

The London School of Economics and Political Science

The State Through Its Mirrors

An Anthropological Study of a 'Respect-the-Elderly Home'
in Rural China at the Turn of the 21st Century

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To Little Cloud

Declaration

I certify that the thesis I have presented for examination for the PhD degree of the London School of Economics and Political Science is solely my own work other than where I have clearly indicated that it is the work of others (in which case the extent of any work carried out jointly by me and any other person is clearly identified in it).

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Abstract

This thesis represents an endeavour to study and rethink bureaucracy through an ethnography of the bureaucratic organisation called ‘Respect-the-Elderly Home’ (REH) in rural China in the first decade of the 21st century. Its contextual concern is to examine the phenomenon of old age support being transferred from primary groups (family and village) to the state in the processes of modern state formation, a context in which elderly support is portrayed by both the Chinese government and mainstream academic discourse as a symptom of family dysfunction and moral crisis; and a state project to build up REHs to host the welfare category of ‘Five-Guarantee Elderly’ is hailed to be practically therapeutic and ideologically significant.

Based on long term fieldwork in one REH in southwestern China and more REHs generally (April 2010 – June 2011), this thesis reveals a secret function of this organisation, namely, ‘accommodative inversion’, and argues for a heterotopian looking-glass perspective to conceptualise it. The first chapter outlines the fieldwork setting in a way that its heterotopian qualities are simultaneously presented. The following chapters are divided into two parts. The first part delineates the realities of the institution-defined order and disorders of dining, spatial layout and temporal orientation, and explores the mechanisms which make the presumable incompatibility of these distinct orders practically irrelevant. The second part explores the dialectics of state and family in service delivery, guarantee and deprivation, and the condition of the residents as the served and the serving, and explains why structural inversions are inevitable through institutional processes beyond individual intention.

This research brings the myth of our era – of bureaucracy and in particular of the Chinese bureaucracy – into a dialogue with the literature on bureaucratic organisation that has emerged in social science since the 1960s. More significantly, by disclosing and expounding the violent nature of state welfare, it presents a fundamental challenge to conventional understandings of benefactor and beneficiary in state provision.

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This thesis reflects my first intellectual endeavour since I started to learn anthropology at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) in 2006. Searching my blurred memories, a thousand moments of hesitation and doubt spring to mind. Little could be recalled to explain my persistence though. If academic austerity is the necessary condition for this work, I may, by now, have also become its product.

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Acronyms

CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CPPCC	Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference
MCA	Ministry of Civil Affairs
PDCA	Provincial Department of Civil Affairs
CCAB	County Civil Affairs Bureau
The Bureau	Yinhe County Civil Affairs Bureau
The EC	Elderly Committee
The SL Project	The Sunset Light Project
The CREH Project	The Central Respect-the-Elderly Home Project
The Centralisation Project	The Central Village Construction Experiment Project
CREH	Central Respect-the-Elderly Home
RREH	Rural Respect-the-Elderly Home
REH	Respect-the-Elderly Home
The Home	Hongfan Central Respect-the-Elderly Home
WBE	WuBao-Elderly
WBH	WuBao-Household
HP	Home People

Notes on the Text

Transliteration

Except for the names of place and people, Chinese words are written italicised in square brackets. English translation or insertions are put in parentheses. All the translations are made by myself unless specified. ‘Staff’ includes the directors and workers. The welfare recipients are referred to with four terms. WuBao-Elderly follows the government official discourse. ‘Home people’ [*yuanmin*] reflects the Home official language, and WuBao-Household [*wubao-hu*] that of the local language. I also use the term ‘resident’ to correspond to ‘staff’. For textual clarity, I use WuBao-Elderly and resident as general terms. The other two addresses are used in the contexts where they are emphasised. The connotation of ‘management’ changes with specific context.

Names

To protect privacy, all names of persons and locations (county and below) are anonymised. The workers are identified by given name. Individual residents and the directors are identified by surname.

