's side. Discussion continued even after Lao Su had departed. Some of the elderly thought that Lao Su was also at fault; they thought she was 'merciless' towards the old woman and had called her son only because she did not wish to be inconvenienced.

The old woman's story is a product of a wider social dynamic. She is just one of many who want to live in a *loufang*. Community leaders say that elderly from the *liandui* frequently come to their office seeking help to rent a flat in town, complaining of the inconvenience and loneliness of the unit,

particularly in winter. During research in both *liandui* and town, I was given similar reasons for the desire to move. Convenience and a lively social life were emphasized as benefits of the town.

Plate 9. Old houses in the *liandui*.

The Inconveniences of *Liandui* Life

As mentioned earlier, the migration of many to town has had a negative impact on those left behind in the *liandui*. For the elderly, poor transport and the difficulties in reaching a doctor are sources of constant complaint. With fewer neighbours to help with transportation, the harsh conditions of *liandui* living have become even worse. Two examples show some of the dynamics.

On its return to the *liandui* one cold dark evening in December, the bus from town stopped right in front of me as I stood outside the station. An old man carrying two bags jumped off and started vomiting. Others followed him off the bus, asking 'Are you okay?' The man answered, 'No. I feel dizzy'. I recognized the old man as Lao Cui. I had previously interviewed him, and I too was concerned. Recovering slightly, he asked to no one in particular, 'How much must I suffer in a day?' Lao Cui had gone to the hospital in Shihezi for his own health concerns and to collect medicine for his wife. He complained that he had caught the earliest bus of the morning

while it was still dark, but had waited. The driver would not go to Tuanbu – from whence one had to catch another bus to Shihezi – until the bus was full, so they had gone from one *liandui* to another picking up passengers for two hours. Once in Shihezi he had to catch yet another bus to the hospital, and arrived there only late in the day. He then had to repeat the process on the way home, arriving only after a long slow journey in an overcrowded bus. At the bus stop, Lao Cui had only to complain of the initial early morning wait to make the other passengers smile in agreement that it was 'always like this', and that 'there was no solution'. Later, Lao Cui told me the full travel story, and even then he concluded: 'No solutions – few people are left now – everything is inconvenient!'

In fact, Lao Cui's complaint was relatively minor. Another elderly informant, Lao Ma, could not take the bus and struggled to find alternative and affordable transportation. In winter, Lao Ma suffered back pains so severe that she could not walk. She asked the *liandui*'s retired doctor, Musa, to give her an injection, but it did not help. Musa suggested that she should get an X-ray at Shihezi Hospital, but Lao Ma thought this was very difficult to arrange. She explained to me, 'See, the snow is so heavy, the weather is so cold, and there is no direct bus to Shihezi. How can I dash back and forth at my age? Look at my husband, how could he move my body to transfer from bus to bus?'[83] I suggested taking a taxi, but she shook her head and said, 'too expensive'. Moreover, she did not know how to get a taxi. 'We are both illiterate', she explained, 'we don't know where to find a taxi'. 'You know', she continued, 'all those people who have cars do not live here anymore. *Ahi*! If we lived in the town, life would not be so difficult'.

Lao Ma had further complaints that day, and it soon became clear that the problems of transportation and medical assistance were linked to a growing desire to move to town. Lao Ma's husband came from a very traditional Gansu family and had never cooked while she was fit. Now that her mobility was limited, he cooked only instant noodles. But Lao Ma was tired of the noodles. 'I feel sick of them', she told me. 'I have not had a proper meal since I lay down. If we were living in the town, at least we could go to a restaurant. See now, the only restaurant in *yingbu* closed when winter came'. She complained too that her husband did not know how to manage the stove, and his efforts to cook every morning made the whole room smoky. 'I think I will get tuberculosis before my back is better', she concluded.

Seeing a doctor is a major problem for elderly in the *liandui* when even minor health problems may require a major journey. The official doctor

[83] Her husband is in his 80s, a tall and thin man.

in this *liandui* was new, and like others, his work time was divided between two *liandui*, while he himself lived in town. The presence of a second, albeit retired, doctor in this village was a stroke of good fortune. Musa, whom Lao Ma consulted, was 56 and had been retired from his local practice for one year. He had a *loufang* in town, but spent most of his time in the *liandui.* People tried to build good relations with him by gifting vegetables and inviting him for meals – all to be sure of his willingness to help later. Even people in neighbouring *liandui* arranged car transportation to visit Musa; at a distance of only 5 kilometres, this strategy was far preferable to making longer journeys to town. Musa's preference for *liandui* living brought some comfort to the elderly who felt insecure about their access to medical assistance. But even the presence of two doctors cannot resolve all feelings of insecurity.

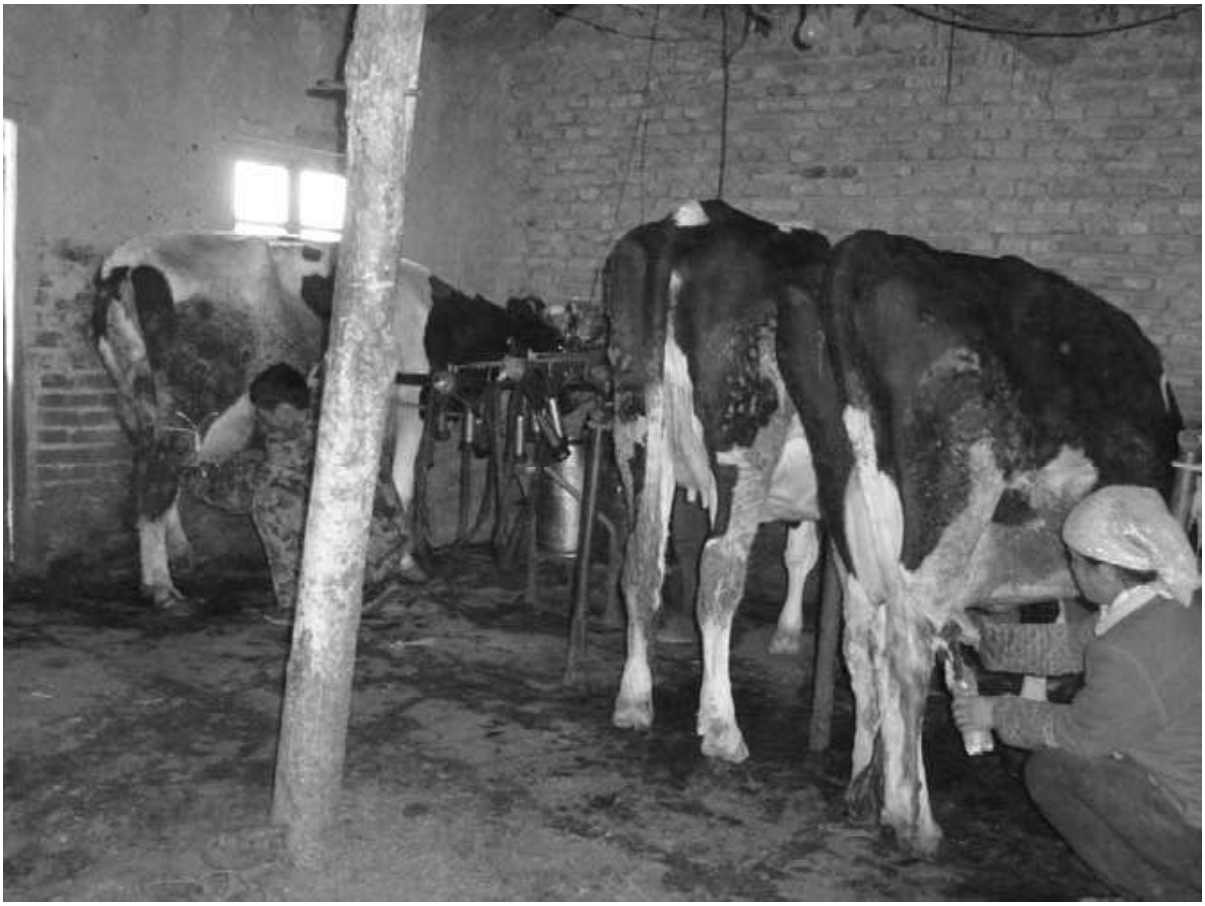


Plate 10. Milking shed in the *liandui*.

For example, people also worry intensely about their security. Many get up at night to check their cows, and some build the barn right next to their house to hear any attempted thefts. Although each *liandui* arranges a guard to protect people and property, uncertainty remains. Since many houses were locked and empty during winter, a robbery might not be noticed for a long

time. Crime was not common, but rumours brought anxiety to the elderly. Some people, like Deng, had dogs. The first time I visited her, I was frightened by the barking of a large, fierce dog tied outside her house. The 61-year-old explained, 'If we didn't keep such a ferocious dog, suppose someone stole our cows? You don't know how many cows we have lost here'.[84] She continued her explanation, 'Now it is more dangerous with fewer people'. Others noted that even a fierce dog does not guarantee peace of mind because – as 74-year-old Lao Min pointed out – a dog could be drugged.

Crimes that did occur were unsettling for all who knew about them, especially if the justice process was delayed. For example, Lao Zhu, my neighbour in town, told me how – after he had moved to town – hay was stolen from his barn in the *liandui*. The thief, a young local man, was caught and jailed for two months. When he was released, he sought revenge and attacked Lao Zhu when he was walking alone in the evening. The head injury he caused required Lao Zhu to be hospitalized. The young man threatened Lao Zhu with further harm if he went to the police again, but Lao Zhu had nevertheless reported the incident. The case was still under police investigation when I left the field, and it caused considerable disquiet among the elderly population.

Widows are particularly concerned about their personal security. Xu, a 73-year-old widow, talked of the vulnerabilities brought on her by the pension system. Like Deng above, Xu felt that migration to town had increased her insecurity in the *liandui*:

> With so few people left, everyone knows if you are a retired *zhigong*: they know everything about you. So every time I go to *yingbu* to get my pension, I withdraw a little and spend it. I dare not withdraw all of it. I just don't trust people nowadays. What won't people do for money? Particularly now, all those young single men left in *liandui* are jobless, do you think they don't need money? I don't think they are reliable, not to mention those new migrants.

While the pension brings much financial security, pensioners are concerned that it could be stolen from them. Indeed, thefts were a reality, and stories circulated of pensions stolen even by sons and grandsons. The better-paid *zhigong* feel especially vulnerable. It is not hard to see how many elderly would begin to feel much safer living among other elderly in the more secure and better protected buildings in town.

---

[84] The cows are stolen by thieves who walk them out of the village. In winter, the cow's tracks disappear on the icy main road, and then there is no way to pursue them.

Plate 11. Shop in the *liandui*.

The material conditions of life in the *liandui* are particularly hard for the elderly as their bodies become weaker, more fragile, and less resilient to cold and to manual labour. Moreover, the material conditions work against sociality in the winter. As in most rural areas of China, houses in the *liandui* do not have central heating. They are heated by the wood or coal cooking stove which is used only twice daily. There is no heating in the administrative offices at all. Workers squeeze into one office during the colder months, but most stop coming to work altogether after the fall harvest. Water had become a problem with the high levels of out-migration because the communal pipes froze as a result of under-use. Those who remained had to melt snow for water. As with the office workers, people might join together for some tasks, but they found it unpleasant to do so too often. Li, a 72-year-old former *wuqiqong*, told me how she attempted to stretch her smaller pension by saving coal. To stay warm in the hours between cooking she drank hot water (kept in a thermos bottle), and visited neighbours' warmer houses. But this strategy was limited: there were increasingly fewer neighbours to visit, and it was not good, she admitted, to use-up others' coal.

Plate 12. Elders in the *liandui* struggle with heavy snow in winter.

The elderly complained too of the monotonous and lonely life in the countryside. Expressions of loneliness are always accompanied by comparisons with life in the past, and reinforced by references to the practical difficulties of life in the *liandui*. For example, Lao Liu, a 75-year-old widowed *zhigong*, claimed that even the dogs in the countryside are now lonely: 'Life used to be very lively here. You know, ours was a big unit, there were always lots of events: performances, movies, and we always felt happy even if life was hard. Now, it is just deathly quiet. See, even the dogs feel excited when they see a man'. Another widowed *zhigong,* Lao Zheng, aged 77, expressed a similar sentiment:

> I've been living here for half a century. Since I arrived in Xinjiang, I have been in this unit. This is my second home, and even closer than my own hometown. I had so many *laoxiang*, and so many good friends here. We all worked together and always visited each other in our free time. But now, they have all left. I feel like all my relatives have left me. What else can I do? Every day I went to the shop. Now I try to go less, because it reminds me of the past. There were several tables of people playing poker, it was crowded and so warm. Look at it now, how many people were there – did you see?

Plate 13. Elderly 'left behind' in the *liandui*.

Women too, commented on the pleasures of sociability in the past and the loneliness of the present. Lao Zhang, a 76-year-old former *wuqigong* contrasted the beauty of the countryside with its loneliness:

> In the afternoon, my husband and I go for a walk. I like the fresh air. It is so clean, especially on sunny days, you know, with white shining snow, it is beautiful. But sometimes, when I walk through all those houses, I feel something is wrong. Because you see, they are all locked. Such new houses are all locked. I used to have lots of *laoxiang* here, and we always visited each other. *Ahi*, now, they all have left.

In the past, *liandui* were not just places for production. They were also social spaces; social life took place in the *liandui*, social networks were built, and social support was found. With many neighbours moving to town, the 'door to door' connection is broken, and with it, people's social support networks. The physical hardships of life in the countryside are real, as are the practical difficulties, inconveniences, and even lack of certain goods (like fresh foods in the winter or a range of choice in the shops). People complain about all of these, and they connect their severity to the recent out-migration. What they really seem to notice, though, are the changed social relationships occa-

sioned by so much migration and the re-arrangement of social spaces. In particular, the elderly keenly miss the emotional support associated with daily interaction among old neighbours through visits, chatting, and various forms of entertainment. The increasing practical hardships and loss of emotional support as a result of rural depopulation are underlain by another factor which the elderly feel most reluctant to speak about – even if it is perhaps the most fundamental effect of urbanization among *bingtuan* people – the differentiation of social status. The differentiation in physical space has created new social identities and new forms of social status in the *bingtuan*, leading to the feeling that one group is inferior to another.

Feeling Uncomfortable: Status Differentiation in the *Liandui*

On a sunny day in late October 2012, three elderly men were sitting in front of the *liandui* administrative office, which was locked, as usual. All had dark skin and from their dress, appeared poor and dirty. They seemed to be discussing inflation, saying 'the boat rises with water' (*shuizhang chuangao*) and 'it rose again'. I went to say hello, and recognizing one of them as a Hui called Lao Mu, I started the conversation by asking how he had celebrated Eid the day before. To my surprise, he said that he did not celebrate because he had gone to Shihezi to ask for money from his son to buy a flat in town. Considering his wife's worsening health condition, he hoped it would be more convenient for seeing a doctor there, and wanted to help her accomplish her dream of living in a *loufang*. Unfortunately, his son had no money, and anticipated that it would be difficult to borrow. Lao Mu and his wife were both retired *zhigong*, but they were not well-off because almost all of their money was spent on the wife's healthcare. Lao Mu was very frustrated.

When we were talking, a well-dressed elderly man walked slowly towards us. He appeared happy, and greeted us, smiling. The group responded: 'You came back?' It seemed to me that there was some reluctance in their voices, and no one smiled back at the newcomer. The man kept smiling and replied: 'Yes, I came to stay for a few days, see my old house, and organize something. My son will come to pick me up this afternoon'. The other men just replied 'oh'. Then nothing. I was a little confused regarding their cold attitude to the man. After a few seconds of silence, he looked at me and asked: 'Who is this girl? I've never seen her before'. I explained who I was and what I was doing there. Then he responded: 'If you do research on the elderly, what are you doing here? Why not go to Shihezi, there are thousands of elderly there. Just go to the square, you will find that it is very lively'. As he continued to describe the rich and

active life of the elderly in Shihezi, the three other men stood up, said 'we are leaving' (*huiqu lou*), and left.

After they left, I discovered that the man I was speaking with had moved from the *liandui* to Shihezi. He lived in a *loufang* bought by his son. When I asked about the differences between the *liandui* and city, he said:

> Of course, Shihezi is awesome. But in front of people here, you have to lie. Otherwise, they would feel unhappy. Did you not notice just now? I just said a few words about Shihezi and they were all unhappy. You do not know, young girl (*yatou*), it is very sensitive, so you need to be careful. Because some people could not afford a *loufang*, they feel unbalanced.

After his explanation, I realized why the three men had seemed discomfited, particularly because Lao Mu had just been telling us about his failure to find money for a *loufang*. The description of life in the city only induced bad feelings for those who desired it but could not have it.

During the following months of my stay, I observed that there were tensions between those who had moved to the city and those 'left behind'. Those who had moved to Tuanbu or Shihezi were not welcomed when they returned to visit. In the eyes of people in the *liandui*, 'those people always presented themselves as having become city people', and those who were 'left behind' felt uncomfortable around their former neighbours. Lao Mu later commented on the man from Shihezi:

> How long has he been there? Look at him, as if he grew up in the city since he was born. Why so high-profile? Just two, three years ago he was raising pigs, his dress was so dirty and tattered. Look at him now, on the other side. Nowadays people are very snobbish (*shili*). If you are poor, they look down on you, as if you are lower than them (*bi tamen di yideng*).

I asked, 'Do you mean those who moved to a *loufang* feel they have higher status than those living here?' Lao Mu replied, 'Of course. Otherwise, why do people all want to move to a *loufang*? If we all had money, we would all move to a *loufang*'.

Lao Mu's words demonstrate how urbanization creates status differences between old neighbours, which in turn stimulate stronger desires to move to a *loufang*. Many elderly in the *liandui* described themselves as feeling 'uncomfortable' when old neighbours visited and talked delightedly about life in town. Such encounters could be hard to avoid, but the self-esteem of the rural dwellers was adversely affected by them. During my research in the *liandui*, there were several funerals and one large festival on the occasion of Eid when the village became crowded with returning city dwellers. The returnees' status was emphasized by their smart dress and talk

of city life. On such occasions those left in the *liandui* had nothing to say, except 'oh' or 'really?'. Then they would add, 'I need to accumulate some more money, then I will be there soon'. It was obvious from their faces that those from town were proud of their new status, and that the rural dwellers were low-spirited. After each such an event, the *liandui* returned to a deathly quiet, and my landlady would complain to her husband that his son did not offer them a *loufang*. Sometimes the couple argued (see chapter 8).

Sometimes resentment at status differences is openly expressed. Once, after a funeral, a female returnee complained of the cold in the room where we were waiting for food. A woman still resident in the *liandui* asked her: 'Well, how did you survive here before? You don't remember it now?' The returnee replied: 'Yes, I also wonder how I survived. Now I cannot stay even one night here. Last time I came to my brother's, I could not sleep the whole night. It was just freezing'. The *liandui* woman rejoined sarcastically: 'Well, living in a *loufang* could change one's body then? First time I heard that! Let's see if my body will change after I move to a *loufang* in the future'.

In interviews, some *liandui* residents tried to re-focus on the positive aspects of rural life. The 75-year-old former *zhigong* Lao Liu offered a conciliatory perspective. 'Actually', he said, 'those elderly all went to take care of children, otherwise, they did not want to go. But you must go because when those young people come back to work here, no one takes care of their children, so these elderly were almost being forced to go. Compared to them, my life is more free (*ziyou*) here'. Many, however, expressed a strong desire to leave such a 'devil place' (*gui difang*) as soon as possible. No one could deny how disturbing it was to be 'left behind'. A 77-year-old widowed and retired *zhigong*, Lao Zheng, expressed it thusly:

> Sometimes thinking about all these changes, it's just unbelievable (*buke siyi*). It's just hard for me to understand how this happened. See, we used to be all the same: arrived here almost the same time, all did the same work, and lived the same life. Suddenly, we are different! Everything has changed! It's just too fast. So it's hard to say whether social development is good or bad.

Like Lao Zheng, most people in the *liandui* have difficulties coping with rapid social change. Not only did urbanization affect living arrangements both in the town and the rural area, but it revealed and exaggerated existing status differences and created new ones. As Zhang (2010: 120) put it, 'through highly visible spatial demarcation, [urbanization] externalizes and foregrounds previously invisible or less pronounced socio-economic differences'. Among the middle class of Kunming studied by Zhang, the spatial exclusion and security systems of housing compounds reinforce and exacerbate the inequality and tension between urban social groups (2010:

13), but in a rural area distinction is created by whether one could or could not move to a *loufang* in town. As within urban areas, the perceived difference in status between those in the *liandui* and those in town, 'derived mainly from … inability to acquire a place that demands consuming power beyond … reach, a place that so tangibly demarcates socioeconomic differences through concrete spatial forms' (Zhang 2008: 34). This sense of exclusion is reinforced by occasional encounters between the social groups, and by nostalgic feelings among those in the *liandui* as they compare past and present. Therefore, as Zhang points out, 'It is in this sense that residential space does not merely encode socio-economic differences but plays an active role in the making of class and social performance' (Zhang 2008: 39). Lao Zheng's question was also mine: how did such large differences come about? The elderly were supposed to have similar situations due to the pension system. How had some people acquired *loufang*, while others lacked the necessary resources and stayed in the *liandui*?

Constrained Desires: Poor Elderly, Poor Children

As one of the elderly in the *liandui* said, 'If *loufang* were free, everyone would move'. There were two common factors constraining a move to town: one was the collective wealth of the parents and their children; the other was the relative priority the family placed on housing the elderly or their children. If both the elderly and their children were economically poor, as often in the case of families headed by *wuqigong* widows, a *loufang* was usually out of reach. When both parents and children were poor, the children also tended to live in the *liandui*. A few had bought *loufang*, but in those cases, inter-generational relations were bad, and the elderly felt that they could not reside with their children. In other cases, where the family was relatively well-off, the elderly had prioritized buying a house in town for their son. In other words, the elderly's ability to move to town was constrained not only by their own pensions, but by the whole family's financial situation and by the quality of parent-child relationships. The gender of the elderly's children also mattered somewhat: those with daughters seemed more likely to move to town; and others noted that 'those who have single sons' cannot get housing in town.

The distinct feature of the *wuqigong* widows who still live in the *liandui* is their lower pension. Compared to other elderly women, the *wuqigong* were more likely to have been married to *laojiu*, who had long since died; and they were likely to have had more children. Before they received a subsidy in recent years, therefore, they had already been in a disadvantaged situation. Moreover, all the responsibility both inside and

outside the house fell on their shoulders and few of their children had stable jobs. Even when their children had managed to buy a *loufang*, some widows chose to stay in the *liandui*, either due to bad in-law relationships, or because they valued a free life more than 'looking at the face of their children'.[85] Such relationships may have been more difficult for *wuqigong* than more affluent groups because, as some stated, their small pension could make them a burden on their children. I will exemplify this through the case of Lao He.

Lao He, 76, came from Sichuan Province in 1956. At the time of our interview, she had been widowed for 21 years. She has three sons and three daughters. The youngest daughter is in Shihezi, the rest are in the *tuan*, and all engage in farming. Her oldest son (aged 54) has a *loufang* in town, but her relationship with her daughter-in-law is not good. 'My oldest son would let me live with them, but I don't want to look at the face of his wife. If you do not have money, others [i.e. daughters-in-law] do not like you. Also, they don't have children I could care for[86], so why should I go there? I'd rather stay here, and enjoy my freedom', said Lao He.

Her oldest daughter (52), the second son (47), and the second daughter (50) all live in other *liandui* and sometimes visit her. But as Lao He commented: 'All those who have daughters have moved to a *loufang*, but those who have sons are still here'. Lao He's youngest son (aged 45) has divorced without children; he lives in the same *liandui* as Lao He and does temporary work. The youngest daughter (aged 43) was busy with her own family, particularly taking care of her son who is in high school, and she visited Lao He only a few times each year. Lao He had lived with her youngest daughter in town for one month, but because she found no acquaintances there, was scared of using the gas stove, and felt helpless, she came back to the unit. Lao He's house was old and dilapidated because she had not been able to re-build while the Welfare Housing Policy was in vigour, so neighbours offered her their house for the low price of RMB 6,000, and they then moved to town.[87] Poor health meant that she spent half her pension on medicine, but she had social support because other widows came to help her when she was sick. Like most elderly, she feels it inconvenient and lonely living in the unit, but she finds ways to socialize. She is a Christian, so she gathers twice a week with other Christians, and this makes her feel better. She has learned from Christianity that she should

[85] 看人家脸色。This phrase carries connotations of restrictions on freedom and having to please their children.

[86] Her oldest grandson is at university in Urumqi, and her granddaughter works in Shihezi.

[87] Selling a house was a common way for people in the *liandui* to gather money to buy a *loufang* in town.

accept and appreciate life as it is, because this is the will of God. Still, she expressed the same wish as other *wuqigong*: that her pension would be raised so that she could rent a flat in Tuanbu.

Lao He, like other *wuqigong*, cannot purchase a *loufang* with her small pension, which just covers daily life expenses. It is not just the pension system which puts *wuqigong* in a lower category, however, as their children's financial condition and living situation also matters. The inability to purchase housing in town is not restricted to *wuqigong*; some retired *zhigong* face similar problems. All *zhigong* are entitled to similar retirement benefits, but this does not mean that they all have equal opportunities to move to a *loufang*.

'Those whose children have capability all move to *loufang*, but my children are all disappointing', started Lao Cui. Lao Cui, 75, is a retired *zhigong*, originally from Hunan. His wife is a *wuqigong*, originally from Hubei. They have four sons and one married daughter. The daughter is a *zhigong* in the neighbouring *liandui*; she often visits and helps with housework. One son is married and works in Manasi, the other three live in the *liandui* and are single, though one was likely to marry soon. Two had given up *zhigong* status to seek work outside the Corps, but they returned after a few years, 'without money, and without a girlfriend'. Unable to regain *zhigong* status, one acquired a tractor and works on the cotton and tomato harvests, while the other raises cattle, and does temporary work in the *liandui*. Lao Cui and his wife help with the cows when he is busy. The youngest son worked in a mine for a few years, then helped his father on the farm for a couple of years, took part-time jobs, and eventually began to raise sheep and cattle.

For Lao Cui, life has never been easy. Before retiring, he was RMB 70,000 in debt due to poor harvests. He recalls that during that period, income from the land just covered living expenses. Some of his problems were caused by floods, hail, and drought, but he thought the major factor that forced him into debt was the *bingtuan* management.

State policy prescribes that all debt must be settled before retirement. Lao Cui had postponed his retirement for two years while he borrowed money and received help from his sons to pay his official debts. He settled most of his debt in 2000 and paid the rest from his pension card.[88] In 2006, the *xiaokangfang* policy came to the *bingtuan*. Even though he had not paid his debts in full, Lao Cui invested the money that he did have to build two houses – one for himself and his wife, and one for his youngest son. By 2010, Lao Cui was set to pay-off the last of his debts. Just then, the

[88] This is very common for *bingtuan* elderly.

urbanization policy was introduced, encouraging people to move to *loufang* in town. Lao Cui had no way to take advantage of the policy. All of his sons were poor and could not help him much with money. Moreover, three were still single and Lao Cui was likely to incur more debts (for brideprices, wedding feasts, and new housing) if they married. Therefore, Lao Cui remained in the *liandui* while his neighbours moved to town.

Lao Cui, his wife, and youngest son lived together, sharing the two new houses. One son lived in Lao Cui's old house; the other bought a house where he lived with his girlfriend, a recently arrived migrant. The youngest son had also found a girlfriend from Manasi, and her parents had asked for a brideprice of RMB 40,000. This was more than Lao Cui could afford, so they were bargaining with the girl's parents. Believing it was his duty to help his sons marry and buy *loufang*, Lao Cui saw no chance to buy a *loufang* for himself – 'unless the state introduces a new policy', as he hoped. When I asked about whether he would help his daughter to move to town, Lao Cui replied, 'Let her husband find a solution'.

Plate 14. *Xiaokangfang*.

Lao Cui's case shows that many elderly are constrained from moving to town by both their own poverty and that of their children. As discussed in

chapter 3, during the 1980s and 1990s, the *bingtuan* farmers faced extreme weather events, the transition from a planned economy to Contract Responsibility, and corruption within the bureaucracy. This combination of factors led many into high levels of debt. At the same time, the expansion of the market economy in Xinjiang and other parts of China tempted many of the younger generation to give up their land and *zhigong* status, either to start their own business or to seek employment in urban areas – often those from which their families had originally migrated. Some of these migrants secured stable employment, but most found themselves trapped in insecure and low-paid work. Unable to establish themselves in the cities, many returned when agriculture in the *bingtuan* improved. They found themselves unable to recover their land or *zhigong* status, and turned to animal or temporary agricultural work. As a result, this group of the *bingtuan*'s second generation was not better-off financially than new migrants to the area, and they could be more disadvantaged in looking for work because they were older.

The other significant factor preventing Lao Cui's *loufang* acquisition was that he, like many, had committed the resources he did have to build new houses under the *xiaokangfang* policy. Until urbanization was introduced, those who had built under the *xiaokangfang* policy had been content. Once urbanization began and others moved to town, however, they were disturbed by both their increasing isolation and loneliness, and a loss of social status.

What is interesting in both of the cases presented above is that the elderly's financial decisions, options, and resources depend heavily on the social statuses of their children. It matters whether they have sons or daughters; whether the children are married, single, or in a state of concubinage; what sorts of work the children have; and where they live. Each family weighs the combined factors differently, but all expect to receive some forms of help from their children and to provide other forms of help.

The 'single sons' issue also weighs on many of the elderly. Zhang (2007: 685) pointed out that 'in rural China marriage continues to be an area where inter-generational obligations are defined and the relative values of sons and daughters are determined'. She noted that the continuing custom of patrilocal marriage reaffirms the preeminence of sons, although women's position has improved. In the *bingtuan*, although patrilocal residence is gradually shifting to neolocal residence due to migration, the idea that parents are responsible for 'taking a wife' (*qu laopo*) for a son remains prevalent. This includes both material and immaterial meanings. Firstly, *bingtuan* elderly believe they are obliged to have their sons married. This

idea has its roots in the patrilineal tradition that the son is responsible for the continuity of the family line. Many elderly said that if their sons did not marry, they would feel they owed a debt and had not finished their life's work. Furthermore, it is seen as shameful to have children unmarried, so parents often push their children to marry and provide the resources for them to do so. In the case of sons, this means not only paying the brideprice but – more importantly – offering a house. It is securing a house for the new couple which constitutes the material meaning of 'taking a wife' for a son. Marrying-off sons produced a substantial mental burden (*xinli fudan*) for parents, as well as a financial one.

Like Lao Cui's sons, many young men who migrated to cities for work found that they lacked the wealth and social capital to marry in the city. On their return, they found few women still available because *liandui* girls 'married-up' into the towns; even men with lower earnings in town were considered superior mates to men in the *liandui*. Moreover, competition for women everywhere allowed girls to demand a *loufang* as a condition of marriage.[89] Parents who wanted to secure a *loufang* for their sons could find it impossible to afford one for themselves. It is this situation to which *liandui* people refer when they say, 'All those who have daughters have moved to *loufang*, but those who have sons are still here'. The perception is that those who have daughters can think of their own comforts, while those with unmarried sons must prioritize their responsibility to marry them.

The obligation to invest in a son's marriage above all else impacts even the well-off. Deng and her husband, for example are both retired *zhigong*. They have a beautiful house and a large courtyard with a barn, but still long for a *loufang*. Deng frequently said that 'even those who are less well-off have moved to town, but we still have to be here'. Deng had two sons: the eldest, aged 34, was still single; he claimed that no girl would marry without a house, and that he could not afford one. Deng therefore devoted herself to raising cattle and picking cotton in hopes of buying a house for her son. Like Lao Cui, Deng and her husband had invested most of their money in a new house prior to urbanization, so she saw no possibility of moving to a *loufang* in the near future. Deng had been proud that both of her sons worked outside the Corps, and had seen herself as close to the top of the social hierarchy prior to urbanization. She found it hard to accept the declining status associated with being 'left behind'. This status anxiety was demonstrated when a Hui villager, who came to buy sheepskins, said: 'I feel

[89] Women who have migrated into the region have less bargaining power – they and their parents rarely demand a brideprice; their parents and relatives rarely attend their wedding; and, as noted in the case of Lao Cui's son, cohabitation without legal marriage is a possibility.

you Han people are very sympathetic (*kelian*). You always encourage your children to leave, in the end, growing old alone. I don't understand for what? We in the minority, no matter what happens, at least one son will be around. I feel so sorry for the elderly here, look at them'. Deng responded sharply to the perceived taunt, asking the villager, 'Why do you not want your son to have a better life than farming?' She continued her counter-attack, humiliating the Hui man by pointing out that as *zhigong* in the *bingtuan* they had many financial benefits that Difang villagers (like himself) lacked.[90]

Many of Deng's generation had encouraged their children to leave the Corps. They had hoped that migrant labour in China's cities would bring economic benefits as well as status to the family in Xinjiang. These hopes were only fulfilled for a few. Those whose sons did not establish themselves and bring stability to their parents remain doubly burdened as they seek to marry their sons and secure their own desires for status.

Moving to a *Loufang*

Most of the elderly who have moved into a *loufang* express enthusiasm for their new living arrangements. They enjoy the convenience and liveliness of life and express a strong appreciation for the state. For them, a *loufang* has many advantages over the *pingfang* (one-storey house) of the *liandui*. A *loufang* has heating; it is clean; and it is conveniently located to amenities including the hospital and shops. The elderly no longer have to struggle with stoves, wind and dust, or long bus journeys. There is no need to clean snow from path or roof – a difficult task for elders. There is more fun in town. Most importantly, it is an important symbol of identity and status. Those who move to a *loufang* are assumed to have *benshi* (ability) or to have children with *benshi*. When asked whether they felt their status was raised by living in a *loufang*, *bingtuan* elderly always answered: 'Of course, if you have not moved to a *loufang*, people look down you'.

Although all were happy to be in this high-status group, those who moved to *loufang* expressed their excitement and superiority in different ways. Some were careful to be modest. For example, Qi moved to a *loufang* in 1999 when most people were still in *pingfang*. He told me that he had felt so happy that he had even smiled in his dreams. But when people asked him how life was in a *loufang*, he reported that he had replied modestly: 'It's okay, it's just clean'.

---

[90] As mentioned in chapter 3, in regional villages, each farmer has only 8 *mu* of land compared to 35 for the *bingtuan zhigong*. Moreover, villagers have no health insurance and must pay their own social insurance for at least 15 years to receive a state pension.

Other early migrants reported initial uncertainty over their status. For example, Zhan moved into a *loufang* in 2001. He had never believed that such a move would be possible because he thought only 'city people' (*chengli ren*) could live in *loufang*. He moved into a building with 143 other elderly who had always lived in Tuanbu; among them were even retired leaders. For the first week, he told me, he questioned if it were dream or reality. He was not sure whether he was in his own house, or not. By the time we talked, Zhan considered that his status had been raised by his new neighbours, and that his old neighbours were jealous of him.

For those who moved later, their desire to live in a *loufang* had been tremendous. Seeing more and more people moving, they had been afraid of being left behind. One informant told me that from the moment they registered to buy a *loufang*, her husband kept muttering: 'Please let's move into the *loufang* as soon as we get the key. No need to decorate! I would be content even if I sleep for only one night in a *loufang* before I die!' His family members did decorate, using the pretence that they had not yet received the key. He had pressed them to get the key every day, claiming that he was dying soon. When they finally moved in, he was so excited he walked from one room to another, touched this and that, looking through each window, 'as if' – said his wife – 'it were not real!'

Though all were excited to move to town, actual moves differed according to the specific socio-economic conditions and government housing policies at the moment of the move; an individual's status in regard to former employment and income; and family and social networks.

For example, after I moved to town, I noticed a few families moved either by renting a flat or by buying a second-hand property. The most common solution, however, is that once a son or daughter is established in a *loufang*, the elderly visit them during the winter and return to the unit in the spring.

During my stay in the *liandui*, the numbers of elderly fell every day as they moved to their children's houses for winter. No matter how strongly they desired to live permanently in a *loufang*, and no matter how much they complained about life in the *liandui*, those leaving never admitted that they were going to spend the winter. Instead, they always told me: 'my child needs help taking care of grandchildren'. I questioned why they were needed only in the winter. One might expect that the elderly would be needed during harvest time, but not later. As I pressed, I was given different reasons, and my informants eventually admitted that they preferred the reliable and warmer heating of the *loufang*. Still, I pressed. When I jokingly asked Lao Liu, 'how did you survive before in winter? Is it getting much colder now?', he admitted other reasons: it was boring and lonely in winter in the *liandui*,

and more importantly, he felt pressure seeing the other elders leave one after another. He did not like the feeling of being left behind. Interviews revealed that this 'short-term migration' had started only recently, suggesting that Lao Liu was not alone in feeling the pressure of being 'left behind' as urbanization intensifies.

In my view, the elderly preferred to claim that their temporary move was needed by their children to care for grandchildren so as not to admit their place in the emerging social hierarchy of urban and rural elderly. They preferred not to show that they wanted to spend winter in town because to do so would have acknowledged their lower status vis-à-vis elderly who live permanently in town. It might also have created social distance from their peers who could not leave the *liandui* even for a short period, but no one commented on this possibility. Other strategies were invoked too, in the bid to reclaim status. For example, some elderly saw their pension as providing necessary help to their children, and thus legitimating their stay. After Lao Liu's wife left to spend winter with their son, he told me:

> In the past we felt uneasy staying at my son's in the city even for a couple of days, because we were poor *dalaocu* [rural people without education]. But see now, my wife went to my son's with money in her pocket. She does not just help them to take care of our grandchildren. She also brings her own money. Although it is not much, at least it is money. So what else could my daughter-in-law say? Of course, she's happy, and my wife can spend the whole winter without worry.

Though pensions might help legitimate a stay in the city, many elderly were still uneasy about their status in their children's house.

In multiple ways, short-term migration brings to the fore the discomfort felt with the possibility of being 'left behind'. This possibility underlies all social interaction between town and country dwellers. Accordingly, changes in spatial arrangements impact not just people's livelihoods, but also their behaviours, thoughts, and relationships vis-à-vis one another.

As their children's situation was one of the most significant factors determining if and when elders might move to a *loufang*, in the section below I consider the urbanization process and housing policy in the Corps relative to the children of the former Kuomintang soldiers and migrants of the Maoist period.

Housing Policy and the *Loufang* Boom[91]

Before the late 1990s, the town's inhabitants lived in one-storey houses similar to those in the *liandui*. The first construction phase of residential *loufang* in Tuan 143 was relatively slow: it began in 1998 and lasted until 2006. During these times, some units in Tuanbu started building *loufang* for their *zhigong* by raising money from individual families to 'fund the construction' (*jizijianfang*). At the time, the price of a *loufang* was very low, only RMB 600 per square metre, with a flat size of either 75 or 90 square metres – a normal size for apartments built across China at the time. By 2006, the cost had risen to RMB 800 per square metre. The number of *loufang* was limited, and in principle the new flats were to be sold only to *zhigong* in the units that undertook the construction. Other provisions, however, made it possible for people outside of the units to purchase the new flats. For example, people whose houses had been demolished for the construction received priority in the distribution of new flats in addition to a monetary compensation of a few thousand to RMB 30,000. Some richer families in the *tuan* also managed to buy flats through personal relationships with people who worked for the eligible units. As more flats were built between 2004 and 2006, such sales became easier. From 2006, demand for flats increased as did their price. Part of this increase can be attributed to the relocation of *liandui* schools to town in 2006. Prices rose to RMB 900 per square metre, and then again to RMB 1,200. By the end of 2006, official data recorded 52 residential multi-storey buildings in the *tuan*, with a total of 1,920 individual flats.

Movement into town was accompanied by some movement out of town. Between 1999–2006, most administrative staff and other affluent people bought *loufang* in Shihezi, where the prices were also comparatively low. In 1999, for example, the average *loufang* price in Shihezi was around RMB 1,200 per square metre. Such prices were within the purchasing capability of administrative stuff whose annual salary was about RMB 12,000 at that time with an annual bonus of RMB 4,000. After 2010, movement out of town to Shihezi continued among the most affluent 'newcomers' who re-sold the *loufang* they had bought only a few years previously.

The new flats, however, were priced well outside the purchasing power of most people who lived in the *liandui*. Average annual incomes for *liandui* dwellers were officially only about RMB 4,000 before 2002. My informants reported lower maximal incomes of some RMB 3,000 per year –

[91] Information in this section is from Cai and Wang (2011), and my interview with the relevant administrative office.

just enough to cover daily expenses and a small surplus to reinvest in the land. The highest pensions were RMB 300 per month. For ordinary *bingtuan* people, and particularly for those who engaged directly in farming in the *liandui, loufang* were associated with wealth and high status. Life in a *loufang* was quite distant from their own lives.

In 2008-09, housing policies sought to remedy the discrepancy in access to flats faced by *zhigong* who lived in the *liandui*. Less expensive and smaller flats of 50-60 square metres were constructed and offered to all *bingtuan zhigong* at a cost of RMB 900 per square metre. The elderly benefitted from this policy because alongside people whose houses had been demolished during construction, priority of distribution was given to retired *zhigong*, and particularly to widows whose husbands had been retired cadre members. Of course, those who applied also had to be able to afford the purchase – a factor that was not missed by those who remained in the *liandui* at the time of my research. By the end of 2009, there were a total of 2,280 flats in Tuanbu.

After the Xinjiang Work Forum in 2010, urbanization in the Corps intensified even more in the Leapfrog Development Stage. Subsequent years were marked by mass construction in the *bingtuan*. Affordable housing was opened to all *zhigong* in the *bingtuan*, including retired cadre, and each *zhigong* applying to purchase a flat received a subsidy of RMB 15,000-20,000 from the Corps. Widows of *laojiu* also received subsidies of RMB 15,000. Those whose houses were demolished continued to enjoy compensation. Housing open to all *bingtuan* residents was built by commercial firms. Temporary migrants were also eligible for new flats, and they could receive household registration (*hukou*) if they bought a flat larger than 80 square metres. Though access to new flats became universal (the only exclusion being one's budget) and sizes became more variable (50-100 square metres), prices increased to RMB 2,000-2,500 per square metre.

The rising prices did nothing to dampen the widespread enthusiasm for *loufang*. Nor did the different levels of support provided to different social categories in their efforts to purchase a *loufang*. Even for many of those whose financial burden was heavier, the purchase of a *loufang* was realistic. Farm incomes had also increased in the years around 2010 and pensions had risen since 2005. In the few years immediately preceding my fieldwork, therefore, urbanization had swept rapidly through the Corps and buying a *loufang* had become the main concern of all *bingtuan* people – young and old alike.

Though purchasing a *loufang* became realistic for many in terms of individual income, actual purchases tended to reflect the combined resources of the elderly and their children. Pensions might be similar, but the elderly's

children had diverse careers and incomes. In general, they could be divided into two categories: those still in the *tuan* and those who had moved outside, whether elsewhere in Xinjiang or in other provinces. Proportions vary according to age-cohort: among those in their 50s, around 75 per cent remained in the *tuan*; among those in their 40s, 30-40 per cent were in the *tuan*; and among those in their 30s, very few could be found in the *tuan*. From a gender perspective, more women than men left the *tuan*, often through marriage.

The second generation who are still in the *tuan* span a broad social spectrum. Some work in administrative offices in Tuanbu or in *liandui*. Some are teachers or doctors. Some have their own businesses or part-time jobs. Some farm. And some are even retired themselves. Children's status often reflects that of their parents. Few of those born to administrative staff in Tuanbu, for example, are engaged in farming. Similarly, most of today's administrative staff were children of earlier administrative leaders. Most of this group have purchased houses in Shihezi and are therefore known as 'commuting leaders' (*zoudu ganbu*).

In general, those who were raised in town have maintained and expanded their privileged status relative to those raised in *liandui*. Town-based entrepreneurs and private business owners often started their working lives in their parents' units or other *tuan* firms. They used family networks to access administrative and other resources within town to set themselves up as entrepreneurs. Second-generation migrants to the town lacked such access because their family networks remained in the *liandui.* Importantly, even as most XPCC firms went out of business in the late 1980s, such town entrepreneurs maintained their *zhigong* identity, doubly benefiting from the state's support for this status and from new opportunities for private business.[92] Furthermore, when the Corps started to build *loufang*, those raised in town were among those who owned the houses – either through inheritance or through earlier housing distributions from the Corps – that were demolished for new construction. Thus they received financial compensation and preferential allocation of new housing.

