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Gender, Sexuality and Power in Chinese Companies

BEAUTIES AT WORK

Liu Jieyu

Gender, Development and Social Change

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'This original book throws into sharp focus the unexpected gendered outcomes for young women in the post-Mao decades. Liu' s meticulous ethnographic research illuminates the processes unleashed by the one child policy, which have produced ambitious young professional women whose investment in their own position and success in the workplace undermines the traditional patriarchal gender order, replacing this with a individualistic femininity more familiar in neo-liberal economies. A case of 'watch what you wish for…'' –Ruth Pearson, University of Leeds, UK

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To Beth and John

Series Editor's Preface

Gender, Sexuality and Power in Chinese Companies: Beauties at Work by Liu Jieyu gives a fascinating account of the working lives of female white-collar 'beauties' through the lens of locally grounded research on gender and sexuality. The book blends Western feminist theory with a starkly different approach to researching and understanding the gender-sex system in East Asia, specifically China. The treatment of the highly patriarchal and I would venture to say sexist and misogynist practices in the workplace reveals how gender and sexuality are an intimate part of the processes of the structural masculine domination in both workplace and home for these highly educated middle-class women in China. It is perhaps telling that the term 'Chinese Beauties' is used in the book, a category that the women themselves have to learn to live with and strategically use in terms of surviving the workplace. It refers to a deep level of objectification that these high-status women have to take on in order to move in a male-dominated world. The book is clear about the agency at work in both the compliance and the resistance of these women. Their very particular historical and generational position marks their lives out as important ones to study in order to elaborate, as the book does so well, the different concerns for Chinese women, which vary from those of their European and American counterparts. In its rich detail, the book reveals the complex negotiations in the lives of these women as they, even through silence, aim to disrupt the troubling double standards at work and in the home in relation to sexuality and gender.

Through different chapters around work, sex, family and self, Liu analyses how these women are objectified, even commoditized in the name

of modern Chinese economic growth, and how they resist, opening up the possibilities for them to act as feminist agents for social change in the urban middle-class Chinese cultural and historical context.

The book is a very welcome one in the Series, not only because it is so well written, provocative and engaging in its storytelling but also because it points to possibilities for change from a very different angle than other books which consider the same through a more traditional gender and development lens. Putting together gender and sexuality in the Chinese context is a daring project which I am very pleased the Series can assist, and as Liu Jieyu says, perhaps it heralds some social change for future generations for whom Chinese 'beauties' will no longer be labelled as such, but seen as workers and leaders regardless of their gender.

Wendy Harcourt
The Hague
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Contents

1 Introduction 1

2 Becoming 'White-Collar Beauties' in Urban China 11

3 Towards a Local Feminist Understanding of Gender and Sexuality 33

4 'The Weaker Sex' 55

5 Sex in Work 73

6 Sex as Work 89

7 Affect, Power and Resistance 107

8 Marriage and Family 123

9 Conclusion 143

Index 155

List of Tables

Table 2.1 Transformations in industrial structure 13
Table 2.2 Proportion of Chinese women's enrolment in university education 14
Table 2.3 Proportion of only children born by five-year period 19

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Chen

Chen is a slim, tall young woman with big eyes and long straight hair tied in a plait. Unlike her mother, who had limited education before being assigned to work in a local factory by the state, Chen completed a Master's degree in engineering and then applied for a post at a prestigious foreign trade company. As the company is highly profitable and offers good welfare provision, it is a desirable employer for graduates in the region. After two rounds of assessment, including a written exam and a face-to-face interview, Chen was thrilled to be offered a role in the company. One of her male classmates, Zhong, was also hired by the same company in the same recruitment round. Zhong had a rounder physique and was slightly shorter than Chen.

When I started my ethnography in 2008, Chen and Zhong, who were both 27 years old at the time, had worked at the company for a year and both had started as sales assistants. Three years later, when I revisited the company in 2011, Zhong had become a sales manager while Chen was a middle-level sales assistant. By 2015, Chen, who had been praised for her attention to detail and commitment to work, had been promoted to senior level assistant and transferred to a new section. The head of the new section was Zhong.

In addition to being locked in a dead-end job, Chen was resisting mounting pressure from the workplace and her parents to get married. As marriage and family are traditionally viewed as the socio-cultural cornerstone which define a person, and especially a woman, in Chinese society, everyone is expected to get married. Zhong was a conformist; he got married two years

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after he joined the company and had a child soon after. In contrast, Chen broke up with her university boyfriend as she felt that he was not kind and respectful towards her. In the eight years which followed, she had been introduced to various potential suitors via matchmaking colleagues and relatives who all focused on the economic wealth of the suitor; however, Chen remained firm in her desire to find someone with whom she also had an emotional connection. In 2016, reflecting upon the career trajectories of Zhong and herself, combined with the pressure to get married, Chen had started to contemplate going abroad to forge an alternative way of life.

Yu

Yu has an oval face, fair skin and almond-shaped eyes with ironed, curly short hair. I first met her in 2007 at her family home where I interviewed her. She was 28 years old at the time. Unlike her mother, who had a middle school education and had been assigned to work in a local factory by the state, after graduating with a BA in business and management studies, Yu had worked her way up to become the sales manager of a state-owned publishing company. Yu owed her role to management's belief that the opposite sex were appealing to each other, and so female employees should be sent to attend business negotiations with the company's predominantly male Chinese clients. According to Yu, doing business within China requires extensive relationship building activities such as taking clients to banquets, karaoke bars and sometimes a sauna.

As a dutiful employee, Yu practised drinking alcohol in private at home to ensure that she could keep pace with her clients. She reported encountering harassment from clients at the leisure venues, but considered this to be an unpleasant but necessary part of working in the male-centred business world. After all, there was no organizational procedure to deal with harassment. Yu's frequent contact with male clients and trips to leisure venues associated with sexual connotations cast a shadow over her reputation. However, Yu felt her business connections were an important career resource and so she ignored the workplace gossip.

In 2011, Yu was introduced to a doctor through a mutual acquaintance. They got married and a year later, she gave birth to a son. With the help of her mother (who took on many childcare duties), she was able to continue her job and attend social gatherings with clients. However, her husband and in-laws frowned upon these frequent interactions with businessmen. Her husband sometimes secretly followed her to the leisure activities and the trust between them gradually broke down. After a period of sustained emotional and verbal abuse from her husband, Yu applied for a divorce when her son was three years old.

Yu's parents initially encouraged her not to give up on her marriage but, witnessing how unhappy she was (and the fact that she was their only child), they stood by her. However, as it is considered socially difficult for a divorced woman with a child to remarry, Yu's parents advised her not to take guardianship of her son. Against her parents' suggestion, Yu insisted upon obtaining guardianship of her son and, after settling the marital property division, Yu moved back in with her parents. As a form of protection as well as revenge, Yu cut all ties between her son and her ex-husband's family. With her parents' help in caring for her son, Yu used her business contacts to switch into a better-paid sales manager role at a bigger company. In order to compensate for the lack of time she spent with her son, Yu pampered him by taking him on various family trips over the weekend and then advertised what a good time they were having by uploading their pictures on social media.

This book provides the first ethnographic account of the work and life of 'white-collar beauties' in China in the new millennium. Hailed by the media as intelligent and beautiful, this group of women is considered to be living an enviable lifestyle on the frontline of a pioneering modernity. Like Chen and Yu, this group of young women share certain common characteristics: urban, highly educated, professional occupation, only child of their natal family and generally have a strong ambition for personal development. Materially and socially, this group enjoys far greater opportunities than older urban women (Liu 2007), rural women migrant workers (Lee 1998; Jacka 2006; Pun 2005; Zheng 2009) and young urban women employed in the classic hospitality industries commonly referred to as 'youth occupations' in China (Hanser 2009; Otis 2012). However, as the stories of Chen and Yu illustrate, life as a 'white-collar beauty' has exposed these women to gender discrimination and sexual consumption; there is a gendered and sexualized story to be told.

Post-socialist China has witnessed a growing deployment of a sexualized femininity in the market domain; as a result, commercial culture and public discourse have been widely imbued with the sexual objectification of women (Zurndorfer 2015). Existing studies on gender and work in China, when touching upon sexuality, have examined the life of sex workers (Zheng 2009) and less-educated service workers (Hanser 2005). This book aims to make an essential and timely contribution to our understanding of highly educated women in the labour market in East Asia. In China, the urban women of the Only Child Generation have gained unprecedented educational investment and enjoy far greater occupational mobility than their mothers' generation. Further, Western feminist studies often view family as a source of subordination, contributing to

a wider system that reproduces women's social and economic inequality. But is this 'cycle of vulnerability' (Okin 1989) reproducing for this particular cohort of women?

Theoretically, by grounding analysis in local socio-cultural meanings and mechanisms of the gender-sex system, this book aims to shed fresh light upon the ways in which gender and sexuality are integral to the processes of compliance and resistance in the structural masculine domination at work beyond a Euro-American parameter. In doing this, the book promotes positioning feminist theory production in local research.

Existing feminist theory remains grounded mostly in an Euro-American axis that has defined its priorities. The recent critique by East Asian scholars in Cultural Studies alert us to the asymmetry of cultural and academic exchange between the 'West' and the rest of the world with the global conceptual vocabulary generally derived from Western theories. Chen (2010) notes,

> Europeans, North Americans …[and others have] been doing area studies in relation to their own living spaces. That is, Martin Heidegger was actually doing European Studies, as were Michel Foucault, Pierre Bourdieu and Jürgen Habermas. Once we recognize how extremely limited the current conditions of knowledge are, we learn to be humble about our knowledge claims. The universalist assertions of theory are premature, for theory too must be deimperialized.

Chen highlights the false dichotomy between 'general theories' generated by the Euro-American axis and the particularity of 'area studies' for scholars working on other regions. In comparison with general social scientists, feminist scholars are more sensitive towards analysing inequalities and asymmetries on a global scale, but there is a still long way to go. So far, major attempts to globalize feminism have been framed in terms of an opposition between First World and Third World women or more recently, between North and South (Kandiyoti 1996; Mohanty 1988; Spivak 1994; Mohanty et al. 1991). While it is evidently necessary to develop feminist analyses of the widening gap between rich and poor nations, the effect of this is to exclude Chinese women who are neither Western nor from the global South.

There is a substantial body of literature on Chinese women available in the West (see Hershatter 2004), yet it has only a marginal impact on Western gender studies and feminist theory. This seems to be closely linked to socio-linguistic constructions such as East and West or North and South, which are implicitly premised upon a superiority of the former colonialist

powers. Therefore, epistemologically, rather than being re-trapped in the hierarchical discursive framework enabled by these artificial categories, this book promotes an alternative way of thinking by anchoring feminist theory production in local research. Western feminist theories are 'local' theories written from a Euro-American social reality and any local theory should be viewed as equally important in understanding what an interconnected global structure could be.

Taking cues from anthropologists' warning against a cultural essentialism and a structuralist tradition in sociology (see Giddens 1987; Gupta 1998; Pigg 1992; Rofel 2007), it is suggested here that there are three layers in the foundation of a locality: historical and cultural remnants, socio-political and economic transformations, connections and tensions with other societies/cultures. These three layers of locality do not stand alone but interweave and reshape each other; locality is therefore the result of an accumulative yet interactive mosaic of various forces. Only seen through locality, can it be made possible to understand the complicated and nuanced ways in which social systems such as gender and sexuality could constrain as well as assist women in their compliance with, and resistance to, a masculine domination.

The third objective of this book is to examine women's agency and raise a new feminist inquiry of social change. For most feminist research, the ultimate goal is to challenge hierarchical gender order and achieve justice for women. Grounded in the experiences of young educated women in urban China, it is argued here that a bottom-up approach could be more productive in continuing the unfinished gender revolution in China. When compared with other groups of women in the country, young urban women from the Only Child Generation possess a great potential as agents for social change via their educational capital and advantageous position in the wider intergenerational family. The irreconcilable contradiction between the structural barriers against women's development and women's unprecedented ambition in personal development became an important drive for women to strive for better development/recognition at work. To facilitate women's enactment of agency, it is important for feminist scholars to go beyond examining how women exercise their agency and identify the mechanisms in place that work to a woman's advantage.[1]

Finally, it is noteworthy that, because the companies involved in this empirical examination were mostly Chinese state-owned (i.e. reformed former socialist work units), an implicit aim of this book is to dovetail with my earlier book on gender relations in urban work units (Liu 2007). This should reveal the continuities and changes in gendered employment in

urban China reflected in the accounts of two distinctive cohorts of women (i.e. the Cultural Revolution Generation in my 2007 book and the Only Child Generation in this book).

Structure of the Book

Chapter 2 examines the social, economic and cultural processes that lead to the making of the 'white-collar beauty' identity in post-Mao China. It is revealed how the discourse is embedded in a framework infused with state and market neoliberal forces: young, educated heterosexual women are constructed to embody the nationalist and neoliberal desires that break from the past ideology attached to socialist factory workers so as to endorse the youth, intelligence, beauty and materiality valued by a market economy. This chapter then proceeds with an introduction of the research setting and a personal account of my research experience, reflecting upon how fieldwork relations were mediated by my own as well as participants' positionalities. The wider socio-economic transformations discussed in this chapter are important in constituting what a locality is and how it has shaped young women's work experiences in complex ways.

Chapter 3 revisits the basic but fundamental concepts in feminist theories: gender and sexuality. By highlighting the historical and socio-cultural constitution of gender and sexuality, this chapter formulates a local feminist framework to account for the gendered and sexual control and resistance Chinese women experience at the workplace. It brings together Western feminist literature of gender and sexuality at work, discussions around sexuality in development studies, and historical studies of gender and sexuality in China. These are rarely, if ever, brought into dialogue, but have something to offer to our nuanced understandings of the Chinese workplace as well as global feminist theorization of gender, sexuality and power.

Chapter 4 considers the way in which essentialized gender categories underlie the division of labour, discourses and practices in the foreign trade company. Because gender is understood in a biological nature that 'is itself a naturalized social construct' (Bourdieu 2001), masculine domination has become legitimized in the workplace. The consequences are both symbolic and material: despite having equal qualifications, women tend to hold subsidiary positions and so have limited access to company profits (i.e. bonus and share awards). However, by making sense of their own experiences in upbringing and education, women question gendered expectations and challenge the notion of men's superiority. The collision

between ideas 'received' from company management and gender stereotypes, and ideas 'created' through lived experiences as the only child, were central to the continual interplay between women's consent and resistance to their experience as wage workers and as women.

Chapter 5 examines the impact of workplace sexuality and reveals the way in which eroticized workplace culture has resulted in a form of masculine domination and hetero-normative control through the process of objectification. Sexual innuendo is encouraged by management to enhance productivity, and morale and agency in public sexual discourse remain male privileges. Facilitated by the vertical segregation between men and women, male-initiated sexual jokes are often intended to introduce expressions of feminine desire that are passive and subordinate. As sexuality remains a key marker of 'reputable' women's social status in post-Mao China, professional women did not find sexualized office interactions the site of empowerment noted by some Western studies and research among Chinese sex workers. Yet this chapter warns against misinterpreting Chinese women's response by viewing them through the lens of inappropriate assumptions. Women's conformity to public scripts on their sexuality should not be read as a sign of their powerlessness; instead, they necessitate a more nuanced analysis invoking the inner-outer framework as a signifier of moral agency.

Chapter 6 considers the experiences of women and men working in the sales departments of a range of domestically oriented Chinese companies. Through an examination of the way in which Chinese businesses utilize the facilities offered by the entertainment and leisure sector to cultivate relationships with clients, I reveal the sexist and sexual content of such interactions and indicate that the selling of women's sexuality is institutionally and deliberately deployed by management. Because the restrictions on women's autonomy in sexual relations are still strong, and women's sexuality is highly moralized, women who had frequent encounters with male clients often found themselves walking a fine line between respectability and disreputability. One strategy to downplay involvement in those sexualized leisure venues was to carefully manage their gender performance, trying to look pretty but not sexy. In contrast, male professionals did not worry about managing the boundary between gender and sexuality or their sexual reputation. Indeed, when a deal was secured, a man's success would be attributed to his brainpower whereas a woman's success would be attributed to her physical appeal. This chapter challenges the recent call by Hakim (2011) for women to use 'erotic capital' to advance

in modern affluent societies, instead showing that such a proposal ignores that sexuality is intertwined with gender relations and shaped by local cultural sociality. This is a negative collective strategy which will further perpetuate and naturalize local gender orders.

Chapter 7 examines the power relationship between men and women as well as among women in the office setting. Although men held official and direct power in the organizational hierarchy, women's indirect power could be more effective in micro-level interactions at work. Women's capacity to affect is deeply grounded in an organizationally embedded pursuit of harmony and gender as a role-oriented and relational system. One important tactic women deploy is the display of private emotions in public, a justified weapon of the weak, to shame and manipulate their male colleagues and turn subordination on its head. However, some women (particularly those with longer service) formed an informal clique which organized regular social activities outside work; the inclusion/exclusion in/from these activities resulted in another segregation among women (based upon local/non-local, urban/rural, employment positions).

Chapter 8 focuses on women's experiences and expectations of marriage and family. Enabled by changing practices relating to housing allocation, the re-constitution of the private sphere away from the workplace has facilitated women's enactment of power play in marriage and family. 'Left-over' single women, despite being ridiculed at work and pressurized to marry by their parents, actively delayed marriage to preserve agency and autonomy in their mate selection. For married women, by reclaiming the traditional divide between inside and outside, they wielded considerable interpersonal power and prevailed over their husbands in decision making at home and in general family life (albeit at the exploitation of senior generations of women who took on housework and childcare). The changes in the private sphere—increasing singlehood and increasing divorce rates—may eventually challenge the workplace assumption of career for men and marriage for women; this may bring about a new interpretation of womanhood that is not bound to marital union.

The conclusion restates one central tenet of this book, that is, grounding feminist theory production in local research. Through a nuanced analysis of the Chinese socio-cultural locality, this book demonstrates the multi-complexity of gender and identifies the indeterminacy within the gender system, which constrains as well as enables women's resistance to masculine domination. While sexual politics are embedded in the operations of companies in China's new market economy and has gendered

consequences for highly educated professional women, a local understanding of sexuality beyond an exclusive focus upon corporeality has reshaped the contour of sexual control and women's responses in the workplaces. I conclude with suggestions for possible new areas of feminist inquiry and agents for social change.

Note

1. There is a considerable body of feminist literature that documents women's enactment of agency. However, this literature places great emphasis upon the forms and presentation of women's agency with limited attention to what makes women's resistance successful (see Ogasawara 1998; Kondo 1990; Wolf 1985).

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CHAPTER 2

Becoming 'White-Collar Beauties' in Urban China

The term 'workers', once proudly used by urban women to distinguish themselves from housewives and recognize their enhanced status under socialism (Rofel 1999), has lost its appeal among the younger generation of urban women. Instead, these women aspire to be 'white-collar beauties', a term coined by the media and generally associated with the cosmopolitan modernity arising from market reform. This chapter examines the social, economic and cultural processes that contextualize the making of this new identity in post-Mao China.[1] It then goes on to introduce the fieldwork setting and my experience of working with white-collar beauties in the Organization. The wider transformations in the post-Mao era, revealed in this chapter, are the first part of what constitutes locality, contributing to the complex shape of women's work experiences.

Women and Employment in China

Women make up a significant part of the labour force in China; in 2014, 64 % of the Chinese women of working age were employed, compared with 56 % in the UK and USA, 49 % in Japan, and 27 % in India (World Bank 2015). Whilst female participation in the labour force is well established, for example, in the early twentieth century women were already working in cotton mills in industrial centres such as Shanghai and Tianjin (Hershatter 1986), it was communism which revolutionized the role of women in the means of production. The Communist Party firmly believed

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that women's emancipation would be realized through full-time participation in paid work outside of the home (Davin 1976). A Party slogan to mobilize women was for them to 'walk out of home' and participate in production. In the cities, women of working age were allocated a job in the work unit[2] whilst in rural areas, women worked in the production brigade[3] to earn work points.

Research has shown that urban women born under socialism (i.e. post-1949) established a working identity and that for these women it was far less acceptable to be a housewife (Wang 2000; Liu 2007). Indeed, by earning a wage that was central to the family budget, urban women were able to more readily achieve parity with men in the family decision-making process (Jankowiak 2002). Similarly, in rural areas, women participated in collective labour and such work relationships equipped them with wider social networks that went beyond their own families (Hershatter 2000).

Whilst the mobilization of women into paid employment under Mao redefined the boundary between household and social production, a focused examination of employment conditions found that gender inequalities persisted in the workplace. For example, in urban areas, the familial organization of the work unit played a significant role in perpetuating gender ideology and practices (Liu 2007). Women's work was a job rather than a career; their access to power and resources was restricted due to horizontal and vertical segregation, they suffered various forms of gendered discrimination, and were disadvantaged in their work development (see Liu 2007). In rural regions, men were remunerated more work points[4] because they undertook what was deemed to be 'heavy work' despite the fact that the division between heavy and light labour could be flexible and arbitrary (Jacka 1997). Further, the mobilization of women into the workplace did not exempt them from their more traditional duties, such as being a good wife and mother. Studies in both urban and rural areas have found that women needed to juggle between work and family duties, and this made it difficult for them to invest time in cultivating the social connections that would benefit their career development (Liu 2007; Hershatter 2004). However, the women's employment landscape has changed tremendously in the post-Mao reform era.

In the cities, economic restructuring of state enterprises and the smashing of the 'iron rice bowl'[5] during the 1990s meant that almost 60 million urban workers had been made redundant by 2004 (Solinger 2006). In particular, middle-aged and older women workers bore the brunt of this

dislocation (Lee 2005; Liu 2007). Despite the mass redundancy, some feminist scholars within China have argued that the reforms created new opportunities and introduced women to modern concepts of competition and self-consciousness (Liu 1992). But in reality, partly as a result of ageist discrimination, laid-off middle-aged women workers were pushed into low paid informal domestic work (Solinger 2002) and the new job possibilities were mostly open only to young women.

In the countryside, collective farming has been displaced by a return to family farming, markets relaxed and the ban on rural-urban migration lifted. As men and young women have left the countryside for better-paid jobs in the cities, married and older women have carried the burden of low value agricultural work with limited state assistance (see Jacka 1997; Judd 1994). Many of the young migrant women work in coastal foreign-owned factories, and whilst migration has broadened their horizons and increased their income, they suffer from unpleasant work conditions and harassment (Pun 2005).

The Emergence of Urban Professionals

The changing industrial structure and women's educational investment contributed to the shape of young urban women's employment in post-Mao China. Over the last six decades, the industrial base of China has shifted rapidly from primary to tertiary industry (see Table 2.1), with the latter generally regarded as best placed to absorb a large number of women employees (Wang 2000).

Zhou (2009) classifies the development of the China's tertiary sector into two phases. Between 1978 and 1991, the speed of development was fast. However, the new jobs created were in low-level service areas such as those in commerce, catering and the hospitality industry. During this

Table 2.1 Transformations in industrial structure

	1952 (%)	*1978 (%)*	*2008 (%)*
Primary industry	51%	28.2%	11.3%
Secondary industry	20.8%	47.9%	48.6%
Tertiary industry	28.2%	23.9%	40.1%

Source: Data derived from National Bureau of Statistics (2009)

phase, women were more likely to be drawn into the expanding 'youth occupations' that demanded physical attractiveness such as waitress and airhostess (Wang 2000). During the second phase, between 1992 and 2006, the speed of development slowed but the structure of the tertiary sector diversified with the growth of high value added industries including finance, insurance, telecommunications and technology which required well-qualified young professionals.

Unlike their mothers' generation, whose education was disturbed by Mao's revolutionary agenda (i.e. the Cultural Revolution), the young women of the Only Child Generation benefited from the exceptional educational investment made by their parents (Fong 2004; Liu 2007). Young women's enrolment in university education has grown to an unprecedented level (Table 2.2).

Market reform, global capitalism, education and a state-driven meritocracy have all played a role in facilitating the emergence of urban professionals in China (Cao 2004; Goodman and Zang 2008). Despite the continued vertical segregation by gender, women constitute 52 % of professionals and technicians in post-2000 workplaces (Hausmann et al. 2011). Urban women from the Only Child Generation have achieved a significant occupational mobility in comparison with the urban women of the Cultural Revolution Generation. This transformation in the space of a single generation from task-oriented factory workshop to a company office that is embedded in social interactions and teamwork presents a new landscape for young women to negotiate with superiors and co-workers, one that their mothers did not experience.

Table 2.2 Proportion of Chinese women's enrolment in university education

Year	*Women with university education (%)*
1980	23%
1990	34%
2000	41%
2010	51%

Source: Data deriving from China Education Statistics Yearbook (Development and Planning Bureau of Ministry of Education China 2011)

Sexualized Femininity and Economy

The form of socialism during Mao's reign over China sought to erase gender (and other) differences between citizens. However, these values were gradually rejected from the early 1980s onwards; for example, the state-controlled media started to promote feminine figures and womanly values as appropriate role models and with this there has been growing deployment of a sexualized femininity in the market domain. The beauty economy is booming: commercial companies employ models to advertise their products and many local governments have sponsored beauty contests to boost local tourism (Xu and Feiner 2007; Yang 2011). The sex industry has also proliferated as a result of the emergent consumerism, catering to the demands of the increasing number of wealthy businessmen, and sexualized leisure activities have become normative business practices to maintain good relationships with clients (Jeffreys 2004; Zhang 2001; Zheng 2009). In the shadow of this growing deployment of a sexualized femininity in the economy, commercial culture and public discourse have been widely imbued with a sexual objectification of women (Zurndorfer 2015). This wider social economic background embedded in sexual consumption of women's bodies has created both risks and opportunities for young women in paid employment.

At the lower end of the labour market are the sex workers involved in prostitution (which re-emerged in the post-Mao era). While subject to extensive institutional and social discrimination in the cities (Pan 1994), sex workers, who are mostly from rural backgrounds, negotiate an urban identity through 'their consumption practices and through exploiting the superior social, cultural, and economic resources possessed by their clients' and in this respect act as 'brokers of modernity' for the countryside (Zheng 2009: 5).

Towards the middle of the labour market spectrum are the urban women employed in 'youth occupations' (Wang 2000). Examining low-level service work (i.e. sales clerks), Hanser (2005, 2009) revealed how an essentialized understanding of gender and sexuality produced new inequalities in urban China by crafting youthful, feminine, urban bodies with value while simultaneously devaluing middle-aged and rural women. Similarly, focusing upon interactions with clients by front desk service workers in hotels, Otis (2012) identified the ways in which various femininities were created in the service of profit via the transformations of women's bodies. However, both Hanser (2009) and Otis (2012) examined occupations

in the classical hospitality industry which are traditionally 'youth occupations' that exploit the bodily labour of young women. What about the top end of the labour market spectrum? How do university-educated women employed in professional jobs experience work under the wider sexualisation of women in post-Mao China?

The socio-economic status of women has a complicated interweaving relation with gender and sexuality. Scholars have found that on lower rungs of the socio-economic ladder, sexuality serves as a critical resource consolidating women's social status and economic security (Gonzalez-Lopez 2005) and this has been confirmed by research among sex workers in China (Zheng 2009; Ding 2012). Despite the desexualisation of women in the market economy, past restrictions on sexual expression and discussion have given 'reputable' women little or no opportunity for sexual autonomy. While men happily consume women's sexuality, women who are actively engaged in sexual activities outside the chastity of marriage are considered decadent. As a result, sex workers are widely regarded as disreputable and viewed as contributing to a crisis in national morality whilst in contrast, sexual respectability is part of what defines the social status of professional women. This creates particular challenges for university-educated women if they must negotiate a sexualized encounter they experience at work.

The Making of 'White-Collar Beauties'

In addition to the material transformations in post-Mao China, state-censored public culture has contributed to the construction of a new white-collar identity for young urban professionals. Searched over one billion times on Baike (the Chinese equivalent of Wikipedia), the definition of 'white collar' 'refers to professionals with high educational background. It is a general term in the West to describe people who are not engaged in manual work. White-collar professionals usually have a well-off stable income, compared with blue-collar workers.' (Author's translation). According to Baike (2014), white-collar employees share the following features:

- aged between 25 and 40;
- most are from the only child generation in urban China and have individualist ideas;
- higher than average salary and so enjoy a higher quality lifestyle;

- strong materialist desire and keen to make economic profits;
- career development is a key consideration in choosing work; and
- prone to suffer from anxiety and high pressure from work.

The term was first widely used in China to describe employees in foreign-owned companies in the early 1990s when it became associated with a clean office setting, high salary, smart presentation, confident smile, fast rhythm of work and consumption of various high-end products. Since 2000, with the expansion of office-based work, the label has been used to refer to highly educated employees engaged in mental labour.

Whilst the term 'white collar' appears gender neutral it has a gendered affix: there is no male equivalent of the term 'white-collar beauty'. According to Baike (2012), 'white-collar beauties' are female professionals who dress elegantly, have a certain capability in the office, are physically appealing and intelligent. Discussions and depictions about the work and life of 'white-collar beauties' feature heavily in everyday glossy magazines, newspapers and TV dramas, and this has left an indelible mark upon people's consciousness and acceptance of this new identity in the new millennium China. The current discourse around 'white-collar beauties' operates in a framework that is infused by state and market neoliberal forces. Young educated heterosexual women have been constructed to embody the nationalist and neoliberal desires to break from the past ideology attached to socialist factory workers and instead endorse the youth, intelligence, beauty and materiality that are valued by market economy. Rofel's (2007) discussions of 'desire' are an effective means of analysing this white-collar discourse in post-2000 China.[6]

The first desire elicited in the 'white-collar beauty' discourse is this embodiment of youth, intelligence and beauty in female professionals to replace a desexualized and a de-gendered body in socialist work units. This desire is required to eradicate the supposedly 'unnatural' gender politics of socialism and fill the vacuum created by the economic restructuring of the mid-1990s, during which the women workers, once hailed as heroines and pioneers of socialist modernity, were ridiculed as incapable, uneducated and backward. Whilst the formation of women workers image was once central to socialist gender equality campaigns, in post-socialist China a vacuum in the gender model was created and this necessitated the making of a new identity to break from the past and look to the gender future. In other words, the state has been both implicated in, and interested in, fostering the structured dichotomies between the past and present (Rofel 2007).

The second desire elicited in the 'white-collar beauty' discourse is premised upon a notion of a free, neoliberal enterprising woman who fits with the values of competition and efficiency promoted in the market economy. While this desire may encourage educated women to focus on their career and remain single, this new identity masks a split gender subjectivity—the single free women versus the married women with children, which foresees an impossibility (Rofel 2007).

Third, whilst simultaneously constituting women as consumers and subjects of desire, this discourse normalizes professional women as brokers of a post-socialist modernity and mediators of cosmopolitan desires.[7] Finally, invoking the identity of 'white-collar beauties' enforces a new form of social stratification among women as state and neoliberal market forces attempt to create new social worlds of segregation through the exclusive definition of being highly educated and urban.

Influenced by public culture, the desire to become a 'white-collar beauty' has been widely enacted by female university graduates (Liu 2007). To reveal whether the enviable lifestyle enjoyed by this group according to depictions in the media is a fantasy or reality is one of the objectives of this book.