Units

1 acre = 6.07 *mu*

1 GBP = 10 yuan

Yuan: RMB

1 kilogram = 2 *jin*

1 mile = 1.61 kilometre

Introduction

Bai Dalin was a 72-year-old resident in the Home where I conducted my research. One day he suggested that we go together to visit his home village and I agreed. So we walked out of the Home to wait at the nearby bus stop, where a crowd of people was gathered. After a while, a bus carrying a few passengers pulled up in front of us.

Bai had problems with one of his legs and tended to limp very badly while walking, but I had noticed that he sometimes walked very quickly with the use of a cane, as if to show that he could actually walk as effectively as others. I never offered him help when I saw him climbing stairs or engaging in other strenuous activities, partly because he kept telling me that there was ‘no problem’ [*mo de shi*] and that he could manage by himself.

When our bus pulled up at the stop, Bai did not move at all, and the other waiting passengers immediately got on in front of him. Only then did Bai start to manoeuvre himself onto the bus in a series of movements that seemed very well practised: he threw his stick onto the floor of the bus, grabbed the handles beside the door, lifted his lame leg, took a deep breath and prepared to jump on. I was standing behind him and, as usual, I did not offer to help but instead waited to see how he would manage himself.

At that moment, the bus driver seemed to notice something and called out loudly to Bai, ‘Hey, where are you from?’

Bai did not reply, apparently so engaged in his efforts to climb aboard the bus that he could not spare any energy to answer irrelevant questions.

The driver tried again. ‘Are you from the Respect-the-Elderly Home?’ he asked brusquely.

At that point, I noticed that Bai was wearing a jacket from the Home that featured the

institution's logo and phone number.

'Yes, over there...' said Bai, paying little attention. By now he had stepped onto the bus and was about to pick up his stick.

Hearing this, the driver became impatient. 'Get off, get off!' he shouted at Bai. 'Take another bus!'

Only on hearing this curt request did Bai give the driver his full attention. 'What's the problem? What's the problem?' he asked.

'The bus is not safe for you. I can't take responsibility if you are injured on my bus. You guys are taken care of by the state – (you're) too precious to get on this shabby vehicle. Hurry, get off!' The driver's tone made it clear that he was not joking and that his demand was a serious one.¹

I did not even have a chance to board the bus. Bai turned and alighted from the bus much more quickly than when he had tried to get on. This time I offered a hand without thinking, maybe feeling hurried by the driver's impatience, and Bai, without taking my hand, jumped down nimbly.

The bus pulled away quickly, kicking up a cloud of dust. Only then did I fully realise that my informant had not been allowed to get on the bus, and in the seconds it took to register this, I became angry myself. I turned to Bai, wanting to express my anger about the unfair treatment he had just received. But to my surprise, Bai did not seem to be particularly irritated. Instead, he spoke to himself as if he was calling the bus driver a fool:

Why be so ferocious? Nowadays, 'who is afraid of whom' [*shei pa shei*]?

Silly enough! It's not that I'm not paying you. You don't earn the money,

¹ My observation was that though the demand was serious, the tone was felt ironic, which combination made the refusal sound neither thoroughly rude nor immediately insulting.

others do!

Then, after a few seconds, as if having worked out what had prompted the bus driver's outburst, he pointed to the logo on his jacket and exclaimed:

How stupid the Respect-the-Elderly Home is! Why do they print these things on my clothes? I shall erase them completely!

The abovementioned episode took place a few steps outside the Hongfan 'Central Respect-the-Elderly Home' [*zhong xin jing lao yuan*] (the Home), the main site of this ethnography. It elicits many questions that are at the heart of this thesis. What is the institution referred to as the Respect-the-Elderly Home, given the rather bewildering reactions of local people to it? Who are the people living in it? What is the Home's relation to the Chinese state? Why is 'being taken care of by the state' an excuse for refusing to accept a passenger? Why was it that Bai, instead of being irritated by the driver, immediately turned his attention to the logo on his clothes and vowed to erase it – a sign, one might argue, of tacit acceptance of the driver's rudeness?