Those raised in the *liandui* are less advantaged than their town-born counterparts. Some of those who remained in the *tuan* have jobs in schools and hospitals, but most are engaged in farming. Because farming incomes were low from the late 1980s until just after 2000, young people often migrated to cities for better-paid jobs during this time. Many of those who held *zhigong* status gave it up, and on their return to the *bingtuan*, were

[92] The policy of Keep the Position without Pay (*tingxin liuzhi*) dissolved companies but allowed former workers to maintain their *zhigong* status. Though they lost a salary, they retained other benefits including an eventual *zhigong* pension.

unable to reclaim it. Lacking the benefits of *zhigong* status, such people take on part-time jobs, raise animals, or start new businesses. Low incomes and the current high price of urban housing make it difficult for them to acquire a *loufang*.

Not all rural-born individuals are disadvantaged in the new housing market. Those who kept their *zhigong* status, for example, have benefited from reforms in the agricultural system since 2000. Their access to cheaper land and the benefits of health and social insurance (described in chapter 3) and rising prices for their crops place them in a favourable position in the *liandui* and housing subsidies are high enough to convince them that moving to town is feasible. Some of the rural-born have come to constitute what is sometimes half-jokingly referred to as a new class of *dizhu* (landlords). Those who acquire such wealth have typically mobilized their social networks to increase their landholdings by borrowing land (see chapter 3). They acquire cars and sometimes accumulate numerous *loufang* registered in the names of various family members.

The situation of the second generation who are outside the *tuan* also varies. Some have stable jobs, acquired through various combinations of university qualifications, colleagues, and family networks. Some have their own businesses while others are temporary workers in private companies. Although the offspring of Tuanbu staff who left the Corps might have initially benefited from social networks or financial support, this has not necessarily allowed them to achieve more successful outcomes than others. Situations vary from poverty to riches, and some who are running private businesses or work in companies outside the *tuan* are financially better-off than leaders or administrative staff in the Corps.

Nevertheless, an overwhelming proportion of youth who migrated out of the *tuan* during the 1980s-early 2000s met with frustration. Without being registered in their new locales, they were limited to irregular and informal work that yielded financial returns too low to secure their own stability or benefit their ageing parents. Moreover, they were not allocated housing in their new locations and their parents' resources were too meagre to afford housing that was available for open sale. Such conditions often enough brought migrants home to the *liandui*.

The low price of housing in the construction boom of the 2000s, however, has meant that many people who had moved out of the *tuan* in earlier decades, particularly those who left in the 1980s, were able to resolve – finally – their housing issues. Migrants in their early 30s or younger face a more difficult situation as the price of housing rises. Unlike their older peers, they must rely on help from their parents to secure a *loufang*.

Getting Housing in Town

Despite the diversity in the routes which led elderly to *loufang* in town, two types of status hierarchy could be identified within the first 15 years of urbanization. First, those who had lived in Tuanbu before 1998 were seen as superior to those who moved to *loufang* after mass urbanization in 2010. Second, among those who moved to town after 2010, those who own their houses are seen as superior to those living with a son or daughter, and to those who rent a flat. People who moved to town between 1998 and 2010 occupied an intermediate status that was rarely acknowledged.

Prior to 2010, most people who bought new flats had received compensation for the demolition of their old houses. Some, particularly unit leaders, bought easily. Many, however, had to borrow money even though the price was low and they had received compensation. Such families had low incomes because they operated small businesses like shops, restaurants, and taxis; or, they had lost their government salaries (even if they maintained *zhigong* status); or, they had low pensions. None wanted to miss the opportunity to buy a *loufang*, however, so they mobilized a range of relationships to raise the necessary funds. It was particularly common for the elderly to turn to their children. Widows or widowers often bought a *loufang* together with their children and co-resided. When adult children had stable jobs, they often provided the main aid to their parents. As shown in the example below, pensioners whose children had stable jobs were most likely to be able to acquire a *loufang*.

For example, Liu (aged 75) and her husband (76) needed an additional RMB 24,000 after compensation for their old home to buy a *loufang* in 2001. They both are retired *zhigong* from *bingtuan* factories, and their combined pensions came to only RMB 600 per month. Liu earned some additional money by selling clothes and vegetables in the market, but this still fell short of what was required.

Liu and her husband have three sons and two daughters. In 2001, both daughters had temporary jobs in Shanxi Province. Her oldest son had a temporary job in Urumqi; he had married a local woman and the couple had bought their own house. The second son was a policeman in the *tuan*, married and living in a single-storey house. Their youngest son was a teacher in a *liandui*; still single, he lived in the school dormitory. The two sons who had stable jobs in the *tuan* became the main source of their parents' aid. Liu's husband also borrowed some money from his brother who was a retired *zhigong* in Urumqi. Later, when the brother's sons purchased their own *loufang*, Liu and her husband were able to donate some money in turn.

The second group of people who bought at this stage were those who were rich or had the ability to mobilize social networks to buy a house even

though they were not on the distribution list for *loufang*. This affluent group included previous and current leaders of the *liandui*, those with successful businesses, and those planting profitable crops such as peaches. The children of this group also tended to be economically self-sufficient, so their parents were able to channel their resources into buying a *loufang* for themselves. Zhan was one such buyer.

Zhan, the retired *laojiu* whom I introduced in chapter 3, also bought his house in 2001. He had been retired for many years and was enjoying life with his wife in the *liandui* raising sheep. His pension was low, but so too were his foreseeable expenses. His six children were all married and four had stable jobs: two daughters were teachers in the *tuan*; the third daughter worked in a state-owned company in Shandong (his wife's home province); the second son was working for a private company in Zhejiang Province. The oldest son had, at least, temporary work in Tuanbu. The youngest son was at university, and thus far his future prospects were good.

In 2001, Zhan had been considering building a new house in the *liandui* with his own money, but his two daughters in the Corps persuaded him to use it to buy a *loufang*. Zhan sold his sheep, and with his own savings and some help from his daughters, he bought a 75 square metre *loufang* for RMB 42,000. Zhan said that if it were not for his two daughters, he would have been unable to 'jump' from his small house in the unit to the *loufang*. With his children married and economically secure, and the benefits of a retired *laojiu*, Zhan has no further burdens – a miracle for which he thanks the Communist Party. He turns his pension to the support of his children (he helped one son to buy a car), but more so to his grandchildren.

Regardless of the precise relations through which they acquired a *loufang*, elderly who did so before 2010 enjoyed a feeling of tremendous superiority because of the exclusivity of *loufang* living until that time. Like Zhan, most also had few if any financial burdens. Because they had purchased their housing at the lowest prices, the pension increases since 2005 have been sufficient for them to repay their housing debts. Indeed, some early buyers subsequently sold their flats to purchase yet newer flats, or to move to more exclusive places like Shihezi and Urumqi.

With the onset of mass urbanization, early buyers experienced a dilemma of status. On the one hand, they still felt pride in being among the 'Veterans' (i.e. in being counted as original inhabitants of Tuan 143). On the other hand, newer flats are warmer, better equipped, and more fashionable in style and decoration, than those they purchased. Thus many envied the status of those who moved in later. Though financially secure, they did not have enough money to purchase a newer flat. Many opined that it was

unnecessary; after all, the *tuan* did invest in new insulation that was applied to the exterior of the older buildings.

In 2009, as the construction of less expensive houses was completed, excitement spread in the *bingtuan*. Anyone who met the criteria and had money could compete for the limited number of houses. Individual savings and the ability to mobilize kinship or other networks were important factors for all potential buyers. For most elderly, once again, their children's situation was crucial. Kang was one of them.

At the time of research, Kang was a 75-year-old retired *zhigong* with four daughters and one son. Her husband died in 2007, and in 2009 she moved into a *loufang* with her son's family. Kang used to live in a *liandui*. She moved to Tuanbu with her husband in 2000 when her son married. Kang and her husband purchased two adjoining one-storey houses for a total of RMB 30,000; one was to be for them and the other for her son. The son became a company driver in Urumqi, earning RMB 2,500. When Kang's husband became sick, their son returned to Tuanbu with the money he had saved. His wife had poorly paid seasonal work at a construction company. After Kang's husband died, Kang and her son decided to buy a *loufang*. They bought a 60 square metre flat at RMB 900 per square metre, with Kang and her son each contributing half the cost. Since then they have lived together. At first, they rented out the two one-storey houses, but her son eventually sold them to buy a car. Since Kang had only one son, it was clear to both that they would live together. Kang felt that if her son's economic situation had been bad, then it would have been impossible for her to move to a *loufang*.

As seen in these examples, few people turn to bank loans to raise the necessary funds to buy a *loufang*. A small number have sufficient savings, but the majority mobilize family networks. Support from children is particularly important. Sometimes children give their parents money directly; sometimes they co-purchase and co-reside in a flat; sometimes the parent lives in (and even on occasion rents) a child's extra property. Urbanization therefore entails the development of new patterns of inter-generational support as well as new status relationships based on patterns of ownership and living arrangements.

According to a questionnaire which I conducted with 184 randomly selected elderly respondents, nearly half of the elderly in town (47.8 per cent) own their flats. Of the others, 23.9 per cent live with a son and 19.6 per cent with a daughter; 8.7 per cent rent their flats. Most of those who own flats are from Tuanbu and bought their flats before 2010. Only a minority of elders who moved recently from *liandui* have bought their own flats – and

those almost always with the help of children. Most elderly from the *liandui* co-reside with a child in the child's flat, or rent a flat.

Statistics on ownership might suggest that half the elderly population is living alone. In fact, the picture is more complicated. Only 63.6 per cent of those who own their own flats live alone. Interestingly, a sizeable number live with grandchildren (20.5 per cent), but few live with children, and those living with grandchildren are rarely in three-generation households. Those who rent flats reflect a similar pattern: half live alone (50 per cent), most others live with grandchildren (43.8 per cent), and none live in three-generation households. Among those who live in flats owned by their children, the pattern is different: one-quarter live alone; of the others, those living in flats owned by daughters tend to live with either children or grandchildren, but only about 11.1 per cent live in three-generation households. In contrast, more than a quarter of those living in flats owned by sons are in three-generation households.

Flat ownership	Living arrangement				
	Living alone % (No.)	Living just with children, not including grand-children % (No.)	Living just with grand-children % (No.)	Three genera-tions % (No.)	Total % (No.)
Rent	50% (8)	6.2% (1)	43.8% (7)	0 % (0)	100% (16)
Daughter's	25% (9)	33.3% (12)	30.6% (11)	11.1% (4)	100% (36)
Son's	27.3% (12)	20.5% (9)	25% (11)	27.3% (12)	100% (44)
Elder's	63.6% (56)	9.1% (8)	20.5% (18)	6.8% (6)	100% (88)

Table 3. *Loufang* ownership and living arrangements among the elderly, 2013.

Further questions brought out yet more patterns of inter-generational support hidden behind ownership statistics. All 88 of those who bought their own flats were retired *zhigong*. Their high and increased pensions facilitated the purchase, but most also received financial help from their children. Those who report living alone also noted that their children have their own *loufang*

or live outside the *tuan*. If unmarried sons or daughters still live in the *liandui*, it is possible that one will come to reside in town with their parents in winter. Married daughters, as might be expected, rarely come to co-reside with their parents.

My questionnaire also brought out evidence that the elderly are not merely beneficiaries of their children's support. The elderly continue to support their children in a variety of ways. For example, grandchildren are sent to live with their grandparents in town so that their parents can raise livestock in the *liandui* while the children are schooled in town; this arrangement is particularly likely if the elderly have more than two children who do not have *loufang* themselves. In such cases, the children arrange to help their parents rent or buy in town so that the children can stay with the grandparents instead of being boarded at school. The elderly are also keen to repay money to their children, especially for the purchase of a flat. Though the children typically consider such money a gift, their parents feel that it was borrowed. They explain that they have high pensions, spend little in daily life other than on their health, and wish to help their children whose lives – particularly among agricultural workers – may be more difficult than their own. They explained: 'If your children do not live a good life, how can you sleep? How can you not think about it?'. The elderly argued that as their children would inherit all their property, it was better to give what was needed in the moment instead of withholding it until death. Some also explained that even if their own child did not expect repayment, the child's spouse might feel otherwise, and they were reluctant to cause marital strife. When I asked if they did not need to save money for themselves, many of my informants claimed that home ownership gave them such a strong feeling of security that they were confident that they could deal with sickness or other issues that might arise without a wider financial safety net.

The questionnaire also brought out the complexity of co-residence. In some cases, adult children brought their elderly parents into their flats, especially when the grandchildren were grown and working or studying elsewhere, in a move reflecting what might be expected in terms of tradition. But, in many cases co-residence was between the elderly and their single or divorced children. In such cases, the flow of support between generations neither follows tradition nor provides a clear departure from it.

Flat rental seems to reflect a transitional stage in inter-generational support and in individual and family status. Most of the 16 informants who rent a *loufang* are *zhigong*. Though their own status and pensions are generally high, they could not afford to buy a flat (yet) because their children had not acquired enough wealth to help them, or because they felt that they should help their children to acquire a *loufang* first. They used the resources

they did have to rent, and thus avoided the inconvenience and loneliness of being 'left behind' in the *liandui*. Similarly, some *wuqigong* are helped to rent a flat by their children.

Status and its Perception in Town

Elderly in town and in the *liandui* are highly conscious of the status differences between them. The liveliness of life in town is identified by both groups as part of a distinct and desirable lifestyle, and both ascribe higher social prestige and status to those who live in town.

Among the elderly in town, there are also a range of perceived status differences. Those who lived in Tuanbu prior to 2010 regard themselves as veterans, even if they were not among the original settlers. Their status is demonstrated through their monopoly of roles in the elderly clubs: all the organizers and those engaged in performances are veterans. Newcomers nevertheless join club activities. Sometimes, club leaders try to show their privileged status by disciplining the activities of others, however, they often meet resistance from newcomers who claim that they all have a pension, and no one has the right to manage (*guan*) the other. If club leaders persist, newcomers quit and find other entertainments, such as playing poker and mah-jong or simply 'walking the circle'.

It is harder to make out one or several 'class milieux' in the town. Particularly among the elderly, who have experienced hardship and have been trained to be frugal under the socialist system, there is little overt concern for 'taste' in consumption practices, housing styles, dress, food, or modes of transportation. The most important status symbol is the *loufang*, with only subtle preferences for ownership over rental. Practical convenience is a shared preference among the elderly. Some dress more finely than others, and furniture and other decorations may show more or less aesthetic care, but the elderly insist that these differences tend to reflect their children's tastes rather than their own. Most elderly stick to the norms of a 'simple' life and are satisfied with basic amenities. Zhan, for example, despite his high income, kept his old and simple furniture, rejecting his children's suggestion that he should replace it. It was, he said, clean and comfortable, and that was most important.

On the surface, then, status differences among the elderly in town are difficult to distinguish. Yet the elderly themselves are obsessed with status – happy only when they feel themselves high in rank. House ownership and living arrangements are at the centre of the status hierarchy. Those who own their own houses are extremely content. Only a small number expressed any regret, either because they had borrowed too much money and were in debt, or because they had bought a cheap flat on an upper floor, and struggled with

the staircases. Those who live alone in a flat owned by one of their children also express pride, because their children have done well and were able to buy them a flat. In contrast to what might be expected, those who live with their children are not necessarily happy with their situation or proud of their children's support; their happiness is largely dependent on the quality of the family relationships, and many openly admire elderly who live independently. Even if they have chosen deliberately to rent, those living in rented flats are often concerned about the possibility that their status is too low, and that they will not escape it.

The precarious status of those who rent is visible in the material furnishings of the flats themselves. Owner-residents decorate their flats and make them comfortable places to live. Those who rent, however, invest the bare minimum in furnishings because the investment may be lost if they move. For example, rented flats often lacked a vented stove hood and water heater. Their inhabitants had to open the window while cooking (which caused problems in winter), and they had to bathe with water heated in a kettle, just as they had in the *liandui*. Some rented apartments are truly unfurnished, lacking even a stove itself, floor tiles, or doors between the rooms.

Life in an unfurnished flat is inconvenient, and renters are uneasy about revealing their living conditions in daily communication with neighbours or friends, both old and new. For instance, my upstairs neighbour rented her flat. She was proud of her *zhigong* status, and typically expressed satisfaction with her current life. If the conversation turned to housing, however, the usual smile on her face disappeared and she expressed regret that she had not been able to buy a single-storey flat in the town earlier. Having not succeeded with an earlier purchase, she had not received compensation for demolition, and thus could not afford a new *loufang*.

It is striking that home ownership versus rental appears as the major source of status differentiation within town. One might wonder if it is related to the magnitude of financial and social resources necessary to purchase rather than to rent. This may be so, but the extremely emotional component of the status distinction should be explained otherwise. In my view, the importance of owning one's own home is related to the Chinese understanding of 'home' (*jia*) and its distinction from a 'dwelling', such as a house or apartment (*fangzi*). Those who rent a flat often say: 'This is another's *fangzi*. I do not feel it is my *jia*, and I do not feel easiness in my heart'. *Fangzi* refers only to the material house, and everyone agrees that *fangzi* can be bought and sold; *fangzi* can be alienated from its builder, owner, or dweller; it can circulate in the market. *Jia*, in contrast, signals a deep attachment between a person and a dwelling; the word also means

'family'. One's *jia* is a space to which one has a strong emotional attachment, and it is in *jia* (not *fangzi*) that one can feel secure, easy, and free (see also Fleischer 2010: 115). When *jia* is invoked as a desirable type of dwelling, then housing must be understood as a material symbol of family. A 'house' in this sense should provide a deep and irrevocable source of safety and happiness, akin to that provided by the family (Fraser 2000: 29). An elder without his own house, therefore, may feel himself to be without family, or without a stable position within family. Such a situation is socially unthinkable, the worst possible fate, the fate of a 'loser' (*shibai*).

Indeed, when I asked elders who rented their flats what they most regretted, they invariably drew attention to their lack of house ownership. Though they had worked so hard for the *bingtuan*, they told me, they had not 'earned' (*zhengdao*) a *loufang*. I was particularly struck by the response given by a 90-year-old *laojiu* when I asked him to summarize his life for me. He answered: 'Not good at all! Soon I will die, and I still do not have my own house'.

The status of one's children also impacts the status of the elderly. In this regard, the forms of social differentiation developing through the consumption practices of younger generations of Chinese (see Fleischer 2010) also affect the elderly even as they themselves seek to avoid conspicuous consumption. The elderly cannot avoid comparing themselves and being compared against others in terms of their children's situation. The young spend much money on dress, decoration, furniture, and expensive electronic equipment in their bid for status and respect from peers. Not surprisingly, those who work in institutional settings including town offices, hospitals, and schools have undeniably more consumer power (and knowledge) than those who farm, and the elderly feel the ripple effects of these differences. Most importantly, in the *bingtuan*, aside from *loufang*, it is cars that serve as the most important symbol of higher status. When an elder is picked up by one of his children in a car, he cannot hide his feelings of pride and 'having face' (*you mianzi*) among neighbours. On such occasions, his relatively 'poorer' neighbours can only look on with envious eyes, sometimes making comments such as, 'His child has *benshi*. See she has a car'.

Elders spoke of children who had good jobs, houses, or cars at length and with evident pride. When they told me about children who were still in the *liandui*, in part-time work, or unable to buy a *loufang*, their replies were curt and sometimes regretful. While the standards of success and status are commonly recognized, the elderly nevertheless insist on maintaining appearances of equality among themselves. Elders are proud to be taken traveling by their affluent children, but they discourage overt boasting. People com-

plained about and censured neighbours who were known for 'showing off' (*xuanyao*). One retired *zhigong*, for example, who liked to boast loudly in the square about his children's wealth and the places he had travelled as a result, was given the nickname 'Doremifaxi'. Calling him after the tones in the musical scale was a reference to his talkativeness; in other words, he talked so much, he sang. When he left to visit his children inland, the atmosphere on the square lightened noticeably, especially among those who perceived themselves or their children as having lower economic status.

Conclusion

Urbanization has had a great impact on lives in the *bingtuan*. These changes reveal the complex interaction between state policy, the institution of the *bingtuan* itself, households, and family life. These changes are felt intensely. Housing and other facets of urbanization affect people's sense of 'convenience' and life's liveability. Moreover, urbanization and new forms of housing have magnified the status differentiations between those who live in villages and those who live in town, and have begun to create new status differentiations within town.

Access to desirable housing is an individual matter related to one's own purchasing power; and it is a family matter concerning the relative ability of parents and children to pool financial resources and the competing projects which demand similar family cooperation. However, if we look more closely at how the capacity to purchase housing is created, we see several other elements. First, the individual economic status of both the elderly and their children is linked to the internal hierarchy of wages, benefits, and pensions within the *bingtuan* system. This hierarchy is a gendered one (not to mention an ethnic one) in that men are disproportionately assigned to the categories that receive the highest pay and the most comprehensive welfare benefits. It matters not only whether one has the status of *laojiu*, *zhigong*, *wuqigong* (or none of these); it matters also whether one lived in town prior to 2010 or not. The combination of the *bingtuan*'s past and its recent urbanization policies have made Tuanbu *zhigong* the most privileged of all *bingtuan* residents.

China's long-term administrative division of rural-urban residence status also affects, if indirectly, the purchasing power of *bingtuan* households. The *hukou* system has long created a social, political, and economic hierarchy between urban and rural residents in which urban residents are disproportionately privileged by the state (Zhang 2002; Fleischer 2010; Kobi 2014). In the *bingtuan*, there is no such distinction between residence rights in the *liandui* and towns; one is registered only to the *bingtuan*. Migrants to urban areas outside the *bingtuan*, whether in Difang or beyond, are excluded

from registering and receiving welfare benefits. Not only are they less able to find stable employment and favourable pay without registration, they must pay for all health and many other social services. They face administrative barriers to purchasing housing in their adopted cities, and few succeed in amassing the savings necessary to purchase housing back in the *bingtuan*. Combined with enduring cultural patterns in which husbands (with their parents' help) offer a house as a condition of marriage, the widespread inability to purchase housing faced by the young male migrants from the *bingtuan* impacts the choices made by their parents and extended families with respect to their own housing.

In the *bingtuan* too, the privatization of housing has been coupled with a related increase in real estate values. In this process, *loufang* have become clearly visible indicators of one's financial status on a much broader scale of consumption power than visible in all previous eras of socialist rule (Wu 2002; Tomba 2004). In the *bingtuan*, however, this dimension is less visible among the elderly than in younger generations, and generally less overall than in other documented areas of China.

Nevertheless, what matters much to the elderly in the *bingtuan* is that consumer power has been spatialized. As people from the *liandui* have mobilized financial and social resources to purchase, rent, or live in (even temporarily) *loufang*, previously invisible socio-economic differences have been rendered visible (see also Zhang 2008: 34). In turn, these socio-economic distinctions are spatialized and materialized through reconfigurations of residential space and living arrangements, providing the possibility for the formation of distinct new 'classes'. In addition, part of the sense of improvement in social status is highly subjective and connected to the cultural values of 'home' (*jia*). Relatedly, those who cannot leave the *liandui* even when migration is promoted, are seen increasingly as real 'losers'.

Significantly, however, the urbanization process in the *bingtuan* is almost entirely the result of state policies. In this respect, it is different from the urbanization examined by anthropologists in other parts of China (e.g. Tan and Ding 2008; Roberts 2010; Zhou and Huang 2010), which has proceeded from industrial development in rural areas or from urban expansion into rural regions. In the *bingtuan*, urbanization was promoted to remedy the decline in incomes since the late 1980s and the increasing numbers of out-migrating youth, both of which were seen as a threat to the organization's function. Moreover, urbanization in the *bingtuan* is distinguished by the central place given to housing construction as an 'engine' for economic growth (Forrest and Lee 2003).

Chapter 6
Inter-Generational Support and Conflict

Inter-generational relations in China have changed. There has been extensive debate over whether these changes signal the demise of filial piety (Croll 2006b; Thogersen and Ni 2008; Zhan and Luo 2012; Zhang 2017). My research confirms extensive change, but concludes that the status of filial piety, as such, is less clear. In the 2000s, young and old in the *bingtuan* help each other in more balanced ways than prescribed by the hierarchical and patriarchal practices of traditional filial piety. Both gender and generation are less significant than they were in the past. Yet there are discrepancies between ideology and practice. The elderly in the *bingtuan* often remain ideologically conservative, even when they act pragmatically. Filial piety may not be 'eroded', but its associated values and practices are undergoing reinterpretation and renegotiation (cf. Logan and Bian 1999: 1278-82).

In this chapter, I consider several aspects of inter-generational support that concern almost all families in the *bingtuan*. Housing is among the most important, but there are other forms of inter-generational support – both material and immaterial – intertwined with housing arrangements. Negotiations of support often fuel conflict within families. For the elderly, these conflicts emerge as they try to strike a balance between their need for security and their desire to support the well-being of their children.

Living Arrangements and Shifting Values

The previous chapter showed that housing, and in particular, desire for a *loufang*, is a key concern of the elderly in the *bingtuan*. Whether individuals are able to move into a *loufang* is largely determined at the macro-level by government housing policies. At the micro-level, an individual's former work status and current pension, children's economic situation, parent-child relationships, and personal values combine to make possible (or not) the purchase of a *loufang*.

Changing values as well as pragmatic decision-making are particularly evident in the negotiation of living arrangements. Most elderly do not prefer

the formation and maintenance of a large and complex household; they prefer to live apart from their children. In the *liandui*, most elderly had a house apart from their children. The new preference for town living, however, makes independent living more difficult because of financial constraints. Yet the financial arrangements involved in purchasing a *loufang* and childcare arrangements are part of an integrated pattern of inter-generational reciprocity. Thus the negotiation of living arrangements reveals both continuity of traditional culture and the emergence of new gendered values.

To Live Alone or with Children?

Living apart from one's children in the contemporary *bingtuan* is widely accepted, motivated by 'convenience' (*fangbian*) and 'freedom' (*zizai*). On the day I arrived in Tuan 143, community leaders arranged a roundtable discussion with three retired men – two in their seventies, and one in his eighties. I was surprised to learn that all lived apart from their children. When asked the reason, one surprised me with the directness of his answer: 'Living with the younger generation only reduces the well-being of the elderly'. The others nodded and told me that it was inconvenient to live with the younger generation; their habits were different, and so were their tastes in food and entertainment. For instance, the elderly prefer to eat softer food, but the younger generation prefer hard and spicy; the elderly like to retire and rise early, while the younger generation prefers to stay up late; the elderly enjoy watching documentaries or traditional costume dramas on television, but the young prefer romantic movies or imported South Korean dramas. In the hot summers, it could be embarrassing for both elderly men and their daughters-in-law to wear few and light clothes. For these reasons, living together is inconvenient for both young and old. In the case of a three-generation household, the problems are worse. The poor hearing of the elderly means they like the television volume high, but this can interfere with grandchildren's studies. Living separately avoids all these inconveniences and the potential for inter-generational conflict, particularly with daughters-in-law. As one of the elderly men put it, 'if tongue and teeth have time to fight', it is not worth mentioning the capacity of human beings to come into conflict.

During the research which I subsequently conducted, I found that these ideas were shared by most of the elderly. The ideal arrangement was to live independently, but to have one's children living nearby. This was the preference expressed by 76.6 per cent (141) of elderly questioned. Only 17.9 per cent (33) wanted to cohabit with children. Among these 33, 15 already lived with single daughters or sons; 12 were older than 80; and 10 were in

their 70s and had chronic diseases. There were 15 *wuqigong* widows in the group, 9 of whom already lived with daughters. In short, cohabitation was preferred generally only among those who needed intensive care, were unable to buy or rent their own home, or were able to maintain good relationships.

Underlying the preference for independent living is the reality of economic independence, primarily resulting from the pension system. Studies across China show that economically self-sufficient elderly are more likely to live apart from children. This reality is apparent in regional differences: in urban areas where the elderly have a pension, a high percentage live alone (Ikels 1993, 1997; Unger 1993; Chen 2009), while in rural areas where few elderly have a pension cohabitation with children is much more common (Selden 1993; Zhen and Silverstein 2008). Comparative studies in rural and urban areas of China on the relations between income and living arrangement further support this point (Jiang 1995; Lee and Xiao 1998). In rural areas, when economic diversification produces inequality, those who can afford to live independently do so (Jia 1988; Pei and Tang 2012).

In the *bingtuan*, the pension system makes independent living both conceivable and desirable. Economic constraints (i.e. the cost of a *loufang*), however, mean that only 46.2 per cent of the elderly achieve this ideal. A remaining 25 per cent live with grandchildren, 16.4 per cent with children, and 12 per cent in three-generation households as shown below.

Living alone or with a spouse	85	46,2%
Single elderly or a couple living with grandchildren	47	25,5%
Two generations (including single and married children whose children study or work outside the Corps)	30	16,4%
Three-generation household	22	12%
Total	**184**	**100%**

Table 4. Inter-generational living in Tuan 143 based on random sample, 2013.

Few of the elderly cohabited with their children before moving to town. The intense desire for *loufang* living, however, has led 52.8 per cent of the elderly in town to adopt cohabitation as a solution to meet the high costs.[93] This finding is consistent with other research that documents the persistence of high levels of co-residence in urban areas of post-Maoist China. In the

[93] 47.8 per cent of the elderly bought their own homes, 23.9 per cent lived in their son's house, 19.6 per cent in their daughter's house, and the other 8.7 per cent rented flats.

early 1990s, this continuity was attributed to constraints (specifically lack of housing) that resulted from state policy and the planned economy (Davis-Friedmann 1991; Unger 1993). In the *bingtuan* of the 2000s, however, the market is the most significant factor within a complex interplay of personal interests, cultural values, familial relationships, and wider socio-economic constraints (see Zhang 2004b: 1232). As a result, although many elderly would prefer independent living, the high cost of desired housing shapes the development of inter-generational reciprocity.

Housing and Childcare

'In many societies in both East and West … the role of grandparents in providing support such as childcare is not new at all' (Izuhara 2009b: 22). In the *bingtuan*'s early decades, various relatives were 'picked up' to the *tuan* to help care for children, and in later decades childcare was undertaken more narrowly within the inter-generational contract. Yet the exchange of child-care for housing per se constitutes a new pattern. Of those who bought their own *loufang*, 27.4 per cent take responsibility for caring for grandchildren. When children cannot afford a house, they often contribute money to their parents to care for their own children. While the grandparents take care of the grandchildren, the middle generation works in the *liandui* or outside the Corps. Sometimes, the elderly take care of grandchildren from more than one of their children.

In contrast, most of those who live with a daughter or son offered financial support for their children's housing and also shouldered the responsibility of taking care of grandchildren.[94] This arrangement appears to be a traditional form of reciprocity. Traditionally, children should offer their elderly parents a home, and it would be taken for granted that the grandparents cared for grandchildren. Indeed, among the elderly I surveyed, 86 per cent had cared for grandchildren when they lived in the *liandui*. Yet to explain their move to a *loufang*, elders often emphasized their childcare responsibilities. If living with children and caring for grandchildren are both taken for granted, why should they feel the need to justify their move? The answer appears to be that there is an uneasiness about living with children.

[94] Of those who live in a son's home, 52.3 per cent take care of grandchildren, while 41.7 per cent of those in daughter's homes care for grandchildren.

Plate 15. Elders take care of grandchildren.

It was those who lived with their children who often justified their move to a *loufang* by talking about their childcare responsibilities. Those able to buy their own home generally responded with an unqualified '*loufang* is good!' In other words, they saw *loufang* as a wholly positive choice. Those who could not afford to live independently emphasized their lack of choice; it was family responsibilities that drove them to town. Only on further questioning did they reveal that they also had a strong desire to live in a *loufang*.

Moreover, the newly shaped local rules dictate that elderly who live with their children are responsible for the daily expenses of the whole family. They pay for food, electricity, water, gas, and their grandchildren's school fees. While most elderly assert that their pension makes this a reasonable contribution and enables their children to save, a number also complain that they could save more money if they lived alone (see below). It appears, however, that they feel obliged to make this contribution because traditional discourses of filial responsibility have been partially displaced in the contemporary *bingtuan* with the widely accepted notion that one should not be a burden to one's children. By emphasizing their childcare role and making substantial contributions to the household budget, the elderly both

reciprocate their children's support and set their own minds at ease by showing that they are not a 'burden'.

Plate 16. Elders help children with farming.

These practices are a departure from traditional patterns, but they need not be seen as signalling a breakdown in filial obligation. What is going on is not the result simply of 'rational calculation'. Rather, these practices are a complex melding of duty and obligation, emotional attachment, and practical arrangement. They include both continuity of traditional culture and emergence of new values in response to new situations. I will illustrate this through the case of Lao Qi.

My next door neighbour Lao Qi, aged 74, was a widow and former *wuqigong*. She lived with her 10-year-old grandson in a flat that had been purchased by the boy's father – her youngest son. This son was a *zhigong* entitled to 35 *mu* of land in the *liandui,* but because his wife was not a *zhigong*, their combined income was relatively low. Prior to urbanization, Lao Qi and her son had lived in separate houses in the *liandui*. With the onset of urbanization, both Lao Qi and her son wished to move to town, but each had been unable to afford a *loufang*. As increasingly more neighbours left the *liandui*, Lao Qi's son suggested that they should buy a small flat. Lao

Qi could live there year-round and care for her grandson, and her son and daughter-in-law would join them every year after the harvest. Even with the help of other family members, however, they were unable to raise the price of a *loufang*. Moreover, Lao Qi's daughter-in-law was strongly opposed to the idea, suggesting they should wait until they could afford to buy a larger flat; she also demanded that all of Lao Qi's children contribute to the flat's purchase. Lao Qi was moved to tears when she told me how her son had answered his wife's objections: 'I have only one mother, I will not leave her alone. If others do not care, I will take care of my mom. I am the only son here'.

Eventually Lao Qi's son had persuaded his wife that Lao Qi's help with childcare would enable them to work and save for a larger flat in the future. Moreover, owning a *loufang* would avoid the critical problems of in-town schooling faced by rural families. Living in the *liandui*, they had either to transport their son to school daily or leave him in school accommodation. They borrowed RMB 40,000 and bought a small two-room flat. In fact, they did not relocate for the winter months but took on part-time factory work in Shihezi (where they stayed in a dormitory) to pay off the loan. Lao Qi's son visited when he could, sometimes bringing fresh vegetables from the farm. Lao Qi used her pension to provide for her grandson, for whom she cared greatly. She cooked his favourite meals. When it rained, she would meet him from school with an umbrella, even when she was ill. During my talk with him, Lao Qi's son told me repeatedly that 'taking care of parents is an unalterable principle' (*tianjing diyi de*). As a son, he considered it is his obligation to offer housing for his mother when other siblings could not. He was a little emotional when he said, 'My mother is already in her 70s, how much longer will she live? So I bought this tiny flat – I just wanted her to come here earlier and enjoy life, even for one more day'.

Lao Qi's case shows that housing and childcare is not a simple matter of instrumental reciprocity. Inter-generational obligation and emotional attachment are also important components. All the children to whom I talked emphasized their obligation to assist their parents, and consistently characterized this obligation as an 'unalterable principle'. This principle can be glossed as 'Chinese tradition', but it was mediated also by strong feelings that their parents had made sacrifices to raise them; children felt keenly their turn to 'pay back' such debts. Providing housing was one way to return such old debts.

Although such sentiments were expressed by both genders, it was sons (and especially only sons regardless of how many sisters they had), who put more emphasis on the cultural aspect of their relationship to their parents and emphasized their personal responsibility as a son to provide housing. Some

daughters also acknowledged the special responsibility of sons, but such attitudes did not constrain them from offering help, and their brothers were not averse to accepting such help when offered. Children are guided by this 'unalterable principle' as much as by other more rational calculations. A child does not 'pick up' his parents to a *loufang* only if their pensions will be sufficient to cover his family's costs. Lao Qi, for example, was a *wuqigong* with a small pension, and she could not cover the full range of expenses for herself and grandson. While her son did not discuss Lao Qi's financial contributions, Lao Qi herself felt that she should contribute to help her son.

The emotional and rational responses experienced by individuals within the three-generation family vary. Lao Qi, for example, did calculate her ability to contribute financially, and she admitted that she felt more comfortable staying in the *loufang* because of her ability to contribute something. This was especially important to her because of her daughter-in-law's initial opposition to buying the flat. Financial contributions by the elderly are thus often a calculated form of reciprocity which serves a legitimating role, particularly targeted at the daughter-in-law. In contrast, childcare duties are experienced as involving emotional attachment to the grandchildren, and as being motivated by the desire to help one's own child.

Lao Qi's concern for her daughter-in-law's opinions is significant because it reveals a change in the traditionally problematic relationship between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. Traditionally, daughters-in-law were expected to obey powerful mothers-in-law, and Lao Qi would have been entitled to ignore her daughter-in-law's objections. In contemporary China, a rise in women's status and the extension of the nuclear family has dramatically weakened the power of the mother-in-law. There is even a common saying that 'nowadays mother-in-law is daughter-in-law, daughter-in-law is mother-in-law' (*xianzai, erxifu shi popo, popo shi erxifu*). In the *bingtuan*, since most elderly live apart from their children and rely on their own pension, there was less overt conflict between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law than in other areas of rural China. There was also little emotional connection, however, and most had strong feelings of aversion which were disguised to maintain a relatively peaceful life. Lao Qi's daughter-in-law could not always hide this aversion, and Lao Qi also had little affection for her daughter-in-law and frequently gossiped about her shortcomings. Nevertheless, it was important for Lao Qi to continue to persuade her daughter-in-law that the arrangement was a good one.

Nevertheless, most *bingtuan* elderly avoid familial power struggles and adopt the strategy that 'one generation does not interfere with the other, each lives one's own life'. Those who share accommodation face more practical problems in living out this strategy than those who live apart,

however. Some elderly avoid such conflicts by living with a daughter in a departure from the traditional arrangement. A number of factors are considered in such decisions which have practical, relational, and cultural implications.

To Live with Son or Daughter?

Within the patrilineal Confucian tradition which remains strong in modern China, a son is expected to live with his parents and continue the family line, while a daughter is expected to leave and assume duties towards her husband's family. It is traditionally said, therefore, that a daughter is 'poured out water' (*huochuqu de shui*). As documented in previous chapters, sons remain preferred to daughters for co-residence. Elsewhere, the preference is more clearly marked than in the *bingtuan*, where 19.6 per cent of the elderly live with a daughter and 23.9 per cent live with sons. Here too, there is a stronger desire to live with a son, even if it is not as often realized: I found that 60 per cent of the elderly think that they should live with their son; the other 40 per cent consider life with a son and daughter to be of equal preference. Young and old are both conservative in their preferences, but realistic and pragmatic in practice. When a parent chooses to live with a daughter instead of a son, it is rare to describe the son as 'unfilial' and few sons express feelings of guilt in such situations. In such cases, sons seek to assist their parents in other ways, such as with material gifts, visits, transport, or by helping their sister's family.

Elderly men appear to be more culturally conservative than elderly women. Widowers will only live with a daughter if they have no son living in the *tuan*, and couples are more likely to live with a son. It is women who prefer to live with a daughter (partly because this helps to avoid a problematic relationship with their daughter-in-law), and widows are the most likely category to live with a daughter instead of a son. Interestingly, few problems were reported about living with sons-in-law. Women also appreciate close relationships with their daughters of a level which would be difficult to establish with their daughters-in-law. Yet even women who live with daughters tend to retain the traditional view that the son is the more important child. Both men and women therefore find it necessary to provide additional reasons for co-residence if they stay with a daughter; such reasons typically include their help with childcare or their own financial contributions to their daughter's family.

Departures from traditional norms can prove problematic when both spouse's parents need to be 'picked up' to a *loufang*. I found that such situations were rare. Often, one partner in a marriage came from inland and their parents were too far away to consider relocation. It also sometimes

happened that potential conflicts were 'resolved' before they could emerge: for example, one set of parents would 'prefer' independent living in the *liandui*, or they would rent or buy their own *loufang* without discussing the possibility of co-residence with children. Yet the potential for conflict remained and was apparent in cases where both sets of parents lived in the *tuan* and neither owned a *loufang*. In such cases, a wife's parents felt uneasy about living with their daughter. My informant Hao, for example, told me that when her daughter asked her to come and help with childcare, she had told her daughter to ask her parents-in-law first. Hao was concerned that her daughter should avoid gossip or damaged in-law relationships. It was only after the parents-in-law had declined, saying they preferred independent life in the *liandui*, that Hao agreed to move in.

I heard many such stories, and there was much gossip and many explanations. Sometimes, neighbours claimed that if a son's parents refused to move in with him there were poor relationships with the daughter-in-law. Sometimes, it was said that a son had failed to assert his authority to manage these relationships. It was always assumed that the parents of a son should take it for granted that they, rather than their son's wife's parents, would reside with their son. It was also assumed that even if a son's parents had their own home or lived with another son, they would be generally hostile to a situation in which the daughter-in-law's parents lived with their son. In such instances, there was no way to remedy the hurt feelings of the son's parents. The possibility for poor relations between in-laws seemed endless.

Yet I talked with many young men who did live with their wife's parents. A few reported that they had been 'forced' to decide between accommodating their own parents or their wife's. They reported their acquiescence in practical and rational terms, emphasizing the contributions of money and care made by their parents-in-law, asserting that 'they help care for our kids', or 'they have done a lot for our family'. Common views hold that a wife's power in a marriage should not be underestimated, and that recent generations of husbands are 'afraid of their wives'.

Indeed some husbands admitted that it could bring 'peace of mind' (*shengxin*; i.e. be easier) to live with their wife's parents. The arrangement helped to avoided difficult in-law relationships, and to my surprise, some young men did not seek to control their families, admitting that they did not mind deferring to their wife. This too, brought 'peace of mind'.

Beyond Housing: Other Forms of Inter-Generational Support

Beyond the crucial negotiation of inter-generational support in housing, the elderly offer extensive material support to their adult children. They receive respect and other forms of assistance in return, though the children's support

of the parents is supplementary rather than essential. The *bingtuan* elderly emphasize the emotional bonds that motivate such support (Shi 2009: 350), and by underscoring mutual needs, gratitude, and support they discursively shift the generational and gender biases of filial piety (Croll 2006b). As others have documented (Croll 2006b; Zhang 2017) support from daughters to parents now equals and sometimes outweighs support from sons, and elderly parents admit that 'a daughter is good' (*yatou hao*). Nevertheless, the traditional ideology that 'a son is important' (*danshi erzi geng zhongyao*) remains strong in the *bingtuan*.

How Children Support their Parents

Beyond housing, children continue to be the main source of support for *bingtuan* elders when they are in need. Levels of support vary depending on the different situations of each child, obligations, commitments, the parent-child relationship, and other variables. As the elderly liked to say, 'the five fingers are not the same length' (*wuge zhitou buyiyang chang*). Survey results indicated that similar levels of support are provided by sons and daughters. Daughters, however, are perceived as being more considerate and as being more likely to ask whether their parents need money. Sons, on the other hand, are perceived to contribute less and expect more. Yet, the elderly perceive their children as generally filial.

Due to the pension system, the *bingtuan* elders, unlike elders elsewhere in rural China, are not economically reliant on their children. If I asked 'do your children offer you financial support?', most elderly responded proudly, 'we have money, we do not need theirs!' Their disdainful tone hinted at the stupidity of the question. Though elders worry about the costs of intensive healthcare (as detailed earlier) and many cannot purchase a new flat on their own, their pensions generally cover the cost of daily expenses. Little regular financial support comes from adult children to their elderly parents.

Among 184 questionnaire respondents, 68 elderly (36.9 per cent) acknowledged that they had received money from their children.[95] Interestingly, those who own a flat received more support and those who rent received the least. When I questioned this finding, I was told that the higher rates of support among elderly who owned their flats reflected support for the purchase of the flat itself; moreover, I was told that this was more akin to a 'loan' that would be returned in due time as pensions increased. Children assume that their parents have money or are 'richer' than they are themselves, and most children only give cash as a symbolic gift at birthdays

[95] More data is contained in the Appendix.

or times of hospitalization. Another interesting finding is that children who live far away tend to provide more financial support to their parents than those who live nearby. In contrast, children who live nearby tend to offer support-in-kind: furniture, electronic equipment, food, clothes, or health products; and they give this support as 'gifts' at festivals or birthdays. Of 184 respondents, only eight had never been offered material support. Those who rent are just as likely to receive gifts as those who own flats; but it is generally daughters who 'remember' to give gifts while sons are often 'careless'.