The Only Child Generation

Whilst 'white-collar beauties' are depicted as having a strong desire for career development by the media, the source of this desire goes beyond the skilful craftwork of the state and neoliberal market and lies in the women's upbringing as part of the Only Child Generation. The one-child policy was introduced in 1979 and strictly implemented in urban China through workplace punishment leading to a dramatic increase in only children, particularly in urban areas (see Table 2.3).

Considerable Western research has already shown that as a result of the one-child policy, women have become objects of control with their bodies being forced to undergo intrusive physical examination and even forced abortion (e.g. Croll et al. 1985; Doherty et al. 2001; Hesketh and Wei 1997; Milwertz 1996). Moreover, the older generation of women who were of childbearing age when the one-child policy was first introduced suffered from emotional abuse and a lack of support from their in-laws if they failed to give birth to a son (Liu 2007).

Table 2.3 illustrates that the one-child policy was not strictly implemented in rural areas. Indeed, the one-child policy was modified in rural China in the mid-1980s to allow a couple whose first child was a girl to have a second

Table 2.3 Proportion of only children born by five-year period

Birth Year	*Urban China*		*Rural China*	
	Male	*Female*	*Male*	*Female*
1976–1980	31.55	26.55	4.74	2.00
1981–1985	66.59	59.65	10.54	5.19
1986–1990	67.82	61.51	13.18	9.58
1991–1995	67.35	60.45	11.92	7.34

Source: Yang and Guo (2000)

child. Daughters therefore remained structurally located at the bottom of rural kinship arrangement; that is, a sacrificial principle was gradually and consciously imposed upon girls through a culturally sanctioned preference for boys, meaning that rural daughters were more likely to sacrifice their own interests for the collective well-being of the family (Liu 2014, 2016).

In urban China, without the presence of a brother, the Only Child Generation of women received unprecedented care and investment from their parents and grew up in a child-centred environment in which they seldom or never had to do any housework and so were able to focus upon their studies (Liu 2007). Indeed, studies have revealed that there is no gender difference in educational development between single-girl and single-boy families (Tsui and Rich 2002; Fong 2004). These women planned work in terms of career building and personal development and were unwilling to make sacrifices for others like their parents or counterparts in rural China (Liu 2007, 2016). Unlike other studies on gender and work in China, which overlook demographic change in the wider context, I argue here that the early upbringing fostered an unprecedented ambition in individual development and the availability of a non-patrilineal kinship network that centred around them contributed to women's strategizing and significantly shaped their negotiations in the workplace.

The Organization

The site for micro-level ethnographic research was a prestigious state-owned foreign trade company in Jiangsu province. In post-Mao China, foreign trade companies (which essentially buy manufactured goods, such as machinery and clothing, from local suppliers and then sell them to foreign buyers, often in North America and Europe) have been one of the fastest growing industries in the tertiary sector. Because of their proximity

to both Shanghai, a traditional gateway to foreign markets, and domestic factories further up the Yangtze river, foreign trade companies have boomed in Jiangsu. Their profitability, and therefore potential for performance-based bonuses, combined with imagined frequent interactions with the outside, as part of an international business network, have made foreign trade companies a very popular occupation for university graduates.

Despite the economic reforms, state-owned enterprises dominate the foreign trade industry and output in the region. Nationwide, whilst the aggressive reform of state-owned enterprises in the 1990s (which resulted in mergers, bankruptcies and reorganizations) reduced the number of state enterprises by 50 %, the registered capital of the remaining state-owned enterprises comprises 46 % of the registered capital of all companies (Kennedy 2009). The remaining state-owned enterprises therefore have considerable market power. It is also noteworthy that, despite the modernization, state-owned enterprises continue with some of the welfare elements of their socialist legacy and provide benefits and allowances in addition to the specified legal employers' provisions.

Against this backdrop, the Organization had earned a reputation for both profitability and welfare provision and so was a highly attractive employer.[8] Founded in the late 1970s, the Organization was one of a number of the foreign trade enterprises administratively controlled by the Bureau of Foreign Trade. During the 1980s and 1990s it was a favourite of the regional government and a number of officials' relatives had worked in the organization. Its market power and state connections, combined with a new freedom to distribute wealth, meant that there were stories from this time of workers using bags to carry home the cash given to them as a bonus at the end of the year. In common with similar companies in the rest of China, people who worked for the Organization at this time were usually introduced via personal connections.

Although there was no urgent need for redundancies, in the wider climate of economic restructuring, and to acquiesce to state policy, the Organization had laid off some staff in the mid-1990s; or rather people over the age of 50 had been forced to take early retirement. As a result, the age structure of the company was comprised mostly of people under the age of 40 (ranging from 22 to 45 with the majority in their late 20s and early 30s). From 2000 onwards, the Organization had opened its recruitment process and hired college graduates rather than just those with connections. In the years following my fieldwork, the company had diversified into manufacturing production, in addition to simply acting as a middleman, and now owns a factory on the outskirts of the city.

The Organization occupied two floors of a skyscraper in a downtown location. There were other state-owned foreign trade companies on other floors of the skyscraper. There was a communal dining hall on the ground floor where employees from all the companies within the skyscraper ate their lunch and/or dinner. There are also frequent collective activities organized by all the companies in this building. Within the Organization, apart from separate closed offices for General Manager, Deputy General Manager and a few meeting rooms, all employees operated in an open plan space with individual desks compartmented by panels up to the head level when sitting down. In 2008, there were 75 employees in total, split into in four departments: sales (48), finance (6), central administration (6) and technical support (15).

Data arising from the research was derived mostly from in-depth interviews and observation notes taken whilst working as an intern in the sales department for six months in 2008. The company staff were aware of my identity as a researcher and this gave me considerable freedom to walk around, attend meetings and talk to staff. I made two subsequent visits to the Organization and interviewed some staff in 2010 and 2011. In the five years since, I have remained in close contact with some of the staff and gained updates on how their work and family life has evolved.

During three separate field trips in 2007, 2008 and 2011, women and men working in the sales departments of other professional organizations (ranging from IT, finance, medicine, stock exchange, real estate, insurance, car sales, to telecommunications) were also interviewed. Some of these companies were state-owned, others privately owned, but the most distinctive feature was that they were domestically oriented, dealing with Chinese business clients. This difference produced some gendered consequences for division of labour in the sales department (see Chaps. 4 and 6).

Working as a 'White-Collar Beauty' in the Organization

> Often condemned as apolitical, reflexivity, on the contrary can be seen as opening the way to a more radical consciousness of self in facing the political dimensions of fieldwork and constructing knowledge. Other factors intersecting with gender – such as nationality, race, ethnicity, class, and age – also affect the anthropologist's field interactions and textual strategies. Reflexivity becomes a continuing mode of self-analysis and potential awareness. (Callaway 1992: 33)

This study has its origins in a 2007 high school reunion where I met Mr Li and his wife. Mr Li was working in the finance section of the Organization and his wife held in a similar role in another foreign trade company in the same building. I talked about my desire to undertake an ethnographic study of a state-owned Chinese company and Mr Li was very keen that I spend time at his company. Mr Li was very interested in finding out about my life abroad, contemplating a transnational lifestyle for himself and his wife, and in line with the Chinese principle of reciprocity wanted to help me in order to further his objective.

The Organization had a regular internship programme but interns needed to be introduced to the company via existing employees. Through Mr Li's introduction, General Manager Wang agreed to offer me an unpaid internship at the Organization. However, on my first day, at a brief meeting with the Manager of Central Administration Office and Deputy General Manager, I learned that senior management wanted to use my time with the company to learn about the 'true' voices of their employees and so asked me to produce a report to summarize my findings at the end of my six-month internship. They also asked me not to reveal my 'real' identity to the employees at the outset; I was not sure which identity they referred to, whether as a researcher or as a management mole.

Whilst I agreed to the senior management's request, I formed my own ideas of how to comply with them in reality. To satisfy the first request, at the end of each private interview with an employee I asked if there was anything they would like me to pass onto senior management. To comply with the second request, I did not make any formal/public announcement about who I was and what I was doing, but during my everyday interactions, if anyone asked about my background and objectives, I was always honest about my role and my intention to write a book about white-collar professionals' lives. This honesty assisted me in many ways because it attracted considerable interest among the employees. They confessed their dilemmas at work and wanted to know if they were common to others. Some were keen to read my book when it was published. Within four weeks, through word of mouth, everyone in the organization knew who I was and why I was there.

My background (female, post-graduate qualified, transnational living and researcher) produced differentiated responses in the Organization depending upon the participants' own positionality. Among senior women assistants, my level of educational attainment seemed to be a barrier and they displayed caution and remained guarded in my presence.

This seemed grounded in the intersection of gender and class membership in the Organization; men who held the same degree were channelled into managerial roles while women remained sales assistants (see Chap. 4). Their fear might have been that my higher level of education would enable me to break this mould and be hired directly into a managerial role at the end of my internship. However, as Mr Li was popular with the senior women assistants, through his introduction, I was able to gain the trust of a few and conduct private interviews with them.

Lower ranked women assistants were generally far more open and asked me to join them for lunch or on shopping trips outside work. It seemed they were less likely to view me as a competitor and instead felt that, because of my association with the management, a good relationship with me might assist them in climbing the hierarchy of women assistants. Newly recruited female graduates, perhaps because they were still familiar with the academic world and were generally eager to please, combined with the common bond of being a newcomer, were curious about my research and keen to be involved.

The quality of my relationships with the men at the Organization was inverse to their level of seniority. Due to their insecure position within the masculine hierarchy, junior male employees were cautious in the presence of a researcher. Once at a post-lunch gathering, when several women assistants and junior men were discussing their plans regarding marriage and childbirth, one male graduate pointed at me saying 'be careful what you are saying, she is going to post our picture matching our words in her book'. Though represented as a joke, his worry reflected a common confusion between journalism and academic research.[9] Indeed, during private interviews with junior sales managers, despite constant reassurances, there was a general worry that I would leak their private thoughts to senior management. As an aside, it is noteworthy that my experience raises questions around the regulation and ethical mode of conduct in research adopted by Western research councils. These are implicitly premised upon the existence of a legal contractual society; it is problematic adhering to these in a society where trust is grounded in relations and reputations.

Senior male managers treated me with a great deal of curiosity. They viewed me as a woman outside of her traditional sphere with masculine traits such as a PhD qualification (i.e. higher level of qualification than anyone else in the Organization) and a transnational lifestyle. Consequently, these men did not know how to deal with me. Aside from some jokes aimed at me (see Chap. 5), on most occasions, the male section managers displayed a professional politeness when in my company.

Pursuit of Beauty

The term 'Pretty Women' (*meinu*) was used by men at all levels to address women (including me) in the office. In response, some women replied 'Handsome Men' (*shuai ge*) to neutralize the comment. Although these terms were used in a joking manner to blur the labour relations and perhaps boost socio-atmospherics at work, the frequent use of them also created a discursive ritual that reinforced and reproduced essentialized gender categories.

In the Maoist era, people addressed each other with a gender-neutral term—comrade. In the 1990s, with further opening up and greater interactions with the West, 'Miss' and 'Mr' became standard titles when addressing public spheres. Shaped by the state's promotion of a beauty economy, the focus upon aesthetic capital gained momentum in 2000 and it is really since then that the use of 'Pretty Woman' in the workplace has gained prevalence; outside of the Organization young females are constantly addressed as 'Pretty Woman' by the service staff in public settings such as restaurants, hotels and department stores. Indeed, this is not limited to everyday commercial transactions, the cosmetic industry is booming as part of a wider pursuit of aesthetic capital. The discourse and practice around aesthetic capital is highly gendered from the naming of the beauty economy at the outset to the later stage of developing cosmetic industries to remodel women's faces and bodies.

Mann (2011) highlighted that the decoupling of sexual bodies and sin in China's classical tradition made the unclothed physical body inconsequential as a site of beauty. It was the things which covered and decorated the body, rather than the body itself, that were crucial markers of civilization and social hierarchy in late imperial China. The clothed body displayed a person's social, cultural and political identity. In the Maoist era, the Party used costume to position their subjects as submissive and loyal and the same-sex clothing emphasized the Party's commitment to gender equality (Chen 2001). In the post-Mao period, Chinese markets and public discourse were flooded with foreign imports and fashion images that accentuated women's corporeal bodies for aesthetic beauty.

The early ideas about clothed body and recent influence on corporeal body have resulted in a medley of influences upon contemporary educated young Chinese women. In the Organization, female employees seemed to adopt an ambivalent position between 'Chinese' and 'West' and reinvented their own interpretation of aesthetic presentation. On one hand, there was a clear emphasis on maintaining a slim body and this was

achieved either through diet and/or joining sports and dance classes (on many occasions the women I ate lunch with did not finish their portion for this reason). On the other hand, everyday conversations with the women revealed a strong emphasis upon a beauty that was anchored to internal characteristics. In this respect, these educated women purposely devalued the significance of their body while defining what a pretty woman was; they considered themselves above the women who made a living from their appearance. This contrast between a skin-based beauty and an internally oriented beauty meant that professional women attempted to subvert the wider gendered and ageist discourse on beauty. By revoking the clothed body as a marker of their status, these professional women re-inscribed a hierarchy between them and other women. They emphasized their professional status by not wearing revealing clothing (worn by sex workers or low-level service workers) or clothing that might be considered as showing a low 'taste' (worn by uneducated women) and exactly because of this perceived association between clothing and status, they were surprised that as a person from abroad, the clothes I wore appeared so 'ordinary'.

A middle way between early ideas on the clothed body and recent emphasis upon physical body is women's attention to the observable parts of the clothed body that can be judged for virtue and/or beauty, that is, the face. Discussions on skincare products and how to combat ageing were popular among female employees and I joined them on numerous shopping trips for skincare products. In the Organization, because of the way women were pushed into a secondary supporting role in the sales department, a woman's desire to maintain a youthful, pretty face and a slim body was closely linked to a gendered and ageist demand in the marriage market (see Chap. 8). By contrast, in domestic-oriented Chinese companies, women were pushed to the frontier of sales; their aesthetic capital was a mechanism to assist in the pursuit of profit in their companies (see Chap. 6).

Complications

As Western feminist scholars have found, research on sexuality can sometimes put the researcher in morally dubious circumstances (Brewis 2014). Similarly, research upon sexuality created challenges for me. In private interviews, I asked about experiences of sexual jokes and extramarital affairs; the initial response from the participants was generally surprise as

sex is a taboo subject for reputable women (see Chap. 3). Through socializing with women employees, my sexual respectability was established among women interviewees and this helped gain their trust. However, male employees constantly considered me an 'unconventional' woman, and so implicitly questioned my sexual reputability. Their perception was facilitated by the fact that I had lived abroad for a long time and it is a commonly held belief amongst Chinese that foreigners lead a more promiscuous sexual life: that is, I had become westernized in their eyes. Because Mr Li introduced me to the Organization, both junior and senior men often joked about an imagined liaison between Mr Li and myself. Indeed, when Mr Li's divorce emerged near the end of my fieldwork, my sexual morality was under strict scrutiny and a rumour was started saying that I was the third party who had led to his divorce (see Chap. 8). Fortunately, I was at the end of my fieldwork and had completed most of the interviews.

My transnational background often facilitated interactions with employees as the young generation have a transnational, cosmopolitan desire (Rofel 2007) and they wanted to know more about life abroad. However, it also unexpectedly put me in an awkward position when discussing a series of socio-political events that took place in 2008. The Chinese Olympic torch relay was interrupted on a number of occasions by protestors when it passed through some foreign countries. There was also a significant free-Tibet protest in March 2008. The state media blamed these incidents upon foreign forces' trying to intervene in China's affairs and, when these two events took place, employees voluntarily put a small national flag on their social media pages. At lunch, I once questioned the widely held belief that foreign forces were trying to launch an ideological revolution in China. This triggered heated debate on the Communist Party's control over China. Flag bearers claimed that their love for the country was not equal to their love towards the Party; however, because party-state unity is reinforced by public and popular discourse, it is not entirely clear how they distinguish between the party and the state. I was branded non-patriotic for questioning nationalist behaviour.

These events trigged demonstrations of nationalist complex consistent with Zsang's (2009) argument that nationalism has replaced communism and become an important mechanism in ideological control in post-socialist China. They also revealed a paradoxical attitude among the young professionals towards the West: while they aspired to have a transnational lifestyle by visiting Western countries, their image of the West is deeply conditioned by the perceptions of the Party-state.

Despite the complications, I made a number of friends through this ethnography and have maintained contact with some ever since. Working with them, witnessing experiences, hearing about their hopes and dilemmas in work and family and writing about their everyday life has been a very inspiring journey for me.

Notes

1. With respect to the wider economic and structural changes and their implications for gender relations, there are some parallels between post-Mao China and Central and Eastern Europe after the post-socialist marketization. For example, in the latter region, this resulted in mass unemployment for women (see Einhorn 1993). Over time, gender representation has been remodeled from a drab communist woman to a highly sexualized identity (Ibroscheva 2013). As Einhorn (2006:125) notes, this 'new' gender imagining 'opens up (the possibility) of discourses around identity in terms of sexuality in a way precluded by the asexual roles of socialist rhetoric and imagery. What they do not include, however, is any kind of deconstruction of gendered discourses, gendered imagery, or gendered power relations'. This observation rings true for the process of the making of 'white-collar beauties' in post-Mao China.
2. The work unit was the work and residential unit fundamental to social organization in urban China prior to the 1990s (see Walder 1986; Bray 2005; Liu 2007).
3. The production brigade was a form of agricultural production unit in the countryside that was controlled by a village committee.
4. This practice was used during the collective agriculture period: the workers' labour input was first calculated in points and then converted into money.
5. 'Iron rice bowl' was a metaphor used to describe the lifelong employment security enjoyed by Chinese workers in the pre-reform era. Davis notes 'the essence of the Maoist "iron rice bowl" for urban state workers was bureaucratic allocation of undifferentiated labour within administratively defined enclaves' (Davis 1989: 89). As a result of the economic reforms, this protection was abolished.
6. Rofel (2007) used 'desire' to 'gloss a wide range of aspirations, needs, and longings' and argued that desire was a key cultural practice with which 'the government and its citizens reconfigure their relationship to a post socialist world'.
7. Rofel (2007) argues that cosmopolitanism serves as one of the key nodes through which sexual, material and affective desires bind citizen-subjects to state and transnational neoliberal policies.

8. In order to carry out an implicit comparison with my earlier work on the socialist work unit (Liu 2007), this ethnographic study purposely focused upon a state-owned organization (i.e. a contemporary form of the work unit).
9. All the names used in the book are false names. Some of the characteristics of their life had also been deliberately modified in order to protect their confidentiality. The city where the Organization is based has purposely not been revealed in order to protect the anonymity of the participants. No pictures have ever been taken of the participants.

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CHAPTER 3

Towards a Local Feminist Understanding of Gender and Sexuality

This chapter revisits the basic but fundamental concepts in feminism: gender and sexuality. It has two interrelated objectives. First, because the dominant scholarship on gender and sexuality in organization studies is largely premised upon a Western originated notion of gender and sexuality, it is necessary to formulate a local feminist framework to account for the gendered and sexual control that Chinese women encounter and their resistance to it in the workplace. Second, by highlighting the historic and socio-cultural constitution of gender and sexuality in China, this chapter aims to offer an alternative perspective to reshaping existing feminist sociological understanding of gender and sexuality. This chapter brings together Western feminist literature of gender and sexuality at work, discussions around gender and sexuality in development literature, and historical studies of gender and sexuality in China. Whilst the latter are rarely, if ever, brought into Western feminist dialogue, they enhance our nuanced understandings of the Chinese workplace as well as global feminist theorizations of gender, sexuality and power.

Gender

There is a lack of a consensus as to the meaning of the term 'gender' among Western feminist scholars. Gender is sometimes deployed to denote masculinity and femininity, with the general understanding of it being about identity, performance and presentation (Butler 1990). An

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alternative understanding of gender focuses upon its structuring capability; this approach tends to dominate existing scholarship on gender and work. According to Acker, gender is defined as the 'patterned, socially produced distinction between female and male, feminine and masculine' (Acker 1992: 250). In this framework, gender is first understood as a social structure, which Connell and Pearse (2015: 11) term the 'enduring or widespread patterns among social relations'. Second, it is a historically and socially constructed process (rather than a fixed social arrangement) (see Delphy 1993; Jackson and Scott 2002). Third, it is embodied in a binary division between female and male, feminine and masculine.

Gender and Work

As feminism established itself as an academic discipline in the 1970s, Western feminists initially focused upon social and economic structuring of the gendered division of labour in employment. These forbears highlighted the role of the family and labour market in disadvantaging women's employment opportunities and the ways in which capitalism or patriarchy contributed to gender inequality (Rees 1992; Walby 1986). In recent years, there has been a shift in focus away from the macro-level exploration of the 'economic' positioning of men and women to studies of micro-processes in the workplace. As a result, many empirical studies in the West have provided a detailed analysis of gendered work in particular settings or industries, showing how cultural meanings and practices contribute to the gendering of the workplace and maintenance of women's subordination (Adkins 1995; Bradley 1999).

Joan Acker (1990, 1992) set out a prominent framework for understanding organizations through a gendered lens. Acker argued that organizational structure is not gender neutral; instead, the documents and contracts used to construct organizations are embedded in gender assumptions; for most high-paying and high-power jobs, the ideal worker has a gender, and that gender is 'male'. At the same time, organizations provide an important arena where images and practices of gender are invented and reproduced: that is, 'gender is present in the processes, practices and images and ideologies, and distributions of power in various sectors of social life' (Acker 1992: 567).

Over the last decade, intersectionality-based approaches to the study of gendered organization have burgeoned as a research paradigm

(Hancock 2007; Phoenix and Pattynama 2006; Winker and Degele 2011; Yuval-Davis 2006). Here, the concept of 'intersectionality' refers to the 'simultaneity and linkages of oppressions in the intersections of race, class, gender, sexuality, etc., aiming to understand these as processes and outcomes in the context of social restructuring' (Carlas and Smircich 2006: 305). This concept has been used to shed new light on organizational inequalities and power relations (Acker 2006, 2012; Boogaard and Roggeband 2010; Holvino 2010; Tatli and Özbilgin 2012).

While the existing Western studies on gender and work will inform the analysis of some data in the Chinese context, this scholarship is largely grounded in a binary notion of gender, implicitly premised upon an individuated notion of self. Indeed, an analysis of the historic and cultural constitution of gender in China reveals that such a binary notion is insufficient to capture gender relations in a non-Western society that does not have a liberal notion of self and individual. Two systems greatly shaped gender in pre-modern China: yin-yang and Confucianism.

Yin-Yang and the Pursuit of Harmony

In elaborate Han (206 BC–220 C) cosmologies, the forces of yin and yang interact to generate change and form the basis of everything in the universe, whether natural (e.g. night and day or the sequence of the seasons) or man-made (e.g. the rise and fall of dynasties) (Mann 2011). According to this understanding of the known world, the gender categories 'female' and 'male' were often subsumed under, or syncretized with, notions of yin and yang. Indeed, pre-Han philosophers held a 'cyclical model of the yin-yang polarity' that focused on the alternation and changes of these two forces (Wang 2005). From Han onwards, Dong Zhongshu, the founder of imperial Confucianism, installed Confucianism as the orthodoxy of the state governance; this inserted a hierarchical order and fixed the lower position of women in this syncretic cosmological system (Wang 2005). As a consequence, the yin-yang gender analogies were marked by a distinct emphasis on the construction of three polarities: (i) complementary distinction, (ii) oppositional distinction and (iii) hierarchical distinction (Raphals 1998).

It is well researched how the hierarchical polarity of yin-yang led to a systematic oppression of Chinese women (See Hinsch 1994; Mann 2001; Rosenlee 2006; Watson and Ebrey 1991), however, the complementary

distinction and its impact upon gender relations receives inadequate attention. This complementary model is closely linked to another key emphasis in Classical Chinese philosophical thinking; that harmony should be a central goal of all personal, social and political relationships (Wang 2005). Whilst the Confucian ideal state of affairs is yin and yang in unity, Ames detects a deeper insight to be gathered from the associated meanings of harmony; that is, it is the 'art of combining and blending two or more foodstuffs so that they mutually enhance one another without losing their distinctive flavours' (Ames 1993: 70). Interestingly, this classical understanding of harmony has been re-employed in the rhetoric of the contemporary Chinese government which strongly promotes building a 'harmonious society' (*Hexie shehui*), for example, the high-speed trains which bring together people from all walks of life across the country are called 'China Rail Harmony'.

The rhetoric of harmony, in both pre-modern and contemporary China, is often built upon a hierarchical order of domination and submission. Yet the relational thinking embedded in harmony and the complementary model of yin-yang can assist in the conceptualization of gender. The binary understanding of gender that dominates Western scholarship cannot accommodate the complementary distinction embedded in the yin-yang model; instead, the binary conception reflects a bias in Western social theory largely premised upon an individuated autonomous self. In light of historical and cultural studies of China, it seems that the conception of gender should include an inherently relational principle. First, men and women are interdependent and so are reciprocally constituted in relation to each other. Second, although the relationship can be hierarchical, men and women rely on one another for legitimacy: they are 'complementary pairs that complete rather than contradict one another' (Rosenlee 2006: 63). Since men and women derive meaning, significance and identity from their complex and interactive relationship they also play a necessary part in the co-production of gender.

The yin-yang model of gender may be distinctive in the Chinese context; however, the relational feature of gender has wider relevance and recent work has revealed the complementary nature of gender in some parts of Africa, Mexico and India (Egbo 2000, Govers 2006, Rao 2012). Due to this relational principle, gender has automatically entailed an enabling and subversive element that women may utilize in their interactions with men. There is a need to rethink gender as co-produced through interdependent relational dynamics between men and women.

Confucian Familialism and Role Orientations

The second system that defined the contours of gender in pre-modern China was state-institutionalized Confucian familialism which prescribed a patrilineal, patriarchal and patrilocal system where men officially dominated women (Ebrey 1993). Classical prescriptions, such as the Sancong (the three obediences), required women to be subject to the authority of their father when young, their husband when married and their son when widowed (see Min 1997).

Some scholars argue that in reality, the Confucian patriarchal arrangement may be less negative than feminist historical interpretation might imply (Mann 2001; Wolf 1985; Ko et al. 2003). The husband gained sexual access to his wife and his patriline gained claims to her labour and the children she would bear. The wife gained financial security via a claim on her husband's estate and also a place of honour in ancestral rites. More commonly, when a wife successfully gave birth to a male heir, her status rose in her family, or when her son got married she would earn the right to oversee her daughter-in-law.

There is already a rich literature on how the Confucian family contributed to gender inequality in China (See Ebrey 2003) and so it is worth highlighting here the role-oriented aspects of behaviours and identities originating in familialism and its implication for our understanding of gender. According to the role-orientated principle, each person was expected to perform according to the situation in which they found themselves (Mann 2011). This indicated that gender could be understood as an interlocking set of dynamic roles, entailing a performative and situational element.[1] Indeed, there were specific terms for the roles played by women at different points in their life cycle: nüzi (girl meaning unmarried woman) and fu (wife or married woman) (Mann 2011).

While there are public scripts for women's behaviours in Confucian protocols, these scripts are not immutable. Individuals have the agency and room to adjust and perform according to their assessment of the relations with, and characteristics of the audience (i.e. age, sex, generation, social status, etc.). Because an individual is understood to be role-based, a man or a woman does not have innate power and instead, power is generated by roles, not an essence attached to biological sex. Yet paradoxically, what constitutes a role is sourced from a complex repertoire that may include sex and other axes of identities. This process and consequence of role orientation may resemble the interlocking system of gender, class,

age, race and other axes in shaping one's identities and experiences captured by recent feminist theory on intersectionality. However, the distinctive feature of the Chinese case is that the intersectionality is not external, but already subsumed in the role-oriented gender system.

Biological Determinism

At the start of the twentieth century, elite intellectuals began to question Confucianism as they sought to explain China's constrained modernization and the inferiority which had allowed European powers to take control of key parts of the country. These reformers regarded the inferior status of women as one of the key obstacles that had prevented China from reaching modernity and so promoted women's rights as an integral part of their nationalist project (Barlow 2004). Concurrently, engagement with Western scientific discourse persuaded many Chinese intellectuals to adopt a biological determinist approach to the understanding of gender. As a result of the alleged superiority of modern science, the belief that gender roles were determined by biological differences and gender hierarchy was 'natural and progressive' became firmly legitimized (Dikotter 1995: 9). This link of gender to a 'natural biological phenomenon' subject to scientific explanation was considered the main difference between the pre-twentieth-century and twentieth-century discourse on gender (Evans 1995: 360).

The founders of the Chinese Communist Party were also part of the early twentieth-century intellectual force advocating gender equality and regarded the liberation of women as an essential part of a successful communist revolution. From 1949, the Party used its political power to endorse a new ideology of gender equality through legislation, propaganda and the mass mobilization of women into paid employment outside the home (Davin 1976; Croll 1983). However, the Maoist conception of equality was built upon gender sameness or masculinization, whereby women dressed and acted like men but remained responsible for domestic work (Brownell and Wasserstrom 2002). Indeed, Chinese feminist scholars such as Li Xiaojiang promoted the emphasis of women's femininity as an empowering way to subvert the androgynous presentation of women under Mao (Barlow 2004). The Post-Mao era witnessed the revival of a biological notion of gender which emphasized anatomical differences (Evans 1997) and the state endorsed this because it justified gendered discrimination during the economic restructuring of state enterprises (Liu 2007). In the first decade of the twentieth-first century, Confucian-style courses to promote classical

womanly behaviours have started to reappear in the public sphere, albeit receiving a mixed response from women. The extent to which this could lead to a revival of a new Confucian regime for women remains to be seen.

Sexuality

Since the 1980s, Western feminist scholars have criticized mainstream organization studies for overlooking the issue of sexuality. Like gender, sexuality is an integral part of work relations. At one end of the spectrum—sex *as* work—is the scholarship revealing how women are expected to perform aesthetic and sexual labour; sexuality is literally 'part of the job' (Williams 2002). In the mainstream labour market there are still many roles designed to incorporate women's sexual appeal with a view to attracting male customers (Adkins 1995); for example, service roles such as flight attendants and waitresses (Abbott and Tyler 1998; Erickson 2004; Williams 2003). At the other end of the spectrum— sex *in* work—is the investigation into how sexual relations exist as a dialectic of control and resistance within organizations. For example, male bosses tell sex jokes and exploit the relationship with their female secretaries (Pringle 1989); male workers developed predatory sexual discourses and shop floor cultures that derogate and segregate women (Collinson 1992). In spite of this, or perhaps because of it, women actively engage in sexual politics. Pringle (1989) found that female secretaries flirted with their male managers in order to gain concessions or even just for fun. Fleming's (2007) study of call centre workers exposed the organization's role in purposely controlling sexuality and how an organization's apparent openness to sexuality masked how only certain sexual expressions and bodies that are deemed managerially useful are condoned.