Based on long-term ethnographic fieldwork conducted in and around the Home, this thesis addresses these questions by proposing a heterotopian perspective for understanding the Home as a bureaucratic organisation. With the aim of establishing the theoretical framework, the rest of this introduction is composed of five sections. The first section introduces the WuBao (five-guarantee) welfare programme, in which the creation of Respect-the-Elderly Home is an important element, and situates this in its cultural and ideological context. The second section reviews a range of expositions of bureaucratic organisations in western scholarship, and points out an important shift in how bureaucratic boundaries are conceived. After weighing up the relevance of these expositions to the current research, the third section explains the notion of heterotopia proposed in this study. The fourth section summarises the fieldwork context, and finally it gives an outline of the chapters that follow.

REH to CREH: Historical Familiarity and Unfamiliarity

Shamgar-Handelman (1981: 24), among others, has pointed out that ‘(a) major characteristic of the modern state is the increase in the transfer of responsibility for the well-being of the individual, and of social categories of persons, from primary groups to the state and its bureaucratic organs’. The WuBao welfare programme provides a rare opportunity to study this characteristic empirically in relation to the formation of the modern Chinese state. It is the only example of state welfare provision to rural people that has continued uninterrupted in the official record from the 1950s to the present day. And it reflects a two-stage process through which the old age support of the welfare recipients is eventually handed over to the state from diverse local institutions, including kin organisation and village administration. In this section, I summarise the cultural foundation and historical background of this welfare system and discuss the ambivalence surrounding its recent revival.

Filial Piety and the ‘Life-Giving Benevolence’ in the Chinese Political Discourse

The WuBao welfare programme has been articulated through the discourse of ‘mutual sacrifice’ during Mao’s era and that of a free gift from the state at the present time. In both cases, the primacy of ‘life-giving benevolence’ and the principle of filial piety as prescribed in Confucianism can be said to be the ‘hidden transcripts’ (Scott 1990). Therefore, let me first give a very brief review of the key features of filial piety in Chinese philosophies.

Filial piety defines Chinese personhood, in that filial reverence for one’s parents is considered the *basic* condition for developing any of the other human qualities of excellence (for a full review, see Ivanhoe 2007; Rosemont & Ames 2009). One’s obedience to one’s father signifies not only subordination to a specific individual but also virtuous piety to the overall cosmogonic order (Tu 1994); it regulates the fundamental relatedness in Chinese personhood, in that the authority of one’s superiors is not rooted in a legal or religious entitlement, but prevails only when one

acquires the virtue of submission and expresses it through family reverence. By extension, it also informs the public relation between different age cohorts, since it entails that the elderly in general should be respected in a similar way to one's own parents (see 'Mencius'); it therefore underpins the high status of the elderly. Being integral to *Ren* (benevolence and humanity) and *Li* (propriety), filial piety is held to be the essence of Chinese civilization. The notion of Chineseness goes beyond ethnic, regional and historical origins to encompass a higher level of belonging, namely the Central Kingdom Complex [*zhong guo qing jie*], which formulates a sense of common civilisational identity and is instrumental in allowing the Chinese to identify with their peers (Qian 2001; Chan 2004; Isay 2005).

The emergence of the Classic of Filial Piety [*xiao jing*] during the Han dynasty marks the official endorsement of Confucian ethics, which designates filiality to one's parents and loyalty to one's ruler as two parallel aspects of filial piety; in other words, loyalty to one's superior resembles filiality to one's father in the state political regime (Holzman 1998; Ebrey 2004). Since the Han dynasty, the notion of the 'state family' has survived numerous transformations, and has continued to stress structural resemblance, instead of opposition, between family and state. The impulse to be filial and loyal is therefore also part of the moral prescription of patriotism and nationalism (Eastman 1988). This is very different from the situation in Europe, where the monarch-minister relationship is most often ecclesiastical and private/public spheres are marked off by radically contrasting rules (Hamilton 1990).