The *bingtuan* elderly do not rely upon instrumental or practical assistance from their children. They like to say, 'we can move, we do not need their help'. Nevertheless, children provide practical assistance when they visit: daughters cook and help with housework such as washing and cleaning, and sons fix lights and ovens and make other small repairs. When they are ill, the elderly are supported not only by their spouses, but by also by their children. Sons transport elderly parents to and from the hospital, and daughters provide care in feeding, cleaning, dressing, and administering medicines. Parents and sons alike agree that men are not well suited for nursing. Traditionally, a daughter-in-law should be the main carer, but my observations suggested that daughters-in-law make only brief visits to the elderly and have a distant relationship with them.

The elderly in the *bingtuan* strive to appear independent, but their children's demonstrations of filial behaviour are important to them. They do not usually ask for support for minor medical treatments, such as injections. Sometimes they do not even inform their children about such treatments, so as not to cause their worry. Particularly at harvest time, the elderly tried to avoid making demands on their children's time. The elderly preferred to trade the work of making their own transportation arrangements for a phone call. This, they said, was less disruptive for their children. But the trade itself was important; those who received a call raised their 'face' in front of other patients because their children demonstrated their filiality. Those who did not receive a phone call, however, lost 'face', and they sometimes complained about their children's lack of filiality.

If practical support is regarded as supplementary by the elderly, they consider emotional support a different matter. Emotional support is judged by phone calls and visits. Most days, the elderly are happy to socialize with their peers and do not expect attention from their children, but at festivals and during illness, such attention is of vital importance. Indeed, as everyone recognizes the importance of family visits during festivals; it is common for elderly without children to be invited to visit other relatives, old neighbours, or *laoxiang*.

Spring Festival is the most important period in the Chinese calendar. All children are expected to return home at this time, regardless of their whereabouts. In recent years, the Chinese government has emphasized the importance of other festivals to encourage tourism and consumption. For example, the Dragon Boat and Mid-Autumn festivals are now also promoted as times for family reunion. In the *bingtuan*, most families continued to unite at Spring Festival, they had not picked up the new observances because of conflict with the farming calendar. The three-day national holiday of Mid-Autumn Festival occurs during the harvest itself – the busiest time of the year for farmers.

During 2013, a bazaar was held on the morning of the Mid-Autumn Festival. The streets were full and everybody seemed happy. By the afternoon, however, as the elderly chatted outside their buildings, a feeling of sadness hovered in the air. It stemmed from those whose children were not visiting, and their sadness grew palpably as they watched cars arriving with their neighbours' children, and listened to descriptions made by other proud neighbours of the meals their children had cooked for them. Even some whose children had come bearing gifts were disappointed; their children had rushed away quickly, without staying to eat with their parents. Hou, who was proud that her children worked in Urumqi, put on a brave face. At least, she said, it was not necessary to prepare a big meal and clean up afterwards. Still, she had tears in her eyes.

Even the toughest of personalities could be affected by such a lack of attention. Lao Yu, my upstairs neighbour was already upset and angry in the morning. He would receive no visits, and only three children had telephoned: his daughter and two of his six sons. He had tried to phone his other sons himself and was unable to reach them. So he had called his daughter back: 'tell your brothers they no longer have a father', he had instructed her. Lao Yu had remarried late in life, and his wife's children visited in the afternoon. This only depressed him further.

Late in the evening, Lao Yu's daughter arrived. She had travelled from Karamy, and brought small gifts. As Lao Yu held the tobacco she had brought, his face finally showed some sign of happiness. Yet despite the woman's assurances that her brothers were very busy and might visit later, Lao Yu remained disappointed. They had failed even to contact him. He went to bed early, having no interest in the festival performances.

The new media coverage of festivals other than Spring Festival raised their significance in the eyes of the elderly. Visiting patterns for most families, however, remained unchanged. After the festival, I conducted a brief random sample of 35 elderly people. About half had not been visited by their children. Their emotional responses varied: some expressed under-

standing of their children's situation, but others were upset. Some women cried in front of neighbours. For all, the compact living arrangements in *loufang* meant that it was difficult to ignore the delight of luckier neighbours.

The Unending Obligation of Parents (or, 'The Stone Rolls down the Mountain')

A number of studies have shown that Chinese parents invest deeply in their children's education, marriage, and employment (Davis-Friedmann 1991; Ikels 1993; Whyte 2003a). What has been less often discussed is how and why parents experience happiness from their children's success. In the *bingtuan*, the elderly perceived their life in retirement as 'paradise' because of the security provided by their pensions. But their own personal happiness (i.e. pride) is closely connected with their children's situation. When I asked them, 'what in your life makes you most proud (*jiao'ao*)?', the elderly often referred to their children. Typical answers noted that 'all my children have good jobs', they 'are married', or they 'own a *loufang*'. Sometimes I was told, 'I am living in the nice house of my son [or daughter]'. Similarly, regret and sorrow was connected to children's status. When I asked what people most regretted, many gave answers such as 'my children did not go to university'; they 'did not get good jobs but were stuck in farming [or temporary jobs (*dagong*)]'; they 'do not own *loufang*'; or, they 'did not marry'. Both the successes and difficulties of the children are perceived as the personal successes and difficulties of the parents. The attachment to children's status is ongoing; as one elder said, 'we come to life to worry about children. If they live a good life, we feel released, otherwise we will always think about it'. It is perhaps for this reason that elders continue to regularly mobilize their own resources and networks to assist their children. Importantly, the elderly know what they do; they are quick to describe the support roles they provide for their children: 'kindergarten', 'bank', 'shop', 'restaurant', and 'free labour'.

Kindergarten

As the elderly seek to lift the burden of childcare from their children's shoulders, they encounter new challenges in their own lives.

There is a huge diversity in the 'kindergartens' operated by the elderly. Grandchildren can vary in age from the newborn baby to the high school student, and the role of the elderly can be either short- or long-term. Three broad categories can be identified. The first category is that of grandparents caring for children during the school week. When parents work

in the *liandui*, it is common for their children to live with grandparents during the week, spending time with their parents only on weekends or holidays until the harvest is finished. When parents own a *loufang* of their own, children will relocate to be with their parents; otherwise the parents also move in with the grandparents for the winter. The second category comprises high school aged children who live with their parents, but come to their grandparents for meals during the day. The third category is children in the long-term care of grandparents because they have been 'left behind' as a result of divorce or rural-urban labour migration. Each role presents its own challenges, as do the various ages of children.

Caring for newborn babies is physically difficult for the elderly, especially with their own reduced strength and health. Teenagers can be a 'headache'. Children in between these extremes exhibit homesickness and miss their parents. The elderly worry about how to supervise and care for their charges. Most elderly are illiterate and feel themselves unable to supervise their grandchildren's studies. They fear that without parental supervision, their grandchildren do not study, but simply eat, sleep, and watch television – 'just like us', as one informant put it. I was sometimes recruited as a mentor and English tutor, but we quickly saw that my influence was limited.

Many children themselves find it difficult to concentrate on their studies because they are only looking forward to being picked up by their parents at the weekend. My neighbour Lu's granddaughter, Lingling, for example, came to my flat in the evening and secretly used my cell phone to call her parents. She did not reveal to her grandparents how much she missed her mother. Such homesickness caused problems for Lingling, as it did for many young children. A teacher told me that there was a clear pattern of lower performance among children who lived apart from their parents. This is a source of distress to both parents and grandparents who hope for their children's good future, but they felt helpless because they felt they had limited options with the now-centralized schooling.

At the beginning of the summer holiday, Lingling packed in great excitement when her mother arrived. She was quickly disappointed by the announcement that she would go to summer school because of her poor exams. Lingling burst into tears, crying out 'No! I want to go home!' Neither mother nor grandmother yielded, and Lu further schooled her granddaughter, 'See, if you had listened to me and done well at school, you would be going home now. Remember this lesson well, and do better next time'. Lingling had to accept her mother's decision, but she was mollified by promises of frequent visits and a return home if she did well.

The increased autonomy of middle school students created even greater worries for their grandparents. Students would tell their grandparents that they planned to do their homework at school or at a friend's flat, and would then go to an internet bar to play computer games. According to law, no one under the age of 18 was allowed to frequent the internet bars, but the bar owners themselves provided children with fake ID cards. I too went to the internet bars to check my email, and on occasions when I forgot my ID, the owners were only too happy to provide me with one. The bars were always full of teenagers playing games, smoking, and drinking soft drinks. Early on weekend mornings, teenagers were still asleep on the bar chairs, having apparently spent the night playing computer games. Parents, grandparents, and school officials all believed that student performance suffered from the time spent in internet bars. For a time, the school and municipal authorities had worked together to patrol the bars, but the cooperation had lapsed.

Grandparents felt helpless to control their grandchildren's access to technology. Those who went to the bars financed their game-playing with money that their grandparents gave them for 'school projects'. Those who had access to the internet at home also spent much time playing computer games. Even when their grandparents curtailed their computer time, the grandchildren could elude their control with smartphones.

My neighbour Pan confided her worries to me. She worked hard, she said, for her grandson. She went out daily to buy fresh food regardless of the weather. She ensured that he ate a healthy diet. She washed his clothes. Her grandson, however, spent his time 'playing with his phone'. He would not go to bed when he was told, and it was hard to wake him in the morning. She was angry: 'Mathematics failed, English failed, history failed'. 'How is it', she asked, 'that he repaid my work in this way?' Pan had attempted to remonstrate her grandson, but he had closed his door and ignored her. She was having sleepless nights, she said, and felt that her heart was not well. If she died early, she told me, it would be from worrying about her grandson.

Like many grandparents, Pan was stressed, worried, and felt helpless because her grandchild was not afraid of her. Teachers also find such children difficult to manage and often respond by ignoring them. Parents are more inclined to blame teachers than their own children for difficult behaviours or poor academic performance. They complain that teachers do not teach effectively. Some think that teachers are deliberate in their inattention because they recommend extra tuition for the children. Extra tuition must be paid privately, and parents see it as a sign of the 'corruption

of education'.[96] Even parents who admit that the problem does not rest with the teachers nevertheless see 'no solution' (*mei banfa*). They need to work, they explain, so the children must be cared for by the grandparents. Parents and grandparents alike adopted an attitude of resignation. They contented themselves with telling the school-aged children, 'I have already fulfilled my obligation by explaining everything. If you do not listen, you will understand someday when you suffer'.

In truth, there seemed to be no easy solutions for the problems of childcare that went along with urbanization. In a few households, elders went to help their son on the farm, so that their daughter-in-law could care for her children in town. For most elderly, this solution was untenable because of their health. Thus as they tried to lift the burden of childcare from their own children, the elderly found themselves facing new challenges and uncertainties.

Bank, Shop, Restaurant, and Free Labour

The elderly played other support roles for their children which they likened to the institutions of the market: bank, shop, restaurant, and 'labour'.

The first three of these roles are related to the regular pension disbursements received by the elderly. Pensions provide a logical and moral basis for the elderly to support their children. Popular discourse in the *bingtuan* emphasizes the disproportionate ratio of income to expenses among the old and the young. While the elderly have stable pensions and spend little in daily life, the young 'have families to support' and 'their life is not easy'. Such perceived disbalance further legitimates what is already seen as natural: as some informants said, 'It is reasonable for the younger to spend the money of the older, but not the reverse'. The economic independence of the elderly, so they agree, should not just secure them a 'good life'; it should be turned to the support of their children. Such support is driven by a strong sense of obligation and attachment. As people posed the problem to me (and themselves), 'They are your children. If you do not help them, who will?' Out of deep emotional feelings of attachment and obligation, the elderly therefore pass on the benefits of their pensions to their children.

Pension money is turned towards children's housing and its decoration. When the elderly reside with their children, pension monies also go towards daily living expenses. Sometimes, elders support their children's farming enterprise by buying agricultural materials or by paying the cost of labour during the harvest season. Sometimes elders contribute to their

[96] In the *tuan*, extra courses are offered by some of the teachers. Courses are also offered by private companies which are suspected of bribing teachers to secure recommendations.

children's healthcare, particularly if the children do not receive their own benefits as *zhigong*, and they sometimes even pay social insurance for jobless children. In more affluent families, the elderly might help with more expensive commodities, such as a car. In a word, whenever the children have a financial problem, the elderly may play the role of 'bank' for them.

Smaller but still important sums of money also go towards grandchildren. 'Lucky money' (*yasuiqian*) is always given to grandchildren at Spring Festival. The average amount given in the *bingtuan* is RMB 200, regardless of a grandchild's gender. Many elders give sums of RMB 500-2,000 to a grandchild upon university enrolment. And at a grandchild's marriage, grandparents typically contribute at least RMB 1,000. Sometimes financial assistance extends to house buying, but most elderly say, 'one generation cannot concern itself with two generations' (*yidairen buguan liangdairen de shier*).

The elderly may play the role of 'shop' in sharing other resources. For example, when they have extra food, they are likely to give some to their children. If some of their better-off children bring food to the elderly, they may even save some to redistribute to their needier children. The role of shop frequently blurs with that of 'restaurant', as many children come for lunch or dinner at the elder's place. This is particularly true when children live in Shihezi but work at the administrative offices, schools, or hospitals in the *tuan*. Sometimes, the 'restaurant' is mobile: some elderly go to cook for their children in the *liandui* during harvest time.

The elderly also provide 'free labour' to help accomplish necessary tasks and offset their children's living costs in less direct ways. They may, for example, help with the harvest. In town, they may do their children's daily shopping. And some found ways to make small change to turn over to their children by, for example, collecting plastic bottles or garbage to sell. As one such woman explained, 'My daughter just bought a *loufang* with lots of debt, and now she dare not buy anything for her children. I feel sympathetic, but I'm not affluent either, so I do this. At least I can help them buy some fruit'.

The elderly help their children to meet basic needs and large-scale financial investments. Some also turn their efforts to expanding their children's social networks to increase their social capital. They may give home-grown chickens or vegetables to their children's colleagues or supervisors. Some encourage children to bring colleagues home for meals, which they prepare to a higher standard than ordinary family meals. Some build their own relationships with friends or neighbours to secure help in finding a girlfriend for an unmarried son.

Younger ranks of the elderly, particularly those in their 60s, feel disturbed if they are unable to help their children. Tao, for example, was disturbed because her son had worked in the administrative office of another *tuan* for many years without promotion. When she heard that her sister-in-law's husband (who was the driver for the commander of the Urumqi Corps), was in the *tuan* where her son worked, she immediately called him. She asked the man to have dinner with her son, which he did. But Tao was disappointed because the man had invited only her son. She had hoped that he would understand her concerns and intervene, 'Why not invite my son's leaders together and tell them to take care of him?' she asked me.

The constant work and worry to support and improve children's lives through both direct and indirect means leaves the elderly with many opportunities for disappointment. One might, therefore, wonder if there are parameters by which the elderly might limit their investments in their children, whether to save some resources for themselves, to stave off disappointment, or to make sure that at least one child succeeds.

Persistent Gender Roles: 'Daughter is Good, but Son is Important'

Traditional ideology and practice favoured investment in and ongoing support of sons. In the 2000s, *bingtuan* elderly certainly seem to have a less patrilineal bias than previous generations. During the year of my stay, elders constantly emphasized that daughters were more considerate and supportive than sons. In practice, the elderly co-reside nearly as often with daughters as with sons; they do help their daughter's children; and they offer financial and material support to their daughters – not only to sons. All this would seem to indicate a move towards an equal valuation and an equal investment in children of both genders. Yet the elderly still insist that the 'son is important', even if they also believe that 'daughter and son are equal'.

Closer comparison reveals that the elderly actually do give more money to their sons than to their daughters. When the elderly live in their own house or in their son's house, these sums are much greater than those given to daughters. The distribution is not made simply as a matter of need. Rather, it is taken for granted that greater financial support should be offered to sons. Similarly, elders are more likely to help on a son's farm, or to cook for a son who lives in the *liandui* to offset the demands for labour in his household. It is assumed that all families proceed in the same way, and thus that the parents of a daughter's husband will be similarly supportive of their own son, and thus – indirectly – of one's daughter. Yet the equation of concern and investment is not quite balanced by the behaviour of in-laws.

Traces of patrilineal ideology remain in the greater concern shown to arrange and support good marriages for sons and to secure good housing for sons. So too in the case that children divorce, parents show more concern that adequate childcare be secured for their divorced sons' children than for those of divorced daughters. These manifestations of a greater concern for the welfare of the son and his children betray the continuity of the traditional idea that the son represents the family line. What happens to the son and his children therefore affects more directly both the status and reputation of the parents (and future generations) than what happens to the daughter. In any case, after marriage the daughter belongs to another family, and her fate is connected to theirs.

Most daughters tolerate their parent's direction of greater support to their brothers than to themselves. Some daughters also acquiesce in the idea that 'son is important' and identify it as part of traditional culture. Often, daughters provide their parents with a greater proportion of help to benefit than is provided by their brothers. Such an imbalanced exchange occurs when the elderly keep close connections with their daughters, and also when relationships with sons are poor. How is it that the elderly continue to value sons more, even when they rely on daughters? Or rather, why do the daughters tolerate the disjuncture between practice and ideology? The lasting power of cultural norms is important; so too are the emotions involved in parent-child bonds; and so too are patterns of long-term reciprocity. These come together in the claim made by both sons and daughters that they bear an 'unalterable' (*tianjingdiyi de*) obligation to support their ageing parents. Daughters explained that their obligation was to return their parents' investments in their early life. Sons tended to mix such a conception of limited reciprocity with the traditional obligation of sons.

Some married daughters do negotiate the balance of support between genders and generations. One of my informants commented on what her brother was entitled to in exchange for care of their father: 'He is the son of the family. Of course he has an obligation to take care of father. I do not mind that my father gives him his pension card, but the precondition is that he must treat my father well. Otherwise, he will get nothing. I am the oldest daughter in the family and I have the right to decide'. What does such a statement mean in practice? It might signal a general trend in the rising power of married daughters within their natal families. But one must look further to be sure – to what extent can a daughter influence her parent's decisions? How do brothers react to their sisters' bids for equal (or greater) authority? Some information appears below in the broader framework of inter-generational conflicts.

Plate 17. Retired son takes care of mother.

Inter-Generational Conflicts

Until this point, I have painted a generally harmonious picture of inter-generational support, but conflicts do arise. There are two main sources of inter-generational conflict. One has to do with the use of pensions. The other major source of conflict is between in-laws; these are especially common within two- and three-generation households.

Even generous pensions are limited, and the elderly must decide whether to give out money to their children in small disbursements, or to save up the pensions for the future. As noted above, there are strong expectations that the elderly should use their money to help their children. Sometimes, uncertainty about their own future can constrain an elder's desire to give so freely. Those who reside with their children, in particular, may find themselves under pressure to give more than they want. Kang was one of them.

As a retired 75-year-old *zhigong*, Kang has lived with her only son's family since 2009 – the year after her husband's death. Kang's son has a well-paid driving job, but Kang has done much to support his family. She has taken care of her 10-year-old granddaughter since birth, even while her husband was ailing. She contributed money to help her son buy the house,

and since living with them, she has paid the family's daily expenses, including a lunch allowance to her daughter-in-law of RMB 500 so that she can eat out in Shihezi, where she works for a low salary.

Kang is an outgoing and strong-minded woman. She spends most of her time on the square, playing poker and dancing, before going home to cook. On meeting her, I was impressed with her energy, as she practised Uyghur dances with young people long after other elderly had returned home. In the winter, as well as spending time at the Elderly Club during the day, I also saw her at dance halls primarily frequented by young people. We became friends and dance partners, and it was Kang who brought me to these activities and introduced me to many people. Only after we became close friends did this apparently easy-going woman share with me that she was embroiled in inter-generational conflict.

Kang told me that her son and daughter-in-law showed no appreciation for her contribution to the family. She cooked, cleaned, and washed, but when her son and daughter-in-law returned from work, they just ate and watched TV. When Kang finished her cleaning and wished to join them in front of the TV, they suggested that she should go to the square, even encouraging her to go out during the winter when a dangerous fall on ice was possible. While she understood that her son and daughter-in-law wanted privacy for their conjugal life, Kang was not so happy with the active life that I had observed. Despite her obvious strength and energy, she herself felt that she was too old to dance and play 'from morning to night' in addition to doing so much housework.

There were other conflicts over money. The year before I met her, Kang had even moved out and lived alone for six months in protest over her son's requests for money. At the time, the son owned a truck, but he wanted to buy a car as well, and asked Kang for help. Kang felt this was an unnecessary luxury, and besides – she wished to save some money for herself, so she refused the request. Her son had bought the car anyway by selling the old house he and Kang had owned jointly. The incident had damaged their relationship. The daughter-in-law now characterized Kang as 'stingy', and Kang felt that her son and his wife were 'staring at her pocket'. Such feelings had been intensified on both sides when Kang subsequently refused to allow her son to 'manage' her pension card.

Furthermore, the conflict had been intensified when other family members became involved. Kang's daughter had intervened to support her mother. Like the informant quoted above, she claimed a right and duty as her brother's older sister to speak up concerning her mother's poor treatment. In this case, Kang's son and his wife rejected the sister's intervention. She was,

they argued, 'poured out water'. As a married daughter, she had no rights to intervene in family matters.

Kang's daughter-in-law's mother also involved herself, claiming rights as a mother to look after her daughter's welfare. She had always felt that her daughter had married down, and now encouraged her daughter to seek divorce and find a wealthier husband.

Kang had escaped from the conflict by moving into an empty house in the *liandui* owned by her brother. She refused her daughter's offer of shelter because she did not want to be seen as having been 'kicked out' by her son and 'squeezed in' with her daughter.

After six months in the cold house in the countryside, Kang had accepted her daughter-in-law's offer to return. The relationship, however, had not recovered. Kang remained unhappy that her daughter-in-law did not help her with housework, that she did not call her 'mother', and that she regularly visited and bought gifts for her own mother, but showed little consideration for Kang. By the time I left the field, Kang was looking for a house where she could live independently, feeling it wisest to move out before any further conflict. When she moved out, she expected to rely on her daughters for further care. In return, she would give them her savings. The situation was – of course – uncertain, and Kang recognized that she might end her days in institutional care.

Kang's case shows a number of features of elderly life that have not been so far discussed. Among these are the specific vulnerabilities faced by widows, and the limitations of control over one's income and freedoms that come with co-residence. Even co-residence with a son does not confer unmitigated authority in family affairs. Instead, shared expectations of a parent's boundless support for a son can become unduly constraining. A son's mother, especially when widowed, feels compelled to undertake housework and make financial contributions that may be too much, yet she remains vulnerable to accusations of 'stinginess' by both son and daughter-in-law. The factors that intertwined in Kang's situation: distribution of pension, co-residence, and relationships between mother, son, daughter, daughter-in-law and her relatives – are well recognized sources of inter-generational conflict in the *bingtuan*.

As she reported the situation to me, Kang was reluctant to satisfy all her son's requests due to her strong sense of uncertainty concerning the future. She had little trust that her son and daughter-in-law would care for her if she became bedridden. Nor could she be sure that her daughters would do so. She therefore felt that she needed to save some money to secure her future. Having lived much of her life in tough conditions, Kang saw the lifestyle of young people, including her son and his wife, as 'wasteful'

(*langfei*). I spoke also with Kang's daughter, her son, and her daughter-in-law. I did not raise the subject of the family conflict for fear of exacerbating it. Kang's son and daughter-in-law never mentioned it, but her daughter did, blaming the couple rather than her mother. It did become clear, however, that Kang's son and daughter-in-law were focused on the present rather than the future. Her son was quite clear about the orientation of his values: 'Human beings should live in the current time, should follow the society and age. What is the meaning of saving and worrying about the future? We could all die tomorrow in an earthquake like Wenchuan'.[97]

The perspective of Kang's son was not unusual. Both old and young felt that they held different values. Generally, the young perceived the old as 'stingy', and the old perceived the young as 'wasteful'. But everyone could be accused of either stinginess or wastefulness, and they often were. The retorts were strong. Kang's son drew on the possibility of natural disaster; sometimes elders refuted their children's claims with the harsh reminder that, 'my money comes from the Communist Party, not from you'. The degree of separation and conflict over these two perspectives surprised me. Though I grew up in Xinjiang, I had never heard the term 'stingy' used quite so often as it is in the *bingtuan*, and certainly not as a common descriptor for the elderly.

Complaints about the stinginess of the elderly were like those made by Kang's daughter-in-law. She complained that Kang was 'stingy' because she saved dirty water to use for the toilet, grumbled about the electricity bill, and bought the cheapest food and clothes. The elderly complained that their children were 'stingy' when the children were reluctant to lend money or offer material support. Neighbours, friends, relatives, and in-laws all accused each other of 'stinginess' for various reasons. Many in the *bingtuan* claimed that 'stinginess' was not just prudence regarding the future, but a result of 'valuing money too much' (*ba qian kande taizhong*). Elders who were not seen as 'stingy' explained that they enjoyed good relations with their children because they shared most of their wealth. They thought sharing now was preferable to saving because their money would go to their children after their death anyway. They suspected that other elderly who had problems with their children really 'valued money too much' and were as stingy as their children claimed.

Some elders agree that their generation can be stingy, and some young people agree that theirs can be selfish, wasteful, and vain. Kang's daughter, for example, agreed with her mother. She too thought that her brother and sister-in-law were wrong to think only about material competition with their

[97] The Wenchuan earthquake of 12 May 2008 was one of China's biggest recorded earthquakes, it claimed some 90,000 human lives.

peers, and to never consider that 'old mother' (*laoma*) might need to save money for the future.

Though the intensity of such accusations of stinginess and wastefulness in a region of Xinjiang were new to me, they appear to be common in other parts of China. Yan (2009) observed that the globalization and consumerism which followed economic reform have stimulated the 'individualization' of Chinese society. This consumerist individualism manifests less often as a desire for 'independence' and 'freedom' (as supposedly in the West), and more often as a form of competitive materialism. Such competitive materialism is strongly evident among the young in the *bingtuan* in every aspect of life, from home decoration, to dress, car, phone, travel, children's investments, and eating out. Children desire parental support to pursue this materialist dream: in the words of one young informant: 'Who does not want to control their elder's money?' As a result, many elderly believe that young people would waste their money if given the opportunity. As one put it, 'If you gave them the pension card, they would spend it immediately'.

The widespread impression that younger people are dedicated to wasteful, vanity-driven consumerism intensifies feelings of uncertainty about the future for the elderly. They feel the need to balance their financial commitments, and to think not only of their children but also of themselves. Underlying these different perceptions and apparent different values are the real source of 'uncertainty': shifting power relationships within the family resulting from changes in the wider society.

Renegotiating Filial Piety: Power and Care

Modernization theory assumed that with industrialization and urbanization, the prevalence of the nuclear family would expand. Conjugal relationships were expected to supersede parent-child relationships in importance. The authority of elders would decline, and so too would the support they receive from their children (Goode 1963). Critics of modernization theory have claimed, conversely, that modern social security systems, cultural values, local custom, and long-term parent-child bonds would combine to guarantee the security of the elderly even if the elderly lost their authority within the family.

In the *bingtuan*, the power of the elderly is felt to stem primarily from their pensions, and to some extent to be embedded in home ownership and living arrangements. There is no doubt that the state-sponsored pension system greatly improves the security of elders, especially because pensions are used to benefit whole families. Positive inter-generational relationships and respect for the elderly are both seen as depending on the use of pensions.

As one elderly man put it: 'Why are our children filial nowadays? All because we have the pension, and support them from time to time. If we did not, it is hard to say [whether they would remain filial]'.

The elderly have adopted other attitudes that help to counter negative impacts of the change in inter-generational relationships. Many now also seek a 'free' lifestyle based on their financial independence. When they achieve it, they do not need to calculate their authority. They can instead assert, 'One generation should not care about the other! Why worry so much?' It is more difficult for cohabiting families such as Kang's to avoid power struggles. Even if they do not want to care about 'power', they face its realities every day. Daughters-in-law who work outside the house, socialist ideologies of equality between men and women (and daughters and sons), and so many new possibilities for consumption are all forces which confront the elderly. Against such forces, the pension is a source of bargaining power, but the elderly (and particularly widows) still feel vulnerable.

The increasing power of wives is reported widely across China. In the *bingtuan*, there are several factors which have contributed to this increasing power. As young women leave rural areas, fewer marriageable girls are left in rural areas – this increases their bargaining position vis-à-vis suitors and their families. Almost all expect their own house. The rising market in housing likewise demands an increasing investment from the husband's family in the provision of housing. Once a man secures a wife, he is desperate not to lose her through divorce. The husband's family supports his efforts to keep his wife, and usually keep their distance to avoid conflict. Elders like Kang, who live with a child, spend so much time on the square in part to maintain physical distance from their child and his or her spouse. Yet distance is rarely enough to prevent conflict. Conflicts occur most frequently between wives and mothers-in-law, and when they appear, only the husband-son can resolve them.

The Husband's Dilemma: Wife or Mother?

Bingtuan husbands fear divorce, but also wish to maintain their status as filial sons. Parents frequently regard sons as less filial than daughters, and complain of 'laziness', 'selfishness', and 'greed'. Once their sons marry, such complaints are frequently displaced from the son to his wife. The wife is accused of leading the son astray, and the son is said to be 'afraid of his wife'. The idea of the wife as a fearsome 'tigress' is widely accepted.

Husbands, including Kang's son, are forced to negotiate the potential disaster of divorce while maintaining the 'unalterable principal' of filial care. They most often attempt to adopt a mediating role. Kang's son, for example, told me that in any situation of conflict, he would stand on the 'right side'

and comfort the 'wrong side' later. My observations suggested, however, that the 'wrong side' was usually the parent's side. Sons knew that their parents were more tolerant than their wives and more likely to forgive their faults. There could be a limit to such tolerance, however. The pension enabled elders to act on the widespread values of 'independence' and 'freedom' and move out if they were pushed too far. The son would then not only lose the financial contribution and free labour of the parent, but could also lose 'face', if he were deemed to be an unfilial son who had 'kicked out' his parent. Even a parent's pension, however, is worth less to sons than a 'peaceful mind' in regard to their wife. In open conflict, a son is likely to support his wife, yet find covert ways to help his parents. He may, for instance, give cash, food, or medicine to his parents without his wife's knowledge. Through such behaviours, even scared sons with fearsome wives may still be regarded as filial.

Good Daughter but Bad Daughter-in-Law

While it is sometimes not clear whether a son is regarded as a 'filial son' or a man who is 'afraid of his wife', daughters-in-law are almost always seen as a 'tigress'. The elderly showed widespread aversion to their daughters-in-law, and could talk endlessly about their shortcomings. Daughters-in-law exhibited a shameless desire to control their pension card; they lacked sympathy and gratitude for the childcare provided by the elderly; they were too lazy to cook or clean; they were stingy; they bought cheap food; and they desired to take advantage of the elderly at every opportunity. The daughter-in-law, it seemed, was the source of all evil.

When the elderly spoke of their own daughters, in contrast, their tone was full of praise and appreciation. Since most daughters were married, it seemed that one elder's dutiful daughter was another's fearsome 'tigress'. Kang, for example, regarded her daughter-in-law as a harsh tigress, yet her descriptions made it clear that the woman was also a 'good daughter' who visited and brought gifts regularly to her own mother. Similarly, Kang's own daughter, who came to support her, might be seen as a 'tigress' by her husband's family. Why was it so difficult (or unimaginable) for a 'good daughter' to be simultaneously a 'good daughter-in-law'?

Kang's daughter-in-law was in no doubt that the blame did not lie with the younger women. 'The elderly', she said, 'never treat their daughter-in-law in the same way as their own daughter'. Almost all the young women with whom I talked agreed. No matter how well they treated their mother-in-law, they explained, she would never treat them like her own daughter. The best daughter-in-law could never replace the worst daughter in a parent's, and especially a mother's, heart. Like many wives, Kang's daughter-in-law

had many complaints about her mother-in-law's behaviour. Kang, she said, had denigrated her because she had given birth to a girl; she tried to incite her son to dominate his wife in their conjugal relationship – sometimes being generous to her daughter and 'stingy' towards her son to foster competition for her favour. In contrast to Kang, her own mother was always helpful, and had made contributions to buying both house and car. In defending themselves from being labelled as 'tigresses', wives pointed out that the husband's family also had to take some responsibility for the relationship with their daughter-in-law. In their words: 'one hand cannot make a noise unless the other claps' (*ygie bazhang pai buxiang*). A 'good mother', it would seem, is not often a 'good-mother-in-law'.

Sister or Outsider?

One factor leading to the escalation of the conflict in Kang's family was the intervention of the 'good daughter' to support Kang. According to Kang's daughter-in-law, Kang seldom complained at home. She grumbled to her daughter, and the daughter then came to make trouble. As a result of such interventions, Kang's daughter-in-law claimed that she had almost divorced her husband several times. Kang's daughter-in-law holds the view that sons have more responsibility to care for their parents than do daughters. Thus, considering that her husband was the only son, Kang's daughter-in-law said that she 'had to forgive' her mother-in-law and sister-in-law, but they had a bad relationship and never talked when they met.

Stories of sisters-in-law making trouble were common. I heard of several cases where the involvement of sisters-in-law did lead to divorces. In the eyes of both husband and wife, the sister-in-law is always seen as a trouble maker. Sisters-in-law side with their aggrieved parents and can exacerbate problems because they strengthen the elders' power vis-à-vis the younger couple and also weaken their brother's resolve to side with his wife. Furthermore, their right to intervene is unclear. Once married, daughters are supposed to be outsiders to their natal families. Husbands and wives often told me that they argued to their sisters-in-law, 'You are a married girl. A married daughter is "poured out water". You have no right to disturb our life, so what are you doing here?'

Despite their invocation of traditional norms at times of conflict, I observed that couples were far less concerned with tradition when they needed assistance. When the elderly were sick, for example, young couples sometimes argued that they were too busy to care for them, and pushed responsibility onto the husband's sister. 'Tradition' provided discourses that could be strategically drawn upon to legitimate particular arguments, but

could be discarded just as easily. Tradition did not dictate decisions; it was manipulated strategically in taking decisions.

Carrying the Bowl with Balance

Besides deciding between 'giving' to their children or 'saving' for themselves, the elderly must also follow the principle of 'carrying the bowl with balance' in deciding what assistance each child should receive. In the *bingtuan* context, this means that elders must consider 'equality' when making decisions about assistance with property or money. Since children's situations may be as different as the lengths of 'five fingers', and the parent's relationship to children may be just as variable, this can be difficult. Yet, it is clear to elders that failing to maintain a balance will result in conflict. A common strategy elders adopt, therefore, is not to let each child know what other children have been given. Even one of the *tuan* deputy heads was told by his father not to let his brother know that he was given more. As a result of such secrecy, suspicion between children is not uncommon. Mutual suspicion between children need not be dangerous to the elderly themselves. Those who live apart from their children can usually manage the relationships with each child to their own benefit.

The issue can be more problematic for those who cohabit with children, particularly in the case of retired *zhigong* who are expected to have a relative abundance of money. Brothers may be suspicious of the amount of support offered to their sisters, but it is competition between brothers that is most disruptive. I will exemplify this through the case of Wan.

Wan, 77, is a widow and retired *zhigong*. Since her husband died, she has lived with her youngest son and shared her pension with him and his wife. Her son's income is low and his wife has no job, so she has covered most of their expenses and hardly saved anything for herself. In the advent of Spring Festival, the son of Wan's oldest son married. Wan's oldest son, who lived in the same *tuan*, asked her to contribute RMB 2,000 to the wedding. Wan offered RMB 1,000, but this only caused resentment. Wan's oldest son and daughter-in-law blamed her for giving all her money to the youngest son, and claimed this was 'not fair' to the oldest son. 'Both sides of the hand', they argued, 'should be the same' (*shouxin shoubei doushi shou*).

The conflict escalated as Spring Festival approached. The youngest son's wife disliked Wan, and against her husband's wishes, arranged for the oldest son to take Wan to his house. The oldest son came and picked her up. The arrangement suited him because, as he saw it, Wan could help his new daughter-in-law (who was already pregnant) when he and his wife moved back to the *liandui* for the season. Wan stayed only 20 days with her eldest son. The conditions, she said, were too cramped. She felt she had little

respect from her eldest son's family, particularly his wife, who liked her no better than her youngest daughter-in-law. Nor did she have the respect of his pregnant daughter-in-law, who demanded to have her hair washed every day and vomited. The young woman's morning sickness affected Wan's own health and appetite for the worse.

According to Wan, her youngest son treated her well. He even brought her foot-washing water. She would have liked to continue living with him, but it did not seem a good solution. Her oldest son and his wife were unhappy because of her greater financial support of the youngest son, and her youngest son's wife remained hostile to her. Wan considered moving out and renting a flat, but her youngest son threatened to divorce his wife if she did.

Instead of being a time of joyful family reunion, Spring Festival was dominated by the 'war' of Wan's children over her pension and living arrangements. Even Wan's brother-in-law had no success in brokering a solution to the conflict. During the festival itself, Wan was depressed. Her other children just brought simple gifts and then left. They too showed little concern for her health or happiness, interesting themselves only in her money. She was also disappointed that her two daughters, who operated a chicken factory in the *liandui* and were economically comfortable, offered no help. She would have liked their assistance at least at the emotional level, but they did not even argue for justice with her brothers as did other daughters in the cases mentioned above.

Finally, Wan rented a small flat later the same spring. Her youngest son visited her every day and one of her daughters also visited occasionally. Questioned about Wan's future when she became immobile, her youngest son said he would take care of her, but in the meantime, he respected her decision to live alone.

Wan's case shows that an elder's pension could become the target for competition, create disputes among family members, and bring trouble to the life of the elderly. Although it is local custom for elders to share their pension with the child with whom they reside, this did not necessarily avoid jealous reactions from other children. Jealous children could deploy the discourse of 'equality' to make demands on a parent. In turn, the co-resident child could use the bargaining power of care to justify their higher share of the pension, but they might (as in Wan's case) push the responsibility of care onto the jealous sibling.

The conflicting logics of 'equality' and 'care' can be particularly problematic when combined with the elders' own preferred living arrangements. Most elders prefer to live in *loufang*, and few would like to be 'passed' to children in the *liandui*. Children who still live in the *liandui* then,

may argue that they are not avoiding responsibility. Rather, their parents do not wish to live with them. Nevertheless, 'equality' dictates that they should still receive some financial help from their parents. Wan's situation was not quite so complicated because the children who remained in the *liandui* year-round (the more affluent daughters) did not raise demands on her limited funds. Nevertheless, for Wan, as for others, a pension brought conflict along with its promises of security.

Are such difficulties a sign of shifting values from generalized reciprocity to short-term reciprocity in inter-generational relationships? The diversity of situations in the *bingtuan* makes this difficult to assess. It is clear that most children feel strong obligations to their parents, although not all are able to fill these obligations equally. It is also clear that in families where both parents and children are financially comfortable, there is less conflict and the perceptions of happiness are greater. Conflict is more frequent in families which face financial challenges, particularly among those who live in the *tuan*. Still, economic factors do not alone motivate conflict nor does an account of relative financial standings in a family provide a full explanation.

In Wan's family for instance, her oldest son and two daughters are all economically better situated than the youngest son with whom Wan resided. They even have cars. Yet it is the youngest son who appears the most filial. Such complexities are accounted for in local understanding by the phrase, 'the five fingers are not the same length'. This complexity is increased by the fact that children may not simply pursue quantifiable material interest, but 'equality', which may be conceived in different ways based on different values. All Wan's children except her youngest son are united in hostility to the daughter-in-law who does not work. They see her as undeserving of their mother's support. Such complex familial networks form an 'interdependence web' in which 'members vary in their degree of solidarity' (Liu 2014: 309-10). Elders respond to tensions in the web by pursuing strategies to reduce or manage them. Living independently is one such strategy for asserting control, to which Wan eventually resorted.

Similar to the 'fight' over pensions, there are some signs of competition among children for ownership of their parents' houses, though it is less common. In the small number of households that own two houses, however, disputes can arise. Disputes may also materialize in cases where parents have co-purchased a house with one child and the house is registered in that child's name – most commonly when a widow buys a *loufang* with an unmarried son. In such cases, elder siblings may deploy the logic of 'equality' to argue that the parental contribution to their own (cheaper) house had been much smaller (e.g. for a single-storey mud or brick house). Consequently, rather than transferring ownership of the *loufang* to the

younger brother, the value of the house should be shared equally between the siblings. Alternatively, siblings might argue that parents should help them to buy a new house in turn. Parents may be motivated to purchase more expensive housing to raise the marriageability of the younger son, but then find it difficult to respond to demands for 'equality'. House purchases, then, may sometimes lead to broken family relationships.

Such conflicts might be expected to become more common in the future. I therefore surveyed the elderly regarding their property and its eventual distribution. Most identified their home and pension, rather than other material goods, as their most significant property. In regard to future distribution, 33 per cent planned to distribute property equally between all their children; 24.5 per cent intended to leave their property to those children who treated them well; and 19.6 per cent said they would base their decision on need. Interestingly, only 6 per cent stated that all property would be transferred to a son. Only 4.3 per cent would consider making a legal will to decide distribution. The remaining 13 per cent expressed no clear opinion. Among those who have made their decision, it is clear that more leave houses to sons than to daughters (see Appendix).

In summary, the resources on which the elderly depend for security, such as their home and pension, can become a source of uncertainty and trouble. Elders must balance giving and saving, and the needs and demands of different children. Living conditions play a significant role in the ways these complex issues are resolved, and those who cohabit with their children tend to face greater pressures than those who live independently. Both continuity of traditional culture and the emergence of newly-shaped values are visible. Housing and pensions are recognized increasingly as guarantees for future security in the context of a changing socio-economic environment; and trust is declining in the ability or willingness of the young to provide care for the old.

Conclusion

At the micro-level, the inter-generational contract 'does not exist on its own but is influenced by the more macro social structure and public policy' (Izuhara 2009: 2). Chinese traditional norms emphasize the duty of children, particularly sons, to support elderly parents, but rapid social and economic change in China has challenged this pattern. In the *bingtuan*, rapid urbanization and elders' entitlements to pensions have greatly impacted inter-generational relationships and family support patterns. The inter-generational contract has shifted away from conventional ideas and practice. It also shows a 'divorce' between ideology and practice. Both young and old may be conservative ideologically but pragmatic in practice.

Recent urbanization has made housing the main concern of the elderly and the central element in inter-generational relationships and support patterns. Although the elderly have shaped independent lifestyles stimulated by economic independence, the financial constraints of housing have reshaped patterns of inter-generational reciprocity through co-residence and childcare. Yet, this is a complex melding of duty and obligation, emotional attachment, and practical arrangement. The melding forges both traditional and new values in new social conditions, further modifying the standards of filial practice.

Chapter 7
Long-Term Care in the *Bingtuan*

In the previous chapter, I addressed inter-generational relations and support patterns among elderly who do not need intensive physical care. In this chapter, I will consider the challenges facing those who do need long-term care. How do they mobilize both material and immaterial resources to deal with these challenges? By examining practices of family care for the infirm, I will investigate how family members negotiate traditional norms and actual situations, and consider how traditional patterns of care are changing in the face of contemporary socio-political and economic transitions.

As many scholars have observed, one of the major challenges facing Chinese society is how to support the rapidly growing elderly population, especially those requiring care (Cooney and Di 1999: 740; Wong and Leung 2012: 571).The provision of long-term care (LTC) remains primarily a family responsibility. Already a decade prior to my own fieldwork, Ikels pointed out that 'while this responsibility has its roots in traditional values that emphasize filial obligations to one's parents, it is equally grounded in the contemporary political economy' (Ikels 1997: 452). In other words, the absence of care provided by the state or (affordable) private institutions, made it necessary for most infirm elderly to live with children or other relatives, and the success of long-term care depended on how well they were able to tap the resources of their neighbourhood and former work unit. Ikels argued that long-term care, however, had become a burden for the family, and that there was a need to introduce institutional care. In the decade or more between our researches, the burden on the family could have only increased as deepening market-oriented reforms brought about the full disappearance of work units.