Within existing sexuality at work scholarship, one of the key debates concerns how to locate workplace sexuality between coercion and pleasure. As most of the literature regarding workplace sexuality explores issues of sexual harassment (Gherardi 1995), one dominant view is that sexuality is coercive and dangerous at work and so proponents of this view call for the desexualization of organizations. The alternative to this view is that the suppression of sexuality is a form of managerial control and so the re-eroticization of labour might signify resistance (Burrell 1992). Without ignoring coercive sexuality, some scholars argue that a wider conceptualization of the erotic functions at work might expose how sexuality could be empowering, exciting, ambiguous, frustrating or irritating

(Lerum 2004). Scholars therefore call for a further context-dependent approach to understand the promise and perils of organizational sexuality (Sullivan 2014).

The post-Mao growth of the service sector in China has witnessed the growth of female employment in this area, albeit with opportunities geared towards younger women (see Chap. 2) and an increase in workplace sexuality (including sex in work and sex as work) (see Chaps. 5 and 6). Existing Western debate around pleasure/coercion and sexuality in organizations is grounded in a discourse of sexuality markedly different from that in China, where women's social status and morality is closely measured by their sexuality.

Respectability

Chinese classical philosophers regarded sexual desire to be an innate physical need which should be moderated by social rules: that is, containment for men, concealment for women (Mann 2011). At its core this was both hetero-normative (healthy sex was heterosexual sex) and included the double standard that it was acceptable for men to have multiple sexual partners (such as concubines or prostitutes), while women were valued for their chastity (Hinsch 1994).

Philosophers and physicians warned men that too much sexual activity could deplete their energy and shorten their lives (Chou 1971). In a relational society like China, one mechanism to moderate men's sexuality was the close monitoring of sexually active women through the segregation of the sexes from the early years of life (Watson and Ebrey 1991). The 'inner' space confined women to the household, out of public sight, was seen as necessary counterpart to the 'outer' space where men moved freely. Whether to cross this boundary or not was critical to distinguishing between women who were 'respectable' (*liang*, good) or 'pariahs' (*jian*, polluted) (Mann 2011). A woman who crossed the line could permanently destroy her reputation, and with it the reputation of her family (including her marriageable brothers). The obsessive concern with women's respectability in pre-modern writings (which conveyed messages such as avoid suspicion, shun male company, stay out of gossip) meant that sexuality was central to women' social identity (Mann 2001, 2011). By contrast, the social status of men was defined occupationally, dividing those who labour with their minds (the scholar elite) from those who labour with their hands (farmers and artisans).

Twentieth-century reforms targeted the spatial concealment of women and moved them into the public space, outside the home, through mass mobilization into women's employment. However, the link between sexuality and women's social status was never contested and in the official Maoist discourse, women were the principal targets and agents of sexual morality and respectability (Evans 1997). Although post-Mao China has witnessed a boom of sexualization and commodification of women's bodies, women's sexual desire and autonomy remain moralized in the public space and this continues to be a key marker of 'reputable' women in post-Mao China. Indeed, boundary-crossing sex workers and (the few) women who write about their sexual experiences are publicly condemned as morally abhorrent and disreputable, while businessmen are free to enjoy the sexual consumption of women. This wider context and the deeply engrained link between sexuality and women's social status is the key to understanding the ways in which sexualized control and women's resistance take place in the Chinese workplace.

Inner-Outer as Signifiers of Moral Agency

Because women's social status is measured against their sexual morality, women are subject to greater social control than their male counterparts. However, 'respectable' women's conformity to gendered sexual control cannot simply be viewed as a sign of their powerlessness, and so a more nuanced framework is required to account for women's agency. There is a need to revisit the inner-outer segregation used to conceal women in pre-modern China.

While the inner-outer divide was designed to maintain the purity of women, it also endorsed an organization of production whereby respectable activities outside the home (e.g. access to education and paid employment) were dominated by men. Many existing studies have focused upon this divide as a spatial and occupational segregation to explain how the inner-outer boundary has been redrawn throughout the twentieth century as a result of nationalist projects (see Entwisle and Henderson 2000; Rofel 1999; Liu 2007; Jacka 1997).

While acknowledging the spatial feature of an inner-outer boundary, it would seem that a more flexible conceptualization is required. Haboush, who analysed the influence of Confucian discourse and women-centred writing in Korea, noted: 'The inner and outer were two poles ranging from the most narrow and personal to the widest and most public concerns. In

this graded hierarchy, what was considered public was what benefited the wider sphere, and activities associated with each sphere were viewed with correspondingly graded values' (Haboush 2003: 285). Haboush highlighted the moral superiority of the public sphere over the private sphere, something which has also been noted/acknowledged in China (Ko et al. 2003). Inspired by this revelation, it is suggested here that the closer someone moves towards the inner pole, the more freedom they have in manoeuvring the moral scripts that are accentuated in the outer sphere. In the outer space, someone needs to comply with norms and moral scripts in order to find social acceptance. In the inner sphere, the moral scripts that are subject to affirmation and recognition in the outer sphere lose their social stage and so, whilst the moral scripts may continue to impact upon the self, they may not function in the same binding way as they would in a public sphere. Transgression of publicly acclaimed moral scripts in an inner space would be unknown to the social audience, and so less likely to impact someone's reputation and social status. This re-conception of the inner-outer boundary as a signifier of moral agency is particularly suited to accounting for women's agency, given the Chinese tendency to infer that the inner and outer sphere coincide with the gendered division of labour between public and private spheres. This division is implicated in the common phrase 'men dominate the outer and women dominate the inner'. While the superiority of the 'outer' is scarcely contested, women's autonomy and control over the 'inner' has been legitimized through this discourse.

Going beyond the crude division between public and private spheres, Chinese understanding of how inner and outer is defined is far more fluid and context-specific. The seminal work of Chinese sociologist Fei (1948) demonstrates that Chinese social relations operate through social networks of personal relations with the self at the centre and decreasing closeness thereafter like the ripples created when a stone is thrown into a lake. Therefore, from the very outset, one is enabled to set the boundary between inner rings and outer rings according to one's relations with the audience and then perform accordingly in different interactions.

The theoretical flexibility of the inner-outer concept sheds new light on women's 'submission' to sexual control in a workplace setting. In an 'outer' space, women need to conform to a moral script in order to maintain their own (and their family's) respectability. Conforming in this way is similar to wearing a 'gender mask' for the sake of social acceptance in other non-Western societies (Harris 2004: 21–24) to demonstrate one's capacity to produce 'public transcripts' appropriate to the needs of the

moment (Harris 2006; Rao 2012; Vera-Sanso 2000). What is compelling about the Chinese contextis is that, in a relational society which strongly emphasizes an individual's sociality and popularity with others, women may deliberately invoke the inner-outer boundary to exclude, isolate or shame people as the non-popular outsider through a performing practice. This involves conforming with public rules and rituals during interactions rather than demonstrating familiarity and intimacy that is commonly expected and experienced in their inner circle (see Chap. 7).

Sexuality and Development

Over the last decade, Western feminist scholars have pointed to the silence on sexuality matters at the heart of mainstream Development Studies and attributed it to its being viewed as a heath sector issue. Cornwall, Correa and Jolly (2008) argue that sexuality matters because the silences, taboos and social expectations that surround sex reinforce unhelpful gender stereotypes that can be as problematic for heterosexual men and women as they are for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people. Rather than treating sex as a source of risk and vulnerability, they argue for the inclusion of positive rights such as freedom to seek sexual autonomy, fulfilment and pleasure.

Cornwall and Jolly (2006, 2009) make an important contribution to our understanding of the relation between sexuality and multiple dimensions of development and of the importance to break societal silences about women's sexuality, which should be celebrated rather than being viewed as a danger that supports the policing and containment of women. They rightly propose that we find new ways to communicate about sex, reframe the boundaries of what is acceptable, and foster a sexual rights discourse that recognizes the cross-cultural construction of sexuality. However, it is worth highlighting here two notes of caution with respect to the pleasure-centred approach.

The first is concerned with the term of pleasure. Anthropologists warn against misinterpreting sexual practices by viewing them through a lens of inappropriate assumptions (Weston 1993). For example, Rival, Slater and Miller (1998) found sexual pleasures situated within mundane acts of sociality among Huaorani people in Amazonian Ecuador whilst a study on sex and social change in Hong Kong (Jackson and Ho 2014) also indicated that conjugal intimacy must be mitigated within intergenerational dynamics. It is therefore important to understand sexual pleasure locally and how it is situated in the graded hierarchy of values within the local sociality.

Second, the lack of publically asserted sexual pleasure should not be used as a measure of women's powerlessness. In Chinese medicine and culture, there is not the same association between sex and sin as found in Judaeo-Christian traditions, and sex is seen as an aspect of nature (Mann 2011). The concealment of women in pre-modern China was not to discourage women from having sex but instead to reserve the beneficial sexual essence of women and to enhance the health of men. Women are seen as active agents in sex, according to the popular Chinese idiom: 'women in their thirties are like wolves and women in their forties are like tigers', and so women may adopt a pleasure-centred approach to sex in their inner sphere, but this agency is away from the social audience. The continued inner/outer distinction is influenced by other, seemingly unrelated factors, such as the lack of state welfare provision meaning that the wider family and kinship remain the main source of funding and support for individuals in contemporary China (Shang and Wu 2011), and so for a woman to damage her reputation may have profound economic and social implications in a relational society. Further, while China has undergone significant economic reform, the political-ideological control remains tight in post-Mao China, and if anything has got tighter in recent years. The lack of a widespread civic culture and the coercive political context may mean that a demand for Chinese women to assert themselves for sexual pleasure publicly may be over simplistic, causing more harm to women rather than liberating them.

Towards Local Feminist Research

Women's Studies emerged as an academic discipline after Mao's death. Because feminism originated in the West, and China has complicated historical relations with the West, localizing Western theories and concepts in a Chinese context is an ongoing debate among Chinese feminist scholars. One prominent group, represented by Li Xiaojiang, emphasizes the particularity and uniqueness of China and so is critical of adopting Western feminist theories to explain Chinese phenomena (Li 1999). Li bases her argument on epistemological considerations (the differences in language and traditions that could lead to distortions and detrimental effects in transfers across cultures) and political grounds (the 'imperialist', or more precisely, 'postcolonial' structures underlying these transfers) (Spakowski 2011). The alternative school of thought, represented by Du Fangqin and Wang Zheng, emphasizes that the particularities of China only testify to the local within

the global: that is, 'to develop Chinese women and gender studies one needs a global perspective, regional comparison and local action' (Du 2001: 38).

Spakowski (2011) critiqued Chinese feminist scholars' reference to the 'local' on the grounds that there are implicit global cultural 'flows' or 'travels' of theory. While 'local' scholars might be assigned some agency in terms of selecting or modifying 'global' theory, in the final analysis they are still reduced to occupying the receiving end of transfers. Moreover the notion of 'local' as a historically and culturally partial place that is isolated from any outside influence is a concept that could easily lead to essentialist definitions of what is Chinese.

Taking Spakowski's warnings into consideration, this book implicates 'local' in a considered manner. First, local does not simply equal an essentialist cultural and historical location; Western biological determinist understanding has been influential in the constitution of the Chinese gender-sex system. The Communist Party's mass mobilization of women into paid employment and political intervention in the reproductive arena (creating the urban only child generation) have all played a part in shaping what constitutes the local (see Chap. 2). Rather than viewing recent socio-economic transformations as a replacement of previous historic systems, it is suggested here that the location is grounded in the accumulative yet interactive mosaic of history, culture and socio-economic policy embedded in the tensions and connections with the outside world. Second, it is disputed here that there exists a hierarchy between local and global since the hierarchy itself is a manifestation of postcolonial and neoliberal capitalist economic and political constructions. Western feminist theories are 'local' studies, albeit written from a Euro-American social reality; local should therefore be considered a critical site for feminist theory production. Rather than claim that local findings represent a concrete manifestation of global structures, I suggest that grounding theory production in local research is the first step to examining the links, interactions and contradictions among various locations to understand what might possibly constitute a global structure.

To understand the ways in which gender and sexuality work in the politics of domination and subversion in the Chinese workplace, an adapted version of Connell's (2005) three dimensional structure of gender is used here as an analytical framework to examine the ethnographical data (see Chaps. 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8). Connell points to three sites for examination—power, production, cathexis (emotional attachment)—but acknowledges that these should offer a framework rather than being a fixed philosophical scheme. How these dimensions work in each location is deeply influenced by the

ways gender and sexuality are framed and enacted in socio-cultural locality. Further, the three dimensions are not separate institutions; the different dimensions of gender constantly interweave and condition each other.

Power

Informed by various strands of discussions on power, a three-dimensional understanding of power is adopted here. The three-dimensional model of power was first used by Lukes (1974) building upon Bachrach and Baratz's (1962) approach to the two faces of power. It has an overt dimension (the way decisions are made), covert dimension (the ability to prevent decision making) and latent dimension (the ability to implant in people's minds interests that are contrary to their own good). In order to capture the politics between men and women, I have adapted these three dimensions.

The concept of direct power (overt dimension) is similar to Weber's (1947) interpretation whereby power is viewed as the capacity to make someone do something that they would otherwise not do. Here organizational power of the bureaucracy is the source of the mechanization and routinization of human life. Connell and Pearse (2015) cite two examples of men's direct power over women: (i) patriarchal power (the power of husbands over wives and fathers over daughters) which persists despite resistance of many kinds; and (ii) since men control most large-scale organizations, bureaucracy produces gender inequality. While men hold the balance of direct power, this does not mean that women do not have any direct power; in the Chinese role-oriented gender system, a role will have a positional power attached to it, no matter how strong or weak it is. As a woman's role changes, her ability to exercise direct power will change.

The concept of indirect power (covert dimension) is mostly captured in Foucault's work on the concept (Foucault 1991). Foucault rejects the existence of an ordered and regulating agency and points to the decentralization of the position of power. According to him, there is no source from which actions stem, only an infinite series of practices and so he called for a focus on the micro-politics of power: 'The power exercised on the body is conceived not as a property, but as a strategy, that its effects of domination are attributed not to "appropriation", but to dispositions, manoeuvres, tactics, techniques, functionings' (1991: 26). Also in this space, Scott's work in Malaysia revealed the ways that subaltern people resist domination (Scott 1990). He used 'public transcripts' to describe the open, public interactions between dominators and oppressed and 'hidden transcripts'

for the critique of power that goes on offstage, which power holders do not see or hear.

Confucianism and biological determinism dictate that Chinese women tend to hold the lower end of a hierarchical relation in the yin-yang model and so men are more likely to access direct power. However, indirect power is not a concrete property but is grounded in the exact relation/mechanism that ties men to women in the pursuit of harmony. Women are a compulsory and necessary part of the co-production of gender; and because of the interdependence, this mechanism innately equips the subalterns with a capacity to strategize and manoeuvre and a possibility to transform the relationship.

The third latent dimension of power is captured by what Bourdieu termed 'symbolic power'.[2] According to Bourdieu, 'symbolic power is a power of constructing reality' and is 'invisible power which can be exercised only with the complicity of those who do not want to know they are subject to it or even that they themselves exercise it' (Bourdieu 1994: 164). Symbolic power can be possessed and used as an instrument of domination by individuals or groups. The mechanism by which symbolic power manifests itself in society is as a 'structured and structuring medium tending to impose an apprehension of the established order as natural' (Bourdieu 1994: 169). While Bourdieu used this term extensively to explain the process of class reproduction, symbolic power is embedded in gender struggle as gender and sexuality are also 'symbolic systems'—systems of mental structures and principles of hierarchization.

In China, the complementary dichotomies of masculine and feminine were naturalized through Western scientific discourse at the turn of twentieth century, with men more likely to possess symbolic power. However, while symbolic power gained by men might facilitate easier access to direct power, it is not indestructible. The challenge to the power of symbolic imposition depends upon an awareness of its arbitrary nature, that is, the 'disclosure of the objective truth and the destruction of belief' (Bourdieu 1994: 170). Moreover, symbolic expressions change over time and recent social and demographic transformations may affect gendered attitudes. For example, young urban women of the Only Child Generation have grown up at the centre of their natal family and possess unprecedented educational capital (Tsui and Rich 2002; Liu 2007); with the growth of the internet and other forms of social media giving increased access to alternative gender meanings, whether men's symbolic power will persist and be sustained remains to be seen.

Production Relations

Some form of gendered division of labour is found in most economies in the world. How the division is organized varies between different cultures and different times. In pre-modern China, one dominant form of gendered division was encapsulated by the phrase 'men plough, women weave'. In the Maoist period, women workers were concentrated in light industries such as textiles while men dominated heavy industries such as machinery (Liu 2007). In the Post-Mao era, migrant women and less-educated urban women primarily occupy the lower end of service industries such as catering and domestic work (Jacka 2006; Wang 2000). The division amongst, and impact on, white-collar professionals in post-Mao China will be explored in the chapters that follow.

The second area of examination is the division between 'work' (paid labour) and 'home' (unpaid labour) (Connell and Pearse 2015). It is well documented by Western feminist scholars that the patriarchal structuring of the family contributed to gendered location in the workplace: the exploitation of women's work in the labour market is 'constructed within the terms of…her subordination to husband, her responsibility for child, other dependents and home' (Cockburn 1991: 84). However, the relationship between work and home is not straightforward for young professional women in urban China. The inner-outer separation legitimized women's control over the domestic sphere; the mass redundancy in the 1990s forced the women of the Cultural Revolution Generation out of their workplace (Solinger 2002), and the dominant one-child family structure in urban areas has meant that young women do not need to do the housework themselves and instead rely upon the unpaid labour of older female relatives. As family remains a core part of social relations in China, family may also become a resource for women to resist organizational control (see Chap. 8).

Cathexis *(*Emotional Relations*)*

Connell (2005) uses cathexis to capture the practices that shape and realize desire and emotions. One major arena of emotional attachment is sexuality. Though sexuality cannot be reduced to gender, it is often organized on the basis of gender. Western feminist scholars have extensively documented the ways in which gender and sexuality are mutually constitutive of each other. In China, as noted earlier, the link between gender and sexuality is captured in the ways in which women's social status is

measured by their sexuality. This gender-sex system has specific implications for professional women in post-Mao workplaces.

The wider context of sexualization of women has re-eroticized organizations and the interplay of gender and sexuality contributes to the masculine hierarchy in the workplace. Because professional women's sexuality is strictly moralized, they do not find sexuality a site of empowerment as found by some Western studies (e.g. Fleming 2007) and research among Chinese sex workers (see Ding and Ho 2008). However, their conformity to the public scripts on women's sexuality should not be viewed simply as a sign of their powerlessness. A more nuanced analysis is required to take into consideration the inner-outer boundary as a signifier of moral agency (see Chap. 5).

In recent decades, with the expansion of service industries, Western feminist scholars have examined the ways in which capitalist economies commercialize feelings and gender stereotypes and exploit women workers' emotional labour in customer-oriented jobs (see Hochschild 1983). While the Chinese market economy has followed suit, and female sales professionals are expected to perform emotional, aesthetic and sexual labour in their encounters with their clients (see Chap. 6), these emotions can be a liberating force for women in their workplace interactions. By reclaiming the rhetoric of harmony as well as drawing upon a feminized notion of emotionality, female employees exhibit various emotions as a critical weapon to shame and manipulate their male colleagues and superiors to turn subordination on its head (see Chap. 7). Heckert notes 'The state, capitalism, empire, patriarchy, heternormativity, the university – these are not simply institutions; they are patterns of relationship. The question of how to transform, or even to destroy, the institution, may at the same time be the question of how to relate differently' (Heckert 2010: 409). In a society that places great emphasis upon harmony and relationships, a work organization is an institution as well as being formed by patterns of relationship, and thus women's strategies to relate differently might enact a change from the bottom up, one that organizational management has not yet envisaged.

Notes

1. The performance requirement embedded in the Chinese role-oriented principle resonates with Butler's (1990) notion of 'theatrical' or performative genders in society.
2. Connell and Pearse (2015) added a fourth dimension of gender structure—symbolism, culture and discourse. This addition is captured here within discussions on the Power dimension.

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CHAPTER 4

'The Weaker Sex'

This chapter examines the gender division of labour in the Organization and the consequences of this division. Grounded in feminist discussions on gender, class[1] and organizations, this chapter reveals the ways in which highly educated women have become white-collar proletariats. One key mechanism in legitimizing the economic hierarchy between men and women in the Organization was through naturalization of gender. The consequence of this is both symbolic and material: despite having equal educational qualifications, women tended to hold subsidiary positions and so have limited access to company profits (i.e. bonus and share awards). However, by making sense of their own experiences in upbringing and education, these women questioned gendered expectations and challenged the notion of men's superiority over women. It is revealed here how the collision between ideas as both 'received' from company management and gender stereotypes, and those created through lived experiences as the only child, became central to the continual interplay between women's consent and resistance to their experience as wage workers and as women.

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Organizing Work

Roles and Responsibilities

The sales department, which in itself was sub-divided into various sectors depending on export region, was generally viewed as the core of the company. In the sales department there were two types of positions: sales manager and sales assistant.

The role of sales manager involved meeting clients, negotiating sales deals and other auxiliary market expansion activities. As the company's sales were export-orientated, the opportunity to bring in new deals mostly arose when sales managers attended biannual Chinese trade fairs and overseas trade product exhibitions. For the rest of the year, a sales manager's duties mainly involved the day-to-day management of existing clients and deals. It was commonly understood that a sales manager who excelled would be promoted to section manager and therefore be responsible for all staff (including managers) in an individual regional section.

The role of a sales assistant involved looking after all aspects of an order, such as negotiating with suppliers, organizing transportation and payment, and managing client queries. In 2008, when I conducted my fieldwork, there were 13 male sales managers and one female sales manager; 24 female sales assistants and 10 newly recruited sales assistants (four men, six women). By the end of 2015, the four men from the 2008 recruitment round had all became sales managers, including two section managers, but the six women were still sales assistants.

The official company justification for the gendered division of labour in the sales department (i.e. predominantly male managers and predominantly female assistants) was an historic difference in qualifications and a twofold gender discourse relating to technical ability and spatial arrangement. Before the millennium, the division between male sales managers and female sales assistants was marked and accounted for by the difference in qualifications (the former with university degrees and the latter with vocational school degrees). However, over the five years (to 2008), the educational background of women sales assistants changed considerably with the majority holding a university degree. In the most recent recruitment round, all six women had graduated from top Chinese universities with two having Master's degrees in science. Nevertheless, the female graduate recruits were still channelled into specializing in foreign trade procedure operations, which could realistically only lead to an experienced

sales assistant role. This was in contrast to their male counterparts who started as assistants but were given more varied opportunities and expected to develop into sales managers.

To account for the discrepancy between women's educational qualifications and their vocational destiny, management invoked a particular twofold gender discourse. The first part of the discourse was built upon a gendered assumption in respect of machines and technology. Management claimed that since the company exported machine parts, men were naturally better at technical know-how than women. However, given that many women sales assistants held engineering degrees and the export machinery was not unfamiliar, this explanation seemed to have only limited value.[2]

The second part of the discourse represented the defining reason for a gendered division of labour. I was told by the management that it was not safe for women to go on business trips and, as noted above, these business trips were a key managerial task and the way in which new sales were generated. To consolidate the gender discourse, management gave the example of the chaotic state of some African countries, and cited internet and newspaper horror stories of robbery, violence and rape incurred during business trips and these circulated in the office. This was despite the fact that many trips were made to European countries and North America.

It is worth noting that this spatial arrangement between men and women has some striking similarities with the experiences of women workers in pre-Communist China. Traditionally the proper place of women was closely linked with the inner domain of the family while the proper place of men was associated with the outer public world. As a result, in the early twentieth century, women who worked in paid labour outside their family's (inner) space were seen to do so at the risk of violence and disgrace (Rofel 1999). The views of contemporary urban white-collar Chinese management suggest that the boundary between the workplace and household has been redefined, but that the gendered association of 'inner' and 'outer' remains strong. Underlying this modern gendered spatial arrangement is the belief that women are physically weaker and less capable than men and require protection in the public world. The naturalization of gender validates this spatial discourse.

This inner-outer arrangement requires further enquiry. During my time in the Organization, I noted that female employees did take business trips to the company's domestic suppliers; it was the foreign trips that women were excluded from. When questioned about this, some section managers jokingly stated that they did not want to let foreigners take advantage of

Chinese women. This response was premised upon the nationalist assumption that Chinese women are safer with Chinese men, that it is their duty to protect the purity of Chinese women, and that women are a signifier of national boundary (cf. Einhorn 2006 Yuval-Davis 1997). This nationalist gender rhetoric seemed to drive the difference in gender division of labour between this foreign trade company and the other domestic-oriented Chinese companies that were studied. The latter were far more relaxed and even complicit in encouraging women employees to interact with their clients (see Chap. 6).

In the sales department, it seemed that a male clique played a hunter role, with associated glory and prestige, whilst presiding over an almost exclusively female subsidiary support network. This gendered organizational logic requires a re-questioning of the association between women and work in the Chinese context. Although urban women have been established as full-time lifelong paid employees since the late 1950s, and the contemporary generation of young women had a recognized working identity, from interviews with male managers, it was found that the concept of 'work' needs to be further differentiated into the sub-terms 'career' and 'job' to understand the varying gendered expectations.

One male sales manager explained to me what he considered to be the motivating force behind women's desire to be sales managers:

> Some women in the company want to become sales managers, in fact, they don't know how hard-working a sales manager is. What they see is the income difference between two positions. It is exactly the income gap that motivates the women to desire to be a sales manager. It is not because she wants to achieve any sense of success by being a sales manager.

Another male sales manager held similar views on the relationship between women and work: '*work is important to women but it doesn't need to be challenging, it just needs to be easy and stable work so that women have something to do with their time*'. The male interviewees considered women's work to be a simple matter of generating income, or even just a hobby to kill time. In contrast, for men, the male interviewees implicitly considered work in the sense of a career, that is, a means to take on challenges and to gain success and one of progression and continuous work. This subtle division was also aggravated by the fact that in official and popular discourse women were still considered mainly responsible for the domestic domain despite their mobilization into the workforce since the late 1950s. According

to Acker's theory of gendered organizations, there is a gendered nature to common concepts such as 'job' and 'worker' in organizational logic. These concepts assume a particular organization based upon the image of a white man who is dedicated to 'his full-time life-long job, while his wife and other women take care of his personal needs and his children' (Acker 1990: 149). In the Chinese white-collar context, the concept of career is closely linked with a masculine image, fighting for success at work, with family responsibilities taken care of by his wife.

Related to the gendered associations of job and career is the greater importance that marriage is considered to hold for a woman. As a male manager put it, using a Chinese idiom: '*the biggest fear for a man is to enter the wrong occupation whilst the biggest fear for a woman is to marry the wrong man*'. As a result of the culturally embedded difference between the gendered weight attached to work and family, the company turned a blind eye to female staff who used their family responsibilities to defer demands at work. Although the embedded managerial attitude allowed women to juggle demands between work and family, it reinforced the gendered expectation at work and the gendered organization between domestic life and social production.

Remuneration

The organizing principles and practices of work resulted in a vertical segregation by gender and have significant class consequences for women's access to the company's profits. As Acker (2006: 450) puts it 'wage setting and supervision are class practices'. The wage structure of the company consisted of a basic wage, welfare allowances and a bonus. The first two components were calculated based on a number of factors such as educational level, years of service and positional pay grade. The lowest level pay grade of a sales manager equalled the highest level pay grade of a sales assistant. The major differential in take-home-pay between grades was due to differing bonus entitlements.

The bonus of a sales manager was equal to 15 % of the profit contribution of all deals completed, and in a good month this could be more than a sales assistant earned in a year. Sales assistants, who may have made a significant contribution to the successful completion of a deal, did not receive a bonus based on profits. The bonus of a sales assistant was set within a fixed range with the exact figure determined by their line manager's assessment of their work performance. In other words, while a sales

manager's income was subject to market conditions, the income of a sales assistant was subject to labour control.[3] In order to downplay the injustice felt by the assistants, management frequently tried to highlight the volatile nature of the markets in company-wide meetings to reinforce a notion that the sales managers' bonuses were unstable.

In addition to the officially documented wage structure, there was an unspoken, opaque practice that was crucial to the economic polarization in the company: the annual distribution of dividends from company shares. Although the company was officially classified as state-owned, up to 30 % of its registered share capital was held by management staff[4] and, unbeknown to sales assistants, sales managers were invited to buy company shares at a discounted price. Since the company was both highly profitable and had grown considerably in a relatively short period of time, through dividends several managers had become Chinese millionaires. As one male sales manager (aged 30) said '*I have enough money even to provide for my grandchildren*'.

When I asked if management was planning to allow assistants to buy company shares, the General Manager Wang said '*all sales managers are included however it won't become a rule to include sales assistants. Whether to give or not is arbitrary. If the management felt a certain assistant had behaved well, we would give some to her.*' In 2010, during a follow-up visit to the company, one woman (sales assistant) interviewee had recently been invited to buy some shares in the company (albeit a fraction of those held by sales managers). While the interviewee could not afford to buy the shares on her existing wage she was able to borrow the capital from her parents. She was warned solemnly by management not to reveal details of the purchase to others in the company.

The analysis of the organizational principles and practices of work and the distribution of remuneration in the sales department shows that the organization hierarchy between sales managers and sales assistants constitutes and replicates dominance and subordination relations that are characteristic of class. The income gap between sales managers and sales assistants is polarizing, with a class hierarchy built upon a vertical segregation by gender. The legitimization of gender segregation has been established through gendered associations of career and job, and naturalized gender stereotypes. Indeed, the secretive practice of share and dividend distribution obscures the polarized positions between all managers and (most) assistants and, in doing so, jeopardizes solidarity among assistants.

Consent and Resistance

In the gendered and classed hierarchy of this white-collar organization, how do women sales assistants respond? This question is addressed below by applying a feminist appropriation of Gramsci's theory of hegemonic ideas focused upon class relations (Gramsci 1971). Pollert (1981) used Gramsci's theory through a lens of gender to explore the collision between ideas as both 'received' from dominant class and gender stereotypes, and those created through lived experiences during her study of female factory workers in England. She demonstrated that the contradiction between hegemonic ideas and common sense which comes from an active 'making sense of the world of lived experiences' (Gramsci 1971) were central to the continual interplay between women's consent and resistance to their experience as wage workers and as women. In the modern Chinese organization used in this study, the concept of contradiction is embedded in women's attitudes towards the management's ideological hegemony on the gendered division of labour in the company.

When asked if being a woman shaped her life choices, a 24-year-old sales assistant with a university degree in engineering replied with frustration: 'not until now in the company. I was always expected to excel academically. But now the company thinks of us so differently. My heart sank when my line manager said to me in the annual review meeting, "*don't work so hard; you also need to have time to find a good husband*".' Many women sales assistants rejected the gendered expectations at work. One said '*the company has very different expectations based upon sex, but I feel men and women are of equal importance at work*'. Another complained: '*the sex stereotype is so strong. It appears that we women are naturally less capable than men. As a matter of fact, women are actually more capable than men.*'

On one level, many women firmly rejected the assumption of men's mental superiority over women at work. This questioning of male and female abilities arose from the women's own experiences of growing up as an only child in their family (as in Gramsci's notion of actively 'making sense of the world of lived experiences'). Studies have found that an unintended consequence of the one-child policy is that there are no gender differences in educational development between single-girl and single-boy families in urban China (Tsui and Rich 2002: 74). On another level, women sales assistants seemed to accept the justification that women are not suitable for overseas business trips; one important reason is that they had hardly

any experience of going abroad and so took for granted that what was described to them was factual. Furthermore, the assumption of a weaker female body has wider resonance in public gender discourse in China. For example, Croll (1985) pointed to the fundamental contradiction between Maoist gender rhetoric, that women can do whatever men can do, and the widely accepted belief that women are physically suited to lighter jobs.