A brief comparison of filial piety with the equivalent rules in other patrilineal societies may help to elicit its characteristics. Fortes (1969) suggests that ancestor worship in Africa is sanctioned by political order and that it is the jural status of a male descendant that is transformed into ancestorhood and worshiped, which has little to do with the actual performance of the person. By contrast, honour, the elementary principle legitimising patriarchal authority in Mediterranean cultures, has more private connotations. It is accredited to people in light of their behaviours in fulfilling

gender roles, as opposed to their class and social status, and it concerns the due attribute of a 'whole' person; in other words, it is the individual's behaviour and performance that constitute the substance of honour (Davis 1977; Lapidus 2002). In western Christian societies, the supreme power of God is the sole source of authority for both priesthood and fatherhood. The power of the family patriarch is canonically secondary and derivative by nature. Legal inscription is the most important text for son, wife and juniors to follow and also the most effective sanction when violations occur; in brief, divine power and secular legislation are the sources of western patriarchy (Bellah 1970).

I want to highlight two main characteristics of Chinese filial piety that differentiate it from the above rules. The first are its ultimate goal of forming filial subjectivity and the means of sacrifice. The internalisation of this belief – the willingness to be filial – signifies the attainment of a higher level of 'being a person' [*zuo ren*]. The formation of filial subjectivity is the religious essence of filial piety, and family is the institution that nurtures it (Rosemont & Ames 2009). This is achieved first and foremost through sacrifice: the inculcation of filiality in a junior demands the senior's sacrificial nurturance, and the attainment of filial reverence by the senior demands the junior's sacrificial devotion. The second is that the emphasis on a resemblance between filiality and loyalty to the state coexists with the well-acknowledged tension between them; in other words, this ambivalence is historically acknowledged (Stafford 1995). This suggests that the value of filial piety is defined by paradoxes: harmony obtained through hierarchy, benevolence achieved through sacrifice, and tension articulated as coherence.

The religious ethos of piety makes the Chinese filiality principle function bewilderingly as being both religious and non-religious; and filial piety, and by extension the norm of respecting the elderly, is of particular importance in Chinese culture. In this connection, I argue that studies on the current practice of filial piety should not hastily reduce it to a set of moral principles. If moral rightness and

wrongness is primarily a matter of rational articulation, religious inculcation is always, first and foremost, an enterprise of belief formation. Instead, the current condition of filial piety may be better situated in the studies on the modern fate of other religions (Huxley 1941; Geertz 1983; Casanova 1994; Asad 1999). I argue that the ways in which filial piety functions in both the everyday lives of ordinary Chinese people and that of the modern state are certainly more complex than simple binary oppositions such as discontinuity versus continuity can represent; indeed, they should be better conceived within frameworks that allow both permeation and transfiguration of traditional ideals in a way comparable to the dependence of the secular on preceding Christian religion and the continuation of the latter.

Respect-the-Elderly Home (REH): A Welfare Invention during the Maoist Period

Now let us turn to the modern era, and in particular to the revolutionary era in which China's feudal past, including its Confucian past, was meant to be overcome. As I have noted, the notion of 'mutual sacrifice' was a core political discourse during the Maoist period. The general idea was that the Party had given the peasants a new life of emancipation through its massive sacrifice during the war; therefore, according to the logic of reciprocity, the people should be ready to sacrifice themselves for the Party whenever needed. Likening itself to both parents and Gods [*tian*] for its life-giving benevolence, the state had the effect of replacing both parents and Gods with the all-encompassing Party. It was then achieved through the massive Maoist ideological mobilisation within and outside the bureaucracy in a condition of generally low material provision, which proved to be very effective in mobilising the body politic.

The ideological propaganda and practical measures used to establish solidarity between the people and the Party were fierce and intensive at that time (Apter & Saich 1994; Croll 1994; Feuchtwang 2011). In the course of the first five-year plan (1953-1957), all aspects of the economy had been brought under a single organisational system, including the domestic life of rural households, whose

production and consumption had also become communal events epitomised by the ‘communal dining hall’. Putting all aspects of life into a single ‘great Me’ [*da wo*] could be fraught with coercion, but might give enormous power to the Party and its leadership, which was thus concomitant to a range of self-contradictory Party rules (Feuchtwang 2011). In all, the notion that the Party governs like a life-giver substituting family and kinship and reuniting people under the national flag is thus rooted in Maoist-era politics.