Although institutional care remains rare, long-term care has become a significant political issue. The success of the One Child Policy means that the relative proportion of the elderly in society is increasing. The '4-2-1 family' is likely to become more common in the future with the continuation of policies that encourage single children. The number of elderly who have

been predeceased by their only child is increasing (Wong and Leung 2012), as is the number of elderly who have no children living nearby after decades of economic migration. Women's employment outside the house has also reduced the capacity of families to care for their elderly at home. Rural elderly face additional and acute challenges in not being able to afford long-term care due to rising medical costs and their lack of pension entitlements (Pan 2007: 2). The number of private care institutions has increased dramatically, but they are marked by acute shortage, low quality, and high prices (Cooney and Di 1999: 743; Wong and Leung 2012: 581-84). In 2010, the number of impaired elderly reached 36,000,000 individuals – a number that means one-quarter of China's families face long-term care burdens – and the urgency of the issue generated public appeals to the state to share responsibility for eldercare.[98]

In response, on 1 July 2013, the state issued the Law on the Protection of Rights and Interests of the Aged. The new law emphasizes the responsibility of children to their parents, but also underscores the role of state and society. It tries to integrate three levels of long-term care: home-based care, district community care, and institutional care.[99] The implementation of the law has progressed unevenly across different regions, and financing long-term care from public budgets has remained a problematic issue (Wong and Leung 2012: 579-80). In September 2014, the First Forum on Long-Term Care was held at the highest state level in Beijing.[100] Specific solutions to implementing the law have still not emerged, however, and long-term care remains an ongoing challenge for Chinese government, society, and family.

The *bingtuan* too faces the challenges of long-term care for an increasingly elderly population. According to my questionnaire, around 15 per cent of the elderly in the *bingtuan* need long-term care, and the number is likely to grow. As elsewhere in China, adequate LTC providers are in short supply and primary care remains the responsibility of families. Here too elders are increasingly likely to live on their own, whether because their adult children have left the Corps, prefer to live in nuclear families, or find

[98] http://finance.ce.cn/rolling/201303/03/t20130303_17067118.shtml. Last accessed 5 May 2014.

[99] Home-based care is to be provided by social workers, volunteers, and elderly care institutions that offer in-home services. District community care should keep pace – institutions should offer medical care, entertainment equipment, and daily or short-term care services. Institutional care should be a supplement to these other two forms, and both state-owned and private institutions should be developed. A similar policy direction appeared in the 12th Five Year Plan (2011-15) (Wong and Leung 2012: 578).

[100] http://wenku.baidu.com/view/4b5c3361ddccda38376baf85.html. Last accessed 15 May 2014.

their housing too small. A spouse is often the major caregiver for an infirm elder; of the 57 households I knew about where elders needed long-term care, the spouse was the primary caregiver in 25 of them.[101] Elderly spouses, however, face their own health problems. In such cases, pressure to take-up care falls on adult children who must negotiate filial norms in complex modern circumstances.

In this chapter, I present the LTC challenges faced by *bingtuan* families through ethnographic storytelling. Most studies of LTC in China have been based on statistical data, and there has been little qualitative research to reveal the experience of care. Two useful exceptions are Ikels' early work (1997) and Holroyd's more recent study (2003) which investigated changing family obligations in Beijing and Hong Kong. Ikels and Holroyd both demonstrate that children experience competing obligations because of socio-economic transformation, and Holroyd gives additional attention to the emotional dimension of care practice. Here, I am able to present a more complex picture with my mix of ethnographic methodologies than they were able to provide with interviews alone.

In this chapter, I show that the diversity in family decision-making and caregiving practices also draws on experiences of the past and present, moral ideas, structural constraints, social relationships, and emotions. These dimensions interact to produce various consequences. Still, I too conclude that family care for disabled elderly is determined more by practical constraints than by traditional norms. What does seem to be important about the past are actual histories of relationship, both within and between generations; these do have a major impact on decisions and practices of long-term care.

First I consider a case in which a healthy spouse cares for her elderly partner. Then I look in detail at two cases in which the poor health of the caregiving spouse necessitates extensive help from offspring. Finally, I consider in detail some of the issues that arise from these two cases, the options available to families, and the challenges for long-term care.

In the Care of a Spouse

For disabled elders within the Corps, their spouse is usually the primary caregiver. In most cases, it is an elderly woman who takes care of a disabled husband. Both spouses are usually over 70, and the health condition of each determines the kind of support that is required from the other. In this section, I examine the situation of a relatively healthy caregiver. Subsequent

[101] My knowledge of these families came from mixed sources: 26 emerged from various questionnaires, and 31 emerged from in-depth interviewing and participant observation.

examples hint at the full spectrum of challenges faced by caregiving between elderly spouses.

Lao Huang, 75, is a former *zhigong* who has been blind for eight years and also suffers from heart disease, prostate problems, and back pain; and he is hard of hearing. Lao Huang is cared for by his wife, also a former *zhigong*. The couple have two sons and two daughters. The youngest daughter lives in the neighbouring unit; the older daughter is in Shandong Province; and the sons live in Urumqi and Kuitun.[102]

I first met the couple at their three-bedroom house in the *liandui*. It was unusually well appointed with two courtyards, a bath (uncommon among their generation), and much expensive electrical equipment, some of it still in boxes. Expensive toilet paper was emblazoned with the logo of China Southern Airlines. Lao Huang's wife told me proudly that her two sons, one a well-paid airport worker and the other an accountant, were married to well-paid wives, and they had provided all this equipment for them. Their daughters had not fared as well in financial terms. The eldest daughter was farming with her husband in Shandong and taking care of her in-laws. The youngest daughter, having given up *zhigong* status like many in the late 1990s, was doing temporary farm work alongside her husband. Due to their low and irregular income, they had decided not to have a child.

Lao Huang's blindness curtailed his mobility. He could usually be found sitting on the sofa, crutch in hand. He was able to feed himself, but not much else. His wife worked around the house and garden, where she kept vegetables and chickens. She could not leave Lao Huang alone for long, as his prostate problems meant frequent urination. They had cut a hole into a chair to make a 'toilet' that was more easily accessible than the one in the bathroom. When she went to shop or visit neighbours, Lao Huang's wife cleared the living room of things that might cause him to fall and then locked him in, so that he would not go stumbling around the house or outside. In good weather, she would take Lao Huang outside, where he was happy to recognize the voices of neighbours and chat with them. This was a significant release from boredom for Lao Huang, but he was only comfortable interacting with familiar voices, and he would never speak to me.

The spring after I started my fieldwork, Lao Huang and his wife moved from their house in the *liandui* to a *loufang* in town. Here, isolation became more of a problem because there were no familiar neighbours. Lao Huang's wife would take him to the square in a wheelchair in the hope of encountering old acquaintances, but the noise of music and cars made Lao

[102] Another *bingtuan* city, located some 60 kilometres from Tuan 143.

Huang uncomfortable (*naoxin*). His wife tried to encourage him to stay out, but he pushed her to take him home, saying he needed to urinate. She would find a quiet spot for him under the trees, but then yield to his wishes to return home as soon as they finished the necessary shopping.

Lao Huang's wife felt sorry for him. Lao Huang, she said, had lived through hardship, and was now unable to enjoy the good life. Her life was also difficult – she rose several times each night to help her husband to the bathroom. She had come to accept this as normal, although she sometimes complained or expressed anger towards her husband. Nevertheless, although it was not a topic I could broach directly, it was apparent from her behaviour that she was frightened of losing him. She called all her children when worried about his health, and superstitiously avoided places where others had died.

In terms of practical care, Lao Huang's wife could handle some of her husband's problems alone. A cold, for example, was no problem. When problems became more serious, she would turn to her children for help. Which one helped depended on availability. During the winter when Lao Huang was suffering heart problems, all four visited at different times, including the daughter who lived in Shandong. When Lao Huang was hospitalized for two weeks that winter, his two daughters took turns caring for him. The sons found it more difficult to get away from work, and visited for shorter periods. The eldest son owned a car, and he would drive Lao Huang to hospital, or arrange for friends in the *tuan* to do so if he could not. Lao Huang's wife sometimes became frustrated with her husband. In these times, the children would try to relieve the pressure she felt, they would take care of their father and insist that she take time for herself.

All cases of elderly who require LTC are different, but Lao Huang's situation is representative in a number of ways. For about half the infirm elderly throughout the Corps, it is the healthier spouse, usually the wife, who serves as primary caregiver and cooperates with children to deliver supplementary care. In the 25 households I knew where a spouse was the primary caregiver, the elderly couple also lived apart from their children. The spouse's care responsibilities were round-the-clock. They included dressing, cooking, bathing, and assisting with toileting. In fine weather, most took their spouse out in a wheelchair; in winter, they remained largely housebound with their spouse. Some expressed annoyance or resentment or envied those who were free to dance, play mah-jong, and go where they pleased. Yet all accepted their role as caregiver saying, 'there is no solution'.

Hiring a care worker or nurse was considered unacceptable by most. Some could not afford it, and more affluent families considered it a waste of money that could be better used for other purposes. Moreover, many

considered it their moral duty to care for their spouse as long as they were healthy themselves. Since many of their offspring are employed in other parts of China, they seek not to burden them unnecessarily. In fact, adult children usually do help in various ways, and there is little tension between parents and children regarding the obligation of the family to provide primary care as long as one of the parents provides the bulk of that care. When the health of a caregiving spouse deteriorates, or when a spouse dies, however, relationships become more complicated. These kinds of situation will be explored in the following section.

Calling on the Children to Care

In this and the following section, I show how greater demands are made on children as the health of the caregiving parent declines. In these cases, decisions and practices of care are affected by many factors. As local people put it, 'Each family has its own problems' (*jiajia douyou yiben nan niande jing*). Each family has to face the constraints of its own complex reality, including relationships built up between various family members over many years. The first case illustrates a family in which the children recognize their 'obligations'. The second case illustrates children who offer care from 'love'.

Liu, 89, a *laojiu*, was hard-of-hearing. At the time of my research, he was also bedridden due to two broken legs and back problems. His 76-year-old wife Guo, a *wuqigong*, suffered from several chronic diseases, including heart problems, high blood pressure, diabetes, and arthritis. Guo had long been Liu's primary caregiver, but as her own health deteriorated, their children faced a dilemma of providing further care. Though they agreed they should care for him, they found it difficult to decide how to do so. Liu was a difficult personality; his relationship with his wife had been poor before his illness; there were complex relationships among several family members, and each child had his own circumstantial constraints. I encountered the family somewhat by accident as they were in the midst of deciding how to proceed.

On a sunny morning in May, I had gone to visit some families in another building of our neighbourhood. As I entered the building, I passed an open door on the first floor. I glanced inside, and could see a man lying on a bed in the living room. It was a very small one-bedroom flat (*yishi yiting*). The man looked at me but seemed unable to speak. Seeing an opportunity to gather new informants, I hesitantly knocked on the door and waited until a middle-aged woman came out from the kitchen, and asked who I was. I explained that I was conducting research, and she responded with a friendly attitude. She invited me in and introduced herself as Liu Yun,

the second daughter of Liu, the man on the bed. She told me that she lived in Gansu Province and worked as a temporary waitress. Her father's partial deafness made it difficult to communicate with him. He had broken his legs two months previously and had been bedridden since then. Liu Yun's mother was also ill, she said, and had gone to the hospital for an injection. Liu Yun continued to explain her own presence: she had asked for (and received) one month's leave from work to come and help her parents. 'Don't you have other siblings? Couldn't they help?' I asked. She replied that they were all busy, then asked me a question in return: 'Why does the *tuan* not offer *laojiu* nursing fees?' I explained that I did not work for the government and suggested she should ask the specific office. Her reply brought out several aspects of her problem:

> Well, nowadays in this society, if you do not bribe leaders with gifts, you cannot do anything, particularly for normal families like us. My mother was so sick, she could not even walk steadily, how could she look for this? My younger brother was busy with his work. He went to ask the office a few times, but the answer was that the *tuan* had a quota of offering nursing fees to only three *laojiu* per year, so we must wait. [Later] I heard that one of the daughters of another *laojiu* went to the office to argue (*nao*), and they got it. But we are not that kind of person, so we will not go, but we still feel it is not fair.

Liu Yun went on to tell me that it would cost RMB 6,000 to employ a care worker, which was beyond her family's income. Her parents' pensions came to only RMB 4,000, and she and her siblings were not affluent. But – the family had a problem. Liu Yun's mother was now too weak to be her husband's nurse. A nurse could be hired for half the cost of a professional care worker, but few in the *bingtuan* were interested in such demanding work; even farm work was preferable for most people, and they had been unable to find someone. Most importantly, her father was strongly against being taken care of by 'others'. When he was staying at hospital, his children contributed some money and hired a care worker. Her father had protested loudly during the night and, after three days, they had to release the care worker. Liu Yun had to return to work soon, and she was afraid that she would lose her job if she did not return on time. Still, she worried about how her father would be cared for when she left.

Why, I asked, did her siblings not offer assistance? What were the opinions of Liu's wife? The answers to both questions are important for understanding what did happen after Liu Yun left.

Liu had five children. The oldest daughter, Liu Mei (aged 51), lived in the same town as her parents, but she was busy with other care responsibilities. She was taking care of her daughter's baby while her

daughter worked in the oil city of Kelemay. Liu Mei was also helping her husband on their farm. Liu Yun was the second daughter. She and her husband had been laid off from formerly secure jobs and were surviving on poorly paid temporary work in the private sector in Gansu. The third daughter, Liu Ying, was married with two children and lived in Urumqi. Her daughter was in university in Nanjing, but her son struggled in school, so she had given up work to help him with his studies, leaving only her husband's wage to support the entire family. The two youngest siblings, a fourth daughter (Liu Jing) and a son (Liu Bing), were both divorced and worked in insecure low-paid jobs in Shihezi where they rented flats because they could not afford to buy property.

Liu Yun told me that when Liu was in the hospital, all of his children visited him and took care of him in turn. The youngest daughter, Liu Jing, had even taken a leave of absence from her work for two months; she had returned only shortly before my first visit. Due to poor communication, Liu Jing and Liu Yun had taken overlapping leaves, so Liu Yun would offer her father less care than she might have done. Discussions within the family had failed to produce any long-term solution for Liu's care. Liu himself was strongly opposed to being moved to a home for the elderly because he saw it as abandonment. Liu Yun also felt that this would be a shameful departure from tradition, especially because theirs was a large family. She was frustrated that each sibling had regarded her own issues as the most important, and that their mother was not strong enough to decide how concessions should be made.

There was one possible solution I could see, so I asked whether the daughter of the eldest sister, Liu Mei, had parents-in-law who could care for her baby granddaughter. This, I thought, would enable Liu Mei to help her father. My question drew Liu Yun to reveal more of the situation's complexity. Her feelings towards her siblings were mixed, and she felt a general resentment towards Liu Mei. Liu Yun thought that Liu Mei claimed to be needed for her grandchild's care as an excuse to escape responsibility. Liu Mei, she complained, was out 'dancing on the square in the name of taking care of grandchild, never concerned about what would happen after I left'.

Liu Mei had claimed that shifting care of her grandchild to her in-laws was not possible because her daughter did not have a good relationship with her mother-in-law. Nor did she think it was feasible for her daughter and son-in-law to turn some of their high salaries to the hiring of babysitters – there were too many stories, she said, of babysitters who had harmed their young charges. Though she was unwilling to commit to providing long-term care, Liu Mei said that she would take a turn after the harvest. She could not

come earlier, so she said, because she had to help her son with his farm work so that he could buy a house. Liu Yun was unsympathetic to her sister's objections on family grounds: she too had family responsibilities and her own income was significantly smaller than her sister's. Liu Yun reported that the sisters' discussion had ended acrimoniously and without a solution after Liu Mei questioned what would happen if nobody came to help Liu after her turn was finished. Already frustrated, Liu Yun had responded, 'then just leave him on the square and see whether anyone will take care of him or not. You just dance as usual and watch'.

Liu Yun complained to me that before Liu Mei's family had moved into town, they had been happy to accept their parent's hospitality. Now that they had their own house in town, they seldom visited and rarely offered help. This caused their mother distress. Liu Yun was not charitable in her assessment of her sister's behaviour. 'Now they have money, their daughter has money, but our parents are old and smell bad, therefore, they do not want to come. Liu Mei always says that there is smell in the room, if so, why doesn't she wash it? Yesterday, when my father started defecating, she left immediately. As the oldest daughter in the family, she is escaping her responsibilities'.

Liu Yun's criticisms of Liu Mei did not extend to her second sister, Liu Ying. If anything, she excused Liu Ying from the very same circumstances that she thought Liu Mei should not avoid. Liu Ying was unable to attend the family's meeting because her son was about to take an exam. Because they had failed to find another solution, Liu Yun had telephoned Liu Ying to ask if she would like to take care of her father before their oldest sister took a turn. She might have done, it seemed, if they moved Liu to her house, but she concluded that her house was too small and that her father's presence would affect her son's studies for the worse. Liu Ying offered to help pay for an elderly house or a nurse. Liu Yun expressed sympathy, 'You cannot affect the future of a child. Plus, my father urinates and defecates: the whole room would smell bad. Who knows if her husband would be happy or not'. Yet Liu Yun still felt that Liu Ying was insufficiently concerned with or grateful to their parents. They had borne her into the world, after all. Liu Yun was more sympathetic to her two youngest siblings. Of all the siblings, Liu Jing was the most concerned about her parents, but she could not take her father because she shared a flat. Their brother, as a man, was unsuited to nursing. Moreover, he had found a girlfriend, and taking time away from work might affect his marriage prospects. 'You know', she said, 'girls ask for so much: apartment, car, and stable job. My brother has none of these, so it would be better not to affect him too much'.

Liu Yun resented her siblings' lack of gratitude to their parents, and dependence on her to take care of them. She expressed feelings of pity for her father, who had cried when left with a care worker, and for her mother whose health was also failing. Despite her poverty, Liu Yun regarded fulfilling her filial duty as important. She had considered leaving her job to care for her father, but her husband had been opposed; he had insisted that each sibling should take a turn. His opinion had not been motivated by the belief that siblings should have equal responsibility. Instead he had pointed out that if the other siblings had not experienced the difficulty of caring for someone as ill as their father, they might accuse Liu Yun of failing to care properly for Liu.

Li Yun's husband made a good point: the work required for taking care of an immobile patient is challenging. Liu could not move, and he urinated and defecated in bed. Brute strength was required to move him for cleaning. The caregiver had to launder clothes and bedding frequently; Liu Yun complained that her father urinated a lot as she showed me the clothes drying on the balcony. Unless there was a secondary caregiver, the primary caregiver had little time for herself, and made only necessary excursions out of the house. Liu Yun had been to the square only twice since her arrival because her father really needed someone at his side at all times. Liu ate very well and slept very well during the day time, but at night, he was *nao* (not peaceful). He asked for water and for medicine and complained of feeling uncomfortable. Sometimes she had to wake up six or seven times in the night to respond to his needs.

The personality of an infirm patient can pose other challenges for a caregiver. For family members, it can be difficult to care for someone who has long been considered a difficult person. Such was the case with Liu. Sometimes he wanted to watch television until two o'clock in the morning. These nights, Liu Yun had to watch too because her father was afraid of being alone. Sometimes, she said, he would look around just to check if someone was beside him. 'He was [always] very selfish and never understood people', she continued. Liu Yun's concern for her father was mixed with anger at his difficultness and suspicion that he had weakened her mother's health. She suspected that the long-term hard work he required had contributed to her mother's sickness. 'Perhaps my mother will go before him', she said, looking at her sleeping father angrily.

As her father began to snore, Liu Yun told me yet more about the family's past, and I began to understand the depth of complexity in their discussions of his care in the present. She told me that she felt that it had not been easy for her mother to take care of her father for so many years. She said: 'If you were taking care of someone you loved, it would be fine. But

my mother suffered a lot in her whole life because my father never treated her well and they never got along'. Liu, she said, had been a cold man with his wife and children. He had scolded her mother for using 'his' money, not accounting for the housewife's subsidy that she herself received. With the rising value of his pension in recent years, Liu had become even more arrogant and harsh towards his wife. He insisted on keeping RMB 1,000 in his pocket each month, limiting his wife's resources for the household while ensuring himself generous 'pocket money'. He even had bought himself a new pedicab against his wife's advice. It was because of the pedicab, Liu Yun said, that he had broken his legs, bringing the current troubles to the whole family. Liu Yun told me that now when he made proud assertions about 'his money', she would respond, 'if you have money, let the money nurse you'.

Liu never had been warm towards his wife, and as he got older, he had become more insufferable. Sometimes he even spit on his wife's face when he did not want to take medicine. Nor had Liu ever shown concern for the well-being of herself or her siblings. 'To be honest', she said, 'he is just my father. Otherwise, he never did anything good in his life'.

Liu Yun did not think her family was particularly unusual. Few couples of her parents' set, she said, had good relationships. Some families she knew had decided to care for their parents separately because of the spouses' bad relations.

When I revisited the family a few days later, Liu Yun had left and Liu's wife was at home. I introduced myself, and it became obvious that Liu Yun had already informed her of my previous visit. I asked about her health, and she shook her head, saying 'not good'. Guo complained that her husband had caused her illness, making her life, already difficult, even more miserable in her later years. Now she felt tired of cleaning his urine and excrement, and felt particularly sad when thinking about how her husband had treated her in the past.

Guo assessed her married life as a complete failure. Her marriage was arranged by her family in 1959, and she had known nothing in advance about the man who was to be her husband. Although she was reluctant to come to Xinjiang, her family persuaded her that at least he had a stable salary, so her life would be better if she married him. In Xinjiang, she realized that they had nothing in common. Her husband was 12 years older than she was and had a very bad temper. He worked with the animal herds in the mountains, so they spent little time together. In the first few years she was lonely and homesick. She told me many stories of the hardships she experienced. One such example followed the birth of her first child. She had been hospitalized for a month after the birth. Her husband had come with a

cart to take her and the baby home, and halfway there, he had stopped. He took the baby, unhitched the horse, and walked home with both, leaving her to push the cart home alone. Though he stayed at home for a couple of weeks, he had never helped with any of the housework.

Their subsequent life together had involved no warmth, and there were frequent arguments over money. Her husband left Guo to do all work in the house and in the yard, leading their unit leader to joke that 'entering the house, you are mother; going out of the house, you are the father'. This dual role was carried to extremes when she had to replace her husband working on the farm for six months due to his back problems. In the end, the leaders allowed her husband to retire early. After retirement, her husband had spent his time playing mah-jong, and did not concern himself with their land or with their children's studies, work options, or marriages. Particularly upsetting for Guo was that their third daughter had not been able to attend university. She had failed the entrance exam by only one point, but Liu had refused to pay for further tuition so that she might re-sit the exam; and he had prevented Guo from paying for the tuition by taking out a loan. Guo resented too that on account of his back, Liu had not participated in building his own house, neither in the unit nor when they moved to town. In both cases, he had simply moved in when all the work was done. 'See, he never fulfilled the obligation to be a man', she explained, 'now the pension has been raised, he feels so proud. I have had enough of him'.

After living with a man whom she did not love and being hurt for so many years, Guo found it painful to nurse him too, but she had no choice. She said that in the past, when she had seen neighbours sitting in front of their houses and chatting kindly to each other, she felt very sad that she had married someone like him. Even her children asked her why she had not divorced him earlier. She said that it was because of the children themselves. She knew that she could not bring them up alone without his salary, and that if she left the children behind with him, he definitely would not bring them up. Therefore, she had decided to stay. Her husband's salary was stable, and she had remembered always her mother's words: 'a good woman never remarries'.

Guo's concerns and complaints continued. 'Now', she said with tears, 'I think [and see] that three of my daughters have their own family, but my youngest daughter and son are still not married, so I cannot set my mind to rest'. Her youngest daughter had told Guo that she would rather stay alone than marry someone like her father. Guo felt sorry for her children who had not enjoyed their father's love, and she was reluctant to disturb them for his care. Staring angrily at her sleeping husband, she said, 'he made all the trouble by himself'. Then, she asked him as he slept on, 'See what

happened? If you want to die, why not die soon?' I would hear these words from her many times on subsequent visits, along with those that followed as she returned her gaze to me, 'Honestly, he is just the father of my children. Otherwise, I do not care (*guan*) for him at all'.

Guo worried about her own health as well. It was possible, so she told her children, that she might die before her husband. Crying again, she told me, 'I have been thinking that when my daughter and my son come back, they [should] have a home'. She did not finish this thought, but I understood that it was part of why she tried to keep up her own health.

After Liu Yun left, Guo had to care for her husband alone and be sure to take her own medication. As the weather got hotter, she found it difficult to breathe. To avoid the heat of the day, she would walk to the vegetable market early in the morning. Sometimes I accompanied her and helped to carry groceries. She walked so slowly. I was afraid she might fall. After the shopping, she cleaned the apartment's one room. This too was a slow process. By the time she finished, Guo needed to prepare lunch. 'See', she would say, 'I am just [my husband's] servant now'.

What worried Guo most was that she would fall while moving her husband. Then, instead of dying quickly, she would become another paralyzed patient. Sometimes she took a nap in the afternoon. Sometimes she sat outside, chatting with other elders about what she should cook for her husband. Their conversation wound around her complaints, such as 'he shat twice (or three times) today, I felt so sick and could not eat'. The neighbours were very interested in such topics, and offered her various advice. I never saw Guo smile, except at weekends when her youngest daughter came home.

The youngest daughter, Liu Jing, came to visit her parents every weekend, bringing fruits or tonics. Her visits were a great comfort to her mother. She helped nurse her father. She cooked, cleaned, and chatted with her mother. Sometimes she accompanied her mother to the doctor. A little suspicious of me at first, Liu Jing gradually opened up and spoke with me. Her view on the family and its options were straightforward.

Liu Jing did not believe her mother could take care of her father much longer. She also considered it unrealistic for the siblings to take turns in providing care. Since her father, mother, and Liu Yun all opposed the solution of an elderly house, Liu Jing felt that the best solution would be for Liu Yun to nurse her father. Liu Yun was a family member; and, she was patient, considerate, and reliable. Taking into account Liu Yun's probable loss of work and need for income, Liu Jing thought that the family should pay her sister for the work.

I worked to gather the opinions of the other siblings into the mix. I attempted to talk with Liu Mei, the eldest sister, but found her reluctant to

talk with me. I was there when she brought vegetables to the house, but she hurried away quickly. Then Liu Jing gave me her phone number. When I called, Liu Mei told me that she was too busy to meet, and reacted with some defensiveness to my questions. She emphasized her own difficulties, as Lui Yun had explained them previously. Given a straight choice of taking turns to care for her father, hiring a nurse, or sending him to an elderly house, she came down emphatically in favour of the elderly house.

Liu Jing and Guo agreed with Liu Yun that Liu Mei was selfish. Liu Jing felt that there was no point in open conflict because her sister would not change. Moreover, as Guo did not get along well with Liu Mei or her husband, Liu Jing did not expect Liu Mei to be forthcoming with much help.

I did not manage to meet Liu Bing, the only son in the family. He worked shifts, and although he usually visited each week, his visits were irregular. He did often phone his mother. When she had problems with her husband, she would call him. Guo thought that her husband both liked Liu Bing, and was somewhat intimidated by him. Guo was greatly comforted by Liu Bing's contributions to his father's care, but Liu Jing was less impressed. She considered her brother to be insufficiently 'mannish' and thought that he did not help in important ways. For example, Guo had asked Liu Bing to undertake a complex bureaucratic process to get a RMB 600 health subsidy. Liu Bing had delayed repeatedly. Finally, Liu Jing herself had taken leave from work to complete the necessary process. Despite his failings in his sisters' eyes, Liu Bing's favour with Guo was evident, and the sisters took it for granted that he would inherit all of their parent's property.

I did speak to Liu Bing on the phone once. Regarding his father's care, he said that he had 'no solutions', and that he would respect his sisters' decisions. He thought sending his father to an elderly house would be the easiest alternative. When asked whether he felt that he should take more responsibilities in the family as a son, he said that sometimes he felt pressure to do so because his parents were very conservative Gansu people. Personally, he said, he felt that sons and daughters were equal. More importantly, he repeatedly emphasized that one should look at the reality. The question of providing care is not solved by whether or not one is filial. The reality, he said, is that today's society allows no other solutions. He just tried his best to fulfil his obligation. As for the distribution of family property and future arrangements for his mother – he left those decisions to Guo herself. He never discussed the property issue with his parents but, he said, he would respect their decision. If his mother so desired, he would take her in.

When I left in October, Liu's family had no new arrangement in place. Guo continued as her husband's primary caregiver. Liu Jing visited often.

The family had offered to pay Liu Yun to care for her father, but they were still waiting for her to decide whether and how she could balance her responsibilities to her husband, children, and grandchildren if she accepted their proposal.

Care with Love

Ding, 90, a former *zhigong*, migrated to Xinjiang in 1962 with his wife, son, and daughter. Another son and two more daughters had been born in Xinjiang, all being registered as *zhigong* and living in Tuan 143. Four years before I met the family, Ding suffered a cerebral infection. Over the subsequent two years, he had lost the ability to recognize people, and had become unable to move without assistance. By the time I met him, Ding was bedridden with dementia. Ding's 81-year-old wife Zheng was his primary caregiver. Zheng herself suffered from high blood pressure and heart problems. She was helped in her husband's care by their eldest daughter Ding Hongmei and her husband, a retired doctor whom I knew as Dr. Lin.

Ding required physical assistance in every aspect of his life: dressing, feeding, bathing, and toileting. A chair with a hole in the seat was used to facilitate the latter. Usually, Ding Hongmei and Dr. Lin took care of Ding during the day, and his wife stayed with him at night. If he seemed particularly unwell, sometimes Ding Hongmei and her husband would also stay at night, but because Ding was unable to communicate other than by crying or yelling, even Dr. Lin sometimes had difficulty in identifying problems. All Ding's other children visited regularly and contributed to caring for him.

If Ding became angry and refused to eat, Dr. Lin would prepare medicine to soothe his stomach. Because Ding had lost most of his teeth, his wife prepared soft food and fed him like a baby. She showed enormous patience, always coaxing him to eat something. When their children brought food or fruit, Zheng would always ensure that Ding was fed something before she enjoyed their gifts. Dr. Lin told me that but for the care given by the family, Ding would already be dead.

I was curious to know why Ding's family members nursed him with such dedication when he was unable to recognize or relate to them normally. They explained their motivation in terms of love and gratitude. Ding's wife told me: 'Life was so hard in the past. Now we finally have a good life, so I just want him to live more'. Later she told me how during the 'three-year natural disaster' (1959–62), their life had been very hard. They already had two children and the whole family was about to die. Her husband had moved the family to Xinjiang against their wishes. As a *zhigong*, he had worked from early morning until midnight, while his wife worked in the *wuqidui*.

Their life was hard, but Ding, she told me, had supported all their children. He had enabled them to finish junior school and to register as *zhigong*. Ding had cared for his family. He had made all major decisions in the family, had taken care of all work 'outside the house', and he had taken seriously his role as primary breadwinner; he had farmed, made decisions about the selection and raising of livestock, and been responsible for house building and repair. Even after his retirement, Ding had raised sheep and chickens and helped his children work on the farm. His wife said that she never worried too much about life because her husband always took care of everything, and fulfilled his obligation as a husband and a father. Ding's wife's only regret was that they had insufficient money to send much to their own parents. Ding had sent what they could in equal amounts, and Zheng appreciated that he had treated both sets of parents equally, and this even though her earnings were much less than his. She was comforted that all their children were married and fulfilled their filial duties.

Indeed, it was noticeable that all Ding's children had made considerable efforts to help in his care. As in the previous case, I will now consider how and why this was so. In this case, the most responsibility for Ding's care was taken up by the eldest daughter, rather than one of the sons. I also examine why this was so.

Zheng told me that Ding Hongmei had taken care of Ding in the first year of his sickness because she was retired and lived in the same *liandui*. During the second year, Ding was moved to the house of the eldest son (then 59), whose family was well-established financially. After caring for Ding for two years, however, the eldest son was diagnosed with cancer of the liver and hospitalized. The son's illness depressed Zheng more than did her husband's illness.

Ding's second daughter then took responsibility. She placed her teenage daughter into student accommodation so that her studies would not be interrupted by Ding's cries in the night. At the time, Ding Hongmei had been helping her own pregnant daughter in north-eastern China. On her return, she again assumed responsibility for Ding. The second daughter reopened her shop in the *liandui* and went back to work, but continued to visit her parents and bring fresh home-grown food.

Ding's third daughter worked with her husband on the farm, and was able to make little contribution to Ding's care because she was helping to care for her husband's parents, both of whom suffered from serious illnesses. Ding's youngest son drove a bus between town and *liandui* as well as working on the farm, and was also helping to care for his father-in-law who had a cerebral infection. Nevertheless, he took advantage of the proximity of

the bus station to his parents' home to visit frequently. He also took responsibility for getting Ding to hospital when necessary.

The family agreed that most of the responsibility for caring for Ding fell to Ding Hongmei and her husband primarily for reasons of practicality. Dr. Lin emphasized the hardship and low salary of his early years as a doctor in the *liandui*, but acknowledged that he now had a good salary. The couple owned their own home, had two daughters in university, and had made a down payment on a house for a third daughter. The granddaughter from their second daughter would have liked Ding Hongmei and Dr. Lin to care for her newborn child so that she could return to work, but they had decided that caring for Ding was a greater priority. Instead of providing their labour, they sent the second daughter money to help with childcare.

Dr. Lin insisted that their arrangements were practical. He told me many times that the idea of 'filial piety' was just hogwash (*chedan*). Eldercare was not just a family issue but a social issue. He asked me, 'How can you judge who is filial and who is not? Everyone has his own particular situation'. Dr. Lin nevertheless felt pressure from competing demands, and sometimes reported that he saw 'no solution'. Jokingly, he said, 'People say the stone rolls down the mountain, but we feel like we are pushing the stone up the mountain'.

His wife, Ding Hongmei, felt that she had a 'moral obligation' to care for the parents who had raised her.[103] She also wished to help her second daughter and baby granddaughter, but, she explained – her daughter had a long life ahead of her. For her parents, every remaining minute was valuable. It was on this principle, that Ding Hongmei had decided how to offer care to both. She sought to economize on her own expenses and to send extra money to her daughter, but to devote her time to her parents' care. When her daughter's baby got asthma, Ding Hongmei sent medicine rather than going to help as her daughter would have preferred. She felt she could not leave her parents. She also felt that other options – like sending Ding to an elderly house or hiring a nurse – were unreliable and that care should be given by family members.

There was, however, one major point of tension in the family. Ding and his wife lived in a flat owned by their eldest son who had moved to a new flat. Ding's wife paid her daughter-in-law RMB 500 a month – supposedly to cover the costs of her son's cancer medication. The daughter-in-law, whom I met once, was a dominant character who was always spoken to very respectfully by her mother-in-law and Ding Hongmei. The daughter-in-law believed her husband's cancer had been caused by the stress of caring

[103] The term she used was *zeren* (responsibility); she explained that if she did not fulfil this responsibility, then it would be on account of her own moral faults.

for Ding, and the family feared that if her husband died, she would ask them to leave the apartment. In all probability, the consequences would not have been drastic, as Dr. Lin had made known that he would be happy to take-in his parents-in-law. Due to his willingness to care for his in-laws, Dr. Lin was considered an ideal son-in-law by the family's neighbours.

In the two above-described cases, practical realities are seen to take precedence over traditional norms in determining who from within the family offers care and how. The two cases differ significantly, however, in the emotional responses that family members have towards the provision of care. In Ding's case, the infirm elder is loved and respected by family members; in Liu's case, he is not. This emotional difference seems to have strong effects on the extent to which family members are prepared to commit themselves to caregiving. Each family had a retired daughter who faced a choice between caring for parents or for her own children and grandchildren. Each arrived at a different decision. Regarding various options available, such as an elderly house, nurse, or care by family members, opinions vary both within and across the two families. Every family is different, but the two cases examined above highlight the range of issues and options which are likely to be considered by most. In the following section I will discuss in detail these main challenges and potential solutions.

Even the most patient spouse, and those children who subscribe strongly to ideals of filiality, admit that they are often frustrated by the difficulty of caregiving. Many of them emphasized that in the case of long-term care, it was problematic to talk about filiality. It requires more than a filial heart, they said. Long-term care of the infirm is such hard work that it could turn even a filial child into an unfilial one. That, they reminded me, is why there is an old saying that there is 'no dutiful son at the bedside' (*jiubing chuangqian wu xiaozi*). The work makes one tired and bored. One cannot keep up filial behaviour without respite.

The fundamental challenges of long-term care result from the following questions which families must resolve. Firstly, from whom do the elderly expect assistance? Secondly, who is able, in practice, to offer effective help? Thirdly, who is prepared to offer help? And finally, how do family members reach agreement on these issues? The following sections will examine the options available to families, considering first those that involve care by non-family members.

Alternatives to Family Care

There is no doubt that almost all elderly expect care from their family members. However, when the health condition of the spouse declines and no child is willing or available to offer care, the situation becomes very

challenging indeed. In practice, there are two other possibilities. The infirm person can be sent to an elderly house or a nurse can be hired. Very few people choose these options. Why? As I show below, the answer has to do with the combined influence of traditional culture and the practical difficulties associated with these modern options.

Like Liu, many elderly strongly oppose being taken to an elderly house. According to questionnaires, 38 per cent of the elderly did not want to go to an elderly house; 41 per cent felt that it would be the last choice if children could not offer help. Some children also resist the idea of sending their parents to an elderly house. Tradition plays a role in the opinions of both old and young. As Whyte (2003c: 85) pointed out: 'In the Chinese tradition the family was at the centre of both public philosophy and private morality. The obligation to provide support for ageing parents was rooted in an ancient and widely shared consensus on the priority of family claims against individual desires in general, and the specific ethic embodied in filial piety in particular'. Therefore, adult children have long been expected to provide the major forms of assistance with the physical and health problems of the elderly (Fang and Whyte 2003: 42). As Liu felt, many elderly consider living in an elderly house a sign of abandonment by family members; for many of the young, sending parents to an institution would produce embarrassment and loss of face (*diu lian*) for themselves and for the whole family. While the elderly overwhelmingly regard an elderly house as a last resort, some of the younger generation see it as the best practical solution. In such cases, inter-generational conflict over basic family responsibilities increases the difficulty of arriving at agreement on a practical solution.

Moreover, many people have a very negative impression of the quality of care offered in the elderly house. The nearest elderly houses to Tuanbu are in Shihezi. Only one is publicly owned and seen as offering good quality at an acceptable price. This one has only 200 beds, so its resources are insufficient to meet the possible demand among local elderly. Although there are several privately owned elderly houses, my informants consider their care workers to be untrained and the quality of care to be low. Among the elderly, stories circulate about the undesirable aspects of life in an elderly house: the lack of freedom, fixed times for going in and out, bad food, and unsympathetic care workers who might even demand bribes or steal from those for those in their care. Death is also omnipresent in these institutions, and one elder who had spent a few weeks in such a house when his wife was sick spoke to me of the uneasiness he felt to know that people were dying every day. Most elders fear that going to the elderly house means going to one's death.

Hiring a professional worker or a nurse is another potential solution to the problem of long-term care, but one that is rarely taken up. As in the case of Liu, this is often for economic reasons – families cannot afford the expense. The cost for a bedridden resident is about RMB 6,000. Untrained nurses may be cheaper, but few people in the *bingtuan* want such work. Farm work offers similar salaries and is less demanding. Perhaps surprisingly, it is only other elderly who have no pension of their own who are prepared to take nursing work, but they may lack the physical strength to perform it effectively. I came across only two cases where a nurse was employed. Both nurses were women in their sixties: one was separated from her husband and needed a place to live, which working as a nurse provided; the other was a widow who wanted to amass money to buy a *loufang*.

Even when hiring a nurse is a realistic possibility, many elderly are reluctant to accept their care. For some, the objection remains one of principle: they want to be cared for by family members, and not by an 'outsider'. Some are concerned by practical difficulties such as lack of space for a live-in worker. Some are worried that if they are dissatisfied with such a worker, that it would be difficult or embarrassing to complain. One possible solution that elders suggest is that a family member can be paid instead of a nurse; as seen in Liu's case, however, there has to be an able and willing family member whose only barrier to offering care is a financial one.

Past Relations and the Care Equation

It is clear that a combination of economic, practical, and cultural factors influence the continuing practice and preference of family-provided care for the elderly, regardless of the severity of illness or infirmity. The logistics of family care, however, differ from family to family. One of the key elements influencing care is the long-term relationship between care recipients and providers. In the cases of Liu and Ding, both wives and children acknowledged that the quality of care offered to the recipient was based on who he was and what he had done in the past. In Liu's family, the wife felt resentful to her husband due to her past experience, and the children also felt little affection for their 'cold' father; in Ding's family, both wife and children were grateful to their father, and therefore offered care with affection. The history of past experience shaped current relationships between care recipients and providers, affecting not only the perception and motivation of care work, but also the availability of care. The social security relationships of the present 'are positioned between past and future in complex ways', and 'social security built in the past always has impact in the future' (Benda-Beckmann 2007: 7).

The history of spousal relations is particularly important in eldercare. Among the current generation of elderly, marriages were arranged most often by families or the government, and even those that were not arranged were highly influenced by practical motivations. As a result, many marriages lacked attraction, emotional compatibility, and mutual understanding. Women who were 'lucky' had been cared for by their husbands, had learned to get along with them, and the spouses gradually had developed mutual affection. At least a quarter of my female informants, however, told me that they had experienced bad relationships with their husband. Some were so bad that the women had considered suicide, but they had stayed with their husbands due to the pressure of traditional norms and concern for their children. For these 'unlucky' women, such as Guo, caring for their husbands in old age was a final layer of pain.

In some cases, poor past relationships led to a denial of care. For instance, one 68-year-old man regularly visited the Justice Office to complain that his wife had moved to a different city to live with their daughter. The wife was taking care of the daughter's child, and refused to return and care for her husband. The Justice Office attempted to persuade the daughter to accept her father in her house, but both mother and daughter rejected this possibility on the grounds of past emotional pain. The man's two sons, each living in a different city, also refused to co-reside with their father on account of bad past relationships, and the man was forced to continue living alone.

When probed more closely, 'bad past relationships' between spouses often involved conflicts over money (i.e. 'stingy' husbands) or extra-marital affairs. Women in the older generations, particularly *wuqigong*, had relied on their husbands' incomes to cover most expenses. This wealth gap between men and women has been accentuated in their old age, as rising pensions have increased the economic dominance of men. In their early years, regular conflict emerged when wives perceived their husbands as devoting insufficient resources to the family. In later life, women sometimes moved to live with an adult child to escape their husband's stinginess. If they stayed, they might also withdraw care for a sick husband. For example, one wife refused to take care of a hospitalized husband because she recalled that he had refused on a previous occasion to accompany her for treatment and accused her of overspending money. I saw several occasions when children came to help their parents negotiate over money-related issues.

A man is most likely to fail to provide care for his wife if he has taken up an extra-marital affair. One 80-year-old woman, who suffered from heart problems and high blood pressure, and struggled with housework, cried when she told me of her husband's affair. She hardly spoke to her husband.

He spent his time dancing in the square. Sometimes he came home for meals, but other times he went to his lover's. A daughter came once a week to help her mother with cleaning. The woman would have liked to move in with her daughter, but her daughter lived on an upper floor of a building with no lift, and she would not have managed the stairs. In another case, a 73-year-old woman suffering from several chronic diseases told me that her husband was 'living with his bitch in the *liandui*'. The wife shook and was unable to move steadily or speak clearly. Her husband had moved in with a younger woman and refused to return home. The old woman's son visited her every day, bringing food and helping with housework. I encountered four other women who had moved in with their children as a result of their husband's affairs. In all these cases, extra-marital affairs led to husbands failing to care for disabled wives, placing extra responsibility on children.

Many scholars have pointed out that the Maoist project to emancipate women was an uncompleted task (Parish and Whyte 1978; Johnson 1985; Jacka 1997; Cohen 2005). Although women's status has been greatly improved since 1949, inequalities have followed many women well into old age. Today's elderly women often worked outside the house but still relied on their husbands' higher incomes; their marriages, even when brokered by the state, relied on conservative ideologies about gendered family roles and responsibilities. Today's unequal retirement benefits can become a new tool for men to dominate family life. Extra-marital affairs further show the vulnerability of women within imbalanced husband-wife power relations. For some, affairs may be an indicator of the trend for the elderly to pursue individual happiness and freedom under the new circumstances of socio-economic transformation. Yet in family contexts where so much remains 'traditional', such affairs threaten family loyalty and care possibilities.