Women's more limited experiences and the wider biological determinist discourse both contributed to a process of misrecognition—'the fact of recognition a *violence* which is wielded precisely inasmuch as one does not perceive it as such' (Bourdieu 1994: 168, my own emphasis). This violence did not depend upon physical coercion for the maintenance of order. Instead, it was symbolic—'the violence which is exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity' (Jenkins 1992: 147). Therefore the symbolic violence of masculinity has secured and culturally reproduced the naturalized order between men and women grounded in their physique, which in turn reinforces the legitimacy of the superior status of men in a company. This ideological reproduction, enabled through men's symbolic power, has significant consequences for women's resistance in the workplace.

Class Consciousness

Women sales assistants were aware of their disadvantaged economic position and frequently joked bitterly during the interviews about their status in the company: 'although the company is so glorious from the outside, there is a huge difference inside. We are not white-collar workers; actually we are just blue-collar workers that happen to work in the offices.' I was told about their fight for welfare provision in 2002; according to Chinese labour regulations, employers should contribute to a pension, medical and unemployment fund for all staff. However, all sales assistants were deprived of this welfare entitlement at that time. The sales assistants therefore initiated a united petition and, after half a year of persistent requests to the Head of the Central Administration Office, sales managers and other senior staff, the company acquiesced. From this incident, it is evident that the subordinates had the group solidarity to fight for their interests.

However, there was no appetite to fight against the hierarchical division of labour based upon gender. Instead, the class consciousness of sales assistants seemed to fluctuate in different contexts, contingent upon the presence of a gender order. This is examined through consideration of two pairs of Manager-Assistant relationships. The first pair consists of a

30-year-old male sales manager, Yang, and a 25-year-old female sales assistant, Qing. Yang was married with no children. Qing was single. As gender is inherently role-oriented and intersectional (Chap. 3), the older age and marital status have strengthened Yang's dominant masculine status. The micro-level interactions between them were embedded in symbolic family relations. For example, when Yang was about to go on business trips, he would often say to Qing, 'look after the things within the family well'. Yang also acted as an 'older brother', often enquiring into Qing's private life, such as where she lived, where to go on dates and so on.

Qing could not do the same to Yang. Although Qing could assert some autonomy and power in managing the tasks done in the 'family', their relationship was heavily reliant upon the roles and expectations associated with their gender identities. The expected gender order between an older married man and a younger single woman made this arrangement so natural that a power relation was barely perceived to exist. In this pair, overt conflict was minimized and the unequal position between them was obscured by the 'natural' gender order.

In contrast, the only vertical relationship that consisted of a *woman* sales manager (albeit low-level among managers) and a *woman* sales assistant was less harmonious. The sales manager, Wang, was 29 years old and married with no children. The sales assistant, Li, was 27 years old and married, also with no children. Older age and marital status did not help Wang in the same way as Yang. While Wang spoke well of her assistant and put her forward for a special reward in the company, Li and other assistants referred to Wang as the 'exploiter', criticizing her for making Li work harder than other managers (although, at least from my observation, it seemed that Wang allocated a similar volume of tasks as other male sales managers).

Since involvement in homosocial activities among women was a way to demonstrate one's popularity (see Chap. 7), one tactic that the sales assistants used to fight the 'exploiter' was to exclude Wang from informal encounters both at work and outside work. In the dining hall at lunchtime, most female sales assistants sat in groups or pairs, but more often than not Wang sat alone or with male managers. During interviews Wang confided that she felt lonely and isolated at work. The difficulty in the Wang-Li relationship lay in the fact that Wang could not extract any power from her gender, and instead she had to assert only the authority that came with her position. In effect, women sales assistants saw Wang's authority as 'unnatural' while male managers' authority was taken for granted. In this pair, class politics were pushed to the fore.

On class consciousness, the Marxist framework identified a necessary move for the proletariat in the class struggle, from being a 'class in itself', that is, a structurally created entity, to a 'class for itself', a class conscious of its position and mission (Lukacs 1922 [1968]). Comparing the two pairs of relationships just discussed, it seems that when faced with male managers, women sales assistants would act as 'a class in itself' while in front of a female sales manager, they became 'a class for itself'. Such transformation is closely dependent upon the presence of a gender order, illustrating class's dynamic and complex relation with gender.

Three Paths

With the challenges to the collective fight against naturalized gender discrimination in the Organization, women resorted to different, individualized, paths. These three paths, which are explored below, were to pursue self-development, prioritize family, and/or look for other opportunities.

On the first path, both single and married women evoked a new definition of success and prioritized their own pursuit of self-development. The expression, *cheng jia li ye* (setting up a family and establishing a career) is supposed to refer to success in a person's life. But its application is gendered. Priority will be given to the first event with reference to a woman's life, but the second with reference to a man's life. Through education and early upbringing, women of the Only Child Generation have already reinterpreted the traditional expectation and internalized a strong masculine career-oriented ambition. Now with their career plans disturbed, they discredit the masculinized version of employment-based success and reinvent a notion of success grounded in all-round personal development entailing both material and non-material pursuits.

Jia had been a sales assistant in the company for over five years. She was conscious of the second-class status of sales assistants and often complained about the management when interviewed. Although she acknowledged there was a glass ceiling, she would not leave the company because she suffered from a chronic illness and the state-owned nature of the Organization allowed her to reimburse up to 80 or 90% of her medical bills. This level of reimbursement would be unthinkable in private companies. She joked: *I had tied my whole life to the company.* Having seen how sales managers profited in the Organization, Jia was not reconciled to her status in the company and secretly started an online company which bought and sold books. During the day, I noticed that Jia would check the sales of her bookshop using her work computer but skilfully switched onto another

screen whenever a colleague passed by. By 2011, Jia was married with a child and her online business reflected her change in status as it now sold products related to mothers and babies. Jia was not atypical; almost half of the sales assistants were engaged in online stock market trading[5] and quite a few women were proud of their success. As one put it, '*I am very successful in my stock market investment so I am not lacking in money. I know there is not much scope for my career development, but I really enjoy the friendship I have formed with other sales assistants so I do not want to leave here.*'

In addition to these sideline activities, some women were engaged in non-material pursuits, such as learning an instrument, creative writing and studying a foreign language. For example, one woman sales assistant I met in 2008 took piano lessons in her lunch break and had recently passed her eighth grade exam, another became a fluent French speaker after several years of studying. Through these activities, the women valued the challenges and experienced satisfaction and success from doing them, and this counterbalanced their unjust treatment at work. This reorientation of attitudes away from work and towards life fulfilment was in sharp contrast with male managers who often used phrases such as 'pressure' and 'tiredness' in my interviews with them; they were expected to prioritize employment success.

Despite women's success outside work, they wanted to keep these activities hidden from their colleagues. The women who undertook these activities all asked me not to mention them to any other female sales assistants. Because of the way gender and class had become infused in the Organization, the women's interest in self-development might be interpreted as an effort to transgress gendered class membership and, if revealed, might subject them to exclusion from homosocial activities.

On the second path, married female sales assistants prioritized their family instead of the company. As one woman put it, '*the company hoped for our loyalty, but instead we put our loyalty at home*'. Whilst this may sound family-oriented, they lead a different family life from that of their mothers' generation, who needed to juggle work and family responsibilities (Liu 2007). Instead, for this generation, a considerable amount of housework and childcare was undertaken by their own mothers and/or mothers-in-law.

Through their educational and economic capital, these women tried to create a high quality family life for themselves by invoking a new 'modern' way of living (e.g. a focus on leisure, health and travel). While these women strategically established a family orientation as an act of resistance, through a vicious circle, this reproduced the gendered expectation of

management (i.e. the association of women and family) and reaffirmed their subordinate position at work. This resistance strategy was built upon a gender construction that simultaneously created opposition to management exploitation and trapped the women.

The final path is departure. Over the last eight years since I first visited the Organization, three women have left the company; two chose to study abroad and one obtained a job in a foreign-owned company in hopes of a more open promotion route. This route was considered by a number of interviewees, however, to leave this company is not an easy decision to make. As Jia acknowledged, because the Organization is state-owned, it offers good welfare provision covering illness, childbirth and even contributes to wedding bills, which is rare in other types of Chinese companies. Further, the Organization is famous in the region, and leaving would imply an inability to survive at the highest level. Prospects outside the company may not be better. Faced by limited opportunities in this glorious organization, a woman sales assistant summarized her dilemma, using a classical Chinese saying '*chicken wing is tasteless for eating but it will be a pity to waste it*' (*shizhi wuwei qizhi kexi*).

At the Crossroads

The way gender and class are infused in the company means that being a woman would entail a subordinated class membership while being a man would entail a dominant class membership. Such a pattern made the lives of men and women who did not comply with such normalization in the company problematic. Zhao (30 years old) the Head of Central Office Administration (i.e. not part of the lucrative sales function) was the only woman at senior management level in the company. Through an analysis of her feelings towards male managers, female assistants and her male clerical assistant, there appears to be a fluidity in and between identity categories. Zhao's position at the crossroads of identity categories created particular frustrations, as well as spaces for coping strategies.

Zhao's department supervised trade transactions, managed personnel and undertook general administration, such as the organization of meetings and activities. Other senior managers viewed these as 'housekeeping' activities and so the department was ideal for a female manager to run. This clearly irked Zhao. Despite her annoyance, she invoked her gender identity to strategize in the all-male management environment. She explained, '*I think as a woman I have some advantage. If I make mistakes, the other managers will say, "she is just a woman, the weaker sex,*

let her go". If I try to put forward my plans, they will tolerate and accept them, "no need to be difficult with her".' Indeed, she succeeded in invoking her gender vulnerability to protect herself and to make her voice heard in the paternalistic environment. However, this strategy paradoxically reinforced and reproduced the gender order endorsed by the male management circle.

Since one of Zhao's tasks was to promote morale in the company, helping to build good relationships in the work force and in particular amongst female sales assistants was constantly on her mind. Unfortunately, as Zhao found, being a woman made it difficult for her to command respect: '*Look at Chen* [another male senior manager], *as a man, he can easily establish his authority. But for women, whether it is due to jealousy or lack of respect, I always feel the opposition from them. I need to readjust myself when I interact with them.*'

She gave a detailed example: '*they (women sales assistants) often gathered in the toilet*[6] *discussing food, the make-up and pets and so on. I feel these topics are so low brow. But in order to get close to them, I tried to appeal to their interest by talking to them about what they were interested in.*' In effect, Zhao tried to downplay her class identity and attempted to bond with the assistants as a woman. Although she could maintain a brief informal dialogue with the assistants, the distance between them was carefully guarded by the sales assistants. One of the male senior managers mocked this attempt to integrate, referring to her as the 'mole'.

Zhao's position at the crossroads between gender and class created a particular challenge when she interacted with the male clerical assistant in her department:

> '*Feng* [29 years old] *is almost the same age as me. But when I am in front of him, I don't know how to express it, I feel he is the older brother, I am just a young girl. I said to myself, how come I become so unconfident. I find it hard to assert authority in front of him. I need to show extra confidence but no matter what I try, I still appear as a woman.*'

Gender dictates the kind of power that a female boss is able to exercise in the Chinese context. As a relatively young female senior manager, Zhao's 'weaker' gender status dilutes any power she can draw upon from her bureaucratic position. Such a modification of power is closely embedded in the process through which class hierarchy is formed according to gender segregation within the company.

Feng serves as an example of men who were at the crossroads of gender and class in the company. Although young men started out as sales assistants in the sales department, they were channelled into sales management positions over time. Male staff in the Finance and Technical Support teams were viewed as being equipped with a specialism and treated with respect. However, there was limited potential for promotion and development for men (or women) in the Central Administration Office, and as such Feng was effectively in a position similar to that of a female sales assistant in the sales department.

During interactions with his boss Zhao, Feng was able to take the subject position and assert power in their relationship on the basis of his gender. This was done implicitly; for example, he always addressed Zhao by name, unlike the other sales assistants who added their manager's title when addressing them. It was also done explicitly; for example, he openly joked about Zhao's dress and accessories while women sales assistants only did this behind the backs of their male managers. However, his success in drawing upon the symbolic power of his gender was contingent upon the fragile status Zhao held as a result of her crossroads position. Within the same class membership, however, his gender identity did him no favours.

Due to the association of gender and class, a man was expected to be on the right career track, with a successful future to fight for. Nonconformity with the hegemonic masculine norm made Feng's life difficult among women clerical staff. As one sales assistant confided with contempt for Feng's role: 'a man was doing this kind of work!' At one informal gathering after lunch, in his presence, one female sales assistant said: 'Feng is so frugal, he couldn't afford to buy us ice creams.' She played upon his failure to conform with the hegemonic masculine image (successful and wealthy) to exert indirect power over him in public. Feng initially tried to answer back but ultimately just smiled awkwardly. Paradoxically, in the end, the crossroads between his gender and class membership created an opportunity for Feng. When a vacancy came up for a position as Administrative Director at a newly opened company factory owned by the Organization, Feng was selected to take the post. Although not advertised, it was implicitly understood that it was the incompatibility of his situation with the gendered class arrangement in the company that helped Feng attain the promotion, rather than his performance and ability.

The infusing of gender and class not only created a 'simultaneity of oppression' (Hull et al. 1982) in the company, it also preconditioned the ways in which individuals saw themselves and interacted with each other.

For example, the symbolic power possessed by the male managers helped to consolidate their dominant class position while the inferiority of the female manager's gender status made her dominant class position fragile. Furthermore, tensions, anxieties and sometimes opportunities arose for individuals (both men and women) who were at the crossroads between gender and class membership.

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the ways in which gender and class interact in the production and reproduction of gender division of labour in the Organization. Increasing polarization is taking place. The bureaucratic hierarchy between sales managers and sales assistants constituted and replicated dominance and subordination relationships that were characteristic of class. This class hierarchy was built upon a vertical segregation by gender. The experience of this Organization corresponds with the gendered and classed national picture. In 2010, 45.1 % of the professionals in state-owned companies and civic institutions were women; however they only constituted 16.8 % of senior managers, legislators and officials (Hausmann et al. 2011). Using data from China Family Panel Studies, scholars found that 91 % of the difference in wages between women and men, is 'unexplained' (Dasgupta et al. 2015). Therefore, women and men of similar socio-educational background often ended up with different wage outcomes, precisely because of gender discrimination.

The ethnographic data in this Organization reveals that the legitimization of gender discrimination was established through gendered connotations of 'career' and 'job' and naturalized gender stereotypes. By making sense of their own experiences in natal family and education, women sales assistants began to question gendered expectation at work. However, a biological determinist understanding of gender naturalized men's physical superiority over women, which in turn reinforced a belief in the legitimacy of the superior status of men in the company.

The symbolic violence achieved through the naturalization of gender enables men to possess more symbolic power, which can be transformed to other forms of power (i.e. bureaucratic power). The men's symbolic power is not innate but contingent upon their role and the context, captured in the experiences of Feng who did not comply with the hegemonic managerial masculinity in the Organization. Women's disadvantage in lacking symbolic power is a major barrier in climbing up the

organizational hierarchy. It creates a vicious circle, trapping women in second-class membership and limiting their potential for collective resistance. The lack of symbolic power is also a key obstacle for the few women managers in asserting their bureaucratic power in the Organization.

While highly educated women increasingly become white-collar proletariats, the perception of their career path should not be based upon an assumption of masculinized notions of success. Their only-child upbringing fostered an unprecedented ambition in personal development. Through sabotaging the notion of success grounded in employment and relying upon a reserved domestic labour force formed by older women in the wider family, women have resorted to different individualized paths in their pursuit of success and development.

Notes

1. While class is widely regarded as a difficult concept to define (see Crompton 2010), in the organizational setting it may be viewed as the 'enduring and systematic differences in access to and control over resources' (Acker 2006: 444). As Acker noted, class is analysed as a process of social relations within work organizations. Viewed through this prism, research can show the ways in which inequalities are formed and how class relations are interwoven with other relations such as gender (Acker 2000).
2. Western feminist studies have shown that male technical superiority is socially constructed: that is, it was not gained by men innately but was appropriated by them in their lifetime through social practices such as the definition of tasks and the selective design of tools (Wajcman 1991).
3. Sales managers had much more flexibility over time and space for work in comparison to sales assistants who were closely monitored by line managers and personnel officers. For example, all interviews with sales managers took place in their work time (sometimes in a café or in a private office) while all interviews with sales assistants happened in their personal time.
4. During the economic reforms, state-owned companies were encouraged to be registered as limited companies with shares and became listed on the market; this company went through the same process but was not listed on the stock market.
5. Some male employees also engaged in stock market trading but, because they were generally better paid, did not attach the same importance to it as women did.
6. As the office was open plan, toilets had become a place for socializing with each other without male/senior management interference. Sales assistants generally use online messaging services to arrange toilet breaks.

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CHAPTER 5

Sex in Work

The post-Mao era has witnessed growing consumerism and deployment of a sexualized femininity in the economic and public domain (see Chap. 2). Work organizations are also not immune from this wider resexualization of women. This chapter examines how sexuality is played out in organizational culture and how the interplay of gender and sexuality contributes to the reproduction of a masculine hierarchy in the workplace.

Western scholars have shown how sexualized workplace cultures are integral to organizational control and workplace relations (e.g. Adkins 1995; Tyler 2004; Fleming 2007). To help identify the organizational mechanism in sexual control, objectification theory is an effective analytical framework. Feminist theorists Nussbaum (1995) and Langton (2009) identified key features involved in the process of objectification:

1. *Instrumentality* (treating a person as a tool for the objectifier's purposes);
2. *Denial of autonomy* (treating a person as lacking in autonomy and self-determination);
3. *Inertness* (treating a person as lacking in agency and also in activity);
4. *Fungibility* (treating a person as interchangeable with other objects);
5. *Violability* (treating a person as lacking in boundary-integrity);
6. *Ownership* (treating a person as something that is owned by another);

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7. *Denial of subjectivity* (treating a person as someone whose experiences and feelings need not be taken into account);
8. *Reduction to body* (treating a person as identified with their body, or body parts);
9. *Reduction to appearance* (treating a person primarily in terms of how they look); and
10. *Silencing* (treating a person as if they are lacking the capacity to speak).

Embracing these features, the objectification of women involves the act of disregarding personal and intellectual abilities and capabilities of a woman and equating a woman's worth with her appearance and sexual functions (Langton 2009). This sexual objectification of women is widespread in Western culture, permeating advertising, popular consumption, and of course being present in pornography. China's market reform, commercial culture and public discourse have been imbued with this sexual objectification of women (Zurndorfer 2015) and this has infected organizational culture. Here I utilize this objectification framework to reveal the process in which female employees are sexualized and how the sexualization assists in the maintenance of gendered and hetero-normative control in the Organization.

While exposing the organizational mechanism, I warn against the practice of misinterpreting Chinese women's response by viewing them through the lens of inappropriate assumptions. As noted in Chap. 3, there is a long-established and deeply engrained link between sexuality and woman's social status and so sexuality remains a key marker of 'reputable' women's morality in post-Mao China. While women employees do not find sexualized office interactions a site of empowerment as found by some western studies (see Fleming 2007) and research among Chinese sex workers (Ding 2012), women's conformity to the public scripts on their sexuality should not be simply read as a sign of their powerlessness. This necessitates a more nuanced analysis invoking the inner-outer framework as a signifier of moral agency (see Chap. 3).

The Official Stance

When I first started working at the Organization, the assistant in Central Office Administration, Xiao Chen, gave me a booklet entitled 'Regulations on Employees' Everyday Behaviours'. The booklet had eight pages in total

dealing with everyday manners, office health and safety, and workplace discipline. The first page detailed the 'appearance' requirements in the workplace. Men were not allowed beards, to wear short trousers, a vest or sleeveless shirts. Women were not allowed to wear sleeveless shirts, tummy revealing, low-cut or tight clothing, and miniskirts (skirts needed to be at least knee-length), and their clothing needed to be opaque.

The different requirements of men and women were built upon an assumption that women's gender display is embedded in sexual ways. The prohibited clothing for women was associated with deviant women's sexuality whilst the men's dress code simply differentiated between casual and formal; men's sexuality was not used to define the parameters of their presentation in the workplace. As a consequence, management's different treatment of gender display sent an implicit message that women's sexuality should be monitored and controlled in the Organization, a modification of pre-modern Chinese script on concealment of women (Mann 2011). In practice, I noticed that whilst women complied with the dress code—all women wore feminine, but non-sexy clothes—the style and colours of women's clothing was diverse. Moreover, none of the women wore a suit or formal dress; and during my entire stay I only saw one woman (sales assistant) dressed formally and that was because she was going to fly to a trade fair later that day. All the men wore an open collar shirt and/or suit every day.

Whilst the official regulations prescribed a desexualization of women for the organizational image, my interviews with senior management revealed another side of the story. When I asked how General Manager Wang felt about managing female employees, he reflected, '*women have significant functions. For example, in our industry, the pressure is high and there is lots of boring work. If all employees are men, I feel it very difficult for the organization.*' Mr Wang was married, in his mid-30s and also the Party Secretary for the company. Perhaps because of his position, he was cautious in his words and tended to give ambiguous or indirect answers during my encounters with him. Here he revealed that women employees had significant functions but did not specify how. Instead, he implied that the presence of women would reduce the pressure in men's work. However, most of his males colleagues were more explicit and the phrase '*if men and women work together, the work won't be tiring*' featured frequently in the interviews with them.

How would this pressure be reduced for men?During a conversation with a Section Manager, he gave me a clear answer to the question.

Q: What is the most suitable proportion of women in a workplace?
A: I like a workplace with lots of women. It feels very pleasant.
Q: How?
A: I don't know how to say. It feels pleasant with women around, doesn't it? Feeling like having one on the left and one on the right, it is extremely pleasant.
Q: How will this arrangement play in the workplace?
A: It can stimulate productivity. Life won't be boring. If I flirt with women colleagues, the atmosphere will be lifted up. I hope that in my section there are considerable levels of office banter as I find it can be inspiring.

The interviews with male managers indicated an encouragement of an eroticized workplace culture, which they considered conducive to boosting morale and productivity. Eroticization of the organization is formulated through, and symbolized in, the *interactions* between men and women at work. The underlying message is that women are brought into the workplace to stimulate male workers. The discrepancy between management's desire to eroticize workplace culture and official regulation on appearance creates a paradox for women. While women's desexualized appearance is an important symbol of the Organization's professional image for outsiders, female employees were sexually objectified by the masculine management team within the Organization; one consequence of this was that female employees were routinely subject to sexual innuendo at work.

Office Banter

Zhao had a Master's degree in Human Resource Management, and was head of the Central Office Administration. She was slim, good-looking and 30 years old. She was the only woman in the senior management team. Every three months, the company held a two-day management meeting. After I had been in the company for a couple of months, I attended one of these sessions. Zhao, her deputy, and I were the only women at the gathering. In the opening report by General Manager Wang, he noted the company's initiative to build a factory on a recently purchased piece of land. During the course of his presentation, Wang mentioned that it would be good to plant trees around the factory, then turned to Zhao, smiled and said 'the tree planted by us two will grow fast and strong'. All the other managers laughed. I glanced at Zhao and saw that she remained

silent without any facial expression. Jokes like this occurred several times during the morning meeting. At lunchtime, all the participants of the meeting were invited to a meal at a nearby restaurant. Our table consisted of General Manager Wang, his deputy, a few section managers, and the three women. After asking Zhao how her wedding preparations were going, Mr Wang said '*why did you choose your husband? I heard he looked like me*.' Zhao replied without much facial expression, '*Yes, both you and him are chubby*.' Then laughter burst out at the table.

A while after this joke, the Deputy Manager turned to me and said that since I had the highest degree at the table, he would like to know my opinion in mate selection. He set out a scenario in which the men at our table were candidates for me and asked whom I would select and why. I thought as an outsider to the company, I would be excluded from the banter and so his proposal took me by surprise. In response I explained mate selection in academic terms and diluted the sexual element. I could tell the Deputy was disappointed by my answer as it did not achieve the 'atmosphere stimulating' effect he hoped for.

After this close experience of office banter, I met with Zhao separately and asked her to reflect upon these interactions. Age and marital status seemed to play a key role in the women that men chose as targets for their banter. Zhao felt that since she was the youngest of the three women present, and not married, she was also the softest target. When I asked her how she felt about this, Zhao replied:

> The first time I was really uncomfortable. They told dirty jokes about me, I wanted to find a crack on the ground and slip into it. In fact, at the time I wondered if he was joking or meant it. I felt really awkward and didn't know what to do. Nowadays I am completely used to it. I am neither angry nor care. I have no reaction. When I hear the joke, I feel the same as when someone asks 'have you eaten?'

Apart from the General Manager, other male managers, including those of a rank similar to her, also made jokes at Zhao's expense. However, I did not witness men of a lower rank make sexually referenced jokes towards Zhao. She recalled:

> Look, sometimes when we have lunch together, the section manager A will say something to me like 'beauty, you are my flower, you are my lover'. B, C, D (other section managers) also liked to joke at me. When I was planning my annual leave, a section manager heard and said, in front of my assistant

> Chen in the office, ‘how come you planned to go to Sanya again? Haven’t you already been there? We two went there together once’. Chen threw a glance at me immediately. I knew that she took it as true. I explained to her, ‘he is joking, don’t take it seriously’.

Zhao’s experiences were common and permeated the interactions female sales assistants had with senior male managers. Section Manager Zhou was fond of telling jokes at his female assistants’ expense but he also commented there should be a boundary, that is, men should not have a physical relationship with a female colleague:

A: Telling dirty jokes at women can satisfy a dry ‘erotic’ craving.
Q: What does a dry craving mean?
A: That you want to play with a woman but you cannot have a real sexual relationship with her. Married men already have a responsibility and don’t need any further burden.

Occasionally, staff stepped over Section Manager Zhou’s boundary; before my time at the company, there had been a married sales manager who fell in love with one of his sales assistants and so divorced his wife and got married to the assistant instead, but both parties left the company soon after. Where both employees were single, when the office relationship turned to romance and marriage, the woman was transferred sideways in the company as management did not consider it professional for a husband and wife to work alongside each other. For example, the woman would be moved out of the sales department into a supporting section (an effective demotion because wages were lower outside of the sales function). However, the man involved in the office marriage was more likely to be promoted or given greater responsibility as it was assumed that he now had a family to provide for, that is, following the gendered male breadwinner model (Pearson 2004). In the eight years after 2008, four couples had followed this pattern.

Would office banter bring pleasure or harassment in an organizational setting? This is a question that concerns recent scholarship on sexuality in organization studies (see Sullivan 2014; Chap. 3). The Chinese office dynamics indicate that the answer to this question is complicated and there is a need to examine the impact of such practices on organizational control. Looking closely at the contents of the men’s jokes, the discursive pattern usually involved an affair between the joker and his target. On

most occasions, it was married male managers who told sexual jokes. To an extent, these jokes provided a discursive landscape that embraced their paradoxical stance towards extramarital affairs: on one hand, the managers disputed extramarital affairs as something to be avoided but on the other, they were active in constructing imagined extramarital relationships through the practice of joking. The jokes therefore provided an avenue for a sort of sexually cathartic expression enabling the men to play out a fantasy without disturbing the harmony of their family lives. Through this discursive repetition, a sexual hierarchy was established and symbolized contrasting subordinate expressions of feminine desire and an aggressive drive of masculine desire.

The telling of sexual jokes was grounded in, and further reproduced, an objectification of women. Women were considered an instrument for men's pleasure and a tool to boost morale and productivity for the company (*instrumentality*). By imposing an imagined relationship between the woman being joked about and the joker, the joker claimed *ownership* of the woman and *denial of her autonomy* and *subjectivity*, often producing the *silencing* effect. Through the process of objectification, women's position as a second-class citizen in the Organization was reinforced. As one woman sales assistant put it, '*women are brought into the workplace for amusement*'. When questioned further about why men liked to tell sexual jokes, like many other female interviewees, she replied '*men are just like that*'.

Feminist scholars have highlighted sexuality and gender as mutually inclusive categories of experience and analysis. Avtar Brah (1996) argued that structures of gender and sexuality cannot be treated as independent variables because the oppression of each is constituted by and is constitutive of the other. Sales assistants accounted for men's tendency to tell sexual jokes as an innate aspect of their gender. In effect, the biological determinist understanding of gender has been transplanted onto the discourse around sexuality. Through this mutually constitutive nature between gender and sexuality, men's practice of telling sexual jokes has become naturalized. The symbolic violence grounded in the naturalized sexual order further assists in consolidating the belief in the superior status of men in the company. The symbolic power men possessed via sexual order contributed to the reproduction of the gendered economic hierarchy in the Organization.

Agency in public sexual discourse remains largely a male privilege. Men who initiated sexual jokes were clearly in favour of such a practice, claiming this to be an effective mechanism for stimulating the office atmosphere

and bringing pleasure to all. Men who were good at telling sexual jokes were considered good ice-breakers by senior management, a desirable quality in a client-facing environment, which in turn benefited their perception by senior male colleagues and so ultimately enhanced their career development. By contrast, female employees were uncomfortable with the practice in their initial encounters but needed to learn to live with it due to its routinization in organizational culture. For these women, something that men claimed was pleasurable frequently bordered on sexual harassment, with stressful consequences for young unmarried women. Unlike sex workers, who had already crossed the moral boundary and were hence much freer to engage in sexual joking (Ding 2012), the intersection of gender and professional class put these women's sexuality under a strict moral constraint. I did not encounter any woman in the company who freely and actively responded when sexually joked at in the public office setting; women's silence was the most common response. However, women's silence in public sexual discourse should not simply be interpreted as a sign of their powerlessness. Because of the way in which a woman's social status is judged by her sexuality, the damage to her sexual reputation is far more detrimental in a relational society. There were rumours in the Organization about a woman from another foreign trade company who was good at 'everything' (including sexual joking) but because of this she was nicknamed 'public toilet' by the men, casting a dark cloud over her reputation. Through the repetition of rumours such as these, an implicit warning was sent out to advise people to distance themselves from this type of woman. Taking into account the consequences of their behaviour in a society that places so much emphasis upon relationship building and reputation, women consider it wise to remain silent and expressionless for the sake of maintaining their respectability.

As the inner-outer boundary functions as a signifier of moral agency, while women acquiesce in a public office setting, in those moments/occasions women classify 'inner', they do initiate sexual jokes for the pleasure of the audience in the space. Beyond this space, women comply with public scripts and ensure their reputation remains intact. Through Mr Li, the contact who introduced me to the Organization, I had the privilege of joining women in their inner space.