Having existed in several forms, the origin of the WuBao welfare system is rather hard to specify with certainty, and official demographic data on WuBao-Elderly are sporadic.² Most domestic studies trace it to either a local initiative or a government document issued in the early 1950s. The official version holds that a village in Heilongjiang province came up with a new way of offering communal support to needy elders, whereby the local community constructed an old people’s home to host them and provide for their daily needs. A special name was given to this housing facility: ‘Respect-the-Elderly Home’. This local initiative was later recognised by the central government, which formalised it in a 1956 policy document:

The agricultural production brigade should take care of the elderly, the weak, the widowed and the disabled who are deprived of the ability to work and lack a source of livelihood. It should guarantee them food, clothing, firewood, the education of orphans and the cremation of the old. (Article 53, Chapter 9, ‘High Level Agricultural Production Cooperative Exemplary Ordinance of the PRC’)

The collective residence for WuBao welfare recipients was subsequently instituted and authorised under the name ‘Respect-the-Elderly Home’ in a policy document issued by the Central Committee of the Party in 1958.³ Since the 1950s, WuBao

² I consider that the demographic data on WuBao-Elderly is unreliable. Nevertheless, to give an idea, one version is that approximately three million WuBao-Elderly live in rural China, representing approximately 3.4 per cent of those aged 60 years and over (Li 2004).

³ Titled ‘Decisions on Some Issues of the People’s Commune’.

welfare has remained an official national programme. The absolute majority of WuBao recipients are elders, and it is these WuBao-Elderly who are the main subjects of this study. Regardless of its origins, the programme's current official discourse also evokes the Maoist ethos of the state taking care of the elderly, as well as of the sharing of experiences between the local and the central governments.

In policy analysis literature on contemporary China, state welfare policy is mainly viewed as a supplementary part of the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) national strategy. Welfare policies during the Maoist period are interpreted as having served the primary objective of mobilising workers to engage in a 'class-based struggle' against capitalism and of ensuring 'worker and cadre loyalty' to their workplaces as well as the CCP; in other words, they are geared towards party-state formation (Phillion 1998). It is widely recognised that the development priority at that time was heavy industrial production; rural surplus was extracted and redistributed to subsidise the growing urban proletariat, and social policy was oriented accordingly (Riskin 1987). The social insurance system during this period was intended first and foremost to redistribute surplus via the state. Resources were distributed according to an organisation's proximity to the Party, and state sector workers enjoyed full welfare provided as part of the 'work unit' [*danwei*] system (Szelenyi 1983; Wong 1996).

During this period, the rural peasantry, though receiving far fewer state benefits than their urban counterparts, were not entirely economically exploited. Comparing to peasants in the Soviet Union under Stalin, the Chinese counterpart were subject to considerably less severe 'grain surplus extraction' policies (Selden 1988: 160; Davis 1989). Cooperatives were the main system used to abolish the exploitative social relations that existed in the pre-revolutionary era. As a national policy announced in the 1950s, the WuBao welfare policy, which was instituted in most of the collectivised farming communities, was a major instantiation of the Party's welfare in rural areas. At the beginning of the 'People's Commune' [*renmin gongshe*] period, the number of REHs increased rapidly. It is also recorded that ensuring provision for WuBao-Elderly

was one of the main reasons for retaining the ‘communal dining hall’ in the face of the mainstream discourse that sought to abolish it. During this period, there was also considerable improvement in the social welfare construction in education and health care in rural areas; for example, each village was urged by the government to universalise junior school classes, and many communities also set up senior schools (Davis 1989).