The parent-child relationship is also important for elderly care, particularly in questions of long-term care. As Ikels (1993) pointed out, the physical proximity between children and their parents is an important constraint in care relations, but other factors play a more important role in determining the distribution of care responsibilities. In the *bingtuan* today, practical constraints are moderated heavily by the history of parent-child relationships. In many cases, when children talked about their motivations to care for their parents, they referred to previous assistance that was offered to them in education, marriage, housing, or childcare. Conversely, when children did not offer help, they and their parents alike referred to a history of bad relations. For example, Ding's children recognized their father as having been a real 'head of the family'; he had taken care of them; they felt grateful to him; and they continued to support him through his dementia. Liu's children, in contrast, had little desire to care for their father, though

they did want to provide support to their mother. Though Liu might have seen himself as 'head of the family', his wife and children felt that he had not cared for them; each could marshal evidence about his lack of financial support and emotional coldness. Liu's children did not care for their father, but they recognized various combinations of filial obligation, affection, and gratitude to their mother; a lack of alternate possibilities suitable to a 'good' family; and some concern, albeit limited, for their siblings' welfare.

Even when a family might provide or withhold care as a general rule, individual relationships within the family modified certain aspects of the care given. For example, even Ding could not expect help from his daughter-in-law with whom he did not have a good past relationship. Similarly, Guo had a more difficult relationship with her oldest daughter than with her other children, and even though the daughter and her husband lived in the same town, the daughter seldom visited her mother. This bad relationship between Guo and the oldest daughter also impacted Liu's care because the position of the daughter within the family set a model for the other siblings; as oldest child, she had greater rights and responsibilities, not only to provide care, but also to find solutions. The other siblings were angry that she failed to fulfil her obligation, but did not take-up the responsibilities in her stead. Bad relations often were linked to the failure of parents to help care for grandchildren, a perceived favouring of some children over others, and unequal distributions of property, including access to pension funds.

Some Chinese scholars (Guo 2001; Wang 2013) have regarded the absence of care by children as symptomatic of a moral crisis. In the West, lack of care for elderly parents might not constitute such a crisis. As Fei Xiaotog (1992) has remarked, parent-child relations in the West are characterized by a 'relay pattern': the primary obligation of care for parents is to their own children, with no return responsibilities. In contrast, Confucianism has influenced China to have a 'reciprocity pattern' (*fankui moshi/fanbu moshi*); parents have a primary responsibility to care for minor children, and adult children have an absolute duty to support their parents in old age. Care in the West is thus transmitted across generations, while it is reciprocated in China, with elderly parents receiving tangible displays of gratitude for upbringing from their children. The logic of exchange underlying 'filial obligation' operates over the long-term, and includes material, ritual, emotional, and symbolic exchanges, along with the exchange of social capital (Guo 2001). Changes brought about by state policies and the market economy that make it difficult or undesirable for children to care for their parents affect more than the pragmatics of social life; they undermine traditional cultural norms and disrupt the logic and content of inter-generational exchanges without providing a satisfactory replacement. The

logic of exchange, for example, has become unbalanced in rural China as the young have introduced a form of calculated reciprocity into their side of the equation (Guo 2001; Wang 2013). While the elderly expect unconditional care from their children in repayment of their upbringing, children calculate the material resources they received; children pay less attention to the value of upbringing itself, and render the care they provide to their parents as conditioned. Such a 'superficial' exchange, stripped of its emotional and ethical aspects, has led to a deteriorating quality of life for the elderly, and to a loss of meaning in their lives (Wang 2013).

Guo and Wang have identified real and significant changes in logics of exchange and inter-generational relationships. But they ignore the emotional accounts provided by spouses, children, and in-laws that testify to the powerful impact of long-term relations on present relations. Those who 'should' provide care do cite past instances of material 'care' or its withholding, but they also explain their emotional experience of past and present treatment by the elder for whose care they are obligated. Emotional experience is central to human interaction, and it is *feelings* of obligation or reciprocity which actually motivate and temper caregiving.

My fieldwork suggests that there is no 'moral crisis' per se in inter-generational relations, and that changes in the logic of exchange are not necessarily negative. In the *bingtuan* the logic of exchange does involve calculation in that past experience and relationships are taken into consideration as people make decisions regarding care provision (see also Ikels 1993: 308) . But such calculation does not replace obligation with material interest. Nor does affection (i.e. the emotional evaluation of past relations) overbalance either side of the equation.

What we also see in the *bingtuan* is an adaption to new circumstances and the adoption of new strategies to demonstrate 'care' on both sides of the inter-generational relation. For example, both parents and children recognize that the living expenses of individuals who provide care need to be secured. In the context of an urban environment and market economy there are many 'new' ways to meet carers' needs; equally, in the context of long-term processes of modernization, rural-urban migration, expanded educational opportunities, and the mobilization of women's labour outside the home, children and their spouses are likely to be securing their own needs apart from their parents' household at the onset of their parents' infirmity and need for care.

Parents and children alike thus modify how they meet their 'obligations' on either side of the care equation. Elderly parents may give their pension card to their carer. Alternatively, families may pay one child to give up other work and care for their ageing parents. In general, I found that

the *bingtuan* elderly take it for granted that they should pay children who care for them. Even if the children refuse to accept money, it has become widely accepted for the elderly to pay their carer's daily living costs, including food for the whole family, when the carer is a co-resident child. Questioned about this, the elderly would emphasize the practicalities of the situation: 'They do not just have to care for me – if I do not help them, who will? How will they raise their children?' One informant used an analogy: 'We put powder on our face, not the back of our neck' (*you fen, wang lianshang mo, er bushi wang bozi houtou mo*). He continued explanation by saying that it was meaningless to withhold money or property from children until one's death. If you give them money in the present, 'they will know how to treat you'.

The logic of inter-generational exchange entails some calculation by both sides, and emphasizes a reciprocity that continues into old age. The *bingtuan* elderly show themselves to be more concerned with contemporary practical realities than with traditional norms and values. Yet this should be taken to mean that they are not still pursuing a very 'traditional' logic. The capacity of the *bingtuan* elders to adopt new practices may be much greater than the elderly in China's more rural areas (such as those studied by Guo and Wong). After all, *bingtuan* elderly have pensions, most of them quite generous.

Filial Ideals and Present Practical Realities

Janet Finch (1989) pointed out that family obligations may be looked at either as normative guidelines or as negotiated commitments. In practice, even when the normative guidelines are accepted by all family members, their implementation must be negotiated in practical terms. 'People', she wrote, 'do not operate in a vacuum when they think about obligations and duties within their own family; they make an assessment of what would be the *proper thing to do* by considering the social and economic *circumstances of the individuals* involved' (1994: 143, my emphasis). Confucian norms of filial obligation, particularly for sons, remain prevalent in China and in the *bingtuan*. The way in which filial obligations are discharged can vary considerably as a result of negotiations within the particular circumstances of each family.

Throughout most of this chapter, I have concentrated on detailing individual 'circumstances', especially calling attention to emotional circumstances. In this section, I provide an overview of the patterns that have emerged concerning the 'proper thing to do' in socially recognized types of circumstances.

In sum, there are three main options for children to provide direct care for their disabled parents. Firstly, care may be delivered by a retired son or daughter; secondly, one sibling of working age may be paid to deliver care from the elder's pension; or thirdly, all siblings may take turns in caring. Among 32 households where care was delivered by children without the use of a nurse, 11 opted for care to be delivered by a retired sibling (9 daughters, 2 sons); 16 chose a sibling of working age (8 daughters, 8 sons), and 3 chose to take turns with contributions from both retired and non-retired siblings. Which of these options is chosen and which child takes responsibility is negotiated with regard to traditional norms and practical issues.

Some elements of traditional culture have been subordinated to practical considerations, notably in relation to gender. Instead of emphasizing the duty of a son (and his wife) to provide care, or even asserting a preference for this arrangement, the *bingtuan* families ostensibly give equal consideration to the 'overall circumstances' of all children. In practice, such overall considerations tend to mean that those who are younger and still at work are expected to shoulder the fewest care responsibilities, regardless of their gender. More pressure is placed on older siblings, especially those who are retired. Such a person 'should' offer help, in local discourse, if they have good relationships with parents and no childcare responsibilities. Thus, birth order continues to modulate the importance assigned to eldercare, even as the importance of gender shifts.

As indicated by Ding's husband, many adult children feel that they spend their time 'pushing the stone back up' the mountain. This phrase also points to the fact that retired children feel relatively few benefits from their parents; the money that comes from their elderly parents is rarely enough to cover the education and housing that they wish to provide for their own children.They must cover costs for their children and devote resources to eldercare. Most retired children, however, have reason to beg reconsideration of their overall circumstances. Although most women retire at the age of 50, the less affluent ones may still help their husbands with farming. Most retired individuals are struggling to save money to meet the needs of adult children working or studying in cities. School fees, weddings, and down-payments on houses may have to be met, and grandchildren can create further demands. The pension they receive by taking care of their parents is unlikely to be sufficient to meet such needs, especially as most seek to save some of this pension to meet the medical emergencies of their parents. In some cases, the consideration of circumstances works out: Ding's eldest daughter and her husband decided to care for Ding; they found other ways to meet their remaining obligations, such as care for their grandchild. In other cases, other principles have to be invoked. For example, Liu's eldest

daughter was retired, but she prioritized caring for her daughter's young child over her father's care, and this even though her daughter was affluent enough to employ a nanny without her mother's contributions. In this case, the presence of the principle is visible in the accusations Liu Mei received from her siblings of being 'selfish'.

The second strategy might be seen as an alternative to the first. The payment of a family member for care tacitly recognizes that the burden of care has descended to a child who is not (yet) 'placed' to offer it. Though there are elements of payment and the calculation of income equivalence involved in such arrangements, these are rarely in the foreground of consideration for any of the involved family members. Children who give up other work to take care of their parents seldom have money as a main motivation (nor have they considered it seriously as grounds for refusal). Pensions almost never equate with salaries, and the children of elderly with low pensions are just as likely to agree to the arrangement as those whose parents have higher pensions.[104] Moreover, many children who are paid for their care work still have other jobs.

The third solution of each sibling taking a turn at care is fairly rare. It would be the most direct way to enact the espoused principles of equal responsibility among siblings, but in most cases it is regarded as impractical. I only came across three such cases. It was notable that in these cases, all siblings had similar economic situations, whether rich or poor. Moreover, all had good relationships with their parents.

Conclusion

Family-based care of the elderly is the rule by law and custom in China. The availability of such care, however, is restricted by many elements in real situations. How individuals operate in certain circumstances is dictated more by practicalities than by traditional rules. In most cases, the spouse of an infirm elder takes up care responsibilities until his or her own health presents unsurmountable challenges. Adult children are expected to provide care later and in lesser degrees than what might be imagined from traditional models of filial piety; similarly, less is demanded of sons than might be expected, and there are indications that parents and children alike attempt to hold equal expectations from all children.

---

[104] Of the 16 cases where children of working age took responsibility for care, seven of the elderly were *wuqigong* with very small pensions, and six were *zhigong*. The remaining three were *laojiu*, but there are so few individuals remaining of this status that I hesitate to draw any conclusions about their care except that they are the most likely to need it. As mentioned previously, the pension for *wuqigong* is around RMB 1,000, for *zhigong* it is RMB 2,000-2,800, and for *laojiu* it is about RMB 4,000.

Family care faces further uncertainties in tandem with ongoing socio-political and economic transformation. It is predictable that the number of elderly needing long-term care will increase in the near future. Most *bingtuan* elderly are aware of this trend. Although they still expect care from their children, they are attempting to adjust to developing circumstances with new strategies. As mentioned previously, most elders see their pension and self-care as the best ways to minimize the problems of future care. They exercise to avoid becoming a bedridden family burden, and they put money aside to guarantee their future healthcare. Still, though the pension system is crucial to long-term care in the *bingtuan*, it is not powerful enough to meet all the challenges presented in the current socio-economic situation in China. The state must make good on its policy orientations and take the lead in making up the gap in long-term care. Only with state resources can these challenges be met.

There are indications that the state may provide the resources necessary for eldercare in Xinjiang. Some *tuan* in Xinjiang have established elderly houses. Tuan 143 plans to build an elderly house in the near future. Opinions of the elderly themselves on these facilities remain divided. Those over 70 are most likely to need such care, but many worry about the quality and price of care that will be provided. For those in their 50s and 60s, institutional care is extremely attractive. This generation has fewer children per elder, and most of them live outside the *bingtuan*. Members of this younger generation of elderly are optimistic. They hope and believe that the state will invest in improving their future living conditions.

Chapter 8
Late-Life Marriage and Cohabitation

On my way to Tuan 143 with some local friends, one said: 'It is a good place to do research on elders. There are thousands of elders, and you just don't know how independent and how open they are!' The other added, 'Yes, they are even more open than young people nowadays. They are always playing on the square: many become couples and some even live together without registration'. I was surprised to hear this last bit of information, and felt a little suspicious of the other assertions. One year's fieldwork, however, convinced me that my friends were telling the truth.

I found late-life marriages and cohabitation important for understanding the new lifestyles and support networks developed by elders in response to transformation in the *bingtuan*. The population of the *bingtuan* originally migrated from other provinces where the traditional family structure was one in which elders lived with one or more married sons and daughters-in-law. Sons, daughters-in-law, and grandchildren provided the physical, emotional, and financial support that parents needed to face old age (Stacey 1983; Davis 1993; Whyte 2003a). This norm was often accepted without further justification as natural and right (Miller 2004). My work has shown, however, that in recent decades, elders have set up new models that partly challenge traditional norms. Late-life marriage and cohabitation are further examples of innovation.

In this chapter, I explore the following questions: what are elders' motivations for marriage or cohabitation and what factors influence their decisions? How successful are these relationships? What elements determine the quality of such late-life partnerships? Before examining these questions through statistical data and ethnographic research, I will consider the existing Chinese and Western literature on late-life marriage and cohabitation.

Comparing Late-Life Marriage and Cohabitation in China and the West

The body of Chinese literature on late-life marriage and cohabitation has grown since the late 1990s. Most scholars discuss the challenges faced by widows and widowers when they decide to remarry or cohabit. The most frequently cited issues are property, opposition of children, and traditional conservative values (Ma 1994, 1998; Xu 2003; Jiang 2004; Wu 2006; Jin 2011; Cao 2012; Guo 2012; Jia 2013). Other deterrents to re-partnering are limited opportunities to meet new people and negative public opinions (Jiang 2004; Cao 2012; Jia 2013). One survey on attitudes towards late-life marriage shows that it has the support of 54 per cent of elders and 67.3 per cent of young people (Du and Yin 2004). People from urban areas are more open to remarriage than those from rural parts, and men are more supportive than women. Motivations for cohabitation identified among elders include the need for emotional and economic support and for daily care (Song 2003; Zhang 2009; Guo 2012; Li 2013). Cohabitation is sometimes preferred to avoid the negative consequences of a legally registered marriage (Zhang 2009; Jin 2011), and is also regarded as a means of resource-exchange among widows and widowers (Tan, Xu and Zhu 2004). Li (2013) notes that re-partnering is a compensation mechanism for the absence of the traditional kinship care system.

Men and women do not have equal chances to re-partner. Among elders aged 80-105, the number of widows is higher than that of widowers, and women average significantly longer periods without a spouse than do men (Zheng 2001). Within partnerships, too, women are usually in a weaker position than men due to their lower economic condition, overwork, and misunderstandings with their new partner's children (Tan, Xu and Zhu 2004). Some argue that late-life marriage and cohabitation are unstable due to lack of trust between partners, property issues, 'impure' (e.g. economic) motivations, and unharmonious relations between family members (Wang 2009; Jin 2011; Jia 2013). Few statistical data concerning the stability of late-life partnerships, however, exist. Ethnographic data is almost wholly absent from the discussion.

In the West, the social and personal factors associated with partnerships in old age have been well researched (McKain 1972; Vinck 1978; Cooney and Dunne 2001). Remarriage appears to be a largely positive experience for older adults, but strong demographic, financial, or normative obstacles discourage elders (and particularly women) from remarriage (Carr 2004b). For older adults, cohabitation has a unique meaning and plays a different role in the life-course of older adults than it does in that of the

young (Chevan 1996; Cooney and Dunne 2001; King and Scott 2005). Similarly, motivations for cohabitation and the quality of the resulting relationships are likely to differ from those of young adults (Brown, Lee and Bulanda 2006). Explanations of cohabitation among the elderly have emphasized economic motivations, social context, and individual characteristics (Chevan 1996).

Researchers have also explored differences between remarried, cohabiting, and unpartnered elderly across several dimensions, including socio-demographic characteristics, economic resources, physical health, and social relationships (Brown, Lee and Bulanda 2006). There are two different perspectives regarding the association between economic resources and cohabitation. Earlier research indicated that cohabiters, especially women, are more disadvantaged than those who marry (Chevan 1996; Brown, Lee and Bulanda 2006), but later research (Vespa 2012) does not find late-life cohabitation to be economically disadvantageous. The availability of kinship and social support relations, however, has a powerful influence on decisions to form a union: those who are well-supported are less likely to be interested in cohabitation or marriage (Chevan 1996; Davidson 2002; Carr 2004a; Brown, Lee and Bulanda 2006). Concerns about inheritance and the views of adult children factor prominently in some elders' decisions to cohabit or remarry (King and Scott 2005). Offspring often encourage their parents to cohabit rather than remarry in order to safeguard their assets (Chevan 1996; Gierveld 2004; Brown; Lee and Bulanda 2006). Gender differences are highly emphasized among all the above studies.

On-the-Ground in the *Bingtuan*

My questionnaires in the *bingtuan* identified 67 elderly whose spouse had died: 42 widows and 25 widowers. Of these, 13 had formed new partnerships. The distribution was nearly equal with 6 registered marriages and 7 cohabitations. Similarly, gender patterns showed a near equivalence between the two options: 4 men were married and 4 cohabiting; 2 women were married and 3 cohabiting.

Among the remaining 17 men, 5 want a partner if they can find someone suitable. Three have mixed feelings, and nine do not want to marry or cohabit. Those who do not want a new partner fear that a woman may make excessive demands such as the purchase of a house or control of the man's pension card. Some of the nine who do not want a new partner do not have their own houses; they live with children or take care of grandchildren.

Among the remaining 37 women, 2 admit that they are in the process of 'getting to know someone' (*jiechu*). Four of them wish to find companions, but find it difficult to find someone suitable; two have mixed

feelings, wavering between the benefits and costs of partnering or remaining single. The remaining 29 women do not want to remarry or cohabit. Their reasons for not seeking a partner differ slightly from those volunteered by the men; women say that they are 'too old', have health problems, and do not want to take care of a man. Others say they do not 'need' another relationship because they have pensions or children to take care of them. Some emphasized the freedom of being a widow. Some suggested that 'a half-way couple is not a real couple' (*banlu fuqi bushi qi*). Only a few of these widows think it would be shameful (*diuren*) to remarry. The unpartnered 38 women are mostly in their 70s: 1 is over 90, 8 are in their eighties, 23 are in their seventies, and only 6 are in their sixties. Most take care of their grandchildren.

Remarriage and cohabitation are widely discussed topics in the *bingtuan*. My questionnaire turned up that 19 per cent of the total number of widows and widowers are remarried or cohabiting. To better understand the phenomenon, I sought other cases. I interviewed and observed another 16 cases of late-life partnerships: 6 remarriages, 9 cohabitations, and 1 case of a couple who was 'getting to know' each other. Putting all the cases from questionnaires and interviews together, I have data for 12 registered marriages and 16 cohabitating couples.

All these cases have similarities. Firstly, most of the children from both partners do not live nearby. Secondly, all the men have pensions. Thirdly, most of the women do not have pensions. Fourthly, the men have an economic advantage over the women. Fifthly, the men are responsible for providing housing, whether owned or rented. Sixthly, both the men and women emphasize the need for emotional support. Finally, the men tend to admit motivations for instrumental assistance, while the women admit that they sought an economically-reliable partner.

Remarriage often involves uncertainty resulting from age and income gaps, property issues, and relationships with partners' children. In the twelve cases of remarriage, three were evaluated by the informants themselves as successful, five couples reported uncertainty, and four considered them failures (two ended in divorce). The three successful marriages are distinguished by a small age gap between the partners, and by the pensions held by the women. Among the remainder, there are large age gaps and the wives either have no pension or just receive the housewife subsidy. Officials at the local Justice Office told me that pensions and houses are common issues in remarried families. The problems continue even after death, not only because of conflicts over the division of material property, but also because the state continues to pay out the pension of a deceased person to his closest relatives (spouse or children) for an additional 20 months after his

death. Indeed, many elders come to the Justice Office for advice on how to leave a will, and such problems appeared in my case studies. Two of my female informants reported that they had pension problems with their partner's children after he died. In the other five unstable cases, men complained of tight budgets and of wives who were too demanding and insufficiently understanding. The central complaint of female informants was a lack of respect from their husband's children. They also felt that their husbands were too reliant on them for housework, showed them little trust, and that money management was always a problem.

Cohabitation was widely perceived as unstable by those not involved in such partnerships. Indeed cohabitation can be serial: one man changed partners three times, each time because of conflicts over property and bad relationships between the partners and his grandchildren. Still, it was a desirable arrangement for most elderly. Men and their children particularly prefer this type of relationship over legally registered marriage. Women often desire a marriage certificate but face opposition from the children of their partner. In the sixteen cases of cohabitation that I registered, eight were successful, four often face trouble, and four have completely failed. Age, relative economic position, distribution of income, and relationships with each partner's children played significant roles in determining the quality of the relationship.

Among the eight successful cases, the partners were of similar age in two; and in two of the couples, the women had pensions. In three of the four cases of failed cohabitation, it was the woman who had ended the relationship; all claimed that their partner had been too stingy and that they had received much less than what was offered. The one man to end a relationship said that his partner was 'money consuming' (*aihuaqian*) and lacked consideration for him. Among the other four unsatisfied couples, the women reported that getting a marriage certificate would be beneficial, but that they had given up the idea since they knew their partner's children were not supportive. Financial problems were common: the women worried that they would inherit nothing and have no support after their partner's death, and they complained that their partners were stingy and treated them as cheap labour; one of the male partners also cited a tight budget and lack of understanding from his partner. One felt fine with his partner, but his son strongly objected to their relationship, so when his partner became sick, he sent her home to her daughter.

Remarriage: Full of Uncertainty

The first case – that of my second landlords in the first *liandui* in which I stayed – is typical of many in the Corps. During my stay, Lao Mai married

Na, the much younger woman from outside the Corps who had no pension and with whom he had been cohabiting. In this partnership, the issues of differing expectations, economic inequality, and relationships with partners' children interacted to create challenges for the couple.

The couple had begun cohabiting two years before I met them. The husband was 78 years old, and a retired *zhigong*. Originally from a Muslim community of Gansu Province, Lao Mai immigrated to Xinjiang in the late 1950s where he lived as a shepherd. His first wife had died of cancer three years before he met Na. His first marriage produced two sons and two daughters, all of whom were married. His youngest son, the owner of a brick factory, was considered the richest man in the area and lived in Shihezi. The others lived in Tuanbu. The eldest daughter was retired; the eldest son worked at his younger brother's factory as a manager; and the youngest daughter was a primary school teacher.

Na was 52. She was only slightly older than Lao Mai's oldest daughter, but this detail mattered little to anyone. What mattered, and was valued, was her relative youth compared to Lao Mai. Also originally from Gansu, she had immigrated to Xinjiang in the late 1970s and had lived in a neighbouring village. She too had been married and widowed; her husband had died of a heart attack one year before she met Lao Mai. She had one son and one daughter, both were married and engaged in farming. They lived a 45-minute-drive away from Na, and compared to Lao Mai's children their lives were modest. Na herself had no pension.

I first met Lao Mai at the small *liandui* square while he was grazing his flock. A short, thin healthy-looking man, he was dressed well in comparison to other shepherds. He wore a *zhongshan* jacket[105], new trousers, leather shoes, and a white hat. Later I would learn that Na let him dress well so that no gossip could circulate against her for not taking good care of him. I introduced myself as a researcher, and he was happy to engage in conversation. He told me that although he had a pension of about RMB 2,200 per month, he continued herding sheep because he had nothing else to do. As we walked home in the same direction, he showed me his house – it stood out with a red gate, large courtyard, and flower pond.

I met Lao Mai again at the mosque when I was looking for an elderly family with which to live. A woman suggested asking Lao Mai, so I did. He told me that he would ask his 'wife', and I had the impression that she must be the dominant partner in the marriage. Two days later, passing their house, I saw the gate open. Two women were pulling cotton in the courtyard. I

[105] In English called a 'Mao suit', this form of dress was popular until Economic Reform. Sun Yat-sen introduced the style shortly after the founding of the Republic of China as a form of national dress although with distinctly political and later governmental implications.

entered and introduced myself. The taller and younger woman raised her head and spoke to me: 'Well, you are that student! I heard about you!' She added that they had relatives living with them at the moment, but that I could move in after they had departed in a few days. This was confirmed by Lao Mai, who returned with his sheep at that moment. Three days later, I moved in. The house was large and well decorated with a hallway, two living rooms, three bedrooms, two kitchens, and a tiny bathroom. It belonged to Lao Mai's youngest son.

Each day, after Na had cooked breakfast, Lao Mai went out with his flock and Na began the housework. Sometimes, when Lao Mai was invited to attend a *niansuo*, Na cared for the flock. Na also helped with physical work around the house, such as building an extension on the sheepfold. She could turn to her *laoxiang* in her former village for advice or help. She was thus a significant source of support for Lao Mai who had a nephew in the *liandui* but never found it necessary to call on him for assistance.

Following the death of his first wife, Lao Mai had lived first with his eldest son. He got sick and felt neglected by his son and daughter-in-law, so he moved in with his youngest son in Shihezi. In the city, he had known no one and had not felt at home. He returned to his eldest son's house, but shortly thereafter the son moved to a small house in the town. It was during this period that he was introduced to Na. Following the death of her husband, she had lived with her son, but she had felt badly treated by her daughter-in-law. She was exhausted. At her son's house, she was responsible for all the housework, and she was required to cook for all the cotton-pickers during harvest. Lao Mai was not happy living with his sons, but he could neither cook nor wash his own clothes; Na was seeking to escape an exploitative relationship with her own son and daughter-in-law. Some form of union suited both of them, but there were points of tension.

Lao Mai and Na differed in their expectations of his children. Lao Mai was proud of his rich youngest son, who had provided all the sand and bricks used to build the new mosque, and he was delighted with his baby grandson. Na was less impressed. Na remarked bitterly that Lao Mai's children 'threw him to me' and that they 'never cared'. They seldom visited or phoned, and she had been able to visit the youngest son only once. Though the children were well-off, they did not offer much financial support. Lao Mai and Na depended on Lao Mai's pension to cover their normal living expenses, winter heating, and significant social expenditures. The couple spent RMB 5,000 on coal, and RMB 3,000 on Eid celebrations during which all the children visited. Na thought Lao Mai's children offered too little to the family's celebration: the youngest son contributed RMB 100 and the other children brought only gifts of fruit. Na felt that only Lao Mai's youngest

daughter showed any care for her, helping her with housework and addressing her as *Ayi,* the respectful term for an older woman. Even this daughter, however, rarely visited.

Sometimes Na could no longer bear the disrespect she felt from Lao Mai's children. For example, I once heard Na complaining to another woman that neither Lao Mai's youngest son nor his eldest daughter had invited her to a *Niansuo* within the family. At least some villagers supported Na and felt that Lao Mai should ensure that she was treated as his wife. Once a friend from the mosque visited the house to cut Lao Mai's hair, and took up the theme of Na's treatment. He upbraided Lao Mei for going to Shihezi to visit his son, but leaving Na at home. Lao Mai should remember the work Na put into caring for him, he said, and warned him that the relationship would break down if he did not integrate her into the family. The visitor recommended Lao Mai to tell his son that if Na were not invited, that he would not attend either. After three years of cohabitation, said his friend, Lao Mai should treat Na as a family member or let her go home.

Integration into the Family and Other Problems

My stay with Na and Lao Mai clearly occurred during a difficult period for Na. She complained much about difficulties with her own children as well as those of her husband. Much had to be negotiated.

One day during my stay, Lao Mai's eldest daughter and husband visited to see the two lambs born by one of their sheep. I was not sure how to assess the quality of their visit after hearing Na's complaints. They brought hay for the sheep, and fruit for Na and their father, but the fruit was overripe. Had they meant to be aggressive to Na with such a gift?

The lambs had been born two days previously, and the day before their owners visited, Na had received a phone call with bad news. Her son had undergone a heart attack, and was at home on an intravenous drip. Because his wife had to take care of their two daughters, there was nobody to take him to the doctor. Na was very worried and went to see him the same afternoon. She returned complaining. Her daughter-in-law had not been grateful for the visit it seems, and had not given her 'even a glass of water'.

The following Friday, Na decided to visit her son again. Lao Mai tried to persuade her to postpone the visit until the following day. He would, of course, take her for the visit, but he did not want to miss Friday prayers at the mosque. Na reacted angrily, claiming that he would not react this way if it were his own son. Eventually, Lao Mai was pressured into going with her. They returned by lunchtime. Na's daughter-in-law had made them tea, but she had not cooked for them. Na told me that her son was severely ill, and needed an expensive operation. She was worried.

Na and Lao Mai had no legal marriage certificate when I first arrived in their house. I learned this gradually during the visits made by the older Hui woman who had been pulling cotton with Na when we first met. Na would complain about bad treatment by Lao Mai's family, her fears of being kicked out of the house by his son, or of Lao Mai's stinginess, and the Hui woman would advise her to get a marriage certificate. Without it, said her friend, Na would be treated as a 'slave' and then get nothing when her older husband died. Na and Lao Mai had undertaken the Islamic marriage ceremony (*neke*), and the woman reminded Na that while this legitimated their sexual union in the eyes of the community, it had no legal standing with the Chinese government. Na finally acceded and asked her friend how to apply for a marriage certificate. Evidently, Lao Mai agreed because one snowy morning Na arranged an early morning bus trip to town. Na set off that morning with excitement; Lao Mai showed less enthusiasm. They returned by lunchtime with the certificates, and I congratulated them both.

Lao Mai held up his certificate, and said: 'Well, I have this, so you will never escape'. Na replied, 'I am not afraid of you. I too have a certificate. I am not scared of you anymore'. 'Okay', Lao Mai answered, 'you are not afraid of me. I will not be afraid of you either'.

Economic Burdens and Diverging Plans

Although the marriage certificate increased Na's feeling of security, tensions within the marriage continued over a number of issues largely resulting from economic pressures. Na wanted to contribute at least RMB 1,000 to her son's operation, which was estimated to cost RMB 30-40,000. Lao Mai faced the upcoming marriage of a grandson, to which he was expected to contribute at least RMB 1,000. They needed to work together, but often they did not succeed.

Without access to other funds, Na diverted RMB 100 which was supposed to be spent on a coat for herself to her son. Lao Mai discovered her act, and took back control of his pension which she had previously administered. This upset Na and she complained bitterly to me.

Na and Lao Mai continued to disagree about visits to her son. Na's position was further complicated by a continuing bad relationship with her son's wife. She frequently quoted the saying: 'Nowadays, mother-in-law has become daughter-in-law, and daughter in law has become mother in law'.

Furthermore, Lao Mai and Na had different ideas about how to improve their economic situation. Lao Mai wanted to take advantage of the rising price of sheep by expanding his flock. Na wanted him to sell the entire flock, and instead buy some cows. In part, Na's desire was motivated by the fact that Lao Mai frequently left her to care for the sheep while he spent

entire days at the mosque. Because of the severe cold, Lao Mai brought recently born lambs and their mothers into the house. Na was busy with her own chores, and on these days when the sheep had 'free run of the house', it became dirty and smelly. Na was beside herself; sometimes, she ended up beating the sheep hard. Sometimes Na would suggest selling all the sheep and moving into one of the *loufang* owned by Lao Mai's youngest son. The son's wife's parents already lived in one of his *loufang*. Na envied those who had moved to *loufang*, and she resented the failure of Lao Mai's son to help them when they were facing financial pressure. Lao Mai kept silent in front of her, but told me privately that 'it was a greedy idea', and 'she should appreciate that we already have such a nice house'.

Lao Mai thought more of his wife's future than her complaints would indicate. Because Na had no pension or health insurance, Lao Mai wanted to make money which might be needed for her eventual hospital stays. He expressed disappointment that Na did not think ahead, and only wanted to live a comfortable life. Lao Mai was not brave enough to tell his wife how he was trying to care for her.

Instead, they argued with phrases that could be misconstrued by the other. One day, for example, Na requested exchanging the sheep with cows, and Lao Mai responded, 'You take care of your cow, I take care of my sheep'. Na retorted angrily: 'What do you mean by that?' He did not answer, and she gave his outburst her own interpretation. He must have meant, she said, that Lao Mai would never treat her as a real family member but as a 'slave'. He would not reciprocate all the work she had done for his family over the past three years. Hurt and angry, she began to recall all the unfair treatment she had received in the past, concluding, 'a half-way couple is not a real couple'.

The tensions resulting from these issues came to a head in another quarrel which resulted in the couple sleeping in separate rooms. For two days, the couple did not talk, but Na complained to me every evening. On the third night, as we were having dinner, Na asked Lao Mai, 'What do you think? Tell me your opinion, I'm about to leave'. Lao Mai looked upset but answered, 'Okay, take your things with you, otherwise, I will throw them away!' Annoyed, Na asked 'What do you mean? How could you be so heartless?' As she resumed her litany of complaints against Lao Mai he left the room and went to watch television. I got up too, and tried to mediate but neither wanted to reach a compromise. I felt really tired of their fight.

The next morning, Na did not join us for breakfast. After receiving a phone call she left the house. As she left, she told me her destination: to meet the woman who sells dried noodles. I knew that Na had been to this woman's place several times before to discuss solutions and to ask for

advice in her fights with Lao Mai. After she left, I tried again to persuade Lao Mai to reach some compromise. He was fine with their relationship, he said, but Na was 'never satisfied'. Finally, at the end of the day, Na's daughter and son-in-law visited. They succeeded in reconciling the couple and bringing smiles back to their faces. The following day, I moved to the neighbouring *liandui* for the next phase of my fieldwork. I returned to visit Lao Mai and Na on the occasion of his grandson's wedding, several funerals, and the summer Eid celebrations.

A New House

When I visited Lao Mai and Na at Eid, they had sold all the sheep, as Na had desired. They had purchased and moved into a small three-room house, and were no longer dependent on Lao Mai's youngest son for their home. For the celebrations, they had invited the imam to perform *niansuo*, and many of Lao Mai's family members came for a meal which was prepared by Na with help from Lao Mai's youngest daughter and one of his daughters-in-law. Following the meal, the men went to visit friends, and the women all worked together to clean up. The visitors had brought gifts of fruit, and before they left, Na helped Lao Mai's youngest daughter-in-law and eldest daughter pick fresh tomatoes from their courtyard. Relations between Na and her husband's family seemed much improved. Still, there were some problems.

After Lao Mai's family had left, Na complained that his eldest daughter had blamed her twice during the day for the couple's move into a house that she regarded as much too small. The couple's families also visited in two shifts. Because Lao Mai's children were much more affluent, Na's children felt uncomfortable socializing with them, and therefore the couple had decided to invite the two families separately. Na's family arrived after Lao Mai's departed. Small gifts for Na and Lao Mai, including a pair of cups, were presented to her and more food was cooked. Lao Mai returned from his round of visits, and he was greeted politely by all. He distributed money to Na's granddaughters, and then left to attend another *niansuo*, leaving Na in relaxed conversation with her family. Na's granddaughters stayed with her for a few days after the celebration. The problems that remained seemed, on the whole, relatively minor ones for a couple that was learning to work together.

In tracing the course of the partnership between Lao Mai and Na from cohabitation to marriage and beyond, I have illuminated the kinds of issues that complicate many such relationships. In such marriages with major age and economic disparities, the couple often have different motivations based on their particular circumstances. In this case, although Lao Mai had a pension and his children were affluent, he still needed someone to take care

of him. Na is relatively young and still strong, but her poor economic situation and difficult relationship with her daughter-in-law forced her to find a life partner. Lao Mai and Na relied on each other, one providing financial support and the other providing daily care.

Sustaining the relationship is difficult, however, because the exchange is neither equal nor static, and fulfilling it requires consideration of others' claims to each partner's resources. Firstly, Lao Mai and Na must balance what they offer against what they obtain. This requires income management and labour distribution. Lao Mai controls the money because it is 'his' pension, and Na must justify her share of the budget against the labour she contributes to family and household. With such an equation in play, Na sometimes felt that she contributed much but did not receive a just return in appreciation or material rewards. On such occasions when Na became overwhelmed by housework, domestic conflict was the result. Like Na, many older women who have remarried or cohabit complain that their partner is 'stingy' and describe themselves as free labour, even using the word 'slave' (*nuli*). Many men, however, have similar perspectives to Lao Mai. They see their 'stingy' behaviours as an effort to economize so that two people are supported by one pension. They do not agree that they fail to show sufficient gratitude, but feel that their wives are overly demanding.

Misunderstanding and conflict arising from such material tensions can be exacerbated by the difficulties of integrating into each other's life. In this sense, the view that late-life marriage and cohabitation is pursued as 'a way of resource exchange among widows and widowers' (Tan, Xu and Zhu 2004) is only partly true. Each member of a couple may be drawn to the relationship for practical or financial support, but as seen in Na's case expectations often expand once the relationship is contracted. Once in a 'half-couple', members desire to be treated as real family members. Often enough, a contradiction emerges between these expanded expectations and what is actually possible. There are at least two major obstacles to becoming 'real' family members. One is a possible lack of trust between the couple, which may easily lead to misunderstanding and threaten the stability of the relationship. The other obstacle is the influence of each member's children in the relationship. The extent to which a new partner can become a 'real family member' is strongly dependent on relationships between partners and their adult children, the attitudes these children take to the marriage, and the extent to which positive relationships across families can be developed. It is expected that both partners will seek to fulfil responsibilities to their own children (with whom they are expected to be emotionally closer), but problems can emerge both over the mobilization of resources to provide this help and over the degree of support offered to the other partner's children.

Lao Mai, for example, sought to help his children during lambing, but he had to mobilize his wife's labour to do so. When Lao Mai left the lambs to have 'the run of the house' while he attended to spiritual matters, the mobilization of Na's labour to benefit his children became all too obvious and provoked her strong resentment. Similarly, Lao Mai was not eager to prioritize visits to Na's sick son. Though she resented the use of her time for his children, Na accused Lao Mai of favouritism when he displayed a lack of desire to help fulfil her parental obligations.

Moreover, children's involvement in the couple's life can have significant effects on the relationship, either positive or negative. Na felt that the failure of Lao Mai's affluent children to visit frequently or offer help pushed all responsibility for care onto her. The children themselves had withheld support for the couple on other principles; Lao Mai's youngest daughter told me that her older sister and younger brother had been against the marriage. They suspected that Na pursued the relationship to gain access to their father's money. When their father ignored their opposition, they refused to offer financial support; they also hurt Na's feelings by refusing to invite her to family gatherings. Such tensions are common in the many marriages in which men are economically more advantaged than their partners. Children are often suspicious of a new wife's motives, and are reluctant to develop warm relationships with her despite the care that she provides for their father. Consistent with findings in other parts of China, it is often reported in the *bingtuan* that daughters cause trouble in their fathers' remarriages. Women's children, on the other hand, are more often supportive. When Lao Mai's and Na's marriage was in crisis, it was Na's daughter and her husband who came to help repair the relationship.

Marriage certification is one of the most sensitive elements for both elderly and children in late-life partnerships because it affects economic and property issues. According to Chinese law, a legal spouse is entitled to 50 per cent of the couple's common property when the other spouse dies. Domestic partners have no such legal provisions, regardless of the length of cohabitation. Although it is possible to make alternate arrangements through a will, most elderly do not have one, nor do their children expect them to make one. Perhaps logically enough, most children oppose marriage certification if their own parent's economic situation is better than that of the new spouse because they know that a legal marriage will decrease their own share of the inheritance. In general, it is men's children who oppose formal marriage because men's pensions are almost always higher than women's, and some men own houses. Women often desire certification, but this desire is modulated largely in proportion to the woman's economic condition and anticipation of future uncertainty. Whether a woman succeeds in legalizing

the marriage often depends upon the strength of opposition from children. Na desired certification not only because she had no pension and her children were poor, but because she had a poor relationship with her daughter-in-law and with her husband's children, and because Lao Mai was at such an advanced age. If he had died within a short period of time, she would have had little to secure her subsequent future without the inheritance due to her from a legalized marriage. Na's success in convincing Lao Mai to marry her may be attributed to the poor connection between Lao Mai and his children. He was proud of them, but they rarely called and knew little about the daily developments in his life. Thus as the fights with Na intensified, they were not poised to intervene or to assert their priorities over hers.

The legalization of a marriage does not resolve all points of tension within a couple. Marriage certification can provoke intensified hostility from children. This was not evident directly in my observations of Na and Lao Mai. Her status as a fully legal wife, however, did seem to increase Na's influence in the marriage because she managed to persuade Lao Mai to sell his sheep and to buy a new house. Though marriage settled relations between the couple to a large degree, their independence from Lao Mai's children and increased reliance on each other was noted and objected to by some of his children.

Chinese scholars have concluded that women in late-life marriages are typically weaker in the marital relation than their husbands because of their lower financial contributions and the suspicions and hostilities encountered from the man's children (e.g. Tan, Xu and Zhu; Liu 2005). Such structural weaknesses are present, but I found that women were far from helpless against their husbands. Indeed, marriage itself may be seen as the result of a woman's bid to increase her power in a relationship, and one step among many that a woman will take. Na's responses to the power imbalance in her partnership and eventual marriage are typical. She did not passively accept a fate of lesser control and future uncertainty as Lao Mai's partner. Instead, she actively mobilized her own networks (neighbours, *laoxiang*, children, and other relatives) to gain advice, support for her goal of marriage, and help in resolving conflicts as they emerged.

Na, like many women, used marriage certification to secure her position, both as her husband's full wife in the present and after his death. Yet marriage certification cannot really secure recognition of a spouse's rights in marriage or after death. The following two cases show how married life remains full of uncertainties about one's rightful status and dues.

Lawsuits: Partners, Children, and Property

Property remained a sensitive issue within remarriages. It was a potential landmine that could threaten a couple's relationship, and constitute an 'everlasting obstacle' with the children of one's spouse. As my survey showed, disputes over money or property were a primary cause for the failure of late-life partnerships. While many women complained that their partners were 'stingy', men blamed women for being too demanding or greedy. Both men and women often compared their new partner unfavourably with their former spouse, lamenting the failure of the new spouse to treat them as 'real family' and the impossibility of becoming 'one-heart'. Property issues served as an important indicator of the level of trust, mutual value, and integration within a partnership. If a couple failed to manage such issues, the relationship would be in danger.

Moreover, property issues were the main motivation for adult children to intervene in late-life partnerships. Few adult children wanted to share their parent's property with an 'outsider'. Even when children failed to prevent a legal marriage, they might continue to interfere with the intended distribution of their parent's property, before and after their parent's death. The elderly, for their part, claimed an increasing awareness of the law; they know how to legally protect their own interests against their children's interference, and particularly how to claim individual rights to free choice and remarriage. Elders who appeal to their individual rights, however, strip themselves of the 'protection' provided by the interests of their children and other relatives, and expose themselves to the risk of being cheated by a partner with purely mercenary intentions.

During my volunteer work at the Justice Office, I witnessed several lawsuits over property resulting from remarriage. Some involved married couples, others were disputes between a second wife and her husband's children. I will examine two representative cases, before presenting a third case which has deeper implications.

Husband v Wife

One of the cases I witnessed involved a dispute between a couple over house ownership, which led to divorce and a later lawsuit. Housing is not the only form of property involved in disputes, but it is the most emblematic in determining the result of remarriage.