At lunchtime, most employees ate in the communal dining hall because it served good food that was heavily subsidized by the Organization. However, friendship groups sometimes ate out. On one such occasion, Mr Li sent me a text asking me not to go to the dining hall for lunch but

to meet him by the company gate. There I met a small group of employees (three female senior sales assistants and two male sales assistants from recent round of university recruitment along with Mr Li). The organizer was Xu, a woman senior sales assistant (single, 27 years old) and a very good friend of Mr Li (married, 30 years old). In the restaurant, the seven of us occupied a large round table and ate together. Through my existing relationship with Mr Li, this group considered me 'trustworthy' on this occasion and so I had a chance to see the other side of women's performance.

In the space around the table, it was the women who often (implicitly) initiated sexual jokes to stimulate the atmosphere of the group. For example, seeing that there were some boiled eggs in her noodle soup, Xu said: '*Mr Li is working very hard recently so I would like to save these ones for my Mr Li*', and then Xu transferred the eggs into his bowl. Another woman assistant Jiang (single, 28 years old) suddenly put down her chopsticks and played acting, commenting: '*I cannot eat any longer*; *you two* (intimacy displayed) *are so disgusting!*' Xu then answered back: '*it is none of your business* (facing Jiang first and then Li). *Mr Li*, *isn't right*'? Then all the others at the table laughed. Throughout the whole exchange, Mr Li just smiled and remained silent.

Afterwards, when I asked Mr Li how he felt being the centre of such jokes, he said, '*in public*, *women don't have much chance* (in telling sexual jokes); *in private*, *I am happy to be the means for their amusement. As a man*, *I have nothing to lose.*' Indeed, Mr Li had nothing to lose, firstly because this was done in private and secondly in the unlikely event this imagined affair was leaked as a rumour, his social status would not be affected due to the gendered public scripts for sexuality. A philandering status confirms men's masculine popularity whilst women who are seen as sexually active are considered damaged.

In Xu's joke, she invoked an imagined relationship between herself and Mr Li and, in doing so, claimed ownership of Mr Li at that discursive moment. Xu gained full control and autonomy of the sexual discourse because this was an inner space and she felt confident that others would not believe that she and Mr Li were actually in a relationship. Both Xu and Jiang were quite loud and vocal in their joking exchange, in sharp contrast with their silence when senior managers told sexual jokes about them in the public office setting.

In the 'outer' sphere, women did tell jokes but fewer than their male managers because of their lower position in the organizational hierarchy.

The contents of their jokes also differed as they were concerned with the romance between the one being joked about and his wife/girlfriend and did not involve themselves as the person implicated in the relationship. The pleasure for women was dependent upon the contents, where and who possessed the agency in the joking.

Apart from women's judgement on inner-outer boundary control, there are layers of responses contingent upon the context in which women are faced with men telling sexual jokes in public. If the joker was a man from the senior management team (general manager and his deputy and section managers), women largely conformed to public scripts of masculine domination in sexuality; this was conditioned and facilitated by men's bureaucratic power. Yet after initial stressful encounters, women trivialized them and accepted the jokes as part of their day-to-day job. If the joker was the sales manager (a rank higher than the women yet relatively low in the masculine organizational hierarchy), women did fight back sometimes by either invoking non-sexual jokes or emotional means (see more discussion in Chap. 7) to discredit the joker.

Mr Jing was 27 years old, single and a sales manager. He liked telling sexual jokes. During my time at the company, I often observed him walk around the office telling 'jokes' at women. On one occasion, a female sales assistant, Yin, had just asked me my age when Mr Li passed by and overhead our conversation. He commented: '*I like eating both the big and small* (daxiao tongchi).' In pre-modern China, the 'big' implies the wife and the 'small' implies the concubine whilst eating is an indirect way to infer 'sleeping with'. By invoking this classical Chinese saying, Mr Jing tried to objectify both the sale assistant and me as his sexual partners. Yin answered back sternly, '*go away*, *clean your mouth*'.

Afterwards, Yin warned me that I should be cautious around Mr Jing as he had a reputation for making sexual jokes in an attempt to gain the attention of women and was notorious for being persistent. Other women assistants showed revulsion or chose deliberate avoidance if he came near. As there was no company policy or procedure for dealing with sexual harassment at the Organization, warnings from other women about certain men had become a self-initiated protective mechanism to monitor men in the office. The opposition to Jing lay first in his relatively lower position in the masculine hierarchy, and second in his misjudgement of the function of sexual jokes in the workplace. Sexual jokes, no matter what their private aim, need to be situated within a wider context of building sociality (or using the management's rhetoric: for the pleasure of all); but

Mr Jing used his sexual jokes as an explicit means of personal pursuit. One male manager commented that Mr Jing '*overdid it and did not grasp a good balance between personal and collective needs*'.

Not all men participate in telling sexual jokes. A couple of male sales managers confided to me that because they were shy, they did not know how to speak to women. They did not know how to tell jokes, let alone sexual jokes. As men in senior management set the tone by telling sexual jokes, the hegemonic corporate masculinity of the Organization entails this aspect, which in turn creates a burden for men who do not fit this model.

Moreover, the routinization of men's telling sexual jokes at women reinforced and reproduced the heteronormative model, which made it impossible for homosexuality to emerge at work. In post-Mao China, gay clubs, telephone support lines and other grassroots and activist organizations have begun to emerge in some of the larger cities (Evans 1997). Despite its visibility, homosexuality is seen as being closely associated with AIDS, crime, sickness and abnormality (Pan 1994). All interviewees expressed surprise or shock at my question about homosexuality in the workplace and generally talked about homosexuals as the 'other' in the society.

Cheerleaders

Office banter is a ritualized practice central to organizational culture which takes place at an interpersonal level in a public sphere. Here I examine collective organizational activities that are imbued with gendered and sexual meanings. One of the key features of state-owned companies, like the one that I researched, is the tradition of regular collective events for employees. These events are considered part of an employee's welfare package and may be sports-related, team building events or festival celebrations. When speaking of such events, General Manager Wang commented:

> Since the economic reform, Chinese society has entered a stage in which everything is measured economically. This is not necessarily a good thing. Through these events, perhaps the state hopes to strengthen citizens' faith and spiritual mood. These collective activities aim to boost the collective ideals and foster team spirit.

Mr Wang felt that the collective activities of state-owned companies had an enduring relevance and were a necessary state control to imbue young people with socialist ideals.

During my stay in the Organization, there was a Men's Basketball event. The company needed to form a basketball team to compete with teams from other state-owned foreign trade companies in the region, and the collective spirit of each company would be expected to be on show throughout the event. For these events, it was an unspoken rule that everyone invited must take part and if they chose not to participate they would be considered selfish and lacking in collective values (even though the preparation, and the event itself, took place in the employees' spare time; that is, breaks and weekends).

The senior management of the participating companies decided that, to enable women to participate in a Men's Basketball event, each company also needed to organize a team of 'basketball babes' to choreograph and perform a cheerleading routine. When this decision was confirmed, Zhao, Head of the Central Administration Office, was assigned the task of organizing the company's team of 'basketball babes'. She did so by carefully excluding employees with children and targeting young unmarried women and married women with no children. Recruitment for the team went well and met only with limited resistance. The only significant exception was Miss Wang, who said:

> Zhao asked me to be a basketball babe, explaining that it was a political task. If it is classified as a political task, one has to comply without question. But because everyday we already work quite late, adding this political task, I felt it was too much to take on so I made an excuse of being not well to turn down her request. Later I told my mother and she scolded me badly, because she knew that if I turned it down, people at my workplace would have a bad impression of me.

Miss Wang's mother was right to be concerned, Zhao later confided in me that she felt Miss Wang did not want to be part of the team and so would now exclude her from other activities, including work-related opportunities.

Because the cheerleading team needed to rehearse on weekends, during all lunch breaks, and some evenings they sacrificed considerably more time preparing for the event than the men's basketball team (which only practised on weekends). However, the main discontent in the team arose over how much of a woman's body should be revealed during the performance. Although senior managers at the company had no direct link with the cheerleading team, some sought to influence the women's attire, saying that women should wear something to 'excite one's eyeballs' (*ciji yanqiu*).

Such a request was met with resistance from most women and some even cited the workplace dress code which noted that low-cut tops or miniskirts were not allowed. During the negotiation over the women's clothing, a distorted discourse of women and modernity was induced by male management that the women assistants were too conservative and traditional to wear revealing clothes. Ultimately, a compromise was reached: the company's 'basketball babes' wore a short sleeve T-shirt revealing the waist but not their cleavage and a miniskirt with tight shorts underneath.

On the weekend before the match, I received a call from Zhao in which she explained that one of the cheerleaders had fallen ill, and the team urgently required a replacement. She asked if I would step in. Had it not been for the fact that I was at the final stage of my fieldwork, I would have had little choice but to take part. After I declined, Zhao managed to talk another assistant into cheerleading at the last minute. On the day of match, I sat in the audience with employees from the participating companies. During the cheerleading performances I often heard laughter and explicit comments about the women's bodies from men in the audience: *'why bother to dance since the legs are so round?*'; '*When talking about breasts, there are no proper breasts; when talking about buttocks, there are no proper buttocks*' (implying these body parts are not sexy enough). Later, in the interviews with male managers, some commented that '*although it was a men's basketball game, the 'basketball babes' were the centre of attention*'. When the event was over, the women's embodied performance remained the topic of office banter for a while. Reflecting upon this event, both women and men expressed their doubt over the extent to which such an event boosted the collective ideals among employees.

This basketball event displayed a heterosexual model of workplace relations between male employees (athletes) and female employees (support act), reinforcing a hegemonic masculinity and a sexualized femininity as well as institutionalizing heterosexual normality. Moreover, the event demonstrated key features involved in the objectification of women. Through the male gaze, women as a group became a tool to satisfy men's desire and pleasure (*instrumentality*) and being denied *subjectivity* and *autonomy*, women's bodies were talked about, caricatured and consumed. The personal and intellectual capabilities of a woman were *reduced to her body parts* and through this objectification, a woman employee become a sex object, valorized and devalued, which in turn contributed to her second-class treatment in the workplace. The ultra-public nature of this event made it much harder for women to resist and manoeuvre the collective male gaze.

Feminist writers argue that sexual objectification is often linked to and caused by social inequality (Mackinnon 1987; Nussbaum 1995). Organization culture is not immune to wider socio-cultural discourse and in some respects, the collective objectification of women in the workplace replicated the model of sexual economy in the post-Mao China. Zurndorfer (2015) analysed the cultural discourse of China's sexual economy, revealing that a sexualized landscape has been articulated in the public discourse where young women have become sexualized objects of consumption and as a result, youthful women's bodies have been commercialized for economic resources. Similarly, in this company, economic polarization in the Organization defined the hierarchical position between the consumer and the one being consumed. Female employees are symbolically forced to 'sell' their bodies for the pleasure of collective consumption of men who possess more economic resources. Grounded in wider socio-cultural discourse in China, the objectification of women is facilitated by and then reinforced in economic inequality between women and men.

Conclusion

In comparison with their mothers' generation, who were manufacturing workers, this generation enjoyed an occupational mobility through the educational investment they benefited from as the only child. However, the post-Mao economic reform was constituted by a sexual economy in which women's bodies had become sexualized and commodified (Zurndorfer 2015). This wider socio-economic context subjects these educated professional women to new forms of inequality at work.

This chapter reveals the way in which eroticized workplace culture has resulted in a form of masculine domination and hetero-normative control through the process of objectification. Sexual innuendo is encouraged by management to enhance productivity and morale, and agency in public sexual discourse remain a male privilege. Facilitated by the vertical segregation between men and women, male-initiated sexual jokes were often intended to introduce expressions of feminine desire that are passive and subordinate. Because of its mutually constitutive relation with gender, this sexual hierarchy became naturalized; sexual objectification, through reducing women to their appearances and sexual functions, leads to further naturalization of gender. The interplay between gender and sexuality consolidated men's symbolic power, which was in turn transformed into men's bureaucratic power in the workplace.

The claimed pleasure frequently bordered on harassment with stressful consequences, especially for young unmarried women. Whilst women's autonomy was limited in a male-dominated public sexual discourse, professional women's conformity to the public scripts on their sexuality should not be simply read as a sign of their powerlessness. A more nuanced analysis reveals women's layers of resistance, invoking an inner-outer cultural boundary as a signifier of moral agency and assessing men's position and social performance within the organizational setting. However, when the sexualized interactions are further complicated by a capitalist economic mechanism, women were presented with more challenges. These are explored in the next chapter.

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CHAPTER 6

Sex as Work

This chapter considers the experiences of women and men working in the sales departments of a range of domestically oriented Chinese companies. I draw upon a new set of participants, with whom I conducted in-depth (and repeated) interviews (including a focus group with four men) during three field trips in 2007, 2008 and 2011, All participants (20 women, 10 men) were highly educated (i.e. bachelor's degree or above), aged 24 to 35, and worked in the sales department of their company. These companies, which were both Chinese state-owned and privately owned, operated in a broad range of industries (including finance, trade, medicine, brokerage, real estate, insurance, car manufacturing, telecommunications and IT). The female interviewees over 30 were mostly married with a child; those who were under 30 were mostly engaged or partnered with a boyfriend. The male interviewees were aged 28 to 35 years; two were single and the rest were either married or partnered with a girlfriend.

Aside from the actual product being sold, the main difference between the foreign trade Organization and the companies which employed these participants was the client base; in the Organization they were foreigners, here they were Chinese clients. While the foreign trade Organization was careful to protect Chinese women from foreigners (see Chap. 4), these domestically oriented companies actively and deliberately institutionalized and deployed the selling of women's sexuality in their non-sexual economic operations. With an institutional demand for women to perform aesthetic and sexual labour in their encounters with Chinese clients alongside the

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persistence of past restrictions on women's sexual expression and discussion in the public space, how do women professionals negotiate sexual politics in their working environment?

'Being Pretty but Not Sexy'

All the female sales representatives were strikingly beautiful. Some of the interviewees had served on recruitment committees and stated that the sales section of their own company would not recruit people with a bad physical appearance, because sales people are the 'front door' of the company. However, beauty is both arbitrary and gendered. Whilst the implicit consensus is that women who have fair skin and a slim figure with good facial features (big eyes, oval-shaped) are pretty, when recruiters were asked what type of men were good-looking, they simply said 'tall'[1] but added that 'since not many men are tall, if they look smart and clean, that's acceptable'. Indeed, like in the foreign trade Organization where good-looking men were a minority, there was only one 'tall' man among the ten that I interviewed; the rest were clean and well presented. Women's physical appearance was under great emphasis and particular scrutiny; it was a necessity for women who interfaced with clients but a bonus for men in the same occupation.

Aware of the significance of their physical capital, these highly educated women paid special attention to the maintenance of their figure and appearance. For example, one interview was conducted at the interviewee's home and for the entire interview she wore a special face cream to boost the level of moisture in her skin. Another was conducted during lunchtime: each of us was issued with a lunchbox but the interviewee stopped after eating only a quarter and claimed to be on a diet despite already looking very slim. In contrast, the only grooming the male professionals admitted to were hygiene matters such as shaving and keeping their hair short.

Women went to great lengths to maintain their aesthetic self-image. When presenting themselves in the work environment, they had gone through further careful management of gender display. As doing femininity involves 'doing heterosexuality', which is looking 'sexy' in heterosexist ways (Connell 1999), a gender display carries sexual connotations. For these women professionals, while trying to look pretty they expressed a desire not to be associated with appearing sexy. Building upon early ideas of the clothed body and social status (see Chap. 2) the management of gender display is achieved through control of clothing. At the organizational level,

to maintain institutional professional imagery in the public sphere, companies had a dress code to ensure that neither revealing clothes nor miniskirts be worn at work (this was similar to the regulations on workplace appearance in the foreign trade Organization, see Chap. 5).

Women also actively desexualized their appearance. Aware of the wider context of sexual consumption of women in the market economy, clothing distinguished these women from the other 'decadent'[2] women. A female sales representative at an insurance company (aged 28) joked: '*if I were to wear those revealing clothes at work, I'd have been in the same boat with a street walker*'. Desexualized clothing was also key in women's construction of their identity as professionals. The sales manager at a pharmaceutical company (aged 31) said '*if you dress very sexy and wear very revealing clothes, it will inevitably excite others' visual sense. Others think that you are only a woman so that they can do anything to you. They will forget about the fact that you are a sales manager or sales representative.*' Her strategy to desexualize herself was grounded in a desire to reduce eroticism and objectification. Desexualization helped to minimize suggestions of eroticism and so acted as a protective mechanism against sexual harassment. As discussed later in this chapter, whilst sexual harassment from clients was commonly experienced by these women, this sales representative seemed to imply that women's sexualized appearance was the cause of the harassment. Furthermore, she expressed a desire not to be sexually objectified in order to be respected and taken seriously. Managers in China remain strongly linked with a masculine identity, so desexualizing herself and thereby destabilizing her gender display was her way of trying to 'blend in' (Sheppard 1989) with the existing organizational setting.

In contrast, men were not faced with the need to carefully manage the boundary between gender and sexuality. After all, the traditional concept of masculinity fits well with the male-defined set of norms and culture within the organizational setting. Moreover, a man's gender is rarely sexualized; whilst pre-modern China had a long-established tradition that women were consumed as sexual commodities and recent economic reforms have resurrected this practice, there was no link made between being masculine and being sexy in the past nor, as yet, has this association emerged in contemporary Chinese society.[3] Male professionals had no need to worry about being perceived in a sexualized way at work. When I asked the men in the focus group if they thought that they looked sexy, or were perceived to be so by the women in their workplace, they all expressed confusion about what I was asking them and were unable to make any connection between this idea and their experiences.

Sexualized Encounters

Paradoxically, whilst all women claimed that they wanted to create a professional image by wearing desexualized clothing at work, they told another story when examining their interactions with clients. A common response to being asked about the advantages of working in the sales profession as a woman was: '*women are more likely to persuade the clients as most clients are men. The principle that the opposite sex appeals to each other works well.*' Their replies reflected the vertical segregation by sex in the business world as well as the 'selling of sexuality' (Hearn and Parkin 1987) on the part of these women sales professionals. A woman sales representative (aged 28) gave a detailed example: '*women have the advantage, during the negotiation, women could sajiao (act like a spoiled and naughty child) and pester the client. But men can't do this to either a female client or to a male customer otherwise it will be disgusting.*' The word *sajiao* is used to describe playful children and women, but when used to describe a woman, it has the connotation that she displays feminine and sexual charms. This sales rep felt that a woman could use her sex appeal to gain interactional power over clients in order to complete a deal; with personal income closely linked to the quantity and value of sales,[4] these women recognized the value to them of being able to play on men's sexual susceptibility.

There is obviously a contradiction between desexualized clothing and the use of 'feminine' charms in order to win sales. When I asked to reconcile this contradiction, female sales reps emphasized the importance of subtlety when deploying their femininity. Whilst male professionals were conscious of their female counterparts' advantage in this respect, they rationalized the disparity condescendingly by saying that 'this is their advantage but is also their sadness'. Men deployed the conventional and moral view that reputable women should not use sexuality for financial ends and secretly despised the women who worked in these sales jobs. The men I interviewed all expressed a preference not to find a girlfriend in a sales occupation and instead considered those engaged in teaching, nursing and administrative labour (i.e. like the sales assistants in the Organization) more suitable partners.

On the surface, these women had a financial incentive to deploy their sexual skills during their encounters with clients and so could be considered responsible for jeopardizing their sexual reputation. However, what were the advantages *for them* being a woman in sales were also advantages *for the company* employing saleswomen. The profit motive of enterprises

loomed behind this behaviour. All the participants commented that the sales department was the core of their company because only if products were sold could the company make a profit: that is, regardless of the sales method people used, as long as deals were made, the management would be happy.

Organizations deliberately created a competitive atmosphere in the sales department. This was particularly striking in privately owned Chinese companies: several women reported the practice of ranking sales people on a blackboard according to their monthly sales. The top three would be given a bonus, but the bottom three would be punished with a deduction from their basic wage. An individual who was among the bottom three for three months could face the possibility of being sacked. Sales staff were put under great pressure in these organizations and suffered considerable anxiety as a result. Therefore, in the absence of other incentives with which they could cajole their clients, women had to fall back on a personal resource, their sexual charm, in order to outdo their peers and gain the approval of the management. Although Chinese companies imposed restrictions on overt sexual displays, their guidelines around the interactions of sales staff with clients were vague, mostly grounded in manners and the contrast between being polite and rude. Through wage control, the companies used capitalist forces to push women into implicitly 'selling' their sexuality during these encounters.

Three-Step Socializing

This section highlights the ways in which Chinese businesses utilize the facilities offered by the entertainment and leisure sector to cultivate relationships with clients[5] (such activities are common to other East Asian societies, see Jackson et al. 2008). I reveal that the selling of women's sexuality in the extra-organizational setting is institutionalized and deliberately deployed by the management.

Social connections (*guanxi*) play a very important role in everyday transactions in China. Chinese companies therefore pay special attention to the development and maintenance of relationships with their clients; after-hours socializing has become an important aspect of the work of sales professionals. Women described a three-step entertainment activity common to most Chinese domestic-oriented companies.

Step one: *banqueting*. Despite being called 'banqueting', this is in fact drinking.[6] Usually, the general manager would take a small group of sales

staff to meet a client, who would also be accompanied by a few of his/her employees. When socializing, men were the main actors but women also played a particular role. As a female sales representative (aged 27) for the stock exchange explained:

> have you found any banquet that is made up of male guests only? There is no point in an all-male group drinking together. Chinese men always feel that if there are some girls there, the atmosphere will be better. We women are like the dressing in a dish.

Being present at the banqueting table was not sufficient; women were also expected to participate in the drinking. In Chinese business drinking culture,[7] the host is expected to make a toast to the good health of others at the table. This toasting exercise usually lasts several rounds until the end of the banquet and everyone is expected to take part. One woman (aged 26) in the telecommunications industry explained:

> if a woman claimed that she could not drink, male clients will become excited. They will claim that she is lying and must be able to drink and then insist on her drinking something. Some male clients will try to entice women to drink by saying 'little girl, if you drink one glass, I will drink three glasses'.

The male professionals in the focus group also acknowledged the special effect upon clients of women drinking, commenting: '*when a man makes a toast to you, you will take it for granted but if it is a girl who does this, you will pay special attention to her. So the manager liked the idea of women participating in our drinking.*'

Although some women claimed that they were naturally good at drinking, many complained about the peer pressure to drink at such events. One woman (aged 26) in finance explained: '*If I don't drink, I'd have been considered to cramp the style. The manager always sent signals at the table implying that I should make the toast. I have no choice but to drink. Otherwise, the next day I'd definitely get a scolding from the manager.*' In face of the pressure to drink, the interviewees had found ways to cope. Some women had started drinking at home or during their own socializing events in order to develop their capacity. Others had devised ways to control the level of their own intake. A woman sales representative (aged 29) summarized her tactics: '*since we are the hosts, we will be able to control the bottle. I will pour some liquid into his glass before the client notices. Sometimes*

I will swap the spirits with water or spit the alcohol out into a small towel held against my lips.' However, many interviewees emphasized that care had to be taken with such ploys; if they were found out, it would be considered rude to the clients. Ill-health, though, was an acceptable excuse for abstinence. One interviewee had experienced bleeding in her stomach after a drinking event and had thereafter been excused from drinking.

At the banquet table, the formal business topic was hardly ever mentioned: the main aim was to strengthen the buyer-seller relationship. Therefore, in order to 'enliven' the atmosphere, telling sex jokes had become a common practice. One sales woman (aged 27) in a stock exchange company complained: '*Nowadays society is really open. Men tell sex jokes freely whether women are present or not. We are forced to listen, just like second-hand smoking.*' The sexual banter was a form of harassment about which the female audience felt particularly disturbed. On many occasions, the people implicated in the sex jokes were present; women reported that a young single woman was most likely to be the target for such jokes. The common coping strategies were to pretend not to hear it, or to laugh it off. One woman working in banking said: '*as a woman, what can I do about these comments? They are all about sexual relations. Playing a fool is the wisest.*' Since the audience at the banqueting table was formed of colleagues and clients, the banquet setting was a public space and so women were not in a position to participate and manipulate the situation. The wisest and safest strategy for reputable women in such a space is to keep quiet.

Step two: *karaoke*. After drinking, the next step was often to go to a karaoke bar. Again, these women professionals were expected to accompany the clients in singing and dancing. One woman (aged 27) in an insurance company described the occasion:

> We had to be there too. And if you didn't sing, the manager would point at you specifically, saying: 'someone [the interviewee's name], why not sing a duet together with the guest?' Then if the client wants to dance, I have to accompany him too. After all, the boardroom dances are like walking. I just walk along with them. But sometimes if you bump into some men whose action was a bit inappropriate, that's really unlucky.

These two-step socializing activities usually started at around 6 p.m. and lasted until between midnight and 2 a.m. Indeed, a number of interviews were rescheduled because of the interviewees' socializing duties. One

interview actually took place at 11 p.m. after the interviewee had slipped out of a karaoke bar.

Step three: *sauna*. After visiting the karaoke bar, some clients were taken to a sauna. However, the descriptions given differed sharply. The majority of women claimed that they would go home after the karaoke bar and leave the male professionals to accompany the clients to the sauna. Only four women admitted that they went along with the clients to the sauna. However, they emphasized that there were two types of saunas, those providing sexual services and those which did not, and that they only went to the latter. They said that men and women usually conducted their saunas in separate cubicles, but afterwards, they went to the resting hall where men and women could chat together. They took great care to dissociate themselves from any places offering sexual services; but they all mentioned that they had heard from their friends that male customers sometimes went for sex workers in those saunas that offered sexual services.

This long-drawn out sequence of entertainment was not only exhausting; the sexist context and sexual content of the interactions was extremely stressful for the women. For one of them it felt like 'serving in prison' (a sales woman in insurance, aged 26, single).[8] The women's narratives of those activities reflect a masculine business culture where men were able to consolidate their masculine domination and create a climate of sexual exploitation. The sexuality of the women forced to participate in that culture had become a public commodity to be consumed by the male guests, a practice which has been deliberately initiated and developed by the management of the organizations. One representative working in car sales expressed her confusion as to why women had to attend such events: '*I feel that it seems whenever there are men, women are there too. Chinese feel the need to have women to accompany men. But this explanation seems a bit extreme, inappropriate. I don't know how to explain this clearly.*' The interviewee's use of the term 'inappropriate' arose out of a realization that she had almost grouped herself along with 'decadent' women, the sex workers who operated in entertainment settings. Her difficulty in finding a suitable explanation may reflect an awareness that there were similarities between the sexualized labour women like her were forced to perform and the sexual services provided by sex workers. However, to acknowledge that association overtly was to run the risk of damaging the image of professional women in everyone's eyes by recognizing the threat to their sexual respectability. She might not have been able to find the words to express the situation or she may have been refusing to consider the connotations.

Sexual harassment was another practice that often arose from these sexualized social activities. Women reported incidents of unwanted touching, hugging, kissing to sexual advances. However, they were left on their own with no organizational regulation or protection from harassment.[9] At the same time, they had internalized the expectation that they should be self-reliant, and some suggested that women themselves were to blame if they were harassed. A woman sales manager in medicine (aged 34) commented:

> Some of my clients gave me hugs occasionally. I just laughed it off. Men always have such a habit. You should look at it positively, taking it as a compliment. No need to take it as harassment. Look, in western countries hugs and kisses are local custom. So there is no need to consider it as sexual harassment. Don't over stimulate the situation. The more you are sensitive, the more he is likely to have those ideas. If you take it casually, he will probably do nothing to you.

As she was the manager of the regional branch of her company, I asked her if she had passed on any suggestions to her employees. She replied: '*if a woman couldn't take this light-heartedly, I'd advise her not to stay in this occupation*'. Like many of her Western counterparts, this manager blamed the victim and normalized the men's behaviour; she, too, saw harassment as a 'rite de passage—a gendered test to assess women's ability' to deal with the added pressure of working in a sexist business world (Collinson and Collinson 1996:51). Departure became the only option for women who could not deal with harassment. One woman (aged 24) who had recently joined as a graduate suffered from harassment. She found her job extremely stressful and sighed:

> for us who just entered the society, I felt lost. Nobody taught me how to survive in the society. I wish when I was at university, the teacher had explained what the society really was. But now I had to explore and tried to understand everything on my own. It is very easy to make mistakes.

The attitude of these women towards harassment was in sharp contrast with women's response in the foreign trade Organization. The latter has developed a warning mechanism to protect women against men who were considered harassers (like Mr Jing in Chap. 5). One factor contributing to this is the way in which women on the sales frontier tend to view each other as competitors, while women sales assistants did have a group solidarity based upon their class membership in the Organization. Another

factor contributing to this is the fact that the harassment was from a client rather than colleague and this made it harder for women sales managers to unite, that is, to one woman a client might be a harasser, to another he might be an economic opportunity.

'Pretty Women' and 'Handsome Men'

Hakim (2010, 2011) proposed a new theory of erotic capital as a fourth personal asset (in addition to economic, cultural and social capital) whereby erotic capital is a combination of 'beauty, social skills, good dress sense, physical fitness, liveliness, sex appeal and sexual competence'. Hakim claims that in the sexualized culture of affluent modern societies, erotic capital can be important in labour market, politics and in everyday social interaction. Given the large imbalance between men and women in sexual interest over the life course, women are well placed to exploit their erotic capital (Hakim 2011). Hakim claims that a central feature of patriarchy has been the construction of 'moral' ideologies that inhibit women from exploiting their erotic capital to achieve economic and social benefits; feminist theory has been unable to extricate itself from this patriarchal perspective and reinforces 'moral' prohibitions on women's sexual, social and economic activities and women's exploitation of their erotic capital. According to Hakim, women should therefore develop erotic capital as a powerful tool to ameliorate gender inequality.

Hakim's proposal aroused considerable controversy regarding how and to what extent female attractiveness and sex appeal relate to gender inequality. Here I join other writers who have raised concerns over Hakim's work (see Williams 2011; Green 2013). Through a comparison of a woman and a man's complicated relationship with erotic capital in a Chinese sales pitch, set out below, it would seem that Hakim's proposal ignores the fact that sexuality is deeply enmeshed in gender relations and socio-cultural locality and as a result this is a negative collective strategy which will further perpetuate and naturalize gender orders.

I first met Manager Wei in 2007. At the time she was 29 years old, a very attractive lady, fair skin, big eyes, thin lips and a slim figure. She was the Head of Sales in a Chinese private-owned real estate company. Prior to this job, she had been the head of sales at a mobile phone company in a northern city. We met in a café; using subtle facial expressions and good manners, her feminine charms were obvious throughout the interview and I could imagine that a male client would fall for her easily.

Whether intentionally or unintentionally, the power of Wei's beauty and sex appeal may have facilitated her reception in the male-dominated business world. However, because women's sexuality is tied with their social status, there is a constant struggle in Wei's career to walk the fine line between respectability and disreputability. She commented:

> How to interact with men, and to which level, was a key to determine whether I could develop my career further or not… I am aware of the importance of business networks but I know what I am supposed to do, how to be sensible. For example, I often attend conferences where there are many big developers. But as a woman, it's not convenient for me to approach these men. If other men don't talk to me first, I can't take the initiative to approach them. Because I am a woman, I need to behave myself. Be careful; I don't want any unnecessary things. At the conferences, women are a minority so a lot of attention is already on you. If I were a man, I'd definitely go to talk to these big developers because they are important business resources.