The Great Leap Forward in rural areas and the Cultural Revolution in cities exhausted the ideological invocation of socialism, and commandism was recognised to be an obstacle to economic advancement (Hinton 1990). When it took power, the Deng regime pursued marketisation as a means to rationalise the bureaucratic economy, altering the frame of welfare stipulation from that followed by its Maoist predecessors. Among the marketisation measures, the ‘elimination of the commune’ and the ‘return to individual household agriculture’ had the greatest impact in rural areas (World Bank 1992: 42-46). Yet the introduction of marketisation was predicated upon the institutionalised interest of the Party bureaucracy, and the need to gradually eliminate the foundations of class relations constituted since 1949 continued. Political factors of the kind counteracted the market expansion proposal. Constrained by a similar framework, the reform of the social welfare system towards fuller marketisation was also seriously compromised (Deng 1995). With the collapse of the local collective economy in rural areas, organised communal support for WuBao-Elderly was reduced dramatically. Nevertheless, support for them continued through a range of alternative initiatives. Since the introduction of the major economic mechanism of the ‘household responsibility contract system’ in the early 1980s, actual support for WuBao-Elderly has been often associated with kin, family and local households.⁴

Despite the national agenda of privatisation during this period, the WuBao welfare programme was continued and authorised in the form of the State Council Order [*guowuyuan ling*]. In 1994, the State Council issued the first official document

⁴ On structural changes in Chinese families in this period, see, e.g. Wolf 1984; Whyte 1992; Davis&Harrell 1993; Diamant 1997.

pertaining to the WuBao welfare programme, namely Order 141, which presents a comprehensive national guideline of the eligibility of welfare recipients, regulates implementing agencies and the guaranteed services etc. It allocates responsibility for WuBao-Elderly to local governments:

The funds and goods for the ‘five-guarantees’ subsistence should be disbursed from village retaining or township planning, no double allocation; in areas where collective enterprise operates, such funding can be obtained from local enterprise tax. (Article 11, Chapter 3, Order 141 (1994))

Order 141 also prescribes two main forms of living arrangement, which are ‘concentrated placement’ [*jizhong juzhu*] and ‘scattered/individual placement’ [*fensan juzhu*]. The concentrated placement is named ‘Rural Respect-the-Elderly Home’ (RREH), which is encouraged in areas where the construction and maintenance of such institutions are affordable for the local collective (Articles 13 to 17, Chapter 4), otherwise WuBao-Elderly live independently and receive cash subsidy. Following the promulgation of Order 141, the Ministry of Civil Affairs (MCA) issued a policy document in 1997 entitled ‘Rural Respect-the-Elderly Home Management Tentative Measures’, which serves as the main guidelines for the management of RREH.

Central Respect-the-Elderly Home (CREH): A Theatre of Respecting the Repellent as a Free Gift from the State

Most ethnographic studies of China in the last decade that have addressed the issue of filial piety view it as a moral principle and are mainly concerned with whether and why it is still practised in ordinary people’s lives. Yan Yunxiang (2003), drawing on his ethnography of a village in north-eastern China, asserts that the moral value of filial piety is in crisis. He bases this conclusion on his observations of the treatment of the elderly, leaving little room to consider the likely gap between filial piety as an internalised value or a private conduct and its role as public performance such as RREH. Standing as a counterpoint, we find in Liu Xin’s book ‘The Otherness of Self’

(2002) an ethnographic case in which a Chinese scholar decides to give up his favoured career of teaching political economy at a provincial university to pursue a profitable business – a radical change prompted by an unbearable sense of guilt that, being paid little by the university, he could not even afford to buy a flight ticket for his parents, let alone to fulfil his filial duty to ensure a comfortable material life for them. Though Liu does not go further with this case, I read from it the great impact of filial piety on important life choices of an ordinary Chinese person in this era. Similarly, Vanessa Fong's book 'Only Hope' (2004) can also be read as evidence of the continuing validity of filial piety. She calls attention to a paradox wherein the focus of many families has shifted to the younger generation, which presumably indicates a decline in the status of the elderly (i.e. the former authorities in a household), and yet young people retain strong feelings of filial loyalty to their elders.