Xu, my downstairs neighbour, was 61 years old. Her first husband had been jailed and executed early in their marriage, and she alone had raised their one daughter and one son. Her daughter was married, but her son still lived with her. Eight years before I encountered her, friends introduced her

to Li, who was 69 at the time, a retired *zhigong* with three sons. Two of Li's sons lived inland, and Li lived with the third in a *liandui*. He felt badly treated by his daughter-in-law, however, and was looking for a way to leave his son's house. Li and Xu married, and Li moved in with Xu and her son. There was no opposition from Xu's children, and the newly formed family got along well. Their peaceful life was broken, however, when urbanization in the Corps made houses a significant form of wealth.

The couple had pooled their savings and bought a *loufang* five years after their marriage. When Li's health condition deteriorated, he decided to sign over his share of the property to his wife, and completed the process at the Justice Office. Two years later, however, Xu was awarded another *loufang* in compensation for the demolition of her old house. She assigned the ownership of the second *loufang* to her unmarried son. According to Xu, Li's sister then came to visit from the city of Hami, and persuaded Li that it was not fair that Xu should own two houses. This began a quarrel between the couple which ended in divorce. After renting a house for a period, Li moved in with his sister in Hami due to his poor health. Li and his sister came regularly to the Justice Office to pursue his claim for ownership of the once jointly-owned *loufang*, asserting that he had signed the document of transfer when he was ill and not fully in charge of his senses. Moreover, he claimed some rights to the second *loufang* on the grounds that he had paid for the decoration of Xu's old house prior to its demolition.

While Xu deeply regretted the failure of her marriage, she was resolute in maintaining ownership of the flat that she and Li had bought together. She believed that Li's sister aimed to inherit it from her brother, and had connived to bring about Li's split from her. Li believed that the sister had no right to the property. Neighbours suggested that Li had failed to appreciate the care Xu had taken of him, and had destroyed his own happiness for the sake of property, leaving himself without a carer or a place to live. Regardless of the rights and wrongs of the dispute, the case is an example of the way that property can act as a landmine that may explode under a marriage at any time.

Second Wife v Children

Corps law specified that the family of a pensioner would receive 20 months of pension payments following his or her death. It did not, however, specify how the payments were to be distributed between family members. The dispute discussed below concerned the division of the pension payments along with other property, and had been ongoing for four months before I joined the Justice Office. On my first day of work, both sides came to sign the following agreement:

> After the death of LT (the husband), SY (his wife) will receive RMB 25,000. Property: stove, refrigerator belongs to SY. The pension of LT from 10 September until his death, two months, in total is RMB 9,000. SY will get RMB 800 to cover the cost of natural gas. From today, there is no connection between LT's family and SY.
> Recipient: SY
> Witness: LW

It was the youngest son of LT who arrived first in our office, and I noted that he seemed to know the head of our office very well. As they talked, he stressed that he wanted to end all relationship with his father's second wife. He thought she had already received a lot from his father, and was greedy and never satisfied. He claimed for himself the 20 months pension and other savings left by his father. The department head told him that if his father's widow agreed, all could be arranged within the provisions contained by the Law on Relatives. The department head then drafted the text of the above agreement, to which the son made numerous corrections.

When SY arrived, the department head led her and LT's son to another room. His assistant read out the newly drafted agreement. SY said nothing. She stared fiercely at the table then suddenly burst into tears, crying: 'Okay, you go and try to make a fortune! Let's see if you can manage! You are nothing but a prisoner' (the son had spent a year in jail). After a brief silence, the son replied: 'Okay, let's just go outside and fight!' At that point, the department head intervened. He summoned the angry son to his own office, and left the crying woman with his assistant (and me). Some time passed, the department head returned to ask his assistant to come out and confer, and left me with the instructions to explain the draft agreement. Later the department head would tell me that he had calmed the son (but not dissolved his anger) by reminding him that the woman had taken care of his father, therefore relieving the son from his duties in the matter. Meanwhile, the woman continued weeping to me, repeating that she had always been treated badly by her husband's children. 'These beasts', she said, 'I won't give him the password [of the bankcard]'.

Finally, the department head, his assistant, and the son returned, and the head asked the woman to sign the three copies of the agreement. Though I had explained the document, SY declared that she did not understand its content. Eventually, she signed them, cursing her stepson. It took another while for the woman to reluctantly hand in all the necessary documents. Eventually the department head said, 'Okay, that's it. Hope you will live your own life smoothly'. After SY left, another woman arrived. She introduced herself as the son's wife, and asked with concern, 'Did she give everything?' She was relieved by her husband's answer.

At the end of that day, the department head reflected on the case to me. How complicated remarriage could be, he sighed. I agreed. In the course of the proceedings, I had interviewed both SY and her husband's son. I now retell the story from the beginning to show what had precipitated the legal case.

Employee or Wife?

SY's name was Sa. She was 67, and had one son and three daughters. The oldest daughter lived in Guangdong Province, the other three lived in the town. Of the three living in town, one daughter ran a grocery store at the market, and the other daughter and the son worked in a cotton processing factory. They all had their own *loufang*. Her first husband had died 9 years previously, and she had married Lao Tie two years later. Lao Tie was a *laojiu* who had one daughter and two sons from his first marriage. The oldest son suffered from congenital epilepsy and a tumour, the daughter worked in an office for trade and industry in Shihezi, and the youngest son – whom I met – worked part-time in Shihezi.

After her first husband's death, Sa was entitled to a subsidy for poor families (*dibao*), which at about RMB 150 per month was the lowest guaranteed subsidy one could receive. She lived in a bungalow and life was very hard. She could not get any economic contribution from her children, so a friend suggested marrying a *laojiu* to secure a higher subsidy. After an introduction from a matchmaker, she became a nurse for Lao Tie. They reached an agreement: she would take care of him for three months, and if Lao Tie was satisfied and they both got along well, then they would get a marriage certificate. Sa also had to take care of Lao Tie's oldest son, who was unable to move. After three months, both Lao Tie and Sa were satisfied and decided to get a marriage certificate. Lao Tie's children objected from the very beginning. Lao Tie asked Sa to give him some additional time to persuade his children before they registered the marriage. She agreed, and he provided her RMB 400 per month in addition to allowing her to live in his house and to eat with him for free. Time passed and Lao Tie's children remained hostile. His youngest son even insulted Sa on the phone, calling her a 'lost woman' (*poxie*) and threatening to kill her. Lao Tie informed the police. Nothing came of the threat, but the relationship between father and son was subsequently damaged, and the son hardly ever came to see his father, confining his visits to Spring Festival.

After three years, Lao Tie and Sa finally registered as a legal couple, on the precondition that ownership of the house was transferred from the disabled son to Lao Tie's daughter. Lao Tie gave his new wife RMB 1,500 per month from his pension to save for her future security, using the rest for

everyday expenses and his granddaughter's college fees. Lao Tie frequently warned his new wife that his daughter sought to get all of his money. For instance, his daughter proposed to keep her father's pension and medical cards, and to provide for his food and medicine. With Lao Tie's support, Sa was adamant in her refusal of the proposed arrangement. She was polite, acknowledging that they might wait for the daughter to bring food, but pointed out that diseases could not be foreseen and her father deserved more immediate attention than the daughter would be able to provide. But she also asked the daughter, 'How about we keep your salary card, and if you need food, we buy it for you. What do you think?'

Sa reported that Lao Tie's daughter had said nothing, just smiled, and that Lao Tie had smiled too. Lao Tie was entitled to RMB 7,000 of medicines on his card each year. Most of this sum was spent on his daughter because she had diabetes. His daughter also sought and received financial help from him over other issues: RMB 3,000 as a gift to her daughter's supervisor, aimed at securing a good job for the young woman, and RMB 15,000 for a house. The daughter tried to keep her appeals secret from Sa, but Lao Tie conveyed all of the information to his wife.

In the September before I met Sa, Lao Tie had been taken to hospital. He recovered from the illness, but in the following April he had been diagnosed with hepatic carcinoma and was given a life expectancy of three to six months. Sa continued to care for him. When Lao Tie told her that he had a savings of RMB 40,000, she contacted his son. She had heard that someone else had been cured of the same disease in Urumqi, and – since her husband had such savings – she wanted to bring together Lao Tie's children to discuss the possibility of pursuing similar treatment. The son delayed, saying his sister was away decorating her daughter's house. In the end, the family did not convene, and it seemed that the children did not want to pursue the treatment.

Sa concluded that if Lao Tie's children did not care for him, there was little she could do. On her return, Lao Tie's daughter secured the keys to her father's house, and his bank book, identification card, and residence registration. Sa also complained that money donated by her children to Lao Tie while he was in hospital had been taken by his children. The bad feeling between Sa and Lao Tie's children continued after his death. Sa complained that his daughter refused to hold a memorial ceremony in order to save money, and that she changed the lock to his house so that Sa could not gain access.

As Lao Tie left no clear will, no agreement could be reached on how to divide his property, and so the case was brought to the Justice Office. There it transpired that Lao Tie had lodged two documents before his death.

The first, lodged on 31 March 2008, was an appeal for help in resolving conflicts between his wife and children. The second, a property agreement, was lodged on 8 November 2009. The first document included representations by Lao Tie to the Justice Office, complaining of a range of issues, including the threatening phone call made by his youngest son to his wife; his daughter's unreasonable demands regarding his wife's care of his disabled son; his objections to transferring ownership of the house from his disabled son to his daughter; and the disposal of his disabled son's pension. It also included an affirmation that his marriage with Sa was based on 'true feeling for each other'. The second document was a property agreement completed on the occasion of the marriage between Lao Tie and Sa; it detailed money that would be paid to Sa as nursing fees and saved for her future security. Most importantly, it confirmed that the house would be owned by Lao Tei's daughter, that Sa and Lao Tei would be free to live there until Lao Tei's death, whereupon Sa would return to her family.

From the last two documents, it is clear that Lao Tei's children had sought to prevent the couple from getting marriage certification, and to secure rights to Lao Tei's property for themselves. Ultimately, his daughter succeeded in acquiring ownership of the house, and his son succeeded in getting most of Lao Tei's pension and savings. It is not clear to me how the agreement on the distribution of property was made, as I had three different responses. Sa claimed regretfully that she had not received the share she deserved, but that since she was tired of endless disputes and trusted the Justice Office, she did not question the agreement. Lao Tei's son responded that they had divided the property according to the numbers of family members, including himself and his sister. He cursed Sa when I interviewed him by telephone, claiming that she had cheated his father and used up all his savings and wanted to get more.

The department head told me that the last agreement, cited above and drafted in my presence, was based on relevant members' previous common agreement, as allowed by the law. He explained that according to the law, Sa had a right to 50 per cent of the couple's common property, including bank savings and other property. The 20 months of pension, RMB 90,000 in this case, was considered compensation for all direct relatives of the deceased, and was to be distributed equally between relevant members, including Sa. Lao Tei's sick son had died shortly before his father, so his share was to be divided among the others. All things taken into account, it is clear that Sa was entitled to at least RMB 30,000. Based on the agreement I witnessed, her share was calculated at RMB 34,000; though she would receive only RMB 25,000 because she had received RMB 9,000 (i.e. two months of her husband's pension) before he died.

Whether or not this share was too much or too little was impossible for me to determine. The couple was considered to have had no common property because everything in the house had been purchased by Lao Tei. Sa was to receive the stove and refrigerator, however, because Lao Tei had specified this in his will. His bank accounts and savings were not discussed with me. The department head added only that Sa had entered the family originally as a nurse, and had received due payments for her service from the deceased.

The head's explanations are consistent with the law. It is worth noting, however, that his interpretation of 'property' only included Lao Tei's financial assets and the material goods that had been purchased with his money. It does not take into account seriously Sa's unpaid labour as a wife and household partner once she transitioned from the status of an employed nurse. In other cases too, women's service is not recognized as 'common property', even though they devote their energies to the welfare of the household and do not pursue the accumulation of individual property.

Sa's case shows that sharing a partner's property is not easy even if one gains marriage certification. A spouse's rights may be contested by the adult children of the deceased who want to be the only legal successors. In the settling of property issues, the service offered by a spouse, and the relief this gives to adult children, is often ignored and unappreciated. The landmine of property, then, may explode at any time from the beginning of a partnership until after the death of a partner, and the absence of a will can cause particular problems.

Legal Rights, Legal Protection

The elderly do have some legal protection from the interference of children in their marriages in both the new (2013) and the old (1996) Law on the Protection of Rights and Interests of the Aged (also known as the Elderly Law). The law protects the free choice of marriage of the aged and specifies that children or other family members have no right to interfere in decisions of divorce or remarriage, or in married life. The obligation of caregivers (referring to children) does not change even if the marriage relationship changes. Furthermore, the elderly have the right to their own property: to use, benefit, and distribute it according to law, and children or other family members are specifically prohibited from seizing elders' property rights through cheating, stealing, or requesting with force.[106] In practice, as the cases above show, it is difficult for the law to prevent children from interfering in their elderly parent's life unless the parent appeals directly for

[106] See Articles 20 and 21 of the newly issued law and Articles 18 and 19 of the older version.

help to the Justice Office or district community. Such appeals are rare, perhaps because of the prevailing idea that a family should not wash its dirty linen in public (*jiachou buke waiyang*). News circulates among close acquaintances through gossip, but a court case would enable much wider circulation of news about a family's difficulties. Even if there is a direct appeal, the office may offer education (about the law) and mediation, instead of applying the laws. Thus, the difficulties of implementing the law may leave the elderly vulnerable to their children's ill intentions. But it must also be asked if the children's concerns sometimes might be justified? Might remarriage involve the cheating of one partner by another?

Most of my informants emphasized that their union was based on real affection and agreement, even as they knowingly exchanged service for financial support. In the cases examined above, there seems to be little justification for the accusations levelled by children at their step-parent. But I did come across one case which raised suspicions in the Justice Office. The right to make free decisions should not become the right to be cheated, as apparently occurred in this case, and some balance is needed in the forms of protection provided by law to the elderly.

In early September 2013, two months after the institution of the new Elderly Law, an elderly man and woman came to the Justice Office. They claimed that the woman's son was preventing them from getting marriage certification by keeping her household registration documents (*hukou*). They were both in their mid-70s, both were *zhigong*, and both lived in an elderly house. The woman looked very thin and weak, with grey hair, a wrinkled face, and almost no teeth. It was almost impossible to understand her when she spoke. The man, in contrast, looked much younger than his age. He was strong and healthy, with shining eyes, and projected an air of health and intelligence. According to the woman, two of her sons lived in other cities, and one son lived in Tuanbu, but all refused to take care of her. They had put her in an elderly house in Shihezi. She had met the man there, and felt he was more concerned about her than her children were. Upon hearing her decision to marry the man, her son had refused to pay the elderly house fees, meaning she received no food, forcing her to seek help from the Justice Office. While the woman was reporting her situation, the man took out a leaflet regarding the new Elderly Law, emphasizing the 'free right' of the elderly to marriage by showing the exact page to the officer. He also emphasized his care for the woman, and her need of help. He described how the head of the elderly house had asked him to accompany her to make her claims because her mind was weak, and she was prone to getting lost. The officer was experienced, and he asked the woman whether her mind was clear enough to make the right decision. She did not answer directly, but

repeatedly complained about her children. Interestingly, the man now changed his tone: having previously spoken of the weakness of her mind, he now emphasized that her mind was clear, and that the decision to marry was made by both of them. The officer was unable to contact either the woman's son or the elderly house by telephone, so he told the couple he would persuade the woman's son to pay her fees. He further told them that they could deal with the marriage certification issue once he had collected all necessary information.

After the couple left, the officer asked me: 'Do you think that man really likes this woman? What about her do you think he might be interested in?' I shrugged my shoulders and answered, 'hard to say'. The officer continued: 'Who would take care of a woman who was in poor health and apparently not attractive? Why is the marriage certificate so attractive to the man?'

A second attempt to phone the woman's son was successful. He told the officer that his mother owned a *loufang* in Shihezi, and he strongly suspected that the man's desire for marriage was motivated by the desire to acquire a share in this property. He also claimed that his mother's mind was not clear enough to make decisions related to marriage and the distribution of property. The officer suggested that the son should resume payment of the elderly house fees, and then take his mother to a specified hospital for a mental health test. If his mother's consciousness did not meet legal requirements, her claim for marriage certification would be invalid. The son agreed. The woman failed the mental health test and marriage certification was not issued.

It is impossible to know the real motivation of the elderly man. Perhaps he did care for the woman. And perhaps there was no threat to her property: as seen in the above two cases, the woman's *loufang* would not have been considered common property, and normally a new husband would have had no claim to it at her death. But the possibility remains that he could have persuaded the woman to sign over ownership to him. If she had been of sound mind, then perhaps a trade of property for good care would have been a satisfactory bargain. But her poor mental health made her especially vulnerable to persuasion and less able to gauge the quality of her care. What if she had signed over the property and been poorly cared for? It could have been disastrous for her and her family.

This case, then, has some significant implications. First, it indicates that the law can be abused and turned to the advantage of those who seek to benefit unduly from marital unions. The law does not envision such situations. It was, after all, drafted primarily to protect the elderly from the undue influence of their children. Yet the elderly are more likely than

younger adults to be of unsound mind, unable to exercise their freedoms and vulnerable to deception. Second, this case reveals that the law can only fulfil its protective functions on both sides when applied by a Justice officer. In this case, the issue was sensitively handled by an experienced officer with a full understanding of the relevant law. But this may not always be the case. For example, in the first case discussed above, the husband's sister claimed that her brother had transferred his property when not in full control of his mind. The property transfer had been lodged with the Justice Office, but no one had questioned the man's state of mind. Had he been tested the way that the elderly lady of the last case was tested, a later dispute over the distribution of property might have been avoided. The application of the law can be improved, but additional procedures will rely necessarily on the discretion of those who apply them – allowing for the re-introduction of common values and perceptions. After all, the officer's suspicions had been raised because the complainant hardly seemed an 'attractive catch'.

Remarriage: Possibilities for Stability?

Is there really any possibility for stability in late-life marriage? Analysis of my questionnaire data suggests that there is greater stability when the partners are of a similar age and economic condition. Moreover, partners are likely to encounter fewer problems if their respective children are also of roughly equal economic status. The primary motivation to marry in these situations is to ensure companionship and mutual support in case of sickness, in contrast to the above-described marriages that are more clearly characterized by the economic and instrumental support offered by each spouse. Even in marriages between partners of more equal status, the couple is still widely referred to as being 'two hearts (or minds) in one bed'. The perception remains that such partners do not fully integrate to form a single family, but maintain their loyalty to their separate families. Insofar as the partners remain partial towards their own children, however, they do so covertly or within tolerated limits, prioritizing the stability of their marriage, as exemplified below.

Lu (74), originally from Sichuan, and her husband, Lao Yu (80), originally from Henan, married eight years before I met them. Both are retired *zhigong*, with pensions totalling RMB 5,000 per month. They rent a house in the town and Lu's granddaughter, who is at primary school, lives with them. Lu is in charge of the pension according to the agreement at the beginning of their marriage. Every month, she gives her husband RMB 800 pocket money, takes out living expenses, and saves the remainder. Lu had two sons and two daughters with her first husband. One son was killed in an accident, the other son lives in the *liandui* with his wife. The daughters

married and live in other Corps. Lao Yu has one daughter and six sons. Three sons live in *liandui*, others are in different parts of Xinjiang. Lao Yu's wife died of cancer, and while she was very sick, Lao Yu had an affair with his neighbour's wife. Lao Yu had significant debts, and as soon as his wife died, the two escaped to Yili, another city within Xinjiang, and lived there for eight years. The youngest of Lao Yu's children was 16 at this time, and three were still unmarried. They grew up independently, helped, to some extent, by Lao Yu's sister, who lived in the same *liandui*. Lao Yu made a significant fortune in Yili, and returned after 8 years to clear all his debts. When his partner required him to pay for social insurance, however, he broke up with her and returned to his *liandui*. There he found that apart from his daughter, his children, who had all married without his help, had little feeling for him. Friends then introduced Lao Yu to Lu, who had lost her husband two or three years previously, and they eventually decided to marry.

Although Lu's son was initially opposed to the union, he respected his mother's choice. Lu knew little of Lao Yu's past until after they were married, when she discovered that Lao Yu still maintained a relationship with his ex-partner. She proposed moving to Lao Yu's hometown to break this connection, but quarrels still arose when Lao Yu spoke to the woman by phone, something he eventually agreed to give up. After three years, Lu developed a stomach tumour, and the couple decided to return to the *tuan* in order for her to undergo an operation. They had been back three years when I met them. Here the marriage faced another challenge when Lu's son asked the couple to take-in his daughter so that she could attend school in the town, since there was no school in his *liandui*. Lao Yu was reluctant, but Lu was adamant that it was her responsibility to care for her only son's child. She insisted that if Lao Yu would not accept her position, then they would have to live separately. So Lao Yu accepted that the girl should move in, but further friction arose. Lu took a free and easy attitude to childcare, but Lao Yu was a strong disciplinarian. The granddaughter did not hesitate to directly contradict Lao Yu; he saw this as disrespectful. On one occasion, Lao Yu became so angry that he decided to move to his daughter's in Karamy, a three-hour-drive from Tuanbu. Lu packed his clothes and medicine, thinking it was best to let him take some time and consider their relationship. The following morning, Lao Yu returned. After his daughter went to work and his grandson went to school, Lao Yu found himself alone in a city where he knew nobody. He had taken a taxi and arrived back by lunchtime.

Lu and Lao Yu's different temperaments also led to minor conflicts over cooking and housework. Lu cooked breakfast; Lao Yu, who had been a professional chef, usually cooked lunch and dinner. Lao Yu complained that

Lu did not clean the table and refrigerator thoroughly enough – complaints that got short shrift from Lu. According to Lu's granddaughter, Lao Yu refused to cook when he was unhappy, but since he did not like Lu's southern-style cooking, he did not protest long. Unlike many other couples, *koumen* (stinginess), was not a source of conflict, perhaps because of their similar economic contributions to the household. Usually, Lu and Lao Yu's life was regular and peaceful. Both spent much time socializing, playing board or card games with friends, in between routine housekeeping, shopping, and cooking. There was no clearly dominant partner in the marriage, though Lu was prepared to defer to her partner on issues that she considered 'less important'.

Relationships with children, particularly financial relationships, were seen by Lu as a potential source of difficulties. Lao Yu's daughter visited regularly bringing food and drink, and telling her father 'do not worry about anything, just eat well, sleep well, and play well'. Lao Yu's sons rarely visited, particularly after Lao Yu refused to allow a grandson to stay with him. This neglect upset Lao Yu. Lu's children visited more frequently and brought gifts at festival times.

The couple worked to avoid conflicts over their children. When a child did seek help, it could put the relevant parent in a difficult position. During my stay, for example, Lu's son sought financial help from Lu to buy a *loufang*. Lu gave him just RMB 2,000, but she told him she would help with decorating the house. Her son borrowed money from other friends and bought the flat. Then his wife came to Lu and asked for help with decoration as promised. Lu bought floor tiles and paid for the labour. Her son opined that she must be 'afraid of her husband' to be so careful with money. Lu answered that they had expenses to meet, and that they needed to save for their own future, in case of sickness. Lu was also careful not to favour her own children because she felt her husband and his children trusted her, and she did not want to disappoint them. But sometimes she was partial. Just before harvest, for example, her son got eczema. He could not afford the doctor's visit, so Lu paid for his treatment. Lu did not tell Lao Yu about this financial support for her son, and also kept the amount of her savings secret. Because she was illiterate, she turned to me to help keep track of her incomings and outgoings. Lu felt guilty about helping her son secretly, but rationalized it with the thought that Lao Yu could not possibly be spending the RMB 800 a month she gave him just on breakfast, cigarettes, and the hairdresser. He too did not tell her what he did with his money, so she concluded that he must also be helping his children.

For all the work to maintain honesty with her husband, Lu shared in the idea that a 'half way couple is not a real couple'. Her relationship still

consisted of 'two minds in one bed'. They were not, in the end, fully united as a single family. She could expect deception and partiality. Therefore, she too felt it unnecessary to tell Lao Yu everything. 'Keep one eye open, the other closed', she said.

Lu only considered her future after a long chat with her son's doctor. He told her of many instances of failed remarriage, and of conflicts that arose between a man's children and his second wife. Lu had reflected on the possibility that Lao Yu might have made a secret will, or that his children would claim his property, but she concluded that it was not the time to break the peace of their lives by raising the issue. 'Anyway', she said, 'I have a pension. I could survive if his children take everything away from me'.

Cohabitation

In the cases above, cohabitation was a stage in a relationship that at least one partner hoped would develop into legal marriage. Increasing numbers of elders in the Corps also choose to cohabit with no intention of pursuing marriage. The structure of the partnerships is similar to those of the legally married couples: most of the female partners are younger and economically disadvantaged, and the male partners provide their partners with housing, the cost of food and utilities, and sometimes pocket money in average sums of RMB 300-500. The number of economically stable elders (e.g. retired *zhigong*) involved in cohabitation is also rising because children are unable or unwilling to offer care.

Cohabitation has been perceived as an unstable form of relation. Indeed, they can be short-lived and frequent partner-changing is common for some elderly. A closer look at the cases in my study shows that cohabitations tend to succeed and fail for the same reasons that marriages succeed or fail. As in legal marriages, tensions over money are the main source of relationship breakdown. As in marriages, tensions over money arise more often when there are large discrepancies in age or economic standing between partners. And, when women have strong expectations of financial support from men, relationships tend to be unstable. On the other hand, cohabitation may be more stable than marriage, precisely because tensions within the couple may be lowered on account of the tendency for adult children to accept cohabitation more than marriage. As shown in the following three examples, however, the quality of cohabitation is affected greatly by the balance of expectations held by the two partners. When emotional support takes priority over financial support, cohabitation can be a stable and highly desirable relationship.

Tang, 77, had a pension as a former *zhigong*, of about RMB 2,400 per month. His partner was 52 and had been receiving a pension for six months.

They had been together for a year, and when I visited them, they were about to split. At first, I did not realize the woman in the room was Tang's partner because she looked very young and because he had informed me that his wife had died many years previously. I continued with my questionnaire, asking him how many children he had and if they visited him frequently. The man replied 'one son and one daughter, and my daughter visits me a lot'. 'Visits?' the woman interjected, 'She only came to take a shower!' Continuing, I asked: 'Who takes care of you if you are sick?' Tang replied, 'My daughter!' 'Bullshit!' the woman rejoined, 'You would have died already if it had not been for me!'

After I finished my questions for Tang, I asked the woman for an interview. Songhua had moved to the Corps with her husband from Jiangsu Province 15 years previously. After 10 years in the Corps, she had divorced her husband. Following the divorce, Songhua alone cared for her son and daughter. Her son had no stable job, he stayed with friends and took on part-time work; her daughter was in high school and would take the college entrance exam the following year. Songhua had been renting a house since migrating to the Corps, and had no savings. Therefore she had sought someone who could help share the financial burden, and at least guarantee her daughter the possibility of university study. She met Tang when playing mah-jong. He had lived already with a few partners, so she was initially reluctant to cohabit, but decided to try for the sake of her daughter. The couple made an agreement before moving in together: Tang would pay the daughter's school fees and be responsible for food and accommodation. Songhua complained that after a year, even though she had taken care of everything, including cooking, washing, helping Tang with his personal hygiene, and calling the doctor when he was sick – Tang had no gratitude, and was very stingy. She complained that he bought low quality food and no meat, that he never gave her daughter any pocket money, and that he took advantage of her ignorance of banking to withdraw money from her own pension without informing her. 'Even working as a nursemaid is better than living with him like this', she added.

I saw Songhua several times after she moved out. She earned extra money picking tomatoes and cotton, and had rented a house near her daughter's school. I also saw Tang, who lived a comparatively leisurely life, playing mah-jong all day. He claimed to be satisfied living alone, saying that if he needed help he would call his children in Shihezi. He blamed his partner for the break-up, accusing her of being greedy and stingy because she always used his pension money instead of her own. She had played mah-jong every day too, he said, and neither cooked well nor took good care of him. Both sides seemed to be right: Tang's neighbours and friends

confirmed that his partner often played mah-jong, but they also confirmed that all Tang's previous partners had left on account of his stinginess.

Tensions over money may prompt a woman to give up on a partnership, particularly if she is young enough to earn her own income, or has her own pension, as in Songhua's case. As in formal marriages, however, the tensions can be less if there are fewer economic burdens and less of an age gap, as the following two cases show.

Chen, 71, had a housewife's subsidy. Her three children were all married and had their own houses. Her two sons lived in other provinces and her daughter lived in the town. Her partner was 74, with two sons living in the Corps, and two daughters living in Urumqi. His children all had their own families and houses. They started their relationship eight months before I met them. Chen had lived with her daughter before moving in with her partner. Her partner had his own house, but ate at his sons' in turns. After Chen moved in, she took care of his daily life: cooking, washing, accompanying him to do exercise, and also going to the doctor with him. Three months after she had moved in, her partner was diagnosed with Parkinson's. He could not walk steadily, so sometimes Chen supported him. Sometimes he got around with the help of a crutch. It was not clear how much time he had left to live, but Chen took good care of him, providing for all his needs and wishes. She even withdrew some money from her own bank account for his medicine. Her partner's daughters called every week, and she evaluated their relationship as good. She told me that her partner intended to make a will to allow her to live in his house until her death. She was not concerned about possible objections from his children because she could move back in with her daughter. In short, she did not expect too much from her partner. She was satisfied that she felt free (*ziyou*) to live with him, and she did not mind the prospect of taking care of him until his death.

Less frequently, women provide a house if a man does not possess one, as in the case of Wu nainai's friend Zhang. Zhang, 78, had a housewife's pension. She had lost her husband almost fifteen years previously, and had been living alone until one year before I met her. Her three children all worked inland, but they gave her money and bought her a *loufang* 10 years ago. Her partner Liang, 85, is a retired *zhigong*. They got to know each other when playing mah-jong. They got along well. When Zhang fell ill and had no one to care for her, it was Liang who came to her assistance. He helped her call doctors, accompanied her to the hospital, and took care of her for six days. Liang's care touched her, and she invited him to move in. This he did, three months after their first meeting.

Liang himself had six children, and all but one lived in other cities. One daughter lived in the town. He also had one son who lived nearby, in

Shihezi, where he ran the local bank. Liang had lived with another daughter after losing his wife seven years previously. When the daughter moved to southern Xinjiang to open a business, Liang did not want to follow her, so his daughter rented him a *loufang* which cost almost RMB 10,000 each year. Although his daughter paid for it, the expense bothered him. He only had RMB 40,000 savings, an insufficient sum for buying a house. A previous relationship had ended after 20 days, because the woman had wanted a house. After he moved in with Zhang, Liang turned over all of his money to her, letting her spend according to her judgment. In explanation, Liang emphasized his age, saying, 'How long could I live?' Zhang's companionship was important: in the past, he had felt lonely when he returned home and had to eat alone. Now, there was someone to eat, talk and walk around with, and he felt warmth in his heart, not emptiness as before. 'We are old anyway, who cares?' he responded, when I asked about the perception of cohabitation. 'This kind of situation is very common'. Zhang also emphasized the benefits of Liang's company. She used to watch television in the evening at her *laoxiang*'s flat to avoid the feeling of 'emptiness', but after he moved in she was happy to stay at home.

Conclusion

Facing socio-economic and demographic changes, *bingtuan* elderly have established independent lifestyles and created new norms. Late-life marriage or cohabitation is one of them. Economic independence is one factor making it possible for elderly to seek 'happiness' according to their own expectations. Furthermore, the urbanization process and centralization of people in the town provides new opportunities for elders to meet peers. As a result, remarriage and cohabitation have become compensation mechanisms for the absence of the traditional kinship care system (Li 2013). However, late-life marriage is complicated by age differences, economic disparities, relationships with children, property, and expectations. How a couple responds to the tensions produced by these various elements determines the success or failure of a partnership.

Legal marriage offers the promise of future security, especially for economically disadvantaged partners. At the same time, the children of the economically advantaged partner frequently contest their step-parent's claims to their parent's property. When there is property at stake, elders face both the possibility of unwarranted intrusion by their children into their relationships, and the possibility that they will be taken advantage of by a partner with mercenary intentions if their children do not intervene. The law provides the elderly with the 'freedom' and 'rights' to ignore their children's claims, but the elderly are 'protected' from others' mercenary intentions only

by the discretion of Justice officers who preside over the issuing of marriage certificates, the drafting of wills, and the resolution of property disputes.

A number of factors produce tensions in both married and cohabiting couples. *Bingtuan* cases show that when there are large disparities in age and economic status between men and women, partnerships face more uncertainties. Although both partners need companionship and emotional support, they differ in their expectations and priorities: either for healthcare or for economic dependence. Children may be a source of tensions which may endanger relationships, particularly in relation to issues of property and inheritance. Partnerships in which the partners are of similar age and economic status face fewer problems. They have less interference from children, and are able to prioritize emotional support over instrumental or financial support, rendering them more stable. Nevertheless, full integration into a single family remains rare, and it is difficult to maintain a peaceful relationship without sacrifice. Whether partners choose to persevere or give up may often depend on how they imagine a future without the partner.

Chapter 9
Conclusion

In this work, I have provided an ethnographic exploration of practices, values, and conceptions of eldercare within a specific Chinese community in the north-western frontier province of Xinjiang. I have set this ethnography within the historical context of successive socio-economic transformations in China, from initial migration during the Maoist revolutionary period to the current period of market reform. In so doing, I have shown how social, cultural, and historical changes have shaped the experiences of each cohort, and how ideas and models of care have changed over time. Adapting the insights of researchers such as Croll (2006b) and Zhang (2017) who emphasize new trends in the inter-generational contract in other Chinese contexts, I have argued that the traditional culture of filial piety is not being eroded. Filial piety is being reinterpreted and renegotiated. Care for the elderly is shifting away from an absolute obligation of children to their elderly parents, enforced by the unquestioned authority of the old over the young and implemented to maintain a patriarchal bias. It is shifting towards being a matter of self-reliance, assisted by peer-ageing strategies. Care continues to be provided primarily by the family, but as a matter of more balanced inter-generational reciprocity. Decisions concerning the provision of care within the family are marked by less gender bias, a greater concern for emotional attachment, and a consideration of the situation of various family members than in older models of 'filial piety'.

Ageing has been considered as a fruitful lens through which to exam social changes because 'it links historical, economic and social change with the intimate spaces of caring and obligation within the family' (Cole and Durham 2007: 2; see also Lamb 2007: 134). In other words, social change always takes place 'in specific relationships and in the negotiations of people's everyday obligations and relationships as they struggle to shape liveable presents and futures' (Cole and Durham 2007: 5-6). Thus, the examination of changing care practices in later life contributes to the understanding of socio-economic and cultural transformation in China, and

'how these social transformations reshape the ways in which people forge intimate relations, and intimate practices to form new social hierarchies' (Cole and Durham 2007: 21).

Moreover, the investigation of care in China contributes to the overall discussion of ageing and care from an anthropological perspective. Drawing upon the growing literature on ageing and care, particularly based on the work of feminist anthropologist Tatjana Thelen (2015), I understand care in later life to be associated with insecurity or uncertainty that is socially constructed and shaped by socio-economic transformations. Hence, needs and expectations related to care, and the ways in which the elderly address social uncertainties (and receive care) are shaped by local environments, access to resources, and social relations (Sokolovsky 1997, 2009; Buch 2015: 278). Thus, rather than taking eldercare for granted as something that happens to the elderly as a matter of course, I have argued that it involves a flexible process of negotiation in which moral ethics, emotions and relationships, material considerations, and practical realities are all brought to the fore. Moreover, elders themselves are fully involved in these multifaceted negotiations.

As evident in the data presented, emotional attachment and property issues are central to the provision and receipt of care. Accordingly, the state-sponsored pension system is of paramount importance to the elderly and their families – and not only because of the daily support it provides. The state has been present throughout the lives of the elderly in the *bingtuan*, and the socio-economic changes wrought by the state in preceding decades (and the historical experiences that accompanied them) still play a significant role in shaping contemporary and emerging patterns of care. Eldercare can be understood as a practice embedded in multi-layered webs, involving inter-dependence between individuals, communities, and state agencies. More importantly, these webs require the active participation of the individuals enmeshed in them. The elderly in the *bingtuan* are active participants in making 'care' by shaping new values and lifestyles, and transforming social support networks.

Active Ageing and the Individualization of the Elderly

Personal independence and self-care are the dominant discourses surrounding eldercare in contemporary China. This emphasis on self-reliance contrasts with the traditional image of the elderly, who are often depicted as fragile and passive care receivers. It is more consistent with the process of 'active ageing' now observed in many parts of the world. 'Active ageing', as formulated by the United Nations, is a policy orientation recommended to

states and other institutions[107], but its emergence reflects the observed desires and efforts of elderly themselves to continue active participation in their own lives and that of their communities, making use of new techniques and strategies to offset their declining physical capacities.

It remains a well-known Chinese tradition that children, particularly sons, are expected to provide both material and emotional support to their elderly parents. This tradition is based on Confucian norms of filial piety. However, in contemporary China, the elderly have shaped new individualistic and independent lifestyles. They emphasize their own obligations and self-reliance. This is particularly evident in the self-care activities of the elderly. As in many parts of the world, physical deterioration is recognized as the main indicator of 'being old' by local elderly. But China's elderly do not resign themselves to disease. They engage actively in various health promotion activities, and pay great attention to nutrition, physical exercise, entertainment and leisure activities, and health promotion products. This active engagement with ageing is not just a response to physical deterioration, but a way to adjust to the changing social environment. The marketization of the medical system, the lack of comprehensive healthcare institutions, and the potential unavailability of family care (itself resulting from market-oriented economic transformation) create uncertainty for the elderly. This uncertainty also motivates them to engage in practices of self-care. Nor do the elderly accept a role of passive victimhood vis- à-vis modernization or social transformation. They adapt to these changing circumstances by shaping new values and new lifestyles (Lamb 2007: 134).

These new values and lifestyles are manifest in the rise of individualization among the elderly. Yan Yunxiang (2011: 45) pointed out that 'the most salient feature of the individualization of rural families lies in the rise of the individual and, consequently, the rise of a new ethics discourse that favours the individual. In everyday life, this is mostly reflected in the legitimation of individual desires for intimacy, privacy, freedom, and material comforts as well as in the actual pursuit of these desires'. This

[107] The definition of active ageing was formulated by the World Health Organization (WHO) for the United Nations World Assembly on Ageing in 2002. According to this definition, active ageing is the process of optimizing opportunities for health, participation, and security in order to enhance the quality of life as people age. Active ageing applies to both individuals and whole population groups. It allows people to realize their potential for physical, mental, and social well-being throughout the life-course and to participate in society according to their needs, desires, and capacities, while providing them with adequate protection, security, and care when they require assistance. The word 'active' refers to continuing participation in social, economic, cultural, spiritual, and civic affairs, not just the ability to be physically active or to participate in the labour force (*Active Aging: A Policy Framework* 2002: 12).

process is as strong among the Chinese elderly as in younger generations. In contrast to the collective identities and interests that were highly valued in their past, China's elderly now tend to express their own individual desires and pursue an individual sense of the good life. The state-sponsored pension system makes it possible for the elderly to enjoy more comfortable lives, particularly in material terms. The pension is a new type of property, and elderly enjoy the freedom and autonomy derived from holding it. This feeling of freedom further contributes to the sense of a good (late) life, and itself creates excitement and interest in keeping healthy and living independently.

The 'good life' for China's elderly is a modern and urban one. The desire to live in multi-storey flats (*loufang*) is widespread and increasing, with its promise of the convenience and comforts of modern life. Not only living in a *loufang*, but living independently from children is seen as more desirable. Life in one's own house is more convenient, and offers increased freedom, privacy and control over one's own pocket. Similarly, late-life marriage and cohabitation are important dimensions of elders' desire for intimate relations and a good life.

When talking about the rise of individualization in China, Yan Yunxiang (2009) noted that the party-state's ideology, policies, institutions, and political campaigns contributed to the formation of a new socialist person as early as the 1950s. In the economic reform era, decollectivization and the withdrawal of the state left more space for individuals to pursue their own interests and material comforts. In the 2000s, individualization in the economic arena is as strong among the *bingtuan* elderly as in younger generations, despite their decades of collective life and work. Although the withdrawal of the Communist Party from private life has created a vacuum which the individual can fill, I argue that the state continues to play a significant role in shaping ideas of independence and individualism among the Chinese elderly. The state promotes 'healthy ageing' and 'active ageing' partly as a response to the challenge of meeting the needs of an ageing population. The state creates conditions to facilitate self-reliance among the elderly. For instance, the state-sponsored pension system is the most important factor contributing to elders' independence. Furthermore, the centralization of the elderly in town, the construction of health promotion equipment, and the establishment of the elderly clubs all support elderly self-reliance. In this sense, my observations resonate with those of Lisa Rofel (2007) who described how the individual subject is created through various new forms of public culture that legitimate and promote both individual and national desires. Among the elderly whom I observed in Xinjiang, the material infrastructure plays a role as important as public culture,

particularly in terms of media and elderly club activities. In fact, the state and socio-economic transformation not just shapes the individual values among the elders, but also shapes inter-generational relations and care patterns.

Inter-Generational Care: Interdependence, Reciprocity, and Negotiations

Many scholars have noted that contrary to the arguments made by proponents of the individualization thesis (Giddens 1992; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002; Bauman 2003), families are still strong, and much care work continues to be done in the family, particularly in terms of inter-generational care work (Arber et al. 2003; Afshar et al. 2008; see also Zontini 2013: 178). Similarly, I argue that although individualization is prevalent in China, family ties and inter-generational relations continue to play a key role in later life care. Yet, we know that what constitutes 'care' is socially constructed and embedded in particular socio-economic, political, and cultural contexts. In addition to the cultural traditions which shape care commitments, state policy and ongoing socio-economic transformations play a significant role in shaping care needs, expectations, and practices. In the renegotiations of eldercare that have taken place in China over recent decades, care has come to involve interdependence and reciprocity between family members; care arrangements are no longer understood as unconditional obligations, but as a product of 'negotiated commitments' (Finch 1989; Skornia 2015). While eldercare remains rooted in values particular to the Chinese extended family, it is shaped increasingly by efforts to balance the interests of the members and smaller families that are involved in it. Eldercare emerges as being continuously 'in the making', as the elderly and their families struggle to find solutions that strike a balance between emotional, ethical, and material considerations and that also do justice to the various life situations, needs, and 'futures' of those involved in an increasingly flexible system.

Interdependence between the young and the old is the most salient feature of inter-generational care in contemporary China. Taking care of one's elderly parents is recognized as a form of long-term reciprocity over the life-course, but so too are the commitments of parents to their children. Inter-generational care flows in both directions between parents and children. As Kathleen Lynch pointed out, 'love labour is generally characterised by relations of strong mutuality; there is a sense of mutual dependence no matter how poor the relationship may be' (Lynch 2007: 559). Yet, the state-sponsored pension system and socio-economic development

policy are equally determinative in creating interdependence and mutuality among generations. Pensions and health insurance are meant to guarantee self-sufficiency for the elderly, but they do more: these welfare benefits also enable (some) elderly to offer extensive support to their children. As a result, children's support to the elderly, especially in financial terms, is supplementary rather than essential. The elderly even may become care-givers to their children, rather than being only passive recipients of care.

Moreover, with market economy reform, the state has withdrawn social benefits from most people. The elderly, with their pensions, remain relatively well cared for by the state. In contrast, the children of the elderly (unless they are included in the *bingtuan* social insurance system) often are in a more vulnerable situation in terms of long-term security. Furthermore, due to rising costs of living, particularly in terms of healthcare, education, and housing, supporting a family is a struggle for much of the younger generation. Even in the case of relatively high-income families, the current consumerist trend in China drives people to spend more money. Thus elder's financial support to their children seems more essential to the young, either to support the household or to further supplement family income.

It has been pointed out that 'intergenerational exchanges are crucial to the movement of people through their life cycles, and to the regeneration of households that can themselves engage in productive activity in a changing environment' (Cole and Durham 2007: 19). Such interactions also occur in housing – a central arena for the negotiation of inter-generational care and for the reproduction of both families and households. Aiming to stimulate consumer demand to fuel long-term economic growth, the privatization of housing has been a core part of state policy in China since the last years of the twentieth century. With rapid urbanization and rising real estate values, housing has become one of the most desirable forms of property. Associated with this economic value is a social value: housing represents one's social status. The social stratification created through housing is one of the major ways that the state constructs 'individual' subjects and motivates them to 'climb' a perceived social ladder. The desire for *loufang* living is not just a desire for convenience, but also for value in economic and social terms. Whether individuals are able to move into a *loufang* in town is determined, of course, by various elements – not least of which are the financial situations of a household and its extended 'family'. Thus housing becomes entangled with inter-generational care through purchase, sale, inheritance and other transfers, as well as through complex living arrangements. Housing too makes visible how 'state institutions and market economy are folded into people's intimate relations, commitments, and aspirations' (Han 2012: 17).