Being a woman was not the only cause of her difficulties. It was her awareness of the implications arising from the gendered and sexual nature of public social relations that made her extremely careful in her behaviour. Like the older generation of urban women (see Liu 2007), Wei had internalized the view that women were responsible for their sexual reputation. This double standard of sexual control disadvantaged her in terms of career development: to be a reputable woman she was constrained not to initiate contact with a businessman in public spaces and thus she lost access to the important resources embedded in social networks. She also referred to other difficulties that relationships with clients could present. Recalling her sales experiences, she summarized: '*it's easy for a woman to know a client quickly but it's hard for a woman to know the client well and deepen the relationship. At the most, you can only take them for tea or a meal, how could you take him to a sauna like other male sales professionals?*'

Her special caution was a result of a past experience involving a relationship with a colleague in her previous company. A male section manager (aged 40) in her office became jealous when she was promoted above him and so he had her secretly followed in the evenings. At that time, she often went to a sauna with another male sales manager, thinking of it as 'normal private socializing'. The jealous manager claimed that she had inappropriate sexual relationships and reported her to the general manager who scolded her without asking for her side of the story. She felt extremely wronged and decided to leave the company.

In this incident, Wei's initial deployment of the inner-outer boundary was a signifier of moral agency in her relationships with men. Sauna is an activity in China that is often imbued with a sexual connotation. As the male manager was a good friend, she was conformable going to the sauna with him; the occasion would be treated as an inner space despite being in public. Unfortunately, the jealous section manager exposed her inner sphere to an outer audience.

Leaving her old job and moving into a different industry in a different city was part of Wei's strategy to 'start fresh' and (implicitly) it was also a good opportunity to re-establish her sexual reputation. Now in property sales, she commented that she built very good relationships with the CEOs of various companies in the industry. However, Wei also learned from her experience of the inner space leaking into the outer sphere, commenting '*in my relations with these CEOs, although they thought highly of me, I only limited my relations with them to professional work. I never discuss with them any private matters. If the CEOs did try to talk with me about private matters, I always choose to divert the topic*.' With respect to her career, Wang commented: '*if I were a man, I would have done much better than I have right now*'.

Scholars have found that on lower rungs of the socio-economic ladder, sexuality can serve as a critical resource consolidating women's social status and economic security (Gonzalez-Lopez 2005). This was confirmed by research among sex workers in China (Zheng 2009; Ding 2012). Among the highly educated women in professional jobs, their stories reveal that sexuality actually serves as an obstacle to consolidating their social status and career development. Because women's sexuality is strictly moralized, their frequent contact with male clients has cast doubt upon the morality of women who work in professional occupations that require them to provide emotional, aesthetic and sexual labour services. This complicated order between women, sexuality and socio-economic status is reversed for men. Whilst Chinese society has a long-established stigma against men at the lower end of the socio-economic ladder using their sexuality (exemplified in the ridicule of men in uxorilocal marriages), for men at the upper end, men's erotic capital may boost their social status and career without a naturalizing consequence.

In 2008 I first interviewed Chen, a sales manager at a Chinese bank. He was 31 years old and married, tall, with broad shoulders, and would be considered handsome in the region. When I asked about the advantage of being a man in his occupation, he commented:

> *The biggest advantage is that men are often perceived as more sincere and conscientious. My job is dealing with VIPs' finance; Chinese tradition usually determines that it is the wife who is in charge of family finances. Women have a lot of decision-making power in finance because husbands are busy with their career development but in a weaker position in family life. The wife is in charge. Towards these female VIPs, male sales managers have a certain advantage. Talking about men's disadvantage: some women present themselves very 'cute' and lovely and easily build a good relation with their male clients* [implying a sexual relation]. *That is women's advantage, but not an advantage for us men.*

There is an inherent paradox in Chen's account. On the one hand, he acknowledges the erotic appeal that exists in a male sales manager for women VIPs. On the other hand, he denies men's use of erotic capital and suggests it is a woman's trait. Implicitly, in both relations (male sales manager and woman VIP; woman sales manager and male client), Chen reinforces the assumption that it is women who must take moral responsibility for monitoring sexual appeal. Despite his frequent contact with female clients, Chen did not have the same concerns about his reputation as Wei did.

Through him, I was able to interview one of Chen's VIP clients. In her interview, she commented upon Chen's good looks and was surprised that his wife's physical appeal did not match up with his. She found interactions with him very pleasant and was happy with the service that he and his bank provided. Whether acknowledged by Chen or not, his erotic capital assisted his relations with his female clients. In 2011, when I met him again, Chen had been promoted to the senior management team at the bank.

Comparing the work histories of Chen and Wei reveals that both of them possess more erotic capital than their peers. How their erotic capital worked for them lies in the complicated interplay between gender and sexuality. The social consequence of enacting erotic capital is gendered because the wider objectification of women in popular culture and media as well as in an organizational setting (see Chap. 5) has already pre-established the link between women and erotic capital in the labour market. One woman sales manager commented:

> people think if a woman is beautiful, she is not brainy. Even if a woman's success is completely down to her hard work, people will attribute her success to her physical appeal. If women deliberately use their physical capital for success, it will form a vicious circle and reinforce the social stereotype that traps women in a decorative role in the society; their status will no longer be able to improve. But men do not have an issue with their physical appearance; people will happily say he is handsome and very capable.

As I revealed in Chaps. 4 and 5, symbolic violence grounded in the naturalization and objectification of women was key to the facilitation of masculine domination in the work hierarchy. At an individual level, women's status might increase through their enactment of erotic capital; however, the collective symbolic status of women would certainly not benefit from the same. Hakim's call to use erotic capital as a collective gendered strategy would further accentuate women's relation to their body and perpetuate naturalized gender orders.

Negotiating the Sexualized Business Culture

The majority of the interviewees commented that being a woman gave them advantages but at the same time, it disadvantaged them. Like Wei, several women had tried to avoid attending certain socializing events for the sake of their sexual reputation, but they also expressed regret that doing so might have lost them access to important networks, and so they had resorted to other strategies to cultivate business relationships. For example, women had provided products and services after making a sale, had extended care to the client's family members, and had been ready to fulfil other requests (such as finding a doctor for a client). In addition to those women who tactically withdrew from the business leisure activities, there was a minority who said that as long as they knew they were morally in the right, they would continue to join the socializing activities. They claimed that the business networks were too important to lose so they simply put up with knowing that they were the butt of sexual gossip. For all women interviewees, another reason for maintaining ties with clients was their concern about the devaluation of their erotic capital as they grew older. This concern was grounded in classical Chinese understanding that older women would not be considered sexual (Mann 2011). One interviewee (aged 28) said, '*in China, women over 35 are considered old. So I feel we sales women are also like those in youth occupations. Face and figure are very important. But I also find that clients are important social resources. For example, if I choose to move to another company, I'll take my own groups of clients with me. The company will be keen on my experiences as well as on the resources I will bring in*.' This interviewee had, in fact, rejected job offers from several companies and was intending on opening her own company by drawing on the resources of her existing clients.

Despite the various strategies these women adopted in face of the sexualized business culture, their occupation had in one way or another impacted

their private lives. Their long working hours and close contact with male clients sometimes caused suspicion and resentment in their boyfriends or husbands. For example, the telephone calls or text messages a woman received would sometimes lead to a misunderstanding. Moreover, if a partner did not earn more than his wife or girlfriend, he would feel threatened by her achievement and salary. Many male partners had suggested that the women change jobs, but none of the interviewees had followed this advice because they were clearly aware of the link between paid employment, financial independence and bargaining power in the family. Eight years on from my first encounters with these women, three of the twenty women sales professionals had got married and then divorced. During one divorce, the husband secretly followed his wife and took photos of her meetings with her clients as evidence of her alleged infidelity. Despite being divorced, as the only child, these women were accepted and supported by their natal family. This was a key break from their mother's generation when the natal families usually turned their back upon a divorced daughter (see more discussions on family and marriage in Chap. 8).

Ironically, women's private family life could also be used as a resource to impact upon the ways they managed the sexualized business culture in their occupation. Married women might use the excuse of a family emergency (e.g. illness of family members) to avoid socializing without being sanctioned by their company. In 2011 Manager Wei was already the mother of a two-year-old son. She confided in me that originally she had not felt ready for childbirth but, under pressure from her in-laws and her husband, she had gone ahead with it. After childbirth, she often accentuated her role as a mother in banqueting events to deter the sexual context of any jokes made by male clients. Wei also intentionally included her family in some social gatherings (e.g. weekend trips) with important clients as a mechanism to divert her husband's doubt over her reputation and divert her clients' 'inappropriate thoughts'.

Conclusion

This chapter has focused upon the working lives of young professional women at the frontier of sales in Chinese domestic-oriented companies. In their interactions with clients, both within the workplace and outside at places of entertainment and leisure, women were expected to engage in some aspects of aesthetic and sexualized labour. In particular, the sexualized aspects of Chinese business culture subjected professional women

to sexual exploitation and made them vulnerable to sexual harassment. Women's sexuality had become a commercial resource deliberately initiated and developed by their organizations in those entertainment settings. Compared with women sales assistants who were faced with sexual jokes by their male colleagues (Chap. 5), the capitalist labour relations have commodified women's encounters with their clients, making it harder for women managers to unite when sexual harassment arises.

With China's transition to a market economy, the selling of sexuality demanded of these professional saleswomen parallels in many ways the experience of their Western counterparts in service-based or consumption-based economies (see e.g. Adkins 1995; Hearn and Parkin 1996; Sullivan 2014). However, the wider social discourse of sexuality in China differs considerably from that in many Western countries, where the idea of sexual liberation has circulated since the 1960s and where women possess some autonomy upon sexual discourse in public arenas. While Chinese men happily consume women's sexuality, women who are actively engaged in sexual activities, explicit or implicit, are considered disreputable. This has created challenges for these young professional women as they attempt to negotiate the sexualized work culture within which their occupations are embedded. To be a reputable woman as well as to excel in a sexualized business world has created a critical dilemma for them. Carefully managing their non-sexual presentation through control of clothing and invoking their familial role to divert the sexual content of the encounters with the clients, professional women walk a very fine line between respectability and disreputability.

Male sales professionals did not worry about managing the boundary between gender and sexuality or their sexual reputation. Indeed, when they secured a deal, a man's success would be attributed to his brainpower whereas a woman's success would be attributed to her physical appeal. Ignoring the fact that sexuality is deeply enmeshed in gender relations and local cultural sociality, following Hakim's (2011) call for women to use 'erotic capital' for advancement would further naturalize women in a physical bodily difference from men, doing more harm rather than improving women's collective status.

Notes

1. In East China, the common understanding is that men of a height of 1.78 metres and above are considered tall men.
2. The word 'decadent' is widely used in public to describe the moral implications of the behaviour of sex workers. It has a specifically sexualized connotation.

3. In recent years, images of Western men as ‘sexy’ have begun to appear in the media, for example, in perfume advertisements.
4. Monthly income generally consisted of a basic wage plus commission. Some sales reps were given a bonus either quarterly or yearly depending upon the profits of the company. The basic wage of a sales rep was c.800–1000 Yuan (c.80–100 pounds), equal to half the average salary of a university-educated graduate in an administrative job (c.2000 yuan). The commission depends upon the quantity of their sales. According to these professionals, sometimes they could take home up to 20,000 yuan of commission each month.
5. See Zhang’s (2001) paper on *goudui* in south-western China for a discussion of the ways in which private entrepreneurs engaged with government officials.
6. Male professionals complained that they could not eat well during ‘banqueting’ and had to eat properly when they arrived home. The male professionals in the foreign trade Organization considered themselves lucky because they did not have to deal with Chinese clients and attend such banqueting events.
7. Women reported that at the table people often drank spirits, and white and red wine. The choice of alcohol depended upon the guests’ preferences. However, when making a toast to an important guest, drinking spirits was considered the ultimate in politeness. And according to the male professionals: ‘*the higher the degree of the spirits, the better in order to enliven the atmosphere at the table*’.
8. For male professionals, they did not express the stress their female counterparts had experienced. The main concern they had was related to the impact of excessive drinking upon their health.
9. The issue of sexual harassment at work has only recently been openly acknowledged as a problem, and has not yet been formally recognized in labour legislation.

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CHAPTER 7

Affect, Power and Resistance

Following the trilogy of Chaps. 4, 5 and 6 exposing the organizational mechanisms of gendered control—naturalization, objectification and commodification—wielded over women in post-Mao white-collar Chinese workplaces, this chapter moves back to the foreign trade Organization's office setting to examine the power relationship between men and women, as well as among women, to reveal a 'plurality of resistances' (Foucault 1978: 96).

As a group, managerial men possess a symbolic power which can be converted into bureaucratic power. However, in an office community, which rhetorically promotes 'harmony' men's success in enacting their bureaucratic power depends upon their relationship building with women. Despite occupying a lower position in the organizational hierarchy, young women are active players who manipulate the dependencies of their male colleagues and engage in hierarchies to their own ends, drawing upon the cultural repertoire of gender as a relational and role-oriented system in this game of power play.

There is no collective fight against the institutionalized gendered division of labour (see Chap. 4). Some women (particularly those with longer service) in the Organization formed an informal clique with regular social activities outside work. The inclusion/exclusion in/from these activities created another form of segregation and hierarchy among women.

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Structural Possibility for Resistance

As a result of their symbolic power, men had easier access to economic resources and bureaucratic power. However, their success in enacting bureaucratic power over women was dependent upon the management of their relations with women. Three factors contextualized the power play between men and women in the Organization; apprenticeships, the evaluation system and the management style.

Apprenticeships

The concept of an apprenticeship has a long-established history in the Chinese workplace and it is the norm for newcomers in a workplace to be assigned an experienced employee from whom they learn the workplace rules and skills. For graduates newly recruited into the Organization, it was normal to go through a three-year apprenticeship and during this time the cultural expectation was of a hierarchical yet close relationship between master and apprentice. The master is expected be a good model and the apprentice is expected to respect and follow the advice of the master. This relationship can be consolidated into one that goes beyond the workplace: it may form a good friendship over a lifetime in which the apprentice is obliged to respect and assist the master in return for the latter's early years of support.

With the exception of a few older sales managers, the majority of sales managers (including two section managers) in the Organization had been apprentices early in their career. Before 2000, sales managers trained newcomers directly. After 2000, due to the company's expansion, the number of graduates far exceeded the number of sales managers and as a result graduates, whether being channelled to become assistants or managers, were put under the guidance of female senior sales assistants for the first three years to learn procedures and about transactions. After their apprenticeship, men were usually promoted to sales managers and/or section managers.

Evaluation System

According to the performance evaluation mechanism adopted by the company, everyone reported directly to a single section manager, regardless of their rank. This meant that sales assistants might work for sales managers

but did not formally report to them. Therefore male sales managers did not have any bureaucratic power over the female sales assistants and so were particularly vulnerable to the influence of women's indirect power.

Management Style

With the wider cultural and social emphasis on relationship management in the pursuit of harmony, the Organization adopted a relationship-oriented, rather than a task-oriented, ethos for its daily operations. General Manager Wang explained:

> Through the lens of western management, regulations and targets are used to manage people. The situation in China is different. Of course, there are regulations and targets but in China relationships are valued higher than laws. Since this is the context we are in, as managers, the thing I constantly think about is how to make employees follow orders whole-heartedly and achieve emotional governance.

Despite the modern office setting, General Manager Wang was in effect describing a throwback to Confucian protocols where harmonious family relationships were emphasized and promoted and formed the model for other relations in society. In many respects this is to be expected given the Party-State has reappraised the Confucian ideology and promotes the ideal of building a harmonious society.

Apprenticeships, evaluation mechanisms and management style are not completely separate; they interweave and condition each other. How these factors contextualize the power play between men and women is examined here through the analysis of the section under the leadership of Qian.

At the time of the study, Section Manager Qian was 32 years old, married and had been with the company for five years. In Qian's section, there was one sales manager (man), one advanced-level sales assistant (woman), one middle-level sales assistant (woman) and two basic-level sales assistants (one woman and one man, both of whom had recently joined as graduates). The advanced-level and middle-level sales assistants each took one of the graduates as their apprentices. Xiao Wu, the female advanced-level senior sales assistant (30 years old, married) had been Qian's master. As Qian had a Master's degree, unlike most graduates who held bachelor's degrees, he served an apprenticeship of two years. After Qian finished his apprenticeship, he became a sales manager.

Following his promotion to manager, Qian's sales rose from hundreds of thousands of Yuan to millions of Yuan within two years, and he had recently been promoted to section manager. As noted in Chap. 4, because Wu was a sales assistant, she did not have any sales attributed to her and so could not put forward a case for promotion linked to the success of the Organization. Wu had therefore only been promoted from a basic-level to advanced-level assistant during the eight years she had been in the Organization.

Although Qian possessed considerable bureaucratic power, his relation with Wu was mosaic-like, rather than hierarchal. When interviewed, Qian said that he adopted a Zen-like management style to 'govern by doing nothing' (*wuwei erzhi*). He explained '*I don't manage you so you don't constrain me*'. Seminal research on the work unit by Walder (1986) characterized the workers and their leaders in a patron-client relationship; it is a relationship of exchange between unequals but individuals in this relationship are locked in bilateral obligations towards each other. Qian's inaction was affected by this patron-client ideal, but he was not at ease with this model: by removing his governance from his employees, Qian waived any obligation he might be expected to perform as a patron towards them.

Qian's desire to opt out of the patron-client model was closely linked to the complicated history between him and Wu and a role-oriented cultural perception of authority. Building upon Weber's theory of power, Hamilton (1990) noted that in China, authority is seen as an aspect of specific social roles (i.e. an impersonal, non-intentional and harmony-seeking) while in the West it is seen as legitimate domination (i.e. intentional, directional and consequential). Due to this role orientation, Qian's dilemma was that he not only held a role that allowed him bureaucratic authority but also inherited an apprentice role that had the potential to sabotage this authority. Culturally, Qian was expected to respect Wu as his former master despite his higher rank, but conforming to this expectation could negatively impact his authority over her and the other employees in his section. Through inaction, Qian treated all employees equally and did not risk the perception of favouring his former master.

Qian's management style was tested when senior management decided that section managers should assess all sales assistants to determine how much bonus each was entitled to receive per month. Qian complained:

> I have discussed this with the deputy general manager twice. I was absolutely against this policy. Through this assessment, the relationship between the

> management and employees will become very tough. As section managers, we are pushed to the frontier and become cannon ashes in the employee-management struggle.

Qian went on:

> Every month, it is very hard to assess sales assistants' performance. It gives me great headaches. In my section, I gave Wu an A score because she is very experienced. All the other assistants a B score but no C or Fail. Everyday I am thinking about how to reduce conflict and build harmonious relationships in my section. This is such a big question because if any woman in my section has unsatisfied emotions, it will cause damage to the team and affect the work of the whole section.

The 'modern' assessment procedure forced Qian to enact his bureaucratic power; however, this did not achieve domination and instead put him under great stress.

The only male sales manager in Qian's section, Zheng, also expressed difficulty in managing relationships with female colleagues. Zheng was 27, single, and had been in the company for five years but only transferred into Qian's section a year earlier. Zheng confided that he was not very good at communicating with female colleagues and this lack of popularity with them had even been picked up in his annual review. Zheng recalled:

> At the year end, the deputy general manager said to me, 'Deng in some technical aspects is not as strong as you. But look, he can easily win the favour of those assistants'. This is really difficult for me. Since the senior management formed the impression that Deng managed relationship well in the company, they would delegate more tasks to him because they believe he will have the support to resolve them. But if they delegate tasks to me, they would wonder if I could get the support from assistants to complete the task. This can form a vicious circle in which good opportunities all go to Deng.

In 2008 Deng was a male sales manager in another section, holding a similar position to Zheng. During my time with the company, I sat at a desk quite close to Deng and watched him regularly initiate small talk (mostly starting with compliments) with female assistants, bringing gifts to the women in his section after his overseas trips and frequently offering to take female colleagues in his section out to lunch at nearby restaurants.

Zheng felt that because of his introverted personality, he would never achieve what Deng could, but acknowledged that there was a need to work on his relationship with the women assistants in his section. His strategy was not to overload the women assistants, but this only meant that he was actively taking on assistants' clerical work. He concluded: *I have no other choice. Building relationships with women is such a complicated thing.* Zheng's inability to transform from introvert to extrovert, and his desire to improve his relationships with his female assistants meant that the Organization's regulation requiring women assistants to support male managers has actually been reversed in his relations with the women in his section. Zheng's speculation about the senior management's perception of Deng was correct; in 2015 Deng had been promoted to section manager while Zheng remained a sales manager (although it was higher than the rank he had held in 2008). Zheng's relationship with women inhibited his progress in the masculine hierarchy.

Despite holding different organizational roles, Qian and Zheng are faced with one common problem: how to deal with women in the workplace. Both Qian and Zheng's concerns were grounded in their understanding of the interdependent relationship mechanism that ties men to women in the co-production of harmony. This mechanism offers women an opportunity to resist men's bureaucratic power in the Chinese workplace.

Affect

As part of an intensified interest in 'emotions, feelings, and affect' as objects of scholarly inquiry over the last decade, feminists have documented the 'affective turn' as a trans-disciplinary intellectual shift emerging out of the 'textual turn' (Cvetkovich 2012: 133). This body of literature has focused upon the cultural, economic and political implications of affect and emotion and analysed the way in which power circulates through feeling and how politically salient ways of being and knowing are produced through affective relations and discourses (Pedwell and Whitehead 2012).

Affect describes 'visceral forces beneath, alongside or generally other than conscious knowing, vital forces insisting beyond emotion' and 'signifies potential: a body's capacity to affect and be affected' (Gregg and Siegworth 2010: 2). As such, affect is positioned as a productive concept and framework for 'grasping transformations, potentialities and unpredictable connections between bodies' (Greco and Stenner 2008: 11) which cannot be reduced to either 'discourse' or 'emotion', but exceeds these

categories. It is a material intensity that emerges via the 'in-between' spaces of embodied encounters, circulating power not primarily as a mode of discursive regulation but rather as the potential to 'become otherwise' (Deleuze and Guattari 1994).

This framework, Grosz suggests, might allow feminists to develop a 'politics of acts, not identities' (2011: 186) and examine the relationship between affect, solidarity and resistance. Boler argues that if emotions are 'a primary site of control', they are also 'a site of political resistance' and 'can mobilize movements for liberation' (1999: xiii). Others warn that feminist enthusiasm for the possibility of solidarity and change associated with the force of affect must be tempered by an acknowledgement of the persistent difficulty in generating structural transformation through projects of collective feelings.

Rather than prioritizing 'the personal' or 'the emotional' above and beyond 'the structural', a recent feminist approach has been to analyse the complex and shifting co-constitution of emotional subjectivities and encounters and socio-economic structures and relations (Pedwell and Whitehead 2012). This recent development in feminist affective theory is particularly helpful when analysing the acts of female assistants in the workplace. Women assistants were generally unhappy as a result of the economic polarization by gender, and a common complaint was: '*we are not white-collar professionals, we are blue-collar workers*'. When discussing their weekend activities, they joked with managers (who might spend their leisure time playing golf, eating at expensive restaurants, etc.): '*you are the rich ones, we cannot afford it*'. This unhappiness cast a shadow over the harmonious workplace the senior management tried to cultivate. The snappy comments and acts of unhappiness were a form of collective resistance and prompted the management to act. During a private interview with the General Manager Wang, he acknowledged that female assistants felt left behind: '*because a gloomy atmosphere is not good for productivity, what we try to achieve is to increase the salary for these women assistants, well above the average in the industry*'.

At the interpersonal level, emotions were also an effective weapon for women to use against particular men. Whilst the 'feeling rule' (Hochschild 2003) in the Chinese public sphere is often associated with being constrained and controlled, women re-appropriated the inner-outer boundary and deliberately staged a display of their strong emotions in public, demonstrating a capacity to affect. During the preparation for the basketball competition, for example, there were often collective propaganda

gatherings called by the management. In such gatherings, the deputy general manager gave a short speech to mobilize the employees participating in the sports event. At a couple of meetings, I noticed that Xiao Qin, a senior female assistant, always pulled a deliberately long sulky face that was in contrast to the inspirational words of the leadership. Another assistant confided in me that Xiao Qin was engaged in a cold war with her section manager but no one knew what it was about; they could just observe the public display of dissatisfaction. During my private interview with Xiao Qin, it emerged that she was taking an evening MBA course which she claimed would increase her performance at work,[1] and so had asked her section manager for a reduced workload, but had been rejected. However, as a result of Xiao Qin's actions and a resulting rumour that it was a reflection of her line manager's personality, in the end he agreed to the workload reduction requested by Xiao Qin.

Through her 'inappropriate' emotional display in the public workplace, Xiao Qin tilted the desired emotional ideal (pleasant and smooth) with her line manager in her favour. In this regard, Xiao Qin and her line manager were compulsory players in a co-maintenance equation which formed part of a bigger harmonious equation promoted by the company's senior management. When Xiao Qin's emotional state changed, the mechanism of the equation determined that other players in the equation also changed and this inevitably affected the line manager. The analysis of Xiao Qin's behaviour shows how the interdependent co-producing mechanism of the equation empowers women's emotions with a capacity to affect.

The structure of emotional display is gendered. While a public outburst of emotion by women is accepted in China, men who reveal significant emotions in public are censored. In a relational setting, such as the corporate space, the expectation is that men will calm a situation and return it to a harmonious equilibrium. I only witnessed one occasion in which a man demonstrated strong emotions; a recent male graduate was unwilling to acquiesce to orders from a female senior sales assistant and raised his voice to express his resistance. The woman assistant then raised her voice leading to an even louder quarrel which attracted the attention of others. The section manager then intervened and defused the situation. Afterwards, this young man's display of strong emotions became the subject of private discussions among colleagues; a couple of interviewees commented that his uncontrolled emotion was a reflection of his immaturity. Whether of his own accord or not, a few days later, the graduate made a public apology to the woman assistant, effectively conceding defeat. Despite his apology, the

graduate's emotional outburst lingered on and his reputation, particularly among female assistants, suffered.

The gendered structure of feeling rules meant that male section managers found it difficult to manage women, even without the complicated situation Qian found himself in (being the apprentice of one of his assistants at one time). One male section manager (aged 34) commented:

> With men, I don't care if I hurt their emotions. I can act as a dictator to them and I don't care. But with women, I have lots of concerns. I think if I am too strict, I will hurt their dignity because women are emotionally fragile. But if I am not strict, I feel annoyed with myself. This is something that bothers me a lot. I have asked the teachers of my MBA course about this but can't find a proper solution.

Emotions had become a site in which men's bureaucratic power was contested whilst women's indirect power was enacted and exercised. Yet feminist writers on affective theories warn that feelings can reproduce dominant social and geo-political hierarchies and exclusions (Pedwell and Whitehead 2012). The above section manager invoked and reinforced a gendered notion of emotionality; however, the naturalized link between emotions and women requires a more nuanced analysis within the local context.

The naturalizing effect of emotions is not as detrimental as women's collective enactment of erotic capital (see Chap. 6). Viewed as the 'weaker sex', the deployment of emotions by women as a form of resistance is considered socially justified, and this is anchored within women's rights discourse. However, when women enact erotic capital, the focus is exclusively on the reputation of the woman who uses it. During a woman's emotional display, the social focus is not only on the person who enacts emotional resistance, but also on the perceived wrongdoer who triggered the display. In a relational society, such as China, the audience naturally questions the behaviour and morality of the person the woman directs her emotions at. An extreme example is the use of suicide as a form of ultimate revenge and a shaming strategy upon a woman's wrongdoers. A woman's ability to deploy her emotions may appear to be a weapon of the weak (Scott 1985); but in a relational society like China it has the potential to retrieve justice by throwing into question the actions of the wrongdoers.

Ogasawara (1998) documented the way in which female professionals in Japanese organizations used gossip, outright work refusal and public gift-giving to manipulate the careers of their male colleagues, forcing the men

to accede to their strategies in order to retain their positions of power. In China, women's indirect power is exercised more fluidly; it is dependent upon the role men hold in the masculine hierarchy. Towards senior management, Chinese women's capacity to affect has mediated and even sabotaged men's enactment of bureaucratic power, putting considerable stress upon section managers. For ordinary male managers, women's capacity to affect, built upon men's desire to conform to the hegemonic corporate masculine model entailing relationship building with women, could remake the order of practical tasks between women assistants and male managers. Although women's emotional resistance could not change the gendered division of labour in the workplace, it is a far more productive collective strategy than erotic capital. The workplace is a pattern of relationships, how to reform it could be a question of how to relate differently. By treating 'good' male managers and 'bad' male managers differently, women sales assistants in the Organization successfully staged 'a politics of acts' (Grosz 2011:186).

Precarious Sisterhood

On my first day with the company, after completing my internship form and handing in my documents for identity verification, Xiao Chen (the assistant in the Central Administration Office) took me to meet Cao in the Central Administrative Office. Cao would be my master for the first six weeks in the Organization to enable me to become familiarized with how it operated. Cao was 27 years old, had been with the Organization for five years, and was well established amongst the network of women sales assistants.

Cao's job was to check the foreign trade procedure of each transaction and then issue the appropriate certificate. Because Cao's job meant that she needed to interact with a number of different departments, she had the freedom to walk around different sections throughout the day with the excuse of checking transaction accuracy. As her apprentice, I followed Cao on most of these trips and so gained an insight into all sections. From the interactions (joking and laughter) Cao had with other women assistants I could tell that she was popular with most of them.

One Friday morning, three weeks into my time with the Organization, I noticed two senior female assistants come close to Cao, whisper something in her ear, followed by Cao smiling cunningly and nodding her head. It seemed that Cao and the senior female assistants were planning

something but did not want others in the Central Administration Office to know. I quietly implored Cao to tell me what was going on but Cao gestured that she would tell me later. At lunch, Cao confided in me that some of the women assistants were organizing a trip to the city zoo the following day and not everyone was invited, but if I was interested she would talk to the event organizer. I thought this would be a great opportunity to build relations with the women assistants in the sales section and jumped at the opportunity. Cao said, 'leave this to me but do not tell this to others'. In the afternoon, just before we finished work, Cao smiled at me to imply that I was in and I thanked her enormously.

The next day, in front of the city zoo gate, I found out who else had been included: one male sales manager, almost half of the advanced and middle-level women assistants, all the recent male university graduates who worked as apprentices to senior women assistants, and one recent woman university graduate. Some were surprised that I had been invited given my status as an intern, however their curiosity about my background and why I was there helped me to overcome the initial awkwardness.

The group had a picnic, played cards together, talked about various topics unrelated to work and seemed to have fun. Indeed, for those present the boundary between work colleagues and friends seemed blurred. These informal activities took place frequently; two weeks later the same group organized a trip to pick strawberries at a local farm and two weeks after that there was a get-together at the flat of one of the senior woman assistants. The activities consolidated existing friendships, particularly amongst women, but an invitation to join the activities was carefully guarded.