Taking these various accounts together, I contend that it is important to delineate the two-level reality of the current state of filial piety, which comprises the problematic practice and the considerable attention given to it by both anthropologists working on China and the people they study. This attention is itself revealing, which, in my view, is a clear demonstration of the continuing validity of filial piety as a national ideology. Indeed, my fieldwork experience also convinced me that the moral righteousness of respecting the elderly was absolute in the eyes of most local people that even though they might not actually practise it, few would question its correctness. When I asked one retired official whether filial piety was still found in society, he dismissed my question as if the answer was self-evident. As he put it,

Filial piety is like the air; people simply live in it. There is no need to specially educate people to understand it; no one can be blind to it. Filial piety may change, but let's say, not for another three or four generations.

In addition, people who took explicit counter action, such as exhibiting disrespect to the elderly, often sought to justify their behaviour by, for example, denying claims that the WuBao-Elderly should be counted as elderly and thus be respected, which, in

my view, also signalled their implicit assumption on the moral rightness of respecting the elderly. Therefore, I argue that a more accurate description of the current situation is that to most ordinary people, filial piety is still held as an upright moral principle that one should stick to; however, the realisation of this is often hindered by other conditions, ranging from the ‘immorality’ of individual persons to practical deficiencies such as a lack of material resources, or physical separation between kin caused by outmigration (Ikels 2004).⁵ Thus, the key point is the tension between the received righteousness of filial piety and the frequent inability to fulfil it among ordinary people.

By intervening in elderly care, the state shows its strength. Confucianism, including filial piety, is advocated and reified in politicians’ speeches, policies, laws and the establishment of new institutions and schools in and outside China (Ai 2009; Bell 2008; Makeham 2008).⁶ The current Chinese government’s advocacy of filial piety portrays old age care as a familial obligation and emphasises material support and notional visits to one’s parents, thereby defining the appropriate manner of treating the elderly with performative respect. This is also part of the government’s national campaign to construct ‘civil citizen’ [*wenming shimin*], defined by an overarching notion of ‘Chinese national virtue’ [*zhonghua minzu meide*], for which Confucianism provides the core set of values. Comparing to the situation during the Mao era, the life-giving logic is also implicated in official discourse, but performative respect and material support substitute willingness and sacrifice, and the five guarantees to WuBao-Elderly are articulated as a free gift from the state, which are fully represented by the project of establishing CREHs.⁷

⁵ On the declining status of old people and their lack of support in this period in China, see e.g. Benjamin et al 2000; Murphy 2002; Croll 2006; Saunders 2006; Giles&Mu 2007; Jing 2007; Brown&Tierney 2009; Cheung&Kwan 2009; Wang&Shang&Xu 2011, and similar phenomena elsewhere, see Finch 1989; Collier 1997; Van Der Geest 2002; Aboderin 2004a.

⁶ Ai Jiawen (2009) undertakes a systematic review of aspects of the Party’s conduct that reflect its ambivalent attitude towards Confucianism and predicts that the future of Confucianism in legitimising the Party’s authority is wide open, with the dying Marxism.

⁷ James Laidlaw (2000) provides a revealing analysis of the illusion of many proclaimed free gifts on the basis of his ethnography of *dan*, a free gift in the life of the Jain renouncers, whose ultimate

Different from their imperial predecessors, who deserve loyalty and respect for being ‘the son of heaven’ [*tian zi*] and the father of all its subjects, the modern Chinese government partially inverts the scenario by retaining the role of life-giver but also by showing respect to those whom it supports. By providing free material support to WuBao-Elderly and ‘feeding’ them, the state enacts the parental role; and by showing respect to the recipients as esteemed elders, it enacts the role of a child. Thus, by simultaneously performing two oppositional roles, the ‘state’ in this project contains the ambivalence that it, as the nurturer, not only supports the nurtured and so to expect filial obedience from them, but also exhibits filial respect to the latter.