Beyond the provision of housing, the old and the young help each other in various ways, living in a complex web of interdependence. Children continue to be the main caregivers when the elderly need it. Children make regular and predictable visits to their elderly parents, call them on the telephone, bring gifts such as food and clothes, and take care of the elderly when they are sick. The care offered by the elderly to their children include financial support to the family budget, childcare, the preparation of meals, and even help with farming and other domestic work. To some extent, elders' ongoing support of their adult children renews the sense of debt and the drive for reciprocity among the children, strengthening inter-generational dependence.

Some scholars, like Yan (2013: 279) and Guo (2001) have argued that Chinese intergenerational reciprocity has shifted from a logic of delayed generalized exchange to a short-term calculated pattern of balanced exchange. My research shows, however, that reciprocity between old and young is not the simple result of rational calculation. Rather, reciprocity is generated by a complex negotiation of ethics, obligations, emotions, economic situations, and practical conditions. Indeed, human behaviours cannot be reduced to a single logic. After all, 'human beings are ethical, committed and emotional, as well as economic, political and cultural; there are sets of values that govern people's actions in everyday life that are central to how people live and define themselves' (Sayer 2005, as cited by Lynch 2007: 555). It is undeniable that filial piety remains a strong value in Chinese society, creating a 'moral imperative' for children to provide help to their parents. The elderly can call on filial piety 'to enforce their care expectations and in that way exercise care commands on carers' (Bubeck 1995 as cited by Lynch 2007: 559). Like human beings everywhere, people in China 'live in affective relational realities, they have emotional ties and bonds that compel them to act as moral agents: to act "otherwise" rather than "self-wise"' (Tronto 1991, 1993; see also Lynch 2007: 555). Nevertheless, care provided to family members is not just the result of the 'proper thing to do', even when it is experienced as such (Finch 1989). Care results from a process of 'working it out' between various family members and other social actors (see, for example, Baldassar et al. 2007: 15; Skornia 2015: 46). Eldercare in China too is a process of negotiation. Family members struggle to balance normative commitments and real situations in terms of care, relationships, and self-interests.

Many scholars have pointed out that 'it is not only the culturally informed sense of obligation but also the capacity (ability, opportunity) to provide care that is crucial in shaping negotiated family commitments' (Baldassar et al. 2007: 15, see also Skornia 2015: 46). In China, both care

capability and changing ethics challenge contemporary families. The Chinese state encourages family care and highlights the Chinese tradition of family obligation, but market-oriented reform makes it difficult to realize such obligations and contributes to the creation of a care gap. Labour migration, an insecure job market, work commitments for those lucky enough to be employed, and commitments to one's own offspring all reduce the availability of children to care for elderly parents. Rising costs from the marketization of healthcare, education, and housing further increases the burden on families, forcing them to prioritize 'earning money' ahead of physical care. In addition, Chinese families face an ethical dilemma which also stems from social and economic transformation. As Yan observed, 'making oneself a moral person by and large has been transformed into a process of making oneself a successful person … measured by economic wealth and political power' (2013: 271-72). Particularly in rural areas, parents want their children to leave for the city to escape the low social status associated with rural life. Rural parents have not, however, given up the expectation that their children will come home to fulfil their duty of filial piety. Nor, in fact, have their children given up this expectation. Old and new moral frameworks, as well as difficult practical circumstances, mean that care arrangements cannot follow a simple formula; they must be negotiated between family members of different ages, genders, and social capacities (Finch and Mason 1993).

The centrality of negotiation means that the webs of family care are complex and variable, accounting as they do for differences in children's multiple commitments, emotional attachments, time availability, economic capability, and self-interests. Nevertheless, two elements are common to nearly all negotiations of family care practices in contemporary China: emotional attachment and property.

The recent trend in anthropological studies of care has been to highlight the importance of emotions. Roger (2013: 139) pointed out that 'care ought to be privileged and positioned as not simply about the practical day-to-day aspects of care but how practical care work and emotional work coexist'. Lynch (2007: 559) also noted that family care (or love labour):

> is a feeling and a way of regarding another while relating…. While it involves respect for the other like all forms of care, it involves higher levels of attentiveness and responsiveness than would apply to other forms of care (Engster 2005)… It also refers to the very real activities of 'looking out for', and 'looking after' the other, including the management of the tensions and conflict which are an integral part of love labour relations.

In the case of eldercare in China, emotional attachments are particularly significant in shaping negotiated commitments. Such attachments are not only the basis of relationships, but also create boundaries and differentiation in care responsibility and care practice.

Emotional attachment is often associated with gender differentiation in care practice. In China, daughters are considered to be emotionally closer to their natal family than sons, and – as women – more natural caregivers. Traditionally, daughters were not expected to care for their elderly parents; this role was assigned to their brothers' wives, while the daughters themselves were 'poured out water' from their natal family. In recent decades, there has been a significant rise in daughters' support to the elderly which ought to raise questions about the balance of emotional attachment to other considerations in the provision of care. I have raised exactly this question.

Feminist studies have pointed already to the gendered nature of care in China. They claim that most care work is done by women who are in vulnerable positions. My data certainly contains examples of this vulnerability, especially in the context of late-life marriages and cohabitations. Most of the daughters I encountered, however, did not see their provision of elder case as unfair, or see themselves as vulnerable. Rather, they gave care out of a sense that they had benefitted already from their parents' care for them as children; investments made in a girl's education, work prospects, or marriage and family life forged the 'unalterable responsibility' she had to care for her parents in their old age. Care was given more freely, and received as being of a higher quality from daughters than from daughters-in-law – a reflection of both the strong emotional connection forged between daughters and parents over a lifetime together, and of the direct and tangible support that daughters received directly from their parents.

The importance of emotional attachment in care becomes more evident when it involves the care of in-laws. In contemporary China, the elderly have fewer expectations of receiving (good) care from their daughters-in-law than the traditional model envisions. On the one hand, tensions between in-laws are not new, and conflicts between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law have been well documented in various historical and popular writings. On the other hand, little attention has been paid to the emotional aspects of in-law relationships. My study has shown that a lack of emotional attachment between daughter in-law and parents-in-law is the main reason for poor relations which affect care availability or quality of care in later life. In fact, the conflict between the traditional value system that guides care expectations and the reality of poor emotional connections

contributes to increasing tension between in-law relations in China. Though parents-in-law continue to expect respect and care (and daughters-in-law expect some consideration too), both sides tend to treat each other as 'outsiders', continuing to create dissatisfaction, disappointment, and even conflicts, with detrimental effects on eldercare.

Nevertheless, Chinese families deploy various strategies to avoid open conflict. For instance, I have shown that the elderly may support their son's family financially, pay for daily costs for living, or offer childcare as reciprocity for the care that they receive. Since the daughter-in-law is considered to be an outsider, it is considered particularly important to establish reciprocity with her to facilitate further care. Sometimes daughters-in-law demonstrate respect, affection, concern, and care, but even those who do told me that they did so at a superficial level and, often enough, instrumentally with tangible goals in mind (such as their husband's happiness or securing better care for their children).

It is important to note that in most cases the elderly receive qualitatively different returns from their support of daughters than from their support of daughters-in-law. Young women have experienced a rise in power over the past several decades that manifests in one form as an increase in care for natal parents, rather than parents-in-law. Many China scholars have traced the rise in girls' power back to the Maoist reforms that introduced equal rights for women. The market economy reforms further facilitated women's participation in the labour market by providing them with an independent income (Shi 2009; Yan 2009). In the *bingtuan* case, as in many rural areas of China, the shortage of young women arising from labour migration makes those who remain valuable in the marriage market. Young women are empowered to demand high degrees of material support from their husbands and in-laws to secure a marriage, as well as throughout the marriage because husbands are afraid of losing them. Fear of estranging a wife (or daughter-in-law) also means that husbands (and their parents) demand less in terms of filial behaviour than tradition entitles them to demand. When a husband 'fears' his wife, he may also place her desires ahead of his parents' needs for care. Thus while care remains feminized, its quality differs markedly according to whether it is provided by a daughter or daughter-in-law.

The existing literatures on care have paid little attention to the relationship between care and property. What attention there is appears in debates about modernization and ageing in the form of a concern for the role of pensions. It has been suggested, for example, that the pension system in modern society compensates for the decline in the status of the elderly that results from their loss of land ownership (Foner 1984: 199; Davis-Friedmann

1991: 387-88; Ikels 2004a: 12, 2006). Such views tend to either simplify or romanticize the role of the pension, and there is little ethnographic work to show the complex relations between property and eldercare.

This work fills that gap, not only showing the central position of property in relation to old age care, but also demonstrating the complexity of those relations. The centrality of property to care is visible in the way that it has both positive and negative roles in care relations: it is an important element that links material aspects of care with dimensions of personal relations, emotions, obligations, and moral ethics; it links past, present, and future; it links a traditional value system and practical reality; and finally it links private intimate care with state and institutional care.

Property in the local context mainly refers to pensions and house ownership. The pension provides security, autonomy, and a powerful gift which creates reciprocity. Property binds family members together. The entitlement to a pension not only guarantees elders' self-sufficiency and autonomy, but also creates a sense of security regarding future care. The pension can be exchanged for care provided by one's children (or a new partner), or (though few elders want to do so) it can be used to purchase care from the market.

Moreover, it is clear from the ethnography that elders' financial support to their children plays a crucial role in maintaining family solidarity and good relations. Although this financial support requires elders to pay – strategically and sometimes reluctantly – for certain aspects of care, it is not an altogether negative or undesirable arrangement. Such 'payment' serves also to 'make the relationship between the carer and the person being cared for more reciprocal and more equal' (Qureshi 1990 as cited by Lynch 2007: 566). In this sense, money is a gift. 'It binds people together and creates a future of enduring relationships' (Geest 2002: 28).

Payment for care has raised criticism from some scholars. For example, Lynch (2007: 563) argues that intimate labour is not (or should not be) subject to commodification. The very nature of intimate care is that 'it is person-specific and is set within the context of pre-established relationships; it has an assumed future involving continuity and attachment'. In other words, the relationship should endure without the grease of money. Others, however, argue that economic transformation can mingle with intimate relations without corrupting them (e.g. Zelizer 2005). In the *bingtuan*, the 'purchase of care' is more embraced than rejected. While elders do sometimes feel used for their pensions, they give material support from a sense of unconditional love and endless duty to their offspring, as well as by an assessment of practical matters. Exchanging money for care is also a way of expressing love and emotional attachment to kin (see also Cole and

Thomas 2009). Flows of money and other material goods do not reduce the provision of care to an operation of rational choice or to a simple market-like exchange.

Like the pension, the house is central to the well-being of the elderly. Owning one's own house brings autonomy, freedom, and social status in the short-term, and it means future security. The value of a *loufang*, so highly desired and acquired by *bingtuan* elderly in the 2000s, is only partly due to its market value. The *loufang*, and housing in general, mediates inter-generational relations. On the one hand, housing is the most important 'bargaining chip' for many elders in their bid to command acceptable care from family members in both the short- and long-terms through its provision, sharing, or transfer. On the other hand, *loufang* are rarely acquired without the joint efforts of parents and children. The assignation of ownership to one generation or another provides 'face' for both parties in the traditional logical of filial piety; sharing ownership too has its merits in this traditional logic. Formal ownership and actual living arrangements combine in emotionally-tinged assessments of relations with children, satisfaction with life, experience of self-sacrifice, and conflict. Though the house is a traditional component in eldercare, like the pension, its modern form is no mere 'compensation' for other property forms. Now entangled with market-oriented state policies, housing is entangled also with the 'materialization of self-interests' and 'self-development' (Yan 2013: 271). When such forces are brought into the centre of family life through housing, inter-generational care relations are further affected.

Beyond Filial Piety: Spouses, Peers, and Self-Care

Traditional models of eldercare in China stress the role of children (i.e. sons and their wives) in providing care. Thus research on contemporary eldercare almost always begins with a consideration of change and continuity in 'filial piety'. This work has been no different. But the findings of this work are that – in practice – most care work is carried out by spouses. In the *bingtuan*, as elsewhere in China, the elderly also practise significant forms of self-care, and peer-ageing strategies (including the active building of new social networks) abound. In this final section, therefore, I turn attention to the broader significances of spouses, peers, and self-care beyond their role as substitutes or replacements in the traditional model of care.

Ageing women are the main caregivers of China's elderly. Normally, a man's wife cares for him as long as she can, and widowers increasingly remarry or cohabit in part to receive care. Like younger women, elderly women tend to take their care work for granted; they consider 'care' to be an obligation of marriage and part of being a wife. This acceptance is consistent

with Zontini's (2013) observation in the Italian context that 'Italian women understand their work as part of their identity and derive pride and self-esteem from it. Self- sacrifice for their family is a feature of much of their lives' (Zontini 2013: 182), though – of course – acceptance is not without negotiation. Borrowing from Alvin Gouldner, Evely Nakano Glenn (2010: 6) referred to such taken-for-granted duties as 'status obligations' that comprise the 'duties assigned to all those in a given status, for example, wife, mother, daughter'. Glenn (2010: 88) noted that:

> status obligations are integral to public and private morals that are internalized by members of a community and enforced by others in the community. A woman's self-identity and reputation (both in the larger community and within the family) as a good wife, daughter, and mother rest on her fulfilling her status obligations (i.e. to care). Status obligations are also part of shared understandings about the social order. Thus women's caring is viewed as an expression of the society's values and as necessary to ensure civilized life.

Glenn (2010: 88) further argued that though women's duty to care has much to do with the power of everyday thought, face-to-face relations, and internalized beliefs about the 'proper' roles of men and women, the state too plays a significant role in defining and maintaining women's obligation to care through laws and policies.

Elderly Chinese women accept their duty to care, and that acceptance forms part of everyday and long-term negotiations of what they are due in return. Few women imagine abandoning care work altogether, and assume that other women are the same. In this way, elderly women 'spare' their daughters and daughters-in-law the burden of care. Yet, it is also true that not all women are happy about their care work, and not only because it is particularly exhausting for elderly women, often with their own health complaints.

The data gathered here also show that pain is caused by care work under certain conditions. Many of the elderly women I interviewed continue to suffer the effects of long-term economic deprivation within the family. Others suffered from the long-term effects of low levels of emotional attachment to those for whom they provided care. Although the Chinese Communist Party tried to improve women's status in the early 1950s, it is generally concluded that the reform was incomplete. Many women continued to receive lower incomes than men, and they were easily removed from the labour market. Today, inequalities in their past work continue to make elderly *bingtuan* women economically reliant on men because they have either no pensions or substantially smaller pensions. Economic dependence tends to breed a tolerance for family violence, even to oneself,

as suggested in many of the biographies I presented here. Many of the *bingtuan*'s elderly women were involved in 'blind marriage', being forced to marry either by their parents or by the Communist Party. Such marriages often yielded little emotional attachment between spouses but frequent problems in spousal relations.

Taken together, the deep inequalities in work and marriage experienced by elderly women throughout their lives make their acceptance of a duty to care something other than a 'status obligation'. Their duty to care involves a consideration of their children's welfare within the context of the market economy. It also involves the exchange of labour for economic support. And it can involve a sacrifice of health and emotional well-being for 'survival'.

Late-life marriage or cohabitation is a compensatory mechanism for those who have lost their spouse. It is also a new lifestyle chosen by the elderly to adjust to the changing social environment. It involves reciprocity and interdependence in which women's labour is typically exchanged for men's financial support, though it is also motivated by the desire to avoid loneliness. This type of relationship can be highly uncertain, however, with less trust between the couple and the families involved on both sides than in more traditional forms of marriage. Both emotional aspects and property issues again come to play a significant role in determining the success of such relationships. Although it is ambiguous to what extent such relationships are based on real feeling, and to what extent on practical considerations, there is a clear emotional boundary between the elderly and their step-children. This not only makes it difficult for a remarried spouse to truly integrate into the new family, it also creates tension within the family. Property is the most sensitive issue, and the major source of conflict and failure in late-life partnerships. Neither remarriage nor cohabitation is a reliable way to secure old age in contemporary China, and such relationships are widely seen as inferior to those with the original spouse.

In China, loneliness is effectively countered through communal activities and constant interaction with peers. The urbanization and centralization of the elderly to the town has created a space for the elderly to socialize. The elderly themselves are active in building and maintaining social relations. To Chinese elders, ageing with peers is considered to be a continuation of long-term collective life. Meanwhile, being surrounded by friends, neighbours, and other peers gives them a sense of belonging and well-being (Zontini 2013: 179). Furthermore, being connected to the peer group contributes to their self-care. For both men and women, their sense of self includes not just being independent but also of being relational and communal in orientation.

The *bingtuan* case shows that community centres are important spaces for intra-generational care and solidarity. The friendships between old and new neighbours and other peers seem to be as important as connections to immediate and distant families (Zontini 2013: 180). They are alternative sources of care in daily life, particularly when family members are absent. Zontini , who drew upon Hill Collins (1995) and Tronto (1995), wrote that we should consider 'care as occurring not just in the sphere of private and intimate relationships but as encompassing wider relations at the community level and beyond' (2013: 171). This means approaching the elderly 'not just as care receivers and "needy" dependents, but as individuals interconnected to others who are involved in complex multidirectional caring networks that span generations' (2013: 171; see also Reynolds and Zontini 2006). Certainly this is one direction for conceptualizing eldercare in China beyond the parameters of filial piety.

As McCarcy (2013: 185) has noted, however, 'it is important not to romanticize the relationality of connections, nor to subsume the needs of the individual into the needs of the group'. The elderly community is a diverse group. There are 'likes' and 'dislikes' between individuals based on past experience, interests, hobbies, and personal characteristics. There are some people who are active, while others are quiet. Disputes may happen because of gossip, simple interactions, or even the casual discussion of a sensitive topic. The elderly community is also a place where 'subtle exclusions operate based on hierarchies of status and respectability' (Zontini 2013: 180). Particularly within the elderly club, leaders enjoy a superior status, and use their authority to manage group activities. Yet, most elderly consider themselves retired persons who are disconnected from the authority of any institution and who should fully enjoy their freedom. These strong senses of freedom and independence are bolstered by entitlement to pensions, as was often evident when the elderly told club leaders with whom they were dissatisfied: 'I have my own pension. I do not eat yours or owe you anything. You have no right to control me'. Thus, the tension between individualistic ideas and communal life make it difficult for the elderly clubs to run as coherent and efficient groups like those that this generation has experienced in the past. Both the support provided by peers in the community and the tensions between individuals thus constitute important aspects of daily life and a significant part of the multi-layered care networks and everyday care practices of old age.

To sum up, eldercare is embedded in multi-layered care webs, which involve individual efforts, inter-generational and intra-generational support, as well as a significant influence from the state. Care is a process of negotiation among different actors. It is a practice that combines moral

ethics, emotional and relational aspects, material considerations, self-interests, and practical realities across intimate and institutional domains.

Ageing in the Age of Neoliberalism

In short, this work has demonstrated both the positive and negative effects of long-term state interventions in welfare through the specific socio-economic context of the *bingtuan*. It has highlighted the active responses of the elderly and their families to the challenges they face in rapidly transforming society. In so doing, it contributes to more general interdisciplinary debates concerning the relationship between social change and ageing, and builds on the comprehensive approach to social support pioneered by Franz and Keebet von Benda-Beckmann with attention to a life-course perspective. It contributes to the anthropology of ageing in China. With additional research in other Chinese contexts, both rural and urban, it may enable further interventions that will improve the situations of the elderly and their families.

At a time when neoliberal economic models are being applied to health and eldercare on a global scale in widely varying contexts, from newly industrializing countries to 'developed' societies with ageing populations, this work may be useful beyond the specific contexts of the People's Republic of China. It is my hope that this account of elders' lives in Xinjiang will help us to understand how different forms of political economy can meet the changing needs of domestic social reproduction in conditions of rapid urbanization everywhere on the planet.

Appendix

Inter-Generational Support and Residence Patterns

Answers / Home ownership	Yes	No	Given but not accepted	We don't need their money	Total
Elder's house	31	14	23	20	88
Son's	18	11	6	9	44
Daughter's	14	8	7	7	36
Rent	5	4	6	1	16
Total	68 (36.9%)	37 (20.1%)	42 (22.8%)	37 (20.1%)	184

Table 5. Do children give money to elders (during the past year)?

Who gave / Home ownership	Son	Daughter	Both son and daughter	Total
Elder's house	11	8	12	31
Son's	6	4	8	18
Daughter's	1	3	10	14
Rent	2	2	1	5
Total	20	17	31	68

Table 6. Which children give money?

Who / Home ownership	Son	Daughter	Both son and daughter
Elder's house	7	10	67
Son's	6	5	33
Daughter's	0	0	36
Rent	0	3	9
Total	13	18	145

Table 7. Who buys things for elder?

Who / House ownership		Spouse	Son	Daughter	Both son and daughter	Spouse and daughter	Spouse and son	No one	Daughter-in-law	Others
Elder's house		54	6	15	5	1	1	5	1	0
Son's		15	11	7	5	0	0	3	2	1 (relative)
Daughter's		9	0	13	9	0	0	4	0	1 (nurse)
Rent		8	1	2	1	1	0	3	0	0
Total		86	18	37	20	2	1	15	3	2

Table 8. Who cares for a sick elder?

Give whom / House ownership	To son	To daughter	To both son and daughter
Elder's house	12	1	11
Son's	7	2	5
Daughter's	0	1	1
Rent	0	0	1
Total	19	4	18

Table 9. To whom does an elder give money (in the past year)?

Property	**No.**
House	21
Pension	60
House and pension	61
House, pension, electronic equipment	12
House, pension, electronic equipment, transport	6
Pension, electronic equipment	2
Other	32
Total	184

Table 10. Property owned by elders.[1]

[1] These responses reflect the perception of property ownership rather than legal definitions. For instance, some elders did not consider their pension as property. They reasoned that it was needed to purchase medicine or housing, and could not be saved; thus, it was not property. Conversely, other elderly considered themselves to own a *loufang* because they expect that their old house in the *liandui* or outskirts of town will be demolished in the future with a *loufang* or its cash value being awarded to them as compensation.

To whom / Property	Son	Daughter	Son and daughter	Spouse	Grand-Children	No idea	Distributed equally	All for son	All for grand-children	All for Spouse
House	32	7	0	1	5					
Pension	26	10	9	5	4					
Electronic equipment	3	3	1	1	0	85 (46,2 %)	24 (13 %)	1	1	1
Transport	3	1	0	0	0					
Other	3	1	0	0	0					

Table 11. How do elders wish to divide inheritance?

Principle for property distribution	**No.**	**(%)**
To those who treat me well	45	(24.5%)
To those who are the most in need	36	(19.6%)
Equal distribution	60	(32.6%)
According to law	8	(4.3%)
Son (‘Son is important’)	11	(6%)
Other (no idea)	24	(13%)

Table 12. Principles for distributing inheritance.

Bibliography

Afshar, H., M. Franks, et al. 2008. *Women in Later Life: Exploring Race and Ethnicity*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Alber, E., and H. Drotbohm (eds.). 2015. *Anthropological Perspectives on Care: Work, Kinship and the Life-Course*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Amoss, P. T., and S. Harrell (eds.). 1991. *Other Ways of Growing Old: Anthropological Perspectives*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Anatulla, G. 2009. Present State and Prospects of Bilingual Education in Xinjiang: An Ethnographic Perspective. *Journal of Research on Education for Ethnic Minorities* 20: 102–07.

Anderson, E. N. 1988. *The Food of China*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Arber, S., K. Davidson, et al. (eds.). 2003. *Gender and Aging: Changing Roles and Relationships*. Berkshire: Open University Press.

Bai, Y. 2008. 经营团场 建设城镇 (Manage Farms and Develop Urbanization). 小城镇建设 *(Development of Small Cities and Towns*) 10: 84–86.

Baidu, W. 2014. *Xinjiang*. http://wenku.baidu.com/link?url=OOHCJeS3P0gp7k8CM7k_HkpJIIlcoVSG3nAWN7ARYEXFxsGlE5IwJwSaDugaNctDbUEchGLM4Egq14kHGe53QR3LBgZBfaJYWhDd8piCoxe, accessed 6 February 2017.

Baldassar, L., C. V. Baldock, et al. 2007. *Families Caring across Borders: Migration, Aging and Transnational Caregiving*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Bao, Y. 2010. 新疆建设兵团体制研究 *(Research on System of Organization of Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps)*. Beijing: Zhongyang Bianyi Press.

Bauman, Z. 2003. *Liquid Love: On the Frailty of Human Bonds*. Cambridge: Polity.

Beck, U., and E. Beck-Gernsheim. 2002. *Individualization: Institutionalized Individualism and its Social and Political Consequences*. London: Sage.

Becquelin, N. 2000. Xinjiang in the Nineties. *The China Journal* 44: 65–90.

———. 2004. Staged Development in Xinjiang. *The China Quarterly* 178: 358–78.

Benda-Beckmann, F., and K. Benda-Beckmann. 2000. *Coping with Insecurity: An 'Underall' Perspective on Social Security in the Third World*. Yogjakarta: Pustaka Pelajar.

——. 2007. *Social Security between Past and Future: Ambonese Networks of Care and Support*. Berlin: Lit.

Benson, L. 2004. Education and Social Mobility among Minority Populations in Xinjiang. In S. F. Starr (ed.), *Xinjiang: China's Muslim Borderland*, pp. 190–215. New York and London: M. E. Sharpe.

Bian, F., J. R. Logan, and Y. Bian. 1998. Intergenerational Relations in Urban China: Proximity, Contact, and Help to Parents. *Demography* 35 (1): 115–24.

Bingtuan Daily. 2011. *2010 Sixth National Census: Demographic Data of Bingtuan*. http://epaper.bingtuannet.com/index.asp?id=54966, accessed 7 February 2017.

Boris, E., and R. S. Parrenas. 2010. *Intimate Labors: Cultures, Technologies, and the Politics of Care*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Bourdieu, P. 1984. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Cambridge: Harvard Univsersity Press.

Bowlbie, S., L. Mckie, et al. 2010. *Interdependency and Care over the Lifecourse*. New York: Routledge.

Boyer, E. 1980. Health Perception in the Elderly: Its Cultural and Social Aspects. In C. L. Fry (ed.), *Aging in Culture and Society: Comparative Viewpoints and Strategies*, pp. 198–216. New York: J. F. Bergin Publishers, Inc.

Brown, S. L., G. R. Lee, and J. R. Bulanda. 2006. Cohabitation among Older Adults: A National Portrait. *Journal of Gerontology* 61 B (2): 71–79.

Brownell, A., and S. A. Shumaker. 1984. Social Support: An Introduction to a Complex Phenomenon. *Journal of Social Issues* 40 (4): 1–9.

Buch, E. D. 2015. Anthropology of Aging and Care. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 44: 227–93.

Bureau of Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. 2012. *6th Census of Xinjiang Population*. http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/tjgb/rkpcgb/dfrkpcgb/201202/t20120228_30407.html, accessed 7 February 2017.

Butto, J. G. IV., et al. 2008. *Domestic Trends in the Unitied States, China, and Iran: Implication for U.S Navy Strategic Planning*. Santa Monica: RAND.

Cai, X., and Y. Wang. 2011. 中国农八师一四三团历史大事纪 *(Historical Events of Tuan 143, Division 8)*. Urumqi: Xinjiang Dazhong Caise Yinshua Youxian Gongsi.

Cao, L. 2012. 山区农村老年人再婚问题探析 *(Research on Late-life Remarriage in Rural China)*. http://www.snzg.cn/article/2012/0923/article_30195.html, accessed 17 January 2014.

Carr, D. 2004a. The Desire to Date and Remarry among Older Widows and Widowers. *Journal of Marriage and Family* 66 (4): 1051–68.

———. 2004b. Gender, Preloss Marital Dependence, and Older Adults' Adjustment to Widowhood. *Journal of Marriage and Family* 66 (1): 220–35.

Carsten, J. (ed.). 2000. *Cultures of Relatedness: New Approaches to the Study of Kinship*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

———. 2004. *After Kinship*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Chen, F. 2009. Family Division in China's Transitional Economy. *Population Studies* 63 (1): 53–69.

Chen, J. 2003. The Effect of Parental Investment on Old-Age Support in Urban China. In M. K. Whyte (ed.), *China's Revolutions and Intergenerational Relations*, pp. 197–221. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Center for Chinese Studies.

Chen, S., and D. J. Adamchak. 1999. The Effects of Filial Responsibility Expectations on Intergenerational Exchanges in Urban China. *Hallym Internatinal Journal of Aging* 1 (1): 58–68.

Chevan, A. 1996. As Cheaply as One: Cohabitation in the Older Population. *Journal of Marriage and Family* 58 (3): 656–67.

China Daily. 2005. *Tomato Paste Exports Hit New High*. http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/english/doc/2005-07/15/content_460452.htm, accessed 7 February 2017.

Chou, R. J.-A. 2011. Filial Piety by Contract? The Emergence, Implementation, and Implications of the 'Family Support Agreement' in China. *The Gerontologist* 51 (1): 3–16.

Cliff, T. M. J. 2009. Neo Oasis: The Xinjiang Bingtuan in the Twenty-First Century. *Asian Studies Review* 33: 83–106.

Cohen, M. L. 1976. *House United, House Divided: The Chinese Family in Taiwan*. New York: Columbia University Press.

———. 1992. Family Management and Family Division in Contemporary Rural China. *The China Quarterly* 130: 357–77.

———. 2005. *Kinship, Contract, Community, and State: Anthropological Perspectives on China*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Cohen, R. 1984. Age and Culture as Theory. In D. I. Kertzer, and J. Keith (eds.), *Age and Anthropological Theory*, pp. 234–49. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Coldstein, M. C., Y. Ku, and C. Ikels. 1990. Household Composition of the Elderly in Two Rural Villages in the People's Republic of China. *Journal of Cross-Cultrual Gerontology* 5 (2): 119–30.

Cole, J., and D. Durham (eds.). 2007. *Generations and Globalization: Youth, Age, and Family in the New World Economy*. Bloomington: Indiana University.

Cole, J., and L. M. Thomas (eds.). 2009. *Love in Africa*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Cooney, R. S., and J. Di. 1999. Primary Family Caregivers of Impaired Elderly in Shanghai, China: Kin Relationship and Caregiver Burden. *Research on Aging* 21 (6): 739–61.

Cooney, T. M., and K. Dunne. 2001. Intimate Relationships in Later Life: Current Realities, Future Prospects. *Journal of Family Issues* 22 (7): 838–58.

Cowgill, D. O., and L. D. Holmes. 1972. *Aging and Modernization*. New York: Meredith Corporation.

Croll, E. 2006a. *China's New Consumers: Social Development and Domestic Demand*. London: Routledge.

———. 2006b. The Intergenerational Contract in the Changing Asian Family. *Oxford Development Studies* 34 (4): 473–91.

Dannefer, D., and P. Uhlenberg. 1999. Path of the Life Course: A Typology. In V. L. Bengtson, and K. W. Schaie (eds.), *Handbook of Theories of Aging*, pp. 306–26. New York: Springer Publishing.

Davidson, K. 2002. Gender Differences in New Partnership Choices and Constraints for Older Widows and Widowers. *Aging International* 27 (4): 43–60.

Davis-Friedmann, D. 1991. *Long Lives: Chinese Elderly and the Communist Revolution*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Davis, D. 1993. Urban Households: Supplicants to a Socialist State. In D. Davis, and S. Harrell (eds.), *Chinese Families in the Post-Mao Era*, pp. 50–76. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Davis, D., and S. Harrell (eds.). 1993. *Chinese Families in the Post-Mao Era*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Davis, M. 1990. *City of Quartz*. London: Verso.

Dillon, M. 2004. *Xinjiang: China's Muslim Far Northwest*. London: Routledge.

Drotbohm, H. 2015. Shifting Care among Families, Social Networks, and State Institutions in Times of Crisis: A Transnational Cape Verdean Perspective. In E. Alber, and H. Drotbohm (eds.), *Anthropological Perspectives on Care: Work, Kinship, and the Life-Course*, pp. 93–116. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Du, P., and F. Wang. 2011. The Development of 'Lao You Suo Wei' in China: Policy Transformation and Framework Construction. *Population and Development* 6.

Du, P., and B. Yin. 2004. 两代人对老年人再婚态度的实证分析 (Empirical Analysis of Attitudes toward Late-life Remarriage from the Perspective of Two Generations). 人口研究 *(Population Research)* 28 (4): 37–42.

Ebrey, P. B., and J. L. Watson (eds.). 1986. *Kinship Organization in Late Imperial China 1000–1940*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Elder, G. H. 1974. *Children of the Great Depression*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

———. 1998. The Life Course and Human Development. In R. M. Lerner (ed.), *Handbook of Child Psychology*, Vol. I, pp. 939–91. New York: Wiley.

England, P. 2005. Emerging Theories of Care Work. *Annual Review of Sociology* 31: 381–99.

Engster, D. 2007. *The Heart of Justice: Care Ethics and Political Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Fang, Y. 1997. 新疆兵团屯垦戍边史 *(The History of Xinjiang Bingtuan)*. Urumqi: Xinjiang Keji Weisheng Press.

Fang, Y., and M. K. Whyte. 2003. Family Support for the Elderly in Urban China: An Intergenerational Approach. In M. K. Whyte (ed.), *China's Revolutions and Intergenerational Relations*, pp. 33–59. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Center for Chinese Studies.

Farquhar, J. 1994. Eating Chinese Medicine. *Cultural Anthropology* 9: 471–97.

Fei, X. 1939. *Peasant Life in China*. London: Routledge.

———. 1992. *From the Soil: The Foundations of Chinese Society*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Finch, J. 1989. *Family Obligations and Social Change*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Finch, J., and J. Mason. 1993. *Negotiating Family Responsibilities*. London and New York: Tavistock/ Routledge.

Fleischer, F. 2010. *Suburban Beijing*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Folbre, N. 1994. *Who Pays for the Kids? Gender and the Structures of Constraint*. London: Routledge.

Foner, N. 1984. Age and Social Change. In D. I. Kertzer, and J. Keith (eds.), *Age and Anthropological Theory*, pp. 195–216. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Forrest, R., and J. Lee. 2003. *Housing and Social Change: East-West Perspectives*. London: Routledge.

Fraser, D. 2000. Inventing Oasis: Luxury Housing Advertisements and Reconfiguring Domestic Space in Shanghai. In D. Davis (ed.), *The Consumer Revolution in Urban China*, pp. 25–53. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Fry, C. L. 1980. *Aging in Culture and Society: Comparative Viewpoints and Strategies*. New York: J. F. Bergin Publishers, Inc.

Fuller-Iglesias, H., J. Smith, et al. 2009. Theories of Aging from a Life-Course and Life-Span Perspective: An Overview. *Annual Review of Gerontology and Geriatrics* 29 (1): 3–25.

Geest, S. V. 2002. Respect and Reciprocity: Care of Elderly People in Ghana. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Gerontology* 17 (1): 3–31.

Giddens, A. 1973. *The Class Structure of the Advanced Societies*. London: Hutchinson.

———. 1992. *The Transformation of Intimacy: Sexuality, Love and Eroticism in Modern Societies*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Gierveld, J. D. J. 2004. Remarriage, Unmarried Cohabitation, Living apart Together: Partner Relationships Following Bereavement or Divorce. *Journal of Marriage and Family* 66 (1): 236–43.

Giles, J., D. Wang, and W. Cai. 2012. The Labor Supply and Retirement Behavior of China's Older Workers and Elderly in Comparative Perspecitve. In J. P. Smith, and M. Majmundar (eds.), *Aging in China: Findings from New and Emerging Data Initiatives*, pp. 116–47. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press.

Glascock, A. G., and S. Feinman. 1981. Social Asset or Social Burden: Treatment of the Aged in Non-Industrial Societies. In C. L. Fry (ed.), *Dimensions: Aging, Culture, and Health*, pp. 13–31. South Hadley, Mass.: Bergin and Garvey.

Glenn, E. N. 2010. *Forced to Care: Coercion and Caregiving in America*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Goode, W. J. 1963. *World Revolution and Family Patterns*. Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press of Glencoe.

Goodman, D. S. G. 2004. The Campaign to 'Open Up the West': National, Provincial-level and Local Perspectives. *The China Quarterly* 178: 317–34.

GROUP 18. 2011. 破解人口增加与安置之困的思考： 新疆生产建设兵团农八师 143 团劳动力现状调研报告 *(Survey on Labor State of Corps 143)*. http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/ blog_6b0a456501017tor.html, accessed 7 February 2017.

Guan, L. H. 2008. *Aging in Southeast and East Asia: Family, Social Protection and Policy Challenges*. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.

Guo, G. 2008. 兵团计划单列的前前后后 (The Process of Putting Bingtuan on the Separate List of the State Plan). In Institute of Xinjiang Agriculture Settlement and Culture in Shihezi University (ed.), 新疆屯垦戍边研究丛书 *(Collection of Researches on Xinjiang Agricultural Settlement)*, pp. 1–19. Shihezi: Zhongguo Nongye Press.

Guo, H. 2012. '搭伴' 老人的社会支持研究-以 S 省 X 市为例 *(Research on the Social Support of 'Accompanied' Elderly – Examples from Province S and City X)*. Masters thesis, Tianjing Normal University.

Guo, Y. 2001. 代际关系中的公平逻辑：对河北农村养老实践的分析 (The Logic of Fairness in Intergenerational Relationships: An Analysis of Elderly Care Practice in a Rural Area of Heibei). *Zhongguo Xueshu* 4: 221–54.

Han, C. 2012. *Life in Debt: Times of Care and Violence in Neoliberal Chile*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Hann, C. 2013. Harmonious or Homogeneous? Language, Education and Social Mobility in Rural Uyghur Society. In T. Brox, and I. Beller-Hann (eds.), *On the Fringes of the Harmonious Society: Tibetans and Uyghures in Socialist China*, pp. 183–208. Copenhagen: NIAS Press.

Harrell, S. 1991. Growing Old in Rural Taiwan. In P. T. Amoss, and S. Harrell (eds.), *Other Ways of Growing Old: Anthropological Perspectives*, pp. 193–210. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Hill Collins, P. 1995. Black Women and Motherhood. In V. Held (ed.), *Justice and Care: Essential Readings in Feminist Ethics*, pp. 117-138. Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press.

Hochschild, A. R. 2000. Global Care Chains and Emotional Surplus Value. In W. Hutton, and A. Giddens (eds.), *On the Edge: Living with Global Capitalism*, pp. 130–46. London: Jonathon Cape.

Holbig, H. 2004. The Emergence of the Campaign to Open Up the West: Ideological Formation, Central Decision-Making and the Role of the Provinces. *The China Quarterly* 178: 335–57.

Holroyd, E. E. 2003. Chinese Family Obligations toward Chronically Ill Elderly Members: Comparing Caregivers in Beijing and Hong Kong. *Qualitative Health Reaserch* 13 (3): 302–18.

Hooyman, N. R., and J. Gonyea. 1999. A Feminist Model of Family Care: Practice and Policy Directions. *Journal of Women and Aging* 11 (2/3): 149–69.

Ikels, C. 1993. Settling Accounts: The Intergenerational Contract in an Age of Reform. In D. Davis, and S. Harrell (eds.), *Chinese Families in*

the Post-Mao Era, pp. 307–34. Berkeley: University of California Press.

———. 1997. Long-Term Care and the Disabled Elderly in Urban China. In J. Sokolovsky (ed.), *The Cultural Context of Aging: Worldwide Perspectives*, pp. 452–71. London: Bergin and Garvey.

———. (ed.). 2004a. *Filial Piety: Practice and Discourse in Contemporary East Asia*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

———. 2004b. The Impact of Housing Policy on China's Urban Elderly. *Urban Anthropology and Studies of Cultural Systems and World Economic Development* 33 (2/ 4): 321–55.

———. 2006. Economic Reform and Intergenerational Relationships in China. *Oxford Development Studies* 34 (4): 387–400.

Izuhara, M. 2009. *Housing, Care and Inheritance*. London and New York: Routledge.

Jacka, T. 1997. *Women's Work in Rural China: Change and Continuity in an Era of Reform*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Jia, A. 1988. New Experiments with Elderly Care in Rural China. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Gerontology* (3) 2: 139–148.

Jia, H. 2013. 社会工作视野下的城市老年人再婚问题的研究 *(A Study on the Remarried Issues of the Urban Elderly from the View of Social Work)*. Masters thesis, Shandong University.

Jiang, Lin. 1995. Changing Kinship Structure and its Implication for Old-Age Support in Urban and Rural China. *Population Studies* 49 (1): 127–45.

Jiang, Liyun. 1997. 体制与运行：新疆建设兵团的历史与现状 *(The System and Functioning: The History and Present Situation of Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps)*. Ph.D. dissertation, Beijing University.

Jiang, X. 2004. '搭伴养'老现象与老年人再婚难问题 ('Accompany-aging' and Challenges of Late-life Remarriage). 人口研究 *(Population Research)* 28 (3): 94–96.

Jin, Y. 2011. 我国城市老人丧偶再婚问题研究 *(A Study on the Remarriage of the Elderly Widowed in Urban China)*. Masters thesis, Heibei University.

Johnson, K. A. 1985. *Women, the Family and Peasant Revolution in China*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Joniak-Luthi, A. 2013. Han Migration to Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region: Between State Schemes and Migrants' Strategies. *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie* 138 (2): 155–74.

Kertzer, D. I., and J. Keith. 1984. *Age and Anthropological Theory*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Kertzer, D. I., and P. Laslett (eds.). 1995. *Aging in the Past: Demography, Society, and Old Age*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

King, V., and M. E. Scott. 2005. A Comparison of Cohabiting Relationships among Older and Younger Adults. *Journal of Marriage and Family* 67: 271–85.

Kittay, E. F. 1999. *Love's Labor: Essays on Women, Equality, and Dependency*. New York: Routledge.

Kleinman, A., Y. Yan et al. (eds.). 2011. *Deep China: The Moral Life of the Person*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Knight, F. H. 1964. *Risk, Uncertainty and Profit*. New York: A.M. Kelly.

Kobi, M. 2014. *Constructing, Creating, and Contesting Cityscapes*. Ph.D. dissertation, University of Bern.

Lamb, S. 2007. Aging across Worlds: Modern Seniors in an Indian Diaspora. In J. Cole, and D. Durham (eds.), *Globalization: Family, Youth, and Age in the New World Economy*, pp. 132–63. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Lee, Y.-J., and Z. Xiao. 1998. Children's Support for Elderly Parents in Urban and Rural China: Results from a National Survey. *Journal of Cross-Cultrual Gerontology* 13 (1): 39–62.

Lefebvre, H. 1991. *The Production of Space*. Malden: Blackwell.

Leinaweaver, J. 2015. How Internationally Adoptive Parents Become Transnational Parents: 'Cultural' Orientation as Transnational Care. In E. Alber, and H. Drotbohm (eds.), *Anthropological Perspectives on Care: Work, Kinship, and the Life-Course*, pp. 117–36. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Leung, J. C. B. 1997. Family Support for the Elderly in China. *Journal of Aging and Social Policy* 9 (3): 87–101.

Li, H., and M. B. Tracy. 1999. Family Support, Financial Needs, and Health Care Needs of Rural Elderly in China: A Field Study. *Journal of Cross-Cultrual Gerontology* 14 (4): 357–71.

Li, S. 2003. *China Xinjiang: History and Present*. Urumqi: Xinjiang Renmin Chubanshe.

Li, Y. 2013. 老人再婚与代际关系变迁- 湖北省老人再婚现象调查 (Late-life Remarriage and Intergenerational Relationships: Research on Late-life Remarriage in Hubei Province). 华中科技大学学报社会学科版 *(Huazhong Keji University Social Science)* 27 (1): 122–27.

Li, Z. 2009. Overview of Research on Social-Participation of Elderly in the Past 30 Years. *Dongyue Tribune* 30 (8): 60–64.