Five advanced-level women assistants[2] were at the core of these informal gatherings: they were the organizers of the activities but also gatekeepers of the group's membership. These women had joined the company at roughly the same time and were now the longest serving sales assistants in their section. They always ate together at lunchtime and regularly went to the ladies room together. In fact, the ladies room, as a number of female interviewees mentioned, was considered an inner space away from (male) management's control. During my time with the company I found it very difficult to get close to these five women and they always seemed to be on guard when I spoke to them. During one visit to the ladies room, I encountered one of the women and started to talk to her in local dialect as we were both from the same region. In order to classify me as 'outer', she responded in standard Mandarin despite the fact that she was known to speak the local dialect at work. Only through Mr Li, the contact who

introduced me to the Organization, did I manage to conduct a private interview with one of the five women, Xu.

During the interview with Xu, it emerged that the friendship of the five women had become strained. Senior management had recently transferred Xu to another section and, due to her good performance, asked her to lead other women assistants, including Min (one of the five women). This move imposed a bureaucratic hierarchy between Xu and Min, and Xu was anxious concerning its implications. She commented:

> I don't want to manage Min because we are good friends. What would Min think about this? This arrangement would affect our relations and also our productivity. So after I got transferred into Min's section, I talked to the section manager and proposed that work should be divided according to region rather than administrative rank. He agreed. Through this arrangement, Min and I work parallel but not in a hierarchical relationship.

Although the five women seemed to have a strong friendship, this was only because it was carefully managed, as exemplified in Xu's action to avoid a hierarchical relationship with Min. While the core group tried to achieve egalitarianism with one another, the inclusion/exclusion in/from these informal activities resulted in another segregation among women (based upon local/non-local, urban/rural, employment positions).

Membership of the group was not based upon gender. Zhao in the Central Administrative Office and the only woman sales manager (who was rumoured to be a state official's relative) were never invited to any of these gatherings along with all the young women graduates. The female graduates may well have been viewed initially as threats or competitors, but when I revisited the Organization in 2011, a couple of these women had been accepted in the informal group; perhaps by then it was clear to the senior women assistants that these young women were on the same career track as they were.

The inclusion in/from the group was also based upon an urban/rural divide. Whilst the state's ban on rural-urban mobility had been lifted in the 1980s, *suzhi* (quality of individuals, groups and populations) began to be deployed as a discourse to exert social control by the state government; citizens of rural origins in particular are deemed to have low *suzhi* (Jacka 2009). In the Organization, there were only two women assistants from a rural background (both of whom were well qualified) and *suzhi* discourse slipped out from time to time during the conversation among urban-based white-collar women. When one of the female assistants with a rural background

wore a summer dress to the workplace in February, I overheard a woman comment: '*she even wore that type of dress in winter*, *rural suzhi*'. Urban women deliberately invoked the *suzhi* discourse to recompose a hierarchy between them and rural woman, implying that a rural 'habitus' did not fit in with the urban corporate 'field' (Bourdieu 1984).

There was a segregation between local and non-local women. Excluding the two women with a rural background, six more female assistants had been born and brought up in another city before settling in the Organization's city after completing their university education. Because of their urban origins, these women were not the direct target of the derogatory comments from the informal group, but were nonetheless generally excluded from their activities. One mechanism the informal group used to demonstrate closeness was language: they often communicated in local dialect to show affinity with one another and highlight inner membership to outsiders.

Ironically, the urban/rural and local/non-local divide did not apply to the male university graduates. Whilst the recent graduate population included one from a rural background, two from another urban city and one from the local city, all of them had been admitted into the informal group and invited to join the informal activities (although a young man who made an emotional outburst in public was subsequently excluded). Given the career path the male graduates tended to follow, the senior women assistants seemed keen to carefully cultivate close relationships in case these young men became part of the senior management in the future. The reciprocity emphasized in Chinese culture (Yang 1994) entailed that these men would be expected to return the favour sometime in the future; by investing in the economy of gratitude, these women could potentially further mediate any official power the senior management intended to exercise upon them in the future.

Whilst the informal group's gatherings were shrouded in secrecy, the existence of the events and general thrust of the activity was well known and this had a certain impact upon the excluded women assistants. As women's homo-sociality was an important indicator of their popularity, excluded women might be seen as isolated and unpopular. In order to be included, some women tried to gain the favour of core members whilst a minority resigned themselves to exclusion, one commenting: *When they organize activities*, *they never ask us newcomers. At first*, *I thought it was because we are new*, *so they might feel us unfamiliar. But they have always excluded us. I just gave it up. I organize my own leisure activities in my private time*. In this respect, the informal gatherings actually divided rather than consolidated women in the Organization.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the power relationship between men and women as well as among women in an office setting. Although men held direct and bureaucratic power in the organizational hierarchy, women's power, whilst indirect and covert, can be more effective in micro-level interactions at work. Women's capacity to affect was deeply grounded in an organizational pursuit of harmony and gender as a role-oriented and relational system. One important tactic deployed by women was the display of private emotions in public—a justified weapon of the weak—to shame and manipulate their male colleagues and superiors and turn subordination on its head.

Feminist writers of affective theories focus upon the cultural, economic and political implications of affect and emotion. They indicate that women may be more effective in using their capacity to affect to mediate the ways in which power is exercised. This body of literature examines the question of 'how' and consequence of using the capacity to affect with little attention as to why this works so well for women. Implicitly, this scholarship refers to the source of women's efficiency in this arena as grounded in a gendered notion of emotionality. In the Chinese context, as revealed in this chapter, it is not only the gendered rules which matter, but another key determinant that makes women's capacity to affect more effective is the relational co-producing nature of gender in the wider pursuit of harmony. This tilts the balance in the emotional equation so that women project a question on the behaviour of others. Without this key mechanism of power, women's use of emotions in the workplace may only reproduce naturalized gender categories. Precisely because this key mechanism is in place, the potential to naturalize women via their deployment of emotions is alleviated; women's mobilizing their capacity to affect can be a more productive collective strategy than the enactment of erotic capital.

Notes

1. This was a reason she put forward in her official negotiation with her section manager but taking this course would also have benefited her personal development privately.
2. These five women were aged from 27 to 30 years. Two were married (with no children) and three were in stable dating relationships.

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CHAPTER 8

Marriage and Family

The feminist discussion of the relationship between work and family originates in the early debate on the relationship between capitalism and patriarchy. Dual systems theory, one prominent framework of feminist theories, argues that patriarchy and capitalism are related structures of domination that lead to the dual inequalities within work and family for women (Delphy and Leonard 1992; Hartmann 1979; Walby 1990). Inspired by this early work, feminist scholars have extensively analysed how gender inequalities within the family interact with women's work experiences. For example, feminist economists have revealed how women's role in raising and caring for children constrains their ability to pursue careers and compete for demanding jobs (Folbre 1994). Due to gender segregation at work and the lower wages women receive, families may rationally resort to having women withdraw from the workplace to take on the childcare responsibilities. Even those who do somehow manage to combine work and family must work a 'second shift' (Hochschild 1989) in undertaking the responsibility for the bulk of household labour. The economic dependence of women upon marriage may also give husbands considerably more power within the relationship (Sen 1989). Although feminist studies recognize the diversity in family behaviour and practices across the axis of race and class, this body of literature generally views family as a source of subordination, contributing to a wider system that reproduces women's social and economic inequality.

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This chapter revisits the relationship between work and family by examining professional women's experiences of marriage and family. Rather than viewing the structures of work and family as a 'cycle of vulnerability' (Okin 1989), I argue that for women of the Only Child Generation, marriage and family were important places from which to manoeuvre, strategize and exercise power. The distinction between the Chinese context and the Western reality is closely related to the following two factors. First, except for transnational family studies, the family in Western feminist research remains largely premised on the notion of a nuclear family. However, studies of Chinese families in various locales have shown continuing respect for intergenerational reciprocity and lifelong commitment to family ties that go beyond the conjugal family (Davis and Friedman 2014). Thus, the meaning of family in the Chinese context is double-barrelled; regardless of residence patterns, it can refer to both the conjugal family and extended family. In practice, the meaning depends on the context in which the term is used. Given that Chinese family is understood multi-generationally, the intersection between intergenerational dynamics and gender relations could remap women's connections with their workplaces.

Second, unlike most Western workplaces, which are characterized by a sharp separation between work and family life, the previous form of the state-owned companies—'socialist work units'—have had a long history of blurring work and family boundaries through familial practices and spatial organization, which resulted in another form of control and surveillance for women (Liu 2007: 141). As previous chapters reveal, the state-owned foreign trade company still inherited some of the former socialist work units' characteristics. Yet to what extent do continuities and changes in the workplace's familial practices influence young women's experiences in the family and their work organization?

Remnants of the Work Unit

In the work unit, matchmaking was a popular activity. The post-Mao state-owned companies continued this practice. At the official level, the Central Administration Office sent out information on dating activities in the local city to all the single employees every week. Manager Zhao (of the Central Administration Office) also implied that those collective sports activities organized by the Organization were implicitly aimed at creating opportunities for singles to meet prospective partners. During the interview with General Manager Wang, he commented that employees' marital

status was a management concern and delegated this task to Manager Zhao to sort out. However, the management concern was gendered. He stated, 'we hope it won't become an emergency for older single women in the company. This is because for women the longer they delay marriage, the more difficult for them to get a husband. We have been keeping an eye on this.' The Deputy Manager clearly spelled out this particular difficulty for women, saying 'no matter what, men can always find a partner even when they are in their 30s. For women, you need to hurry up. Just like Chinese cabbage, the longer women stay on the market, the less value women have.'

The senior managers' concerns were grounded in the paternalistic tradition of the work unit, in which the leaders were supposed to act as family elders, keeping an eye on all aspects of the employees' lives. Yet it also reflects the societal stereotypes, illuminating how the intersection of gender, sexuality and age creates a disadvantage for women that is reflected in the wider 'left-over women' discourse (To 2015). In the company, 30 years of age was set as the dividing line determining women's marital prospects. At the time that I conducted the fieldwork, there was only one woman (31 years old) who fit their concern, and Manager Zhao actively set up introductions for her while her dating progress became a constant topic of discussion among work colleagues. During private interviews, the staff members also shared their speculations about why this 31-year-old woman had not yet gotten married. The attention must have been incredibly uncomfortable for her, and might explain why, despite being invited to those informal off-work gatherings, she more often than not declined to join.

The paternalist ideal has persisted in state-owned organizations, but the familial model in which the socialist work unit was firmly grounded has lost its material and spatial base in contemporary organizations. One key identifiable change in the state-owned companies from the past work units was to replace the practice of allocating apartments built by the work units with that of issuing employees housing allowances via their wage.[1] This change took place in the context of the privatization of housing in the late 1990s. Rather than being allocated from the work unit, housing became commodified and regulated by the market.

The changing housing allocation practice has had some gendered consequences. First, previously in the work unit, women were not eligible for housing allocation because the socialist work unit continued the pre-socialist belief that it was men who should provide marital accommodation. After the privatization of housing, female employees were eligible to receive housing

allowances in their own name, which made marriage a less material mechanism by which to gain housing. Paradoxically, housing allowance was closely linked to one's pay grade. Due to the vertical segregation at work, male professionals are more likely to receive greater housing allowance in cash form. The rapid commodification of housing sent local housing prices soaring within a decade, far beyond a young single woman's savings. Second, following this change, employees tend to live in their own purchased residential compounds rather than in a residential unit involving work colleagues and superiors. This has greatly reduced previous surveillance and enabled women to shield their private and family lives from the observations of their work colleagues and superiors.

The most significant effect of this change in housing has been its role in enabling marriage and family to spatially return to a private sphere. Contrary to Western feminist discussions that consider dichotomy between family and work a cause of inequality in the family and segregation in the workplace, I reveal that the re-constitution of the private sphere away from the workplace has facilitated Chinese women's enactment of direct power in the family. Due to gender as a role-oriented system and a gendered understanding of the inner-outer division, women's autonomy and control over the 'inner' is culturally legitimized. Without the previous surveillance and intervention from the work unit, women are considered rightful dominators in the inner sphere.

Finding the 'One'

Sun was university-educated, 25 years old, had fair skin, long, straight hair and dressed elegantly every day at work. She had joined the company the year before, a couple of months prior to my beginning the internship. Our shared newcomer status drew her closer to me, and she showed great interest in my life abroad. Gradually, she revealed that her boyfriend was also studying in the USA and that she hoped to join him some day. Over time, it became clear that this boyfriend was her ex-boyfriend. Due to his parents' opposition to the relationship, they had broken up when he left China, but had resumed contact while he was in the USA. Xiao Sun secretly hoped that they would get back together, but his parents were the financial backers for his education abroad, and therefore he stood by them. Why his parents disapproved of her was never revealed. As we grew closer, it was clear that she hoped that I would set up some introductions for her among my circle of friends, as they might have overseas experiences

that would allow her to pursue her transnational dreams. Although it was a request that I never managed to fulfil, we remained on good terms and she agreed to a private interview with me in a teahouse. Reflecting on her experience and expectations about love and marriage, she commented:

> Marriage has to be based upon love, but love only is not sufficient, far from being sufficient in Chinese society. Some economic foundation is crucial for the marriage. After that, two parties must have a common goal, that is, similar attitudes towards life. If there is a big gap between the two parties, there will be a lot of disagreement. I don't think marriage can take on this much. For example, I would like to live a comfortable and stylish life but the other party does not care and is happy with a life that only covers food and accommodation. So two parties want different things. Women in our age cohort are fine but these women who are younger than us (born after 1990) are too practical. What struck these younger girls first must be material wealth— they get married to rich people even if that they are not in love with them. Then for men, they go for very young and beautiful girls. I feel such a type of marriage won't be happy. After all, I don't think money can buy everything. Oh by the way, nowadays people call those women older than me as 'left-over women'. I don't agree with such terms. For example, like my older cousin, as she is already 33, she felt her life was over and could not find love again. As over 30, she felt she was deprived of the right to romance and love. She thought it okay as long as she got married to someone of similar background and was kind to her, even that there was no love. They could get on with life as companions. I disagreed with her. The husband and wife ought to have a common language because the two parties spend a life together! When I broke up with my boyfriend, I also thought to myself: if I cannot find the right one, I just get married to anyone. But that was only a momentary thought. I think this behaviour is extremely irresponsible for oneself. If the other person is very good, the life of you two go on. But what if some day you or he finds someone you love, that can cause harm for a second time. Alternatively if that person is bad and you cannot bear him, you will lead to divorce. I feel one can make a mistake in dating but marriage is more serious and should be achieved after some observation. People only should get married after they know each other well.

Sun's narrative points to a hybridity of views in terms of mate selection that is common among young professional women. They place great emphasis on romance and feelings in an intimate relationship while simultaneously holding distinctive pragmatic views about the economic

foundation for a marital union. Although women like Sun may not specify a car and a house as marital necessities to distinguish them from the material girls, they would expect to find someone who has the potential to provide such things. This economic concern is linked to the cultural tradition that women marry up the social ladder, as necessitated by the gender inequality in the labour market reflected in the vertical segregation and economic polarization of men and women. However, the majority of the women interviewed would not sacrifice their personal feelings solely for economic security. The significance of personal feelings in a marriage is an important transformation that contrasts with older generations of women.

The traditional Chinese ideologies of romantic love were frequently found in the works of playwrights from the Yuan dynasty and in classical poetry as passion, devotion and endurance through hardship. However, the feelings between partners were secondary to the responsibility for and loyalty to the family (Tzeng and Gandarillas 1992). Potter (1988) also argued that emotional feelings are not as important as action and commitment for the Chinese. Comparing women of the Cultural Revolution Generation, for whom political standing in the 1970s and then economic conditions in the 1980s were under great emphasis in mate selection (Hershatter 2004), the importance of personal feelings has peaked, as seen in the choice of mate selection for young educated women embodying new forms of subjectivity and agency. Similar to Sun, a few other single women confirmed disapproval of two people with no similar experience being forced together through the material condition. ‘I don’t mind finding a boyfriend. But I cannot accept that two people without any common experiences have to be together purely because of the economic conditions. It seems that “left-over” women must accept the introductions to all kinds of men, some divorced, some without qualifications, etc.’

Women’s criteria in mate selection overlapped with men’s ideas, but there were important differences. Men also considered personal feelings to be important, but an emphasis on women’s physical appearance remained a key criterion for men. Although women do pay additional attention to their partner’s physical appearance, its significance in mate selection is different. For women, physical appearance could enhance their feelings towards men, but other personality traits might win them over if the man’s appearance failed to attract a mate. For men,

personal appearance was compulsory for establishing their feelings towards women. However, physical appearance is gendered and ageist. Women's physical beauty is considered to be intensely tied to youth, whereas that of men can be associated with maturity as they age. The interviews with men revealed that those in their 30s found women of the same age too old. This constitution of feminine beauty is closely linked to the wider social context of sexual economy constituted by the rampant representation and exploitation of young women's bodies (Zurndorfer 2015).

Eight years after my initial interviews, a considerable number of the single women I had spoken to remain single, including Sun. Thanks to the rapid development of social media, I maintained close ties with them. A few women informed me that as they aged, they experienced a great deal of pressure, both in the workplace and from their own parents. In the workplace, they constantly received introductions initiated by married work colleagues. Despite these efforts, they remained insistent on emotional connections as a necessary criterion in a future partner. After accumulating economic resources over the years, in 2015, two of the single women managed to buy flats (on the outskirts of the city) with mortgages of their own. In a way, the emotional connection became even more important. By grounding the importance of emotional compatibility in a private site of individual desire and agency, single women tried to negotiate and contest the workplace pressure. A female sales assistant recalled an annual review meeting she had with her section manager: 'he said to me, this year, hopefully you could complete the task of getting married. I said, as long as I find the one I love, I will certainly get married.' The increasing number of divorce cases in the company in recent years may relieve some of the pressure experienced by single women as another new group—divorced employees—emerges.

In addition to workplace pressures, another difficult negotiation single women encounter is with their parents. A female sales assistant commented: 'The common view is that women have an easy job but a rich husband, which means happiness! I don't think marriage is a safe. But my parents think as soon as I get married, everything will be sorted in my life.' During important Chinese festivals, parents and relatives often engaged in matchmaking. One tactic women used to escape these introductions was to claim that they must work during the holidays.

In Charge of the Family

For those women (two-thirds) who conformed to marital expectations, their interviews revealed that they had gained considerable marital power in their family relationships. According to classical resource theory, marital power is defined as the potential ability of one partner to influence the other's behaviour in an ongoing husband-wife relationship, which is manifested in the ability to make decisions in all matters concerning family activities (Blood and Wolf 1960). The decision-making power of each spouse is primarily determined by the amount of structural resources he or she contributes to the marriage. Scholars of modified resource theory recognize the importance of cultural context or normative expectations in the decision-making process in a marital relationship, for example, women may internalize male dominance by accepting gender role norms and their own lack of resources (Scanzoni 1979; McDonald 1980).

Numerous studies have focused on the influence of wives' increased resources on their domestic status (Yi and Chien 2002; Dong et al. 2004; Hu et al. 2010). In contrast, the effects of socio-cultural locality on the ways in which marital power is exercised have been inadequately investigated. Traditionally, due to the gendered divide between inner and outer space, although women were denied access to outer activities such as education and employment, their authority as managers of the household was consolidated through this divide. Yet, in pre-modern Chinese families, a generational hierarchy was imposed in addition to the gendered hierarchy; that is, the mother-in-law was the official supervisor of her daughter-in-law. In contemporary China, the neo-local residence in urban areas has become the majority (see Zang 2011). Thus, urban young women are not necessarily required to live with their in-laws, and become free from the everyday control and supervision of the senior generation.

Further, due to the strict implementation of the one-child policy in urban China and the economic restructuring that has led to redundancy among the older generation of urban women, young women from the Only Child Generation have enjoyed a demographic dividend in that both their mothers and mothers-in-law are on call to help with housework and childcare. This is very different from the women of the Cultural Revolution Generation, for whom parental support was divided among three or four siblings and in-law's support prioritized the families of sons who had produced a male grandchild. Thus, while women are symbolically responsible for the inner sphere, these female professionals did not necessarily have to do the dirty work themselves.

I had the chance to get a glimpse into the domestic life of one of the female sales assistants. After I had been in the Organization for four months, Zhu, one of the female assistants, invited me to join her for lunch in her home on a Saturday. She had always been curious about my life abroad and wanted to ask me for more details in her private space. When I arrived, dishes were already laid on the table. She said that her mother had come in the morning to cook the main dishes (fish and some stir-fries), and that her husband would be back in a minute with a ready-made roast chicken from the supermarket. After a pleasant lunch, her husband tidied up on his own. I was not surprised that her husband did the housework, as I was aware that as only children, many of these women had not learned how to do housework as they grew up (see Liu 2007). It was the ordering tone that she used when talking to her husband that left a deep impression on me.

During our conversation, I learned that her husband was a doctor at the local hospital (implying a good income) and that their apartment was paid for by her husband's family. The resources her husband brought to the conjugal family were materially far more than what Zhu contributed, but the provision from the husband's side was taken for granted, as it conformed to societal expectations of men in marriage. It was clear to me that Zhu was in charge of the family. Her husband may have appeared henpecked, but interviews with male managers further illuminated women's direct power in the family. There were two particular areas where young women seemed to gain firm control in their marital lives: kinship and household finance.

As the only children of their natal families, married women retained extremely close ties with their parents. Even though their husbands were often only children as well, these women tactically prioritized building natal ties over ties with their in-laws. A few married male managers commented that during the weekends, one of the standard activities was to have Sunday lunch at their wives' parents' homes rather than at their own parents' homes. Another example was involvement in caring for grandchildren. As one male manager explained, 'originally I said to my wife, "let my mother look after our son". My wife didn't agree. Since she communicated better with her mother than with my parents, her mother came to live with us to look after our newborn son.' Women commonly solicited their own mothers' help in caring for children, rather than that of their mothers-in-law. In 2015, I learned that some of these maternal grandparents provided support until the grandchildren reached primary school age

(some even middle school age) to facilitate women's pursuit of a career or other side productions (e.g. e-commerce, see Chap. 4). Young women's luxury is certainly built on the exploitation of their mothers' unpaid labour, but one significant consequence of this practice is that the next generation in the family builds a closer bond with the mother's rather than with the father's family, further weakening the patrilineal base of Chinese familial patriarchy.

The second area over which women retained close control was family finance. During interviews, married women professionals claimed that their husbands should hand over their money, citing that managing the household had always been the woman's responsibility in Chinese culture. The male managers admitted that they had handed their money over to their wives, but they interpreted the practice differently. As the Section Manager Zhou explained:

> Chinese women are often worried about their husband finding other lovers after marriage. Women are relatively lazy and would like stability after marriage. To give her this sense of security, I give all my income to her. Women will feel better if they get hold of money. If I don't have much money on me, she will feel more secure, right? If I want to have an affair, I need to have money with me first. My wife feels that if her husband has nothing on him, he won't be able to attract other women.

What Zhou did not point out is the economic polarization in the workplace that results in women being less financially secure, which contributes to women's motivation to gain control of conjugal family finances.

One key material resource in the marriage is conjugal housing. Traditionally, due to patrilocal practices, women moved in with their in-laws. In the socialist work unit, only male employees were allowed to apply for work unit housing upon marriage. In the post-Mao era, after housing became privatized, the patrilocal practice was transformed into a social norm resulting in the man's family being responsible for providing the new couple with their neo-local marital home. All of the interviewees had complied with this model: those with wealthy parents paid for the apartment at once, whereas those whose parents were less well-off usually had them pay for the deposit (ranging from 30–50 %) on an apartment. As one male manager put it, 'my parents said, "we will get a flat for your marriage, otherwise we will be looked down upon by your wife's family"'.

Due to this widespread practice, the official and public media criticize women for being too materialistic in their marriage choices. A policy change in Marriage Law was introduced in 2013 regarding marital property (Shangdu Estate 2013). If an apartment is purchased by the parents of one particular party, the apartment would not be classified as joint property, yet if a woman's name is on the title of deeds, the apartment would be considered a joint property. This change has, to some extent, disadvantaged women without tackling the gender inequality in the labour market. However, Well before this law was introduced, women had begun to strategize how to secure their interests in marriage. Back in 2008, Manager Zhou revealed that although he had purchased the marital apartment before marriage with his parents' money, he agreed to transfer the title of deeds to his wife after she insisted:

> [A]fter marriage, my wife talked about the fact that since the home was purchased before the marriage, she did not have any sense of security if anything happens to the marriage. I feel it doesn't matter. To give her this sense of security, I transferred the title of deeds under her name only. Of course, if we do resort to divorce, she has to give half of the property sales back. But this is an important gesture to show my love for her.

This 'gesture of love' is frequently cited by female assistants as another key rhetoric through which to control their husbands. Despite the 2013 change in Marriage Law, most of the married women I spoke to had managed to get their names onto the housing deeds by 2015. Thus, given their careful control of family finances, divorce does not necessarily represent an asymmetrical exit for these women.

Getting a Divorce

For older generations, divorce was rare and had significant material and social consequences.[2] Due to the gendered housing allocation practice in the work units, divorced women lost their right to live in the apartments provided by their husbands' work units. This gave them little choice but to move back in with their natal family, subjecting them to stigma at work and in the kinship network. In contrast, in the Only Child Generation, women have carefully tried to mitigate the social and economic consequences of exiting from marriage.

There are two structural factors that may also facilitate women's negotiations when a divorce arises. First, due to the strict implementation of the one-child policy in urban China, as only children, these women do not have any siblings who might compete for parental resources and support. This is in contrast with the women of the Cultural Revolution Generation who usually had three or four siblings. This demographic structure has made it possible for parents to take in a divorced daughter, unlike in earlier generations where parents gave up on children who did not comply with norms. In the Only Child Generation, being the only child creates leverage for negotiating with parents even when there has been a failure to comply with social norms. Second, the deinstitutionalization of housing from the workplace has created some space and opportunities for women to enact their agency and maximize their interest during a divorce case. In such situations, what was happening in the family was not scrutinized by their work colleagues, creating a discursive possibility for women to reconstruct family stories. Drawing on the overlapping interest between work and family in state-owned companies, divorced women might use what was happening in the private sphere as a resource to combat the previous disgrace associated with divorce and to re-establish themselves in the workplace.

Mr Li, the friend who introduced me and supported my fieldwork in the Organization, was working in the financial department. He came from a wealthy, well-connected family with parents who were middle-ranking civil servants in the local government. His financial background and generous personality meant that he enjoyed treating his colleagues and friends well (e.g. paying restaurant bills and offering colleagues free lifts) and was popular with both men and women in the sales department. For the first five months, I benefited greatly from his popularity through my association with him. He sometimes assisted my work by setting up private interviews for me. However, suddenly, at the end of the fifth month, those in the company learned that he was in the middle of a divorce from his wife, Zhang (an employee of another state-owned foreign trade company). Like the ripples from a stone thrown into a lake, this news stirred up office discussions and gossip. People speculated, trying to discover the reason behind their divorce.

Much like everyone else in the company, I was shocked to hear the news. With the exception of working frequent late nights with a few other male sales managers, there had been no obvious signs that Mr Li had been struggling through a divorce for almost half a year. One week after the

news became known in the company, because she had known me before the fieldwork commenced, Zhang contacted me and wanted to have a talk. We met in a teahouse downtown and she told me what had happened between them.

In the year before I entered the company, I met them both at a school reunion gathering. During that encounter, I learned that they were planning to live abroad to experience something different. After chatting with me about my life outside China, they firmed up their plan to go abroad; that is, Li pursued a Master's degree in the USA and Zhang accompanied him during his study. Before the news of their divorce broke, I had always believed that Li and Zhang would go abroad together.

According to Zhang, the trouble started in October the year before, when Li enrolled himself in an English class to prepare for the entrance exam required for a Master's degree. As Zhang intended to apply for a companion visa, she did not join him in the class. Zhang claimed that Li met a woman at the class and that she had caught them meeting secretly once. Zhang questioned Li and they quarrelled about the affair. In the end, Li initiated the request to divorce in December. Zhang was against Li's divorce request for the first few months, as she felt it unfair that Li would get to start a fresh life abroad while she stayed behind as a divorced woman in her company. This was particularly problematic because the employees in Li and Zhang's companies (occupying different floors of the same skyscraper) often interacted, so her colleagues knew Li and Li's colleagues knew her.

She asked me to meet, wanting to know whether I thought she should go ahead with the divorce or not. I found it incredibly difficult to respond. According to Chinese culture, it is considered a virtue to contribute to two people's marital union, and it is very bad behaviour to suggest that people break up. Thus, people are culturally expected to encourage a couple to stay in a marriage rather than to promote a divorce. In light of this, I suggested that she reflect on their relationship and communicate with Li about possible reconciliation. I also told her that I disagreed with the gendered social norm that stigmatized divorced women. I told her that she should not feel disgraced or devalued when divorced. Gradually, our conversation revealed that she had met a man who was five years younger and was interested in developing a relationship with her. Given the presence of another suitor, she was oscillating between whether to let her marriage go or not. After Zhang presented her side of the story to me, Li also got in touch with me and tried to explain things privately, seeking to win

me over to his side. His main explanation was that as he progressed in his pursuit of the transnational dream, Zhang had not developed intellectually, making it difficult for him to communicate with her at the same level. I expressed my understanding and did not question him about the alleged affair Zhang had reported.

Once Li got his Master's application accepted and his visa sorted out, he resigned from the Organization. This news sent another shock wave through the company's population. Because my fieldwork entry and exit from the company paralleled his divorce battle and resignation to go abroad, rumours started to spread in Li and Zhang's companies that I was the cause of their divorce. I tried to clear my name, but it seemed useless. The more I explained, the more people doubted my explanation. I learned from some of the female assistants that it was unclear whether Zhang was the creator of this rumour, but she seemed to confirm what was said about me and Mr Li. This cloud on my reputation was finally cleared three years later when Li got remarried to a woman from another city after coming back from the USA. In 2011, when I revisited some of the company staff, they admitted that I had had nothing to do with Mr Li's divorce.

Zhang carefully used the gendered extramarital affair discourse that usually centres on a man attracted by another woman outside the marriage (usually labelled as the 'third party') to construct herself as the victim in this divorce. Not only did Zhang win the moral sympathy of the public, but also positioned herself well in the legal process. Chinese legal procedure favours the victim in a divorce during the division of marital property, using this as a mechanism to discourage extramarital affairs. Li and Zhang lived in an apartment (on the outskirts of the city) owned by Li's parents. During their marriage, with his parents' help, Li bought another apartment in the centre of the city at a price of over one million yuan. When the divorce was negotiated, this new apartment was being decorated. I learned from Li's good friends that without informing anybody, Zhang had changed the lock on the new apartment and insisted that it go to her, in addition to an Audi Li had bought before the marriage, all as part of the divorce deal. In the end, due to his desire to quickly leave for the USA rather than become trapped in a legal battle, Li accepted all of Zhang's requests.