Lidola, M. 2015. Of Grooming Bodies and Caring Souls: New-Old Forms of Care Work in Brazilian Waxing Studios in Berlin. In E. Alber, and

H. Drotbohm (eds.), *Anthropological Perspectives on Care: Work, Kinship, and the Life-Course*, pp 69–90. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Liebelt, C. 2015. The Gift of Care: On Filipina Domestic Workers and Transnational Cycles of Care. In E. Alber, and H. Drotbohm (eds.), *Anthropological Perspectives on Care: Work, Kinship, and the Life-Course*, pp. 23–42. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Lin, Y.-H. 1948. *The Golden Wing: A Sociological Study of Chinese Families*. London: Kegan Paul.

Liu, G., and Z. Zhang. 2004. Sociodemographic Differentials of the Self-Rated Health of the Oldest-Old Chinese. *Population Research and Policy Review* 23 (2): 117–33.

Liu, J. 2014. Aging, Migration and Familial Support in Rural China. *Goforum* 51: 305–12.

Liu, Q. 2005. 婚姻市场的弱势群体-丧偶老年妇女同居现象 (The Vulnerable Group in the Remarriage-Market: Cohabitation among the Aged Widowed). 福建论坛 *(Fujian Forum)* 51: 1.

Logan, J. R., and F. Bian. 1999. Family Value and Coresidence with Married Children in Urban China. *Social Forces* 77 (4): 1253–82.

——. 2003. Parents' Needs, Family Structure, and Regular Intergenerational Financial Exchange in Chinese Cities. *Social Forum* 18 (1): 85–101.

Lynch, C., and J. Danely. (eds.). 2013. *Transitions and Transformations: Cultural Perspectives on Aging and the Life Course*. New York: Berghahn Books.

Lynch, K. 2007. Love Labour as a Distinct and Non-Commodificable Form of Care Labour. *The Sociological Review* 55 (3): 550–70.

Ma, D. 2006. *Xinjiang Shijian (A Brief History of Xinjiang)*. Xinjiang: Xinjiang Renmin Press.

Ma, Jingrong 1994. 浅谈老年人再婚 (An Analysis on Late-life Remarriage). 黑龙江社会科学 *(Heilongjiang Social Science)* 51: 105–07.

Ma, Jin. 1998. 浅析我国丧偶老人再婚问题 (An Analysis on Remarriage amongst the Widowed). 南方人口 *(South Population)* 1: 50–53.

Ma, R. 2007. Bilingual Education for China's Ethnic Minorities. *Chinese Education and Society* 40 (2): 9–25.

Maxwell, R. J., and P. Silverman. 1970. Information and Esteem: Cultural Considerations in the Treatment of the Aged. *Aging and Human Development* 1 (4): 361–92.

McCarthy, J. R. 2013. Caring after Death: Issues of Embodiment and Relationality. In C. Rogers, and S. Weller (eds.), *Critical*

Approaches to Care: Understanding Caring Relations, Identities and Cultures, pp. 183–94. London: Routledge.

McKain, W. C. 1972. A New Look at Older Marriages. *The Family Coordinator* 21 (1): 61–70.

McMillen, D. H. 1979. *Chinese Communist Power and Policy in Xinjiang, 1949–1977*. Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press.

———. 1981. Xinjiang and the Production and Construction Corps: A Han Organisation in a Non-Han Region. *The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs* 6: 65–96.

Miao, C. 2012. 人口老龄化背景下‘老有所为’研究的回顾与思考 (Overview of Research on ‘Lao You Suo Wei’ with Aging Population). 经济与社会发展 *(Economic and Social Development)* 10 (11): 74–76.

Miller, D. 1998. *A Theory of Shopping*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Miller, E. T. 2004. Filial Daughters, Filial Sons: Comparisons from Rural North China. In C. Ikels (ed.), *Filial Piety: Practice and Discourse in Contemporary East Asia*, pp. 34–52. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Millward, J. A. 2007. *Eurasian Crossroads: A History of Xinjiang*. New York: Columbia University Press.

———. 2009. Positioning Xinjiang in Eurasian and Chinese History: Differing Visions of the ‘Silk Road’. In C. Mackerras, and M. Clarke (eds.), *China, Xinjiang and Central Asia: History, Transition and Crossborder Interaction into the 21st Century*, pp. 55–74. New York: Routledge.

Ministry of Commerce, People’s Republic of China. 2007. *Doing Business in XPCC*. http://english.mofcom.gov.cn/aroundchina/xinjiangbingtuan.shtml, accessed 7 February 2017.

Mol, A., I. Moser, et al. (eds.). 2010. *Care in Practice: On Tinkering in Clinics, Homes and Farms*. Bielefeld: Transcript.

Murphy, R. 2002. *How Migrant Labour Is Changing Rural China*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Nydegger, C. N. 1983. Family Ties of the Aged in Cross-Cultural Perspective. *The Gerontologist* 23 (1): 26–32.

Obendiek, H. 2011. *‘Changing Fate’: Educational Mobility and Social Support in Rural Northwest China*. Ph.D. dissertation, Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg.

Olson, P. 1988. Modernization in the People’s Republic of China: The Politicization of the Elderly. *The Sociological Quarterly* 29 (2): 241–62.

Pan, J. 2007. *Family Size and Intra-Family Transfers: An Empirical Analysis of Long-Term Care Using Chinese Household Data*. Paper presented at Annual Meeting of the Population Association of America. Available online http://paa2008.princeton.edu/sessions/166, accessed 18 February 2017.

Parish, W. L., and M. K. Whyte. 1978. *Village and Family in Contemporary China*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Pei, X., and Y. Tang. 2012. Rural Old Age Support in Transitional China: Efforts Between Family and State. In S. Chen, and J. L. Powell (eds.), *Aging in China: Implications to Social Policy of a Changing Economic State*, pp. 61–82. New York: Springer Science.

Peng, F. 2008. 兵团特殊管理体制与市场经济接轨研究 (Research on the Particular System of Bingtuan and its Adaptation to Market Economy). 黑龙江史志 *(Heilongjiang Shizhi)* 21: 20–26.

Pimentel, E. E., and J. Liu. 2004. Exploring Nonnormative Coresidence in Urban China: Living with Wive's Parents. *Journal of Marriage and Family* 66: 821–36.

Press, I., and M. McKool. 1972. Social Structure and the Status of the Aged: Toward Some Valid Cross-Cultural Generalizations. *Aging and Human Development* 3 (4): 297–306.

Read, R., and T. Thelen. 2007. Social Security and Care after Socialism: Reconfigurations of Public and Private. *Focaal* 50: 3–18.

Reay, D. 2005. Doing the Dirty Work of Social Class? Mothers' Work in Support of their Children's Schooling. *The Sociological Review* 53 (2): 104–15.

Reynolds, T., and E. Zontini. 2006. *A Comparative Study of Care and Provision across Caribbean and Italian Transnational Families*. London: London South Bank University.

Riley, M. W. 1987. On the Significance of Age in Sociology. *American Sociological Review* 52 (1): 1–14.

Roberts, B. 2010. Urbanization, Decentralization and the Reorganization of Rural Life. In N. Long, J. Ye, and Y. Wang (eds.), *Rural Transformations and Development-China in Context: The Everyday Lives of Policies and People*, pp. 171–90. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing Limited.

Rofel, L. 2007. *Desiring China: Experiments in Neoliberalism, Sexuality, and Public Culture*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Rogers, C. 2013. Intellectual Disability and Mothering: An Engagement with Ethics of Care and Emotional Work. In C. Rogers, and S. Weller (eds.), *Critical Approaches to Care: Understanding Care Relations, Identities and Cultures*, pp. 132–43. London: Routledge.

Ryder, N. B. 1965. The Cohort as a Concept in the Study of Social Change. *American Sociological Review* 30: 843–61.

Santos, G. D. D. 2006. The Anthropology of Chinese Kinship: A Critical Overview. *European Journal of East Asian Studies* 5 (2): 275–333.

Schlecker, M., and F. Fleischer. 2013. *Ethnographies of Social Support*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Schluessel, E. T. 2007. 'Bilingual' Education and Discontent in Xinjiang. *Central Asian Survey* 26: 251–77.

Selden, M. 1993. Family Strategies and Structures in Rural North China. In D. Davis, and S. Harrell (eds.), *Chinese Families in the Post-Mao Era*, pp. 139–64. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Seymour, J. D. 2000. Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps, and the Sinification of Eastern Turkenstan. *Inner Asia* 2: 171–93.

Sher, A. E. 1984. *Aging in Post-Mao China: The Politics of Veneration*. Boulder: Westview Press.

Shi, L. 2009. 'Little Quilted Vests to Warm Parents' Hearts': Redefining the Gendered Practice of Filial Piety in Rural North-eastern China. *The China Quarterly* 198: 348–63.

Simoons, F. J. 1991. *Food in China: A Cultural and Historical Inquiry*. Boca Rotan, Flo.: CRC Press.

Skornia, A. K. 2015. Renegotiating the Care of Children and the Elderly in the Context of Family Migration: Transnational Arrangements and Entangled Inequalities between Peru and Italy. In E. Alber, and H. Drotbohm (eds.), *Anthropological Perspectives on Care: Work, Kinship, and the Life-Course*, pp. 43–67. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Sokolovsky, J. (ed.). 1997. *The Cultural Context of Aging: Worldwide Perspectives*. London: Bergin and Garvey.

——— (ed.). 2009. *The Cultural Context of Aging: Worldwide Perspectives*. Third edition. London: Praeger.

Song, J. 2003. '搭伴养老' 胜似 '空巢' 独屈 (The Advantages of 'Accompany-aging' over 'Empty Nests'). 人口研究 *(Population Research)* 27 (3): 26–30.

Spencer, P. (ed.). 1990. *Anthropology and the Riddle of the Sphinx: Paradoxes of Change in the Life Course*. London: Routledge.

Stacey, J. 1983. *Patriarchy and Socialist Revolution in China*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Starr, S. F. 2004. Introduction. In S. F. Starr (ed.), *Xinjiang: China's Muslim Borderland*, pp. 3–26. New York and London: M. E. Sharpe.

State Council Information Office, People's Republic of China. 2014. *The History and Development of the Xinjiang Production and*

Construction Corps. http://english.gov.cn/archive/white_paper/2014/10/05/content_281474992384669.htm, accessed 7 February 2017.

Tan, C.-B., and Y. Ding. 2008. Rural Urbanization and Urban Transformation in Quanzhou, Fujian. *Anthropologica* 50: 215–27.

Tan, L., Q. Xu, and X. Zhu. 2004. '搭伴养老': 我国城市老年同居现象的社会性别分析 ('Accompany-aging': A Gender Analysis of Cohabitation among the Urban Elderly). 学海 *(Xuehai)* 1: 121–26.

Thelen, T. 2015. Care as Social Organization: Creating, Maintaining and Dissolving Significant Relations. *Anthropological Theory* 15 (4): 497–515.

Thelen, T., A. Thiemann, et al. 2014. State Kinning and Kinning the State in Serbian Elder Care Programs. *Social Analysis* 58 (3): 107–23.

Thogersen, S., and A. Ni. 2008. 'He Is He, and I Am I': Individual and Collective among China's Rural Elderly. *European Journal of East Asian Studies* 7: 11–37.

Thomas, C. 1993. De-Constructing Concepts of Care. *Sociology* 27 (4): 649–69.

Tomba, L. 2004. Creating an Urban Middle Class: Social Engineering in Beijing. *The China Journal* 1 (51): 1–26.

Toops, S. W. 2004. The Ecology of Xinjiang: A Focus on Water. In S. F. Starr (ed.), *Xinjiang: China's Muslim Borderland*, pp. 241–63. New York and London: M. E. Sharpe.

Tronto, J. C. 1991. Review: Changing Goals and Changing Strategies: Varieties of Women's Political Activities. *Feminist Studies* 17 (1): 85–104.

———. 1993. *Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for an Ethic of Care*. New York and London: Routledge.

———. 1995. Caring as the Basis for Radical Political Judgments. *Hypatia* 10 (2): 141–49.

———. 2009. Consent as a Grant of Authority: A Care Ethics Reading of Informed Consent. In H. Lindemann, M. Verkerk, and M. U. Walker (eds.), *Naturalized Bioethics: Toward Responsible Knowing and Practice*, pp. 182–98. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

———. 2013. *Caring Democracy: Markets, Equality, and Justice*. New York: New York University Press.

Unger, J. 1993. Urban Families in the Eighties: An Analysis of Chinese Surveys. In D. Davis, and S. Harrell (eds.), *Chinese Families in the Post-Mao Era*, pp. 25–49. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Ungerson, C. 2005. Care, Work and Feeling. In L. Pettinger, J. Perry, R. Taylor et al. (eds.), *A New Sociology of Work?*, pp. 188–203. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.

Veblen, T. B. 2007 (1899). *The Theory of the Leisure Class*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Vespa, J. 2012. Union Formation in Later Life: Economic Determinants of Cohabitation and Remarriage among Older Adults. *Demography* 49: 1103–25.

Vinck, B. H. 1978. Remarriage in Old Age. *The Family Coordinator* 27: 359–63.

Wang, D. 2004. Ritualistic Coresidence and the Weakening of Filial Practice in Rural China. In C. Ikels (ed.), *Filial Piety: Practice and Discourse in Contemporary East Asia*, pp. 16–33. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Wang, F., Z. Xiao, and J. Zhan. 2003. Privilege or Punishment? Retirement and Reemployment among the Chinese Urban Elderly. In M. K. Whyte (ed.), *China's Revolutions and Intergenerational Relations*, pp. 61–84. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Center for Chinese Studies.

Wang, H. 2013. 论交换型养老的特征，逻辑及其影响: 基于华北平原地区的调查 (The Characteristics, Logic and Effects of the Exchange of Elderly Support: A Survey in the North China Plain). 南方人口 *(South China Population)* 28 (5): 53–60.

Wang, X. 2009. 老年人再婚问题的研究- 关于‘走婚’问题的思考 *(Research on Late-Life Remarriage)*. Masters thesis, Heibei University.

Wang, Y. 2006. 一四三团简史 *(A Brief History of Tuan 143)*. Xinjiang: Dazhong Caise Yinshua Youxian Gongsi Press.

——. 2012. 一四三团年鉴 *(Year Book of Tuan 143)*. Shihezi: Shihezi Year Book Commitee.

Watson, J. L. 1986. Anthropological Overview: The Development of Chinese Descent Groups. In P. B. Ebrey (ed.), *Kinship Organization in Late Imperial China, 1000-1940*, pp. 274–92. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Weller, S., E. Zontini et al. 2013. Part IV Summary: Caring across the Life Course. In C. Rogers, and S. Weller (eds.), *Critical Approaches to Care: Understanding Caring Relations, Identities and Cultures*, pp. 157–59. London: Routledge.

Whyte, M. K. 1992. Introduction: Rural Economic Reforms and Chinese Family Patterns. *The China Quarterly* 130: 317–22.

——. 1997. The Fate of Filial Obligations in Urban China. *The China Journal* 38: 1–31.

——. (ed.). 2003a. *China's Revolutions and Intergenerational Relations*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Center for Chinese Studies.

——. 2003b. Introduction. In M. K. Whyte (ed.), *China's Revolutions and Intergenerational Relations*, pp. 3–30. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Center for Chinese Studies.

——. 2003c. *The Persistence of Family Obligations in Baoding*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Center for Chinese Studies.

Whyte, M. K., and Q. Xu. 2003. Support for Aging Parents from Daughters versus Sons. In M. K. Whyte (ed.), *China's Revolutions and Intergenerational Relations*, pp. 167–95. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Center for Chinese Studies.

Wiemer, C. 2004. The Economy of Xinjiang. In S. F. Starr (ed.), *Xinjiang: China's Muslim Borderland*, pp. 163–89. New York and London: M. E. Sharpe.

Williams, A. M., and V. Balaz. 2012. Migration, Risk and Uncertainty: Theoretical Perspectives. *Population, Space and Place* 18 (2): 167–80.

Wong, Y. C., and J. Leung. 2012. Long-term Care in China: Issues and Prospects. *Journal of Gerontological Social Work* 55 (7): 570–86.

World Health Organization. 2002. *Active Ageing: A Policy Framework*. http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/67215/1/WHO_NMH_NPH_02.8.pdf, accessed 6 February 2017.

Wouters, C. 1989. The Sociology of Emotions and Flight Attendants: Hochschild's Managed Heart. *Theory, Culture and Society* 6: 95–123.

Wu, C. 2006. 当前我国老年人再婚现象中存在的主要问题及其伦理对策 *(The Principal Problems with Remarriage of Old People in Present China and Ethical Strategies to Confront Problems)*. Masters thesis, Hunan Normal University.

Wu, F. 2002. Sociospatial Differentiation in Urban China: Evidence from Shanghai's Real Estate Markets. *Environment and Planning* 34: 1591–1615.

Wu, X., and X. Song. 2014. 劳动力市场中的民族分层: 对新疆维吾尔自治区的实证研究 (Ethnic Stratification in Labor Market: Empirial Research on XUAR). *Kaifang Shidai* 4: 41–60.

Xiong, B. 2011. 老年人长期照料模式与决策—以个人资本为视角 *(Long-Term Care Pattern and Decision-Making among the Elderly)*. Ph.D. dissertation, Huazhong Keji University.

Xu, R. 2003. 老年人再婚的社会学思考 (Late-life Remarriage from a Sociological Perspective). 中国社会福利 *(China Social Welfare)* 8: 9–13.

Yan, S., J. Chen, and S. Yang. 2003. Living Arrangements and Old Age Support. In M. K. Whyte (ed.), *China's Revolutions and Intergenerational Relations*, pp. 143–66. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Center for Chinese Studies.

Yan, Y. 2003. *Private Life Under Socialism*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

———. 2009. *The Individualization of Chinese Society*. Oxford, Berg.

———. 2011. The Changing Moral Landscape. In A. Kleinman et al. (eds.), *Deep China: The Moral Life of the Person: What Anthropology and Psychiatry Tell us about China Today?*, pp. 36-77. Berkeley: University of California Press.

———. 2013. Afterword: The Drive for Success and the Ethics of the Striving Individual. In C. Stafford (ed.), *Ordinary Ethics in China Today*, pp. 263–91. London: Bloomsbury.

Yang, M. C. 1945. *A Chinese Village: Taitou, Shantung Province*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Yu, X., and H. Zhu. 2009. Do Sons or Daughters Give More Money to Parents in Urban-China? *Journal of Marriage and Family* 71 (1): 174–86.

Yuan, F., and M. K. Whyte. 2003. Family Support for the Elderly. In M. K. Whyte (ed.), *Chinese Revolutions and Intergenerational Relations*, pp. 33–59. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Center for Chinese Studies.

Yuen-Tsang, A. W. K. 1997. *Towards a Chinese Conception of Social Support: A Study on the Social Support Networks of Chinese Working Mothers in Beijing*. Aldershot: Ashgate.

Zeng, Y., and Z. Wang. 2003. Dynamics of Family and Elderly Living Arrangements in China: New Lessons Learned from the 2000 Census. *The China Review* 3 (2): 95–119.

Zelizer, V. A. 2005. *The Purchase of Intimacy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Zhan, H. J., and B. Luo. 2012. Filial Piety and Functional Support: Understanding Intergenerational Solidarity Among Families with Migrated Children in Rural China. *Aging INT* 37: 69–92.

Zhan, H. J., and R. J. V. Montgomery. 2003. Gender and Elder Care in China: The Influence of Filial Piety and Structural Constraints. *Gender and Society* 17 (2): 209–29.

Zhang, H. 2004a. 'Living Alone' and the Rural Elderly: Strategy and Agency in Post-Mao Rural China. In C. Ikels (ed.), *Filial Piety*, pp. 63–87. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

———. 2007. China's New Rural Daughters Coming of Age: Downsizing the Family and Firing Up Cash Earning Power in the New Economy. *Signs* 32 (3): 671–98.

———. 2017. Recalibrating Filial Piety: Realigning the State, Family and Market Interests in China. In G. Santos, and S. Harrell (eds.), *Transforming Patriarchy: Chinese Families in the Twenty-First Century*, pp. 234–50. Seattle: University of Washington Press.

Zhang, J. 2011. A General Overview of Educational Development in Xinjiang and its Challenges. *Muslims and a Harmonious Society: Selected Papers from a Three-Conference Series on Muslim Minorities in Northwest China*, pp. 159–74. (trans. Christine Sun). Ethnic Minority Group Development Research Institute within the Development Research Center of China's State Council, and the Religion and Security Research Project of the Center on Faith and International Affairs at the Institute for Global Engagement. Beijing.

Zhang, L. 2002. Spatiality and Urban Citizenship in Late Socialist China. *Public Culture* 14 (2): 311–34.

———. 2008. Private Homes, Distinct Lifestyle: Performing a New Middle Class. In L. Zhang, and A. Ong (eds.), *Privatizing China: Socialism from Afar*, pp. 213–36. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

———. 2010. *In Search of Paradise: Middle-Class Living in a Chinese Metropolis*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Zhang, L., and A. Ong. 2008. *Privatizing China: Socialism From Afar*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Zhang, Q. F. 2004b. Economic Transition and New Patterns of Parent-Adult Child Coresidence in Urban China. *Journal of Marriage and Family* 66 (5): 1231–45.

Zhang, X. 2009. 老年人非婚同居问题分析 *(An Analysis on Late-life Cohabitation)*. Hebei: Hebei University.

Zhao, Y. 1991. 新疆屯垦 *(Xinjiang Agricultural Settlement)*. Xinjiang: Xinjiang Renmin Press.

Zhao, Z., and W. Chen. 2008. Changes in Household Formation and Composition in China since the Mid-Twentieth Century. *Journal of Population Research* 25 (3): 267–86.

Zhen, C., and M. Silverstein. 2008. Intergenerational Support and Depression among Elders in Rural China: Do Daughters-in-Law Matter? *Journal of Marriage and Family* 70 (3): 599–612.

Zheng, Z. Z. 2001. 中国高龄老人丧魂和再婚的性别分析 (A Gender Analysis of Late-life Remarriage among those of Advanced Age). 人口研究 *(Population Research)* 25 (5): 70–80.

———. 2011. 中国的健康转变,人口老龄化与医疗和照料需求 *(Health, Ageing, Medicine and Care Needs in China)*. Conference on Ageing and Family Development Policy, 15 October 2011, Liaoning Jinzhou.

Zhong, M. 2009. 一个真实的新疆 *(A Real Xinjiang)*. Urumqi: Renmin Press.

Zhongguang Web. 2010. 新疆各民族人口的数量变化 *(Demographic Changes of Xinjiang Ethnic Groups)*. http://xj.cnr.cn/mzzj/201006/t20100604_506531332.html, accessed 7 February 2017.

Zhou, D., and X. Huang. 2010. Rural Urbanization in Phoenix Village: Revisiting a Village in Guangdong Province. In N. Long, J. Ye, and Y. Wang (eds.), *Rural Transformations and Development-China in Context: The Everyday Lives of Policies and People*, pp. 191–214. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing.

Zhu, L., and Y. Zhang. 2004. 新疆建设兵团城镇化建设问题研究 (A Research on the Urbanization of Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps). 中国农垦经济 *(Chinese Agricultural Settlement Economy)* 5: 25–25.

Zimmer, Z., and J. Kwong. 2003. Family Size and Support of Older Adults in Urban and Rural China: Current Effects and Future Implications. *Demography* 40 (1): 23–44.

Zontini, E. 2013. Care Arrangements of Transnational Migrant Elders: Between Family, Community and the State. In C. Rogers, and S. Weller (eds.), *Critical Approaches to Care: Understanding Caring Relations, Identities and Cultures*, pp. 171–82. London: Routledge.

Index

active ageing 129, 262, 263, 264
adoption 69, 224
ageing in China 1, 2, 4-7, 11, 16-18, 22, 32, 101, 103, 128-30, 261-4, 270, 274, 276
anthropology of ageing 5, 6, 16, 276

baomu 93, 95
bingtuan; administration of 9, 13, 22, 37, 43, 48, 50, 63, 65, 69, 86, 88, 97; divisions of 35, 46, 50-1, 54, 68; economic and social development 2, 10, 12, 17, 30, 33, 36, 40, 44-6, 48-51, 53-6, 59-61, 66-7, 69，70, 143, 159; ethnic composition of 28-9, 36-7, 82; geography of 34; history of 33, 36, 38; population of 36-8, 45, 49, 63, 65-7, 74-8, 100, 160, 202, 229
Border Support Youth 66-7, 75, 85, 88-90

care 5, 20-2, 223-5, 262, 267, 270-2, 275
care gap 218-20, 263, 268
cohabitation 31-2, 112, 169, 229, 230-3, 236, 239-41, 255, 258, 264, 269, 274
Community Club 113, *see also* elder(ly) club
companionship 125, 252, 258-9
Confucianism 7-9, 11, 223
co-residence 10, 14-5, 161, 169, 175-6, 189, 199

daughter(s) 8, 185-6, 188-9, 192, 194, 241, 269, 270; living arrangement of 159-61, 168-9, *see also* co-residence; support from 15, 149, 174-80, 273; value of 6, 16
daughter(s)-in-law; attitude of 10, 195-6, 244; care of 127, 239, 269-70, 273; living arrangements of 168, 175, *see also* living arrangements; power of 14, 192-4, 217; relations with mother-in-law 126, 133, 152, 173-4, 176, 188-90, 223, 235-7, 240, 242; roles of 15-6, 178, 183, 197, 229
diet (food) 84, 168, 190; food and class/social status 131, 162; food and care 114, 116, 124,171, 178, 182, 184, 193, 215-6, 219, 222, 225, 255, 267; food and family relations 239, 247, 250, 254, 256; food and health 102, 104, 106-8; food distribution policy 67, 90, 94; hardship and food 87, 91-2; urbanization and food supply 83, 140
duty 8, 147, 172, 188, 198-9, 206, 210, 223, 226, 268, 271, 273-74

economic reform 3, 10, 42, 63-4, 69, 70, 98, 131, 191, 234, 264
elder(ly) club 26-7, 29, 74, 81-2, 110, 126, 130, 162, 188, 264-5, 275
Elderly Law, *see* Law on the Protection of Rights and Interests of the Aged
emotional support 3, 8, 22, 141, 229, 232, 255, 259, 263
emotions 21, 32, 125, 186, 203, 262, 267-8, 271
Enterprise Contract Responsibility System 49, 71, 90, 148
entertainments 68, 74, 78, 81-2, 109, 110, 130-1, 141, 162, 168, 263
equality (*pingdeng*) 15-6, 58, 61, 97, 99, 100, 164, 192, 195-8
ethics 20, 32, 262-3, 267-8, 271, 276
exercise 74, 82, 102, 109, 114-5, 228, 252, 257, 263, 267

family farms 71
family structure 7-8, 10, 15-6, 75, *see also* co-residence; filial piety; patriarchy; 8-4-2 family 5; 4-2-1 family 201
filial piety 2-4, 16, 32, 95, 167, 191, 217, 219, 227, 268, 272, 275
financial support 91, 156, 170, 178, 185, 196, 223, 235, 240-1, 250, 254-5, 259, 266-7, 270-1, 274
freedom, *see ziyou*

grandchild(ren) 81, 123, 151-2, 158, 160-1, 169, 170-1, 174, 181-2, 184, 215, 218, 223, 226, 229, 231-3
grandparent(s) 5, 129, 161, 170, 180-4

happiness 3, 13, 18, 86, 96, 104, 116, 127, 163-4, 179-80, 196-7, 222, 244, 258, 270
health 30, 102, 113-4, 123, 129, 134, 161, 205, 210-1, 218, 227, 273; mental 10, 110, 251
health promotion 101, 103, 105, 115-7, 125, 128, 263, 264
healthcare 4, 13, 33, 78, 90, 105-9, 116-7, 124-5, 203, 206, 276, *see also* self-care
housing, *see also* living arrangements; and childcare 152, 170, 173; and intergenerational support 12-3, 151, 158-9, 167, 183, 199, 222, 226, 267-8, 272, *see also* intergenerational support; and marriage 192, 232, 255; concern for 18, 131, 199; constraints of housing 144, 146-7, 165-6; housing and status 131-2, 143-4, 151-2, 158, 162-4
housing policy 55, 69, 153-6, *see also* Welfare Housing Policy

identity land 72, 73n, 76
independence 4, 6, 10, 11, 14, 33, 39, 42, 48-9, 94, 102, 124, 127, 129-30, 168-70, 176, 178, 199, 229, 258, 263, 270, 274
individualism 13, 31, 130, 191, 264
inheritance 12, 155, 161, 195, 198, 214, 223, 231, 241-4, 247-9, 252, 255, 259, 266
insurance (health) 13, 52, 77, 78, 103, 120, 121, 122, 130, 150, 156, 238, 266
interdependence 3, 13, 31, 102, 197, 262, 265-7, 274
intergenerational conflict 15, 31, 168, 187-8, 219
intergenerational contract 7-8, 13, 198-9
intergenerational support 12-3, 15, 31, 160, 167, 176, 186, 199, 201, 275

kinship 4, 6, 8, 9, 13, 18, 21, 85, 129, 131, 159, 230, 231, 258
koumen 12, 254, *see* stinginess

laojiu 77, 86, 90, 93, 95, 124, 144, 154, 158, 164-5, 206-7, 227, 246
Law on the Protection of Rights and Interests of the Aged 202, 249
Leapfrog Development Stage 74, 154
life-course perspective 5, 17, 276
lifestyle 4, 14, 17, 102-3, 108, 128, 132, 162, 189, 192, 274
living arrangements 10, 12, 14-5, 23, 29, 150, 159-60, 162, 166-9, 176, 180, 191, 196, 272
long-term care (LTC) 14, 31, 181, 201-3, 206, 208, 213, 215-6, 218, 220, 222, 228
loufang 12, 31, 88, 91, 93, 95, 97, 103, 114-5

market economy 14, 69, 97, 123, 130, 148, 223-4, 266, 270, 274
marriage 90, 149, 209, 237, 253-4, 264, 269, 270, 272; and gender roles 8, 176; certificate 233, 237, 241-2, 246, 248-51, 259; forced marriage 8, 41, 66, 88, 95, 211, 274; late-life marriage 31, 229-31, 234, 239-40, 243-4, 246, 252, 258, 274; legal (registered) 9-11, 149, 233, 237, 241-3, 246, 248-51, 255, 258-9; migration and marriage 75, 89, 149, 155; property and remarriage 243-4, *see also* property
migration 1, 5, 261; history of 3, 17, 30, 129, 202; impacts on eldercare 6, 14, 152, 202; policy of 9, 37, 56, 75-6; population 37-8, 56, 75-6; risk and support 18-9, 134, 137-8, 140-1; rural-urban 2, 59, 75, 148, 166, 224, 270; state organized 75-7, 84-6; work status 89
modernization 2, 3, 45, 49, 54, 58-9, 60, 224, 263, 270; modernization theory 5, 6, 7, 9, 15-8, 191
money; conflicts/ tensions over 187-91, 195-6, 211, 221, 233, 241, 243, 247, 249, 257; for health 114, 117, 119, 122, 128; for housing 141-3, 149, 157-8, 220, 254; good life 97, 209; income 92, 98-9, 109, 115-6, 118, 146, 238, 268; intergenerational support 90, 96, 100, 159, 161, 170, 177, 182, 184, 185, 207, 216, 225, 227, *see also* financial support, intergenerational support; medical expense 103, 114, 120, 121; pocket money 252, 255-6; poverty 94, 145; power 240; security 137; status 131, 162, 164, 266; urbanization and construction 71, 74, 79, 153
moral 9, 14, 19, 20, 21, 22, 31, 32, 68, 121, 183, 203, 206, 217, 223, 224, 262, 267, 268, 271, 275

National Committee on Ageing 4n, 129n
negotiated commitment 21, 225, 265, 269
negotiations 26n, 167, 225, 261, 262, 265, 268, 273
networks 4, 13-4, 17-9, 21, 80, 84-5, 100, 102-3, 116, 125, 127, 131, 140, 151, 155-7, 159, 180, 184, 197, 229
norms 6, 8, 9, 15, 31, 101-2, 128, 162, 175, 186, 194, 198, 201, 203, 218, 221, 223, 225-6, 229, 258, 263
normative guidelines 20, 225

obligation, *see* filial piety intergenerational contract; of the state 130
Open up the West campaign 49, 54, 56-7, 59, 130

partner 11n, 14-5, 22, 49, 87, 127, 175, 188, 203, 230-4, 239-43, 249-50, 252-8, 271, 274, *see also* spouse
patriarchy 2, 7-9, 130, 167, 267
peer ageing strategies 129-30, 261, 272
pension(s); as power 191-3, 211-2, 220-1, 231, 237, 239, 242, 255, 257, 264, 273; as property 198, 231, 244, 247, 270-1; conflict/ tensions over pension 187-9, 195-7, 231, 233, 237, 240, 247-8, 256; improved living standard 3, 7, 9, 11-2, 18, 86, 88, 91, 93, 97-8, 122, 128, 154, 158, 160, 177, 180, 183, 186, 225, 264, 266; improvement of health 116, 122, 128; inde-

pendence of elderly 169, 193, 275; insecurity 137, 145-6, 150, 157-8, 165, 202, 220, 235, 238; pension category and status 86, 88, 98-9, 103, 120, 131, 144, 154, 162, 165, 192, 212, 232, 234, 239, 241-2, 245, 252, 273; policy of 10-3, 52, 77-8, 91; state care 100, 109, 130, 132, 244, 262, 264; support among family members 15, 19, 96, 145, 152, 161, 171, 173-4, 177, 224-8, 246, 262, 264-6
personality 206, 210
ping-fang 66, 90, 150
play(ing) (*wan*) 112, 125, 229, *see also* entertainments
privatization 10, 12-3, 74, 166, 266
property, *see also* inheritance; and remarriage 230, 232-3, 241, 243-4, 247-9, 251-2, 255, 258-9, 274; eldercare 12, 159, 223, 225, 262, 264, 270-1; forms of 5, 9, 264, 266, 272; house as 151, 159, 208, 244

reciprocity 8, 12, 17, 21, 31-2, 168, 170, 173-4, 186, 197, 199, 223-5, 261, 265, 267, 270-1, 274
relationships 1, 20, 22, 140, 153, 203, 220, 231, 275; family 163, 170, 191, 198, 206, 223, 259, 261-2, 267, 272; in-law 145, 175-6, 189, 240; institutional 39, 43, 51; intergenerational 11, 16-7, 30, 159, 186, 192, 197-9, 224, 226-7, 232-3, 254; parent-child 144, 167, 186, 195, 222, 226-7, 232-4, 254, 259; relations/ connections 31-2, 99, 152, 229, 262, 269; spousal 211, 221, 229, 239, 241, 258, 274, *see also* spouse; with hometown (*laoxiang*) 91, 93, 125-6; with neighbors 126-7, 184
responsibility 149, *see* filial piety and intergenerational contract; of the state 14, 202
retirement 2, 52, 72n, 77, 91, 146, 180, 212, 216, 222

sanhua 49, 54
self-care 14, 30-1, 101, 103, 124-5, 129-30, 228, 262-3, 272, 274
self-interests 267-8, 272
self-reliance 11, 31, 128, 261-4
social networks 21, 84-5, 100, 102, 116, 140, 151, 156-7, 184, 272
social security 19-22, 30, 91, 191, 220
social status/ stratification 5, 31, 131-2, 141, 148, 166, 266, 268, 272
social support 1, 4, 5, 14, 17-20, 22, 31, 103, 125-6, 128, 131, 140, 145, 231, 262, 276
solidarity 19, 42, 197, 271, 275
son(s) 6, 16, 186; gender 90, 94, 96-7, 103, 123, 187, 208, 212-3, 215, 221, 234, 241, 243, 246, 252-3, 255, 269; intergenerational conflict/ tensions 133, 189-90, 192-4, 196-7, 235-6, 247-8, 250, 254; intergenerational support and care 15-6, 91, 103, 114, 149-52, 159, 161, 170, 173, 177-9, 183-5, 204-5, 209, 214, 216, 218, 222, 226-7, 254, 256, 270; living arrangement of 10, 27, 126, 142, 147, 151-2, 157, 160-1, 168-9, 172, 175-6, 217, 237, 257, *see also* living arrangement; property and inheritance 198, 245, 248, 251, *see also* property; single son(s) 144, 148; traditional role of 102, 175, 225, 229, 263, *see also* filial piety; intergenerational contract; patriarchy
son(s)-in-law 239

spouse 15, 22, 124, 161, 169, 175, 178, 192, 203-6, 211, 218, 221, 224, 227, 230-2, 241-3, 249, 252, 272, 274
Spring Festival 2, 26-7, 29, 60, 93, 104, 179, 184, 195-6, 246
stinginess 12, 189-91, 221, 237, 254, 257
structural constraints 31, 203
support, *see* emotional support, social support; between neighbours 84; between siblings 16; mutual (*huangong*) 94
support networks 19, 131, 242, 262, 275
suzhi 58

tuntian 38, 39, 40, 44
Tuan 143 - 18, 33; economic reform of 63-4, 69, 70, 98; history of 64, 69, 71, 76, 158; industry of 69, 73-4, 78; population of 75, 78, 101, 153, 168, 169, 215, 229; social insurance of 50-2, 63, 69, 76-7, 100; urbanization of 63, 228

urbanization; *bingtuan* 12, 17-8, 131, 141, 165-6, 198, 258; intensification 152, 154, 158, 191, 199, 258, 266, 276; *liandui* 25, 30, 133, 143, 172; *loufang* 142, 147, 149, 152, 157; post-Maoist 2, 5, 6, 10, 49, 54-5, 69, *see also* modernization; Tuan 143 - 30, 63, 74-5, 78, 82, 102

veterans 99, 158, 162

Welfare Housing Policy (*xiaokang fan*) 74, 148
widow(s) 25, 27, 83, 95, 118, 126
widower(s) 118, 126, 157, 175, 230-2, 240, 272
wuqigong 77-8, 82-3, 86, 88-9, 92-6, 98-9, 120, 133, 140, 144-6, 162, 165, 169, 172, 174, 206, 221, 227

Xinjiang Work Forum 54, 56, 69, 154

zhigong 255n, 67, 77, 85-6, 95; benefits of 52, 70-2, 74, 77, 93, 99, 120, 150, 172, 184; identity and status 44-5, 53, 88-9, 92, 94, 96, 98, 103, 137, 139, 146, 148, 155-7, 163, 187, 204, 215-6, 227n, 250, 257; policy of 52, 66, 78, 155n; population of 63, 67, 76, 82
ziyou 143, 257

Halle Studies in the Anthropology of Eurasia

1 Hann, Chris, and the "Property Relations" Group, 2003: *The Postsocialist Agrarian Question. Property Relations and the Rural Condition*.

2 Grandits, Hannes, and Patrick Heady (eds.), 2004: *Distinct Inheritances. Property, Family and Community in a Changing Europe*.

3 Torsello, David, 2004: *Trust, Property and Social Change in a Southern Slovakian Village*.

4 Pine, Frances, Deema Kaneff, and Haldis Haukanes (eds.), 2004: *Memory, Politics and Religion. The Past Meets the Present in Europe*.

5 Habeck, Joachim Otto, 2005: *What it Means to be a Herdsman. The Practice and Image of Reindeer Husbandry among the Komi of Northern Russia*.

6 Stammler, Florian, 2009: *Reindeer Nomads Meet the Market. Culture, Property and Globalisation at the 'End of the Land'* (2 editions).

7 Ventsel, Aimar, 2006: *Reindeer,* Rodina *and Reciprocity. Kinship and Property Relations in a Siberian Village*.

8 Hann, Chris, Mihály Sárkány, and Peter Skalník (eds.), 2005: *Studying Peoples in the People's Democracies. Socialist Era Anthropology in East-Central Europe*.

9 Leutloff-Grandits, Caroline, 2006: *Claiming Ownership in Postwar Croatia. The Dynamics of Property Relations and Ethnic Conflict in the Knin Region*.

10 Hann, Chris, 2006: *"Not the Horse We Wanted!" Postsocialism, Neoliberalism, and Eurasia*.

11 Hann, Chris, and the "Civil Religion" Group, 2006: *The Postsocialist Religious Question. Faith and Power in Central Asia and East-Central Europe*.

12 Heintz, Monica, 2006: *"Be European, Recycle Yourself!" The Changing Work Ethic in Romania*.

13 Grant, Bruce, and Lale Yalçın-Heckmann (eds.), 2007: *Caucasus Paradigms. Anthropologies, Histories and the Making of a World Area*.

14 Buzalka, Juraj, 2007: *Nation and Religion. The Politics of Commemoration in South-East Poland*.

15 Naumescu , Vlad, 2007: *Modes of Religiosity in Eastern Christianity. Religious Processes and Social Change in Ukraine*.

16 Mahieu, Stéphanie, and Vlad Naumescu (eds.), 2008: *Churches Inbetween.Greek Catholic Churches in Postsocialist Europe*.

17 Mihăilescu, Vintilă, Ilia Iliev, and Slobodan Naumović (eds.), 2008: *Studying Peoples in the People's Democracies II. Socialist Era Anthropology in South-East Europe*.

18 Kehl-Bodrogi, Krisztina, 2008: *"Religion is not so strong here". Muslim Religious Life in Khorezm after Socialism*.

19 Light, Nathan, 2008: *Intimate Heritage. Creating Uyghur Muqam Song in Xinjiang*.

20 Schröder, Ingo W., and Asta Vonderau (eds.), 2008: *Changing Economies and Changing Identities in Postsocialist Eastern Europe*.

21 Fosztó, László, 2009: *Ritual Revitalisation after Socialism: Community, Personhood, and Conversion among Roma in a Transylvanian Village*.

22 Hilgers, Irene, 2009: *Why Do Uzbeks have to be Muslims? Exploring religiosity in the Ferghana Valley*.

23 Trevisani, Tommaso, 2010: *Land and Power in Khorezm. Farmers, Communities, and the State in Uzbekistan's Decollectivisation*.

24 Yalçın-Heckmann, Lale, 2010: *The Return of Private Property. Rural Life after the Agrarian Reform in the Republic of Azerbaijan*.

25 Mühlfried, Florian, and Sergey Sokolovskiy (eds.), 2011. *Exploring the Edge of Empire: Soviet Era Anthropology in the Caucasus and Central Asia*.

26 Cash, Jennifer R., 2011: *Villages on Stage. Folklore and Nationalism in the Republic of Moldova.*

27 Köllner, Tobias, 2012: *Practising Without Belonging? Entrepreneurship, Morality, and Religion in Contemporary Russia*.

28 Bethmann, Carla, 2013: *"Clean, Friendly, Profitable?" Tourism and the Tourism Industry in Varna, Bulgaria*.

29 Bošković, Aleksandar, and Chris Hann (eds.), 2013: *The Anthropological Field on the Margins of Europe, 1945-1991*.

30 Holzlehner, Tobias, 2014: *Shadow Networks. Border Economies, Informal Markets and Organised Crime in the Russian Far East*.

31 Bellér-Hann, Ildikó, 2015: *Negotiating Identities: Work, Religion, Gender, and the Mobilisation of Tradition among the Uyghur in the 1990s*.

32 Oelschlaegel, Anett C., 2016: *Plural World Interpretations: The Case of the South-Siberian Tyvans*.

33 Obendiek, Helena, 2016: *"Changing Fate". Education, Poverty and Family Support in Contemporary Chinese Society.*

Halle Studies in the Anthropology of Eurasia

"... anthropology needs a broader vision. It needs to shake off its strong association with the primitive and the exotic and become genuinely global in its comparisons. From this perspective, more sustained attention to Eurasia and a renewed focus on its underlying unity might launch the transformation of our parochial scholarly traditions into a mature cosmopolitan science."
– Chris Hann, in his Preface to this series

Care and Ageing in North-West China

This book presents a pioneering ethnographic exploration of practices and ideologies of eldercare in the *bingtuan* – a paramilitary state organization composed largely of migrants (most of them very poor) to the north-western frontier province of Xinjiang since the 1949 Communist Revolution. In exploring the discourses and actions of the elderly, their relatives, and the state, the book uncovers the ways in which macro-level economic and social transformations are linked to the material and emotional realities of ordinary Chinese people. The light shed on gender and inter-generational relations within the modern urbanized *bingtuan* illuminates ageing, care and social support mechanisms in an era of rapid social change globally.

Heila Sha was born and raised in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. She was educated in Beijing, obtained her doctorate in 2015 at the Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg and is currently a Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of Sussex (UK).

LIT
www.lit-verlag.de

978-3-643-90874-2