In the seven divorce cases I have encountered over the past seven years, all of the women involved gained at least half of the value generated by the sale of their marital accommodation, regardless of whether they had contributed to its purchase. Given the skyrocketing urban sales prices and despite the psychological stress associated with divorce, women quickly

became millionaires through their divorce settlements. In 2011, when I revisited the region, Zhang was still working in her company. She had sold the apartment in the downtown centre for two million yuan one year after the divorce. She was by then happily married to a younger bank manager and had recently given birth to a child.

Li and Zhang's divorce points to a new common phenomenon—extramarital affairs—appearing in post-Mao China. Since the 1990s, extramarital love has emerged as a common theme in Chinese public discourse. Through interviews with men and women in Shanghai, Farrer and Sun (2003) found that while extramarital affairs allow the expression of romance and exchange of sex unspoiled by economic factors, they tend to co-exist with the fulfilment of family responsibility by the philandering spouses. Although the participants saw sexual satisfaction as important, media accounts of extramarital affairs were gendered in ways that paralleled mate choice for marriage; that is, women sought affairs with men of higher status while men looked for young and beautiful partners (Hershatter 2004).

Before news of Li's divorce emerged, this topic had already come up repeatedly in private interviews. As Section Manager Zhou explained:

> I cannot tolerate my wife having a physical affair. I feel very disgusted. I don't mind my wife flirting with others, having an emotional bond with another man. Of course, I wouldn't encourage the emotional tie but in terms of the harm to me, the physical affair is lethal. I feel very disgusted, just like feeling my property has been damaged.

Upon seeing my shocked expression, he continued:

> [W]omen might not feel the same way. If a man has an emotional bond established with another woman, he would certainly leave his wife. This is something women most fear for. But what does it mean if her husband has only a physical relationship with another woman? It means that her husband is very attractive, charming.

Corresponding with the moral message sent out by the dramatization of extramarital affairs in the media, all of the men interviewed claimed that extramarital affairs might be very exciting in the beginning, but always ended badly. General Manager Wang stated:

> I don't think I will venture into an extramarital affair because it damages children, having a deep impact upon children's development. Second, divorce

> will hurt women more than men. Men over 35 will have no issue in remarrying but women over 35 will have a great difficulty in getting re-married.

Among all of the married men I talked to, only one admitted that he had had an extramarital affair, but he ended it and gained his wife's forgiveness by coming clean to her.

Single men seemed to be more open to revealing what they thought about extramarital affairs. As single sales manager Zheng explained:

> I think this relates to the emotional needs of different stages. For a man in his twenties, he may have a very small circle. Within this circle, he got married to a girl. Then in his thirties, his circle enlarged. Every day, faced with work and family roles repeatedly, one may get tired of one's roles. Alternatively his wife cannot satisfy his emotional needs. Traditionally, Chinese men were allowed to have concubines. But for me, having an affair is mainly because of the needs of different life stages. If a man avoids extramarital affairs, that will be the best. But I can't guarantee myself because I am worried that I cannot predict my future. Of course, there are men seeking sexual thrill through having affairs but I think it may arise from men's changing emotional needs.

Zheng's response indicates the instability of the stereotypical assumption about extramarital affairs in the media; that is, that men trade money for sexual pleasure with young women.

In contrast to married men, both married and single women seemed to reveal ambivalence towards extramarital affairs. As a married female assistant said, 'if my husband only has a physical relationship with someone, I can take my husband back. For the sake of the children, I will stay in the marriage. But at the same time, I cannot rule out the possibility of my having an affair. If one day I do fall in love with another man, I think I will leave the marriage and take the children with me.' A single woman commented: 'the extra-marital affair is difficult to judge. I've often watched the dramas of extramarital affairs. I felt it was a mess. I discussed with my good friend. She said that there were so many extramarital affair stories so marriage was not a secure place anymore. I agreed with her, but I said that from another perspective the emergence of it may not be a bad thing as it pointed out that in the past individuals' desires were often oppressed for the collective goals.'

Although the discussions around extramarital affairs sometime reproduce a gendered notion of sexuality, women's ambivalence towards extramarital affairs and awareness of marital insecurity may be an early sign of the deinstitutionalization of marriage taking place in urban China.

Given the close association between family and work in the Chinese workplace, this change in attitudes towards marriage may influence work relations. In the last six years, four colleagues from the Organization got divorced, including the Deputy General Manager. The normalization of divorce may help to challenge management's assumption that marriage is more important for female employees. Further, with the emergence of another group—divorced employees—the previous pressure placed on single women to get married may be decreased to some extent.

Conclusion

This chapter reveals that women carefully guarded marriage and family life as a personal and private sphere from which to resist organizational control, and that they were helped in the endeavour by the changing housing allocation practice. Those labelled as 'left-over' single women, despite being ridiculed at work and pressured by parents, actively delayed marriage to preserve the agency and autonomy of their mate selection. For married women, reclaiming the traditional divide between inside and outside granted them considerable interpersonal power to prevail over their husbands in decision making about the home and general family life (e.g., in terms of controlling finances and prioritizing natal ties). However, their luxury was often dependent on their exploitation of senior generations of women taking on the housework and childcare responsibilities.

The empirical data assisted in re-evaluating the relationship between work and family for gender equality. Grounded in the socio-cultural locality, the consequence of reconstituting a private sphere away from the workplace may be liberating for this particular cohort of women. Economic polarization in the workplace does not necessarily lead to women's weaker positions within their families. In contrast, their less secure economic position in the workplace may motivate women to maintain a firm grip on the family. Whilst holding a legitimate position in the inner sphere as managers, in practical terms, young women do not necessarily have to do the dirty work themselves in managing the household, as they benefit from the demographic dividend as being part of the Only Child Generation. Even in the case of exit from marriage, these educated women carefully maximize their interests. The changes in private sphere—the increasing singlehood and normalization of divorce—may eventually challenge the workplace assumption of careers for men and marriage for women, ushering in a new interpretation of womanhood that is not dependant on marital union.

Notes

1. This practice of housing allocation has been changed in most Chinese industrial and commercial companies but still persists in university organizations.
2. Nationwide, the divorce rate was 0.03 % in 1979, 0.07 % in 1990 and 0.21 % in 2003 (Zang 2011: 45).

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CHAPTER 9

Conclusion

The purpose of the research which forms the backbone of this book was to learn more about the lives of young highly educated women in urban China. With unprecedented educational investment (unlike their mothers and contemporaries in the countryside) and opportunities arising from post-Mao reforms, Chinese feminist scholars argue that there is considerable emancipatory potential for this group. Moreover, in popular culture, frequent dramatization and elaborations in the state-controlled media and public culture, a new identity—the 'white-collar beauty'—has grown to become a fresh gender model the state and neoliberal market promote in the new millennium China.

As the first female offspring of the Only Child Generation, young urban women benefited from unprecedented educational investment from their parents. These women then entered China's workforce at a time of considerable opportunities in the bourgeoning tertiary sector as a result of structural reforms and economic growth. Once in the workplace, women found their prospect narrowed and dominated by a masculine hierarchy. Despite holding the same qualifications as their male counterparts, women were more likely to channel into secondary positions that denied them access to opportunities and economic resources. The legitimization of the gendered division of labour was established through gendered connotations of 'career' and 'job' and naturalized gender stereotypes, similar to those experienced by older urban women. By making sense of their own

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self-centred experiences in the natal family and education, young women questioned gendered expectations at work. However, a biological determinist understanding of gender naturalized men's physical superiority over women, which in turn contributed to reinforcing a belief in the legitimacy of the masculine domination in the company.

While these women increasingly became white-collar proletariats, their inability to break through the glass ceiling should not be considered a failure as such an assumption is based upon a masculinized notion of success. Their only-child upbringing fostered an unprecedented ambition in personal development. Through sabotaging the notion of success grounded in employment and relying upon a reserved domestic labour force formed by older women in the intergenerational family, women resorted to different individualized paths in their pursuit of success and development.

Contrasting the 'white-collar beauties' with women of the Cultural Revolution Generation, who were tied to machines and shift work in their socialist work units (Liu 2007), the transformation has set out a new landscape for young women to exhibit their resistance. In an open office community that promotes 'harmony', men's success in enacting bureaucratic power depends upon their relationship building with women. Despite occupying a lower position in the organizational hierarchy, young women were active players who manipulated the dependencies of their male colleagues and engaged hierarchies to their own ends.

A second major difference in contrasting the employment experience of young women to that of the older generation of women in urban China is the wider resexualization and consumption of women in post-Mao commercial and public culture. As work organizations are not immune to the wider context of sexual economy, the obstacles that highly educated young women must negotiate at work are profound. In the foreign trade Organization, where women did not interact face-to-face with clients, they were an important source of internal consumption for men: that is, women were brought into the workplace to stimulate male workers. The routinization of sexual innuendo at work facilitated an eroticized workplace culture, which management considered conducive to boosting morale and productivity.

As sexual respectability constitutes women's social status, agency in public sexual discourse remains largely a male privilege. The men's telling of sexual jokes was grounded in, and further reproduced by, an objectification of women. Through objectification, women's second-class membership in the organization was reinforced. Unlike sex workers who had

crossed the moral boundary and so were much freer to engage in sexual activities (see Ding 2012), professional women were not in a position to engage in sexual joking without damaging their reputation.

Women's silence in public sexual discourse should not be simply read as a sign of powerlessness. Taking into consideration the consequences of their behaviour in a society that emphasizes relationship building and reputation, women considered it sensible to deploy expressionless silence for the sake of maintaining their respectability. Further, as the inner-outer boundary functions as a signifier of moral agency, while women acquiesced in a public office setting to ensure their reputation remained intact, on those moments/occasions women felt they were in an 'inner' space, they did initiate sexual jokes for the pleasure of the audience present.

In Chinese domestic-oriented commercial companies, where women are pushed to the frontiers of sales, there is an institutional demand for women to perform aesthetic and sexual labour in their encounters with clients. In particular, the sexualized aspects of Chinese business culture which involves visiting leisure venues subjected professional women to sexual exploitation and made them vulnerable to sexual harassment. Compared with women sales assistants who endured the sexual jokes of their male colleagues, the capitalist labour relations have commodified women's encounters with their clients, making it harder for women sales managers to unite when sexual harassment arises. Bound by the same rule on sexual respectability and women's status, women sales managers walked a very fine line between respectability and disreputability. By carefully managing their non-sexual presentation through control of clothing and/or invoking their familial role to divert the sexual content of business encounters, women sales managers tried to mitigate the negative impact on their reputation arising from frequent contact with male clients.

A further key difference, when contrasting the employment experience of younger and older women in urban China, is the women's position in the intergenerational family. This could remap their relations with work. Among the women from the Cultural Revolution Generation, many had three or four siblings, which meant their parents had prioritized support to sons' families and/or divided support between children. By contrast, due to the strict implementation of one-child policy, the patrilineal base of familial patriarchy has been sabotaged. Young women in urban China grew up in a self-centred environment with unprecedented educational investment as well as all-round care. Such support continued when women entered the workplace and got married. With the senior generation of

women undertaking domestic chores and childcare, young professional women were afforded the luxury to focus upon their personalized development path.

One point worth highlighting is the structural change in the organization of state-owned enterprise through replacing organizing employees in a residential unit with issuing housing allowances in cash form: while paternalist ideals persisted in the state-owned companies, the previous material and spatial base of the familial control model the work unit was grounded in has been removed. The most significant impact of this change for women is to enable marriage and family materially and spatially to be returned to the private sphere. Contrary to Western feminist discussions that consider dichotomy between family and work a cause of inequality in the family and segregation in the workplace, I reveal that the re-constitution of the private sphere away from the workplace has facilitated young women's enactment of power in the family in China.

Grounding Gender and Sexuality in Local Research

This book promotes feminist theory production grounded in local research which takes into consideration the accumulative yet interactive mosaic of history, culture and socio-economic polity embedded in the tensions and connections with the outside world. This book attempts to throw fresh new light upon the ways in which gender and sexuality are theorized beyond a Euro-American reality.

Gender

Rather than viewing gender as an oppressive structure that leads to gender inequality between men and women, there is a need to understand the multi-complexity of gender and identify the indeterminacy within the gender system. The biological determinist understanding of gender introduced in the early twentieth century by Western science has naturalized a hierarchical social and spatial order between men and women which had previously been established in pre-modern China. Through naturalization, masculinity has legitimized its symbolic dominant position in the public sphere: the symbolic violence of masculine domination is a key mechanism for reproducing gender work inequalities. Men's symbolic power at work could be transformed to other forms of power, a bureaucratic power, resulting in an economic hierarchy between men and women. Women's

lack of symbolic power in the public sphere is a major barrier for them to climb up the bureaucratic hierarchy. This leads to a vicious circle, trapping women in second-class membership in the workplace and limiting their potential for collective resistance.

Gender is also an internally intersectional system, whereby governing principles adjust according to specific roles. There are cultural scripts for a specific pair of interlocking roles and general norms for guiding behaviour according to age, gender and generation. When someone is locked in multiple roles, the different scripts for different roles may contradict each other and create lacunae for one to adopt new scripts to govern their behaviour. For example, when there was a pre master-apprentice relationship between woman sales assistant and male section manager, the section manager found his inability to reconcile the superior role of a line manager and the junior role of an apprentice and neutralized his bureaucratic power.

Further, the cultural scripts for roles are not fixed, they are changeable subject to wider socio-economic and political transformations. Through political engineering, a working identity had been part of what defined a modern woman in socialist China (Wang 2000). The conflict between work demand and family roles subjected older urban women to time poverty (Liu 2007). Now, with the support of a reserve of older female relatives to act as domestic helpers, young urban women interpret motherhood differently; for these women a new term has been created by the media to describe the 'white-collar beauties' who have become mothers: 'spicy [hot] mum' (*lai ma*). This new term is as questionable as the old term 'white-collar beauties', which continues to accentuate beauty and heterosexuality to embody the neoliberal desires. While buying into this new media term, these educated women downplayed the sexual connotation embodied in the new label and emphasized a personal development alongside with their newly gained motherhood; that is, to continue to live for oneself in addition to living for one's children, a key distinction between a modern mother and a traditional mother.

Closely associated with the role-oriented principle is the relational co-production mechanism embedded within the gender system. In the wider pursuit of harmony, everyone is judged and transfigured by their relations with others. Men could not achieve a harmonious relationship without the co-operation of women. Therefore, men's capacity to solicit women's collaboration has become part of what defines a hegemonic model of masculinity in the Organization. Exactly because this mechanism is in

place, women were able to turn their subordination on its head through exhibiting a capacity to affect. While masculinity is considered superior as a symbolic system in the public sphere, the domination of it at the micro-level interactions is sabotaged by the relational and role-oriented principles within the gender system.

Rather than further dichotomizing 'West' and 'non-West' which themselves are artificial constructed categories, it would be more productive to view the model of an autonomous self and the model of a relational self located in a spectrum, mediated by other historical, cultural and material conditions embedded in interactions and tensions with each other. Along this spectrum, scholars should analyse the varieties of forms of indeterminacy and identify the enabling elements within a gender system, which is a very significant step towards the possibilities to reshape the order between men and women in a local society.

Sexuality

This book emphasizes the need to ground the examination and analysis of sexuality in socio-economic-cultural locality. Western feminist scholars highlighted how gender and sexuality are mutually constitutive of each other. This is confirmed in the Chinese context. The biological determinist understanding of gender has been transplanted onto the discourse around sexuality: men's practice of telling sexual jokes was considered an innate habit of men. This naturalized sexual order further assisted in consolidating the superior symbolic and economic status of men in the company.

The recent Western feminist scholars' call to adopt a pleasure-focused approach in sexuality and development may overlook the multi-layered social reality of women's lives. China is a place in which sexuality is closely tied to defining women's social status, society is highly relational and emphasizes reputation, and a coercive political structure remains in place. With this cocktail of forces interacting, the social and economic consequences of publicly asserting sexual pleasure is more severe than its potentially liberating benefit. Women interviewees considered it a sensible choice to deploy silence in public during sexual banter to preserve their reputation and for social acceptance. Further, Chinese cultural discourse of sexuality does not necessarily deny women pleasure; it is the place that matters. Through managing an inner-outer boundary as a signifier of moral agency, women were able to negotiate within the patriarchal gender-sex system. One of the most important tasks for scholars in China is to expose the

symbolic violence men enacted via controlling sexual discourse in a public sphere and de-naturalize the gendered sexual order in society.

Chinese local research has also thrown some light upon the presumptions in discussions of sexuality in the West that are premised upon the corporeal relations between the sexes. In Western organization studies and trading floors' sexuality on the Wall Street, sexual joking has been documented as a standard feature of their organizational life. However, the jokes were centred upon corporeality, drawing upon and reproducing symbolism of male genitalia to humiliate women. By contrast, the sexual jokes male managers initiated were predominantly formulated through and symbolized in imagined affairs between the joker and the one being joked about. There were no references to the physical body. One possible explanation for this is that the clothed body was a marker of civilization and social status, whilst the unclothed body was inconsequential as a site of virtue in the public sphere (Mann 2011). Another explanation could be that the hegemonic Chinese cultural model of masculinity entailed a concept of *wen* (cultural attainment) (Louie 2009), which implied that men who told sexual jokes centring upon the unclothed body in the public sphere might risk being seen as uncultured.

Although sexual jokes in the Chinese office and Western organizations had both harassing consequences for women the context was important; in the Chinese office, the sexual pleasure that was supposedly produced from sexual jokes aimed to go beyond an exclusive physical sensibility and ground itself in a form of sociality. Echoing anthropologists' call to theorize sexuality while leaving open the question of its symbolic configuration within social practice (e.g. Clark 1997; Adams and Pigg 2006), I suggest a pleasure-focused approach in sexuality and development necessitates a nuanced analysis of the multiple meanings and mechanisms of pleasure in each locality.

A Possibility of Change

For most feminist research, the goal is to challenge hierarchical gender order and achieve justice for women. The twentieth-century nationalist revolution made various attempts at externally forcing the re-arrangement of the gender order in China. These were successful in physically bringing women into the public sphere and introduced an ideology/rhetoric of gender equality, which had improved women's lives significantly. However, due to a problematic understanding of gender and locating it

within the nationalist project, the Party-State started a gender revolution that was not properly carried out and completed. A bottom-up approach might be a better way of continuing this gender revolution. Grounded in the experiences of young educated women in urban China, I propose the following steps for a possibility of change.

There is an urgent need to tackle the symbolic violence of masculine domination. The naturalized gender and sexual order legitimize men's superior status in the workplaces. This legitimacy obscures power relations and symbolic reproduction and is achieved through a process of misrecognition. Because the symbolic power of masculinity is considered naturally legitimate, it limits women's potential for collective resistance; it is also much harder for individual woman to sabotage contrasting their resistance to men's bureaucratic power.

In the Organization, one of management's key arguments for gendered division of labour was that it was not safe for women to go on overseas trips. In 2008, none of the women assistants had been abroad and so absorbed the depictions of the outside world provided by the male managers. However, with increasing opening up of China, increased wages and therefore more opportunities to travel without a corporate sponsor, by 2011 a considerable number of women assistants had subsequently holidayed in a foreign country. One woman noted '*as long as one makes a good preparation beforehand, these overseas trips are not dangerous at all*'. By 2015, when I asked them to reflect again upon the management ideology, quite a few women commented: '*that was an excuse. It is in fact gender discrimination.*'

In addition to challenging the management's gender stereotype through making sense of their own experiences, the availability of alternative interpretations of gender via the internet and social media circles also assists in young women's development of gender consciousness. In 2016, one (single) woman assistant commenting on her social media about the cultural reproduction of gender stereotypes associated with childbirth summarized her position by borrowing a quote from Simone de Beauvoir: '*one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman*'. The development of alternative interpretations of gender among these young women will help to tackle the legitimacy of the naturalized symbolic power of masculine domination, serving as a significant step for any possibility of collective activism among the women.

There is a further need to identify the 'crisis tendencies'—'internal contradictions that undermine current patterns and force change in the struc-

ture itself' (Connell and Pearse 2015: 87). In the Chinese white-collar companies, there are two areas that may create a crisis tendency. First, there is an internal conflict between modern organizational bureaucracy grounded in rules and regulations and a cultural emphasis upon relationship building. As long as an institution has an inherent objective to manage relationship building among its employees, this institutional context would automatically give women an opportunity to strategize and manoeuvre, due to the enabling elements-relational and role-oriented-within the gender system. Therefore, since the workplace is an institution as well as a pattern of relationships, how to reform it could be a question of how to relate differently. Second, there is an irreconcilable contradiction between the structural barriers to women's development and women's ambition in development. In comparison with older urban women and rural women (see Liu 2007, 2014, 2016), young women from the Only Child Generation possess great potential as agents for social change. The only child policy broke the patrilineal base of familial patriarchy: parents put great expectations upon their daughters. In a self-centred environment, women developed a strong ambition for personal development. Many of them did not feel constrained by the fact of being a woman until they entered the workplaces. This contradiction between structural constraint and personal ambition was an important driving force in these women's fight for recognition at work.

Among the women of the Only Child Generation, the emergence of a non-married group—single and divorced women—is pioneering and significant. In 2008, there was only one single woman over 30 in the company. In 2016, eight women (ranging from 31 to 36) were not in a marital relationship. Nationally, according to the 2010 census, 2.47 % of women over 30 had never been married, almost double the number of the single women over 30 (0.92 %) in the 2000 census (China News Weekly 2015). In Chinese culture, singlehood has long been considered an anomaly in a hetero-normative system. Although single women are still a very small minority, the visibility of this group challenges a deeply engrained socio-cultural link between women and marriage and children. Despite the social ridicule implicating them as 'left-over' women, single women actively delayed marriage to preserve the agency and autonomy in their mate selection, revealing the potentiality of a new womanhood that is unassociated with marriage; this may in turn prompt management to reconsider the career prospects of women employees.

A second anomaly in the Chinese gender-sex system is divorced women; they broke the socio-cultural expectation that women's chastity was among the highest of a woman's virtues. The divorce rate in China has been steadily rising since 2004, according to statistics from the Ministry of Civil Affairs. In 2012, 3.1 million couples divorced, or 23.4 % of the population, compared to 4.7 % in 1979 (Middlehurst 2015). Because of the change in housing allocation and their position as the only child in the intergenerational family, divorced women from this generation fared much better materially and socially in comparison with the women from the Cultural Revolution Generation. Therefore, I suggest that the increasing cases of divorce and the accompanying normalization of it may be indeed liberating for this cohort of women in urban China because normalizing women's divorce assists to dismantle the association between women's chastity, morality and social status, creating a possibility of disrupting the gendered double standard of sexuality.

As I have revealed in this book, young women's resistance and the possibilities of change are closely tied to the demographic context of being the only child in their family. This is now subject to change. In face of a rapidly ageing population and its impact upon public expenditure, in 2015, the Party-State ended the one-child policy and now promotes a two-child policy nationwide. As the one-child policy was not properly implemented in rural areas, this new two-child policy mostly affects the urban population.

Will the introduction of a two-child policy restore the patrilineal preference for sons over daughters, like the pattern in rural China? I remain optimistic for the following two reasons. First, whether the young women of the Only Child Generation actually have two children is still to be seen. Initial responses from the married women of this cohort indicates that because of the perceived costs and time involved, many are reluctant to have a second child. Second, even when women do have a second child, the urban material background of this professional class and women's own experiences as daughters will mean that there is unlikely to be a repeat of the discriminations rural daughters face in the presence of a brother (Liu 2014). It seems likely that the agency and spirit exhibited by the first offspring of the Only Child Generation will continue in future cohorts of young women in urban China.

This book has exposed the organizational mechanisms—naturalization, objectification and commodification of women—that wield new forms of gendered control in the new Chinese white-collar workplaces. It is also a

tale of women's resistance, raising a new feminist inquiry about the agents for social change. The current decade is a period in which pressures for change are gradually building and it will be intriguing to observe in the years to come if and when these pressures finally erupt into actual crisis and force rapid change for gender and sexual relations in urban China.

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Index

A
Aesthetic capital
aesthetic beauty, 20
aesthetic presentation, 20
Affective theories, 92, 93, 98
capacity to affect, 92, 93, 98
Agency
agents, 4, 7, 31, 34
moral, 6, 31–3, 38, 58, 63, 68, 80, 118, 121

B
Beauty
economy, 12, 19, 20
pretty women, 19, 78–82
white collar beauties, 3, 9–22, 118, 120
Biological determinism, 29
Body
bodily labour, 13
clothed, 20, 72, 122
corporeality, 20
physical, 20, 122
women's bodies, 12, 13, 31, 67, 105

C
Cathexis, 35, 37–8
China
contemporary, 27, 34, 107
new millennium, 14, 117
post 2000, 14
post-Mao, 5, 6, 9, 11, 13, 16, 31, 37, 58, 65, 67, 112
post socialist, 3, 14, 21
pre-modern, 26, 28, 32, 34, 37, 73, 120
Class consciousness, 49–50
gender and class, 18, 51–4
Commodification, 31, 87, 103, 124
commercialization of women's bodies, 31
Compliance, 3, 4, 64
Confucianism, 26, 27, 29, 36

D
Discourse
discursive landscape, 61
discursive ritual, 19

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J. Liu, *Gender, Sexuality and Power in Chinese Companies*, Gender, Development and Social Change, DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-50575-0

Discrimination
ageist, 10
gender, 3, 50, 54, 123

E

Economic reform, 16, 22n4, 55n4, 65, 67, 73
market reform, 9
Educated women, 3, 4, 13, 14, 20, 43, 55, 72, 80, 105, 114, 117, 122
Emotions
emotionality, 38, 93, 98
emotional resistance, 94
Erotic capital, 6, 78–82, 84, 94, 98
eroticized workplace culture, 6, 59, 68, 118
Ethnography
ethnographic account, 3
ethnographic research, 16
fieldwork relations, 5

F

Familialism
familial patriarchy, 108, 119, 123
family, 10, 28, 102, 103, 108, 119
generational hierarchy, 107
natal family, 3, 37, 54, 83, 109, 117
Feminist theory, 3, 4, 7, 29, 35, 78, 119

G

Gender
discrimination, 3, 50, 54, 123
hierarchy, 29
identity, 52, 53
inequalities, 10, 26, 28, 35, 79, 101, 105, 109, 120
mask, 33
order, 4, 6, 49, 50, 52, 79, 82, 122
performance, 6
relational system, 6, 97
role-oriented, 6, 28, 29, 36, 49, 87, 97, 103, 118, 120, 121, 123
Generation
Cultural Revolution, 5, 11, 37, 105, 107, 109, 118, 119, 124
only child, 3–5, 11, 13, 15–16, 34, 37, 50, 101, 107, 109, 114, 117, 123, 124
senior, 7, 107, 114, 119
younger, 9

H

Harmony, 6, 27–8, 36, 38, 62, 87–9, 91, 97, 98, 118, 120
Hetero-normative control, 6, 58, 68
heterosexual-normality, 65
Homo-social activities, 97

I

Inner-outer
boundary control, 64
inside, 7, 49, 114
outside, 31, 32, 45
signifiers of moral agency, 31–3
a spatial and occupational segregation, 32
Intersectionality, 26, 29

K

Kinship
non-patrilineal kinship network, 16
rural kinship arrangement, 15

L

Locality
local and global, 35
local research, 3, 4, 7, 35, 119–21
location, 17, 34, 35, 37

M
Marriage
  conjugal housing, 108
  demographic structure, 109
  divorce, 2, 7, 101–14, 124
  extramarital affairs, 61, 111–13
  marital union, 7, 111, 114
  matchmaking, 1, 102, 106
  mate selection, 7, 104, 105, 114, 124
  singlehood, 7, 114
Masculine domination, 3–7, 64, 68, 77, 81, 117, 120, 122, 123
Modernity
  cosmopolitan, 9
  post-socialist, 14

N
Nationalism, 21
Naturalization, 43, 45, 54, 68, 81, 87, 120
  essentialized gender categories, 5

O
Objectification, 3, 6, 12, 57, 58, 62, 67, 68, 73, 81, 87, 118, 124
One-child policy, 15, 107, 109, 119, 124
Organization
  collective organizational activities, 65
  foreign trade, 71, 72, 78, 84n6, 87, 118
  organizational culture, 57, 58, 62, 65
  organizational principles and practices, 47
  state-owned, 16–18, 47, 50, 52, 54, 65, 71, 102, 103, 119

P
Power
  direct, 6, 35, 36, 103, 107
  indirect, 6, 36, 54, 87, 88, 93, 94, 118
  symbolic, 36, 37, 48, 53–5, 62, 68, 87, 120, 122, 123
  two faces of, 35
Private, 2, 6, 7, 17–19, 21, 32, 49, 50, 55n3, 63, 64, 71, 74, 79, 80, 82, 83, 92, 93, 96, 97, 98n1, 103, 104, 106, 107, 110–12, 114, 119
  public, 3, 6, 12–14, 18–21, 28, 29, 31–3, 36, 38, 45, 48, 54, 57, 58, 62–5, 67, 68, 71, 72, 76, 77, 79, 80, 83, 92–4, 97, 108, 111, 112, 117, 118, 120–2, 124
Production relations, 37
  division of labour, 37

R
Resistance, 3–7, 25, 30, 31, 35, 43, 47–8, 51, 55, 66, 68, 72, 87–94, 120, 122, 124, 125

S
Segregation
  gender, 47, 53, 101
  horizontal and vertical, 10
Sexuality
  gendered public scripts for sexuality, 63–4
  mutually constitutive nature of gender and sexuality, 62
  naturalized sex order, 62, 68, 121
  sex industry, 12
  sexual consumption, 3, 12, 31, 72
  sexual discourse, 6, 30, 62, 64, 68, 83, 118, 121

sexual harassment, 30, 62, 64, 73, 77, 78, 83, 119
sexual hierarchy, 62, 68
sexual innuendo, 6, 59, 68, 118
sexuality and development, 33–4, 121, 122
sexualized business culture, 82–3
sexual jokes, 6, 21, 61–5, 68, 83, 118, 119, 121, 122
sexual morality, 21, 31
sexual objectification, 3, 12, 58, 67, 68
sexual pleasure, 33, 34, 113, 121, 122
sexual reputation, 6, 63, 74, 79, 80, 82, 84
sexual respectability, 13, 21, 77, 119, 181
Social
change, 4, 7, 33, 123, 125
connections, 10, 75
sociality, 6, 33, 65, 84, 97, 122
socio-cultural, 1, 3, 5, 7, 25, 35, 67, 79, 106, 114, 124
socio-economic, 5, 13, 35, 68, 80, 92, 119–21
socio-linguistic, 4
Socialism, 9, 10, 12, 14
Symbolic violence, 48, 54, 62, 81, 120–2

U
Urban-rural divide
rural daughters, 15
suzhi discourse, 96
urban women, 3, 4, 9–12, 37, 45, 96, 107, 117, 120, 123

W
Workers
migrant, 3
professional women, 6, 13, 14, 20, 37, 38, 68, 77, 118
service, 3, 12, 20
sex, 3, 6, 12, 13, 20, 31, 38, 58, 62, 77, 80, 118
women, 10, 14, 37, 38, 45
Work unit
familial model, 103
housing allocation, 103, 109
paternalist tradition, 103, 119

Y
Yin-Yang, 26, 27–8, 36
complimentary model of Yin-Yang, 77, 91