At the turn of the 21st century, the Chinese government started to divert its principal national strategy from economic-oriented development to measures to address social problems such as inequality. A number of political analysts argued that economic growth, while having provided a short-term fillip to party legitimacy, was, like revolutionary legitimacy, bound to be exhausted (Holbig 2011). Denying an intrinsic connection between economic performance and governance legitimacy, Holbig (2011: 24) argues that counter to ‘the end of ideology’ prediction, the CCP has never moved beyond its reliance on ideology as a crucial source of regime legitimacy.⁸ This is

goal in life is spiritual purification and salvation. Following Derrida (1992), who articulates a broad notion of ‘economy’ in which everything is in a constant state of circulation, Laidlaw expounds the deep paradox in free gift by suggesting that it is at the very point of the identification of a gift (i.e. by identifying the object circulating around identifiable ones) that the purity of a gift is destroyed; in other words, for a pure gift to exist, the condition is the suspension of time. Laidlaw points out that what differentiates a gift from a commodity is not the conventional understanding that the former is personal and the latter impersonal, but rather the fact that a pure gift denies any social obligation by making the donor anonymous, and thus it is fundamentally impersonal. Therefore, what matters most is not the distinction between gift and commodity – an often misread aspect of Mauss’ work that leads to the romanticisation of the gift; rather, it is a system that may actually free donors and receivers from being identifiable and socially engaged through which the benefit of the donor is often inevitable. In all, the precondition for a truly free gift is that the giver is anonymous. The WuBao welfare proclaims to be a free gift, which, at a certain level, is verified by observation. Yet the giver – the state – is not only known but also inexorably highlighted. If a pure gift has to be anonymous, we then have to ask what is being disguised by a supposedly free gift from the state, or what kind of relationship is actually generated between the giver and the receiver and what is to be reciprocated. On welfare as gift relationship, see also Titmuss 1970.

⁸ Though the Deng Xiaoping regime was understood to mainly follow pragmatism, after the 1989 Tiananmen Square incident, Deng (1989) reflected that ‘our biggest mistake was in the area of education, in particular ideological and political education’, see also Holcombe 1989.

represented by the ‘harmonious society’ slogan developed by the Hu Jintao regime. The resurgence in this period of Confucianism came from every corner of the society independent of government propaganda (Makeham 2008; Bell 2008). The Party is situated in a range of competing interpretations on Confucianism in the academic discourse and takes on an ambiguous position by reconfiguring a wider discourse of ‘traditional Chinese culture’. Echoing its ambivalent attitude towards the people during the Maoist period, the Party’s current resort to Confucianism is also loaded with contradictions (Ai 2008).

The Hu Jintao regime sought to rein in its commercialising, marketising, privatising service provision and to expand social insurance schemes and strengthen safety networks. In contrast to the 1980s and 1990s, the state extended its provision to solve rural problems through policy stipulation, which were commonly financed through a combination of central and local government funding. These measures included abolishing rural taxes, investing in rural cooperative medical schemes and introducing rural pensions and income support programmes for indigent villagers, though the enforcement of which in practice were often compromised by a decentralised fiscal system, institutional continuity and bureaucratic interests (Duckett 2012). In addition to this, non-state provision, including support from the private sector and civil society, also emerged on a large scale. Today, it is acknowledged that the framework of welfare reforms in China is increasingly shaped by top leaders and the debates among elites, facilitated by a media under a notable degree of government control.

Order 456, the State Council’s second order pertaining to the WuBao welfare programme, was issued in 2006. It was intended as an amended version of Order 141. Retaining most parts of Order 141 in an unmodified form, Order 456 distinguishes itself by reassigning financial and administrative responsibility for WuBao support from the local government (e.g. township) to the state civil affairs bureaucracy:

The funds for the rural five-guarantee subsistence programme should be covered by local government at county level or above. In areas where income

from collective enterprise is available, these funds can also be used as a supplement to improve the living conditions of the five-guarantee subjects. Concrete regulations should be instituted by province, autonomous region and municipality government. (Article 11, Chapter 3, Order 456)

During the time of my fieldwork, the change in the welfare system brought about by Order 456 was widely publicised in official documents, government websites and other media and was celebrated as a ‘historic turn’ [*lishixing zhuanzhe*] in the history of the WuBao welfare programme. Soon after the issue of Order 456, the Ministry of Civil Affairs (MCA) launched a supplementary programme called *Wanxia Gongcheng* (literally ‘Sunset Light Project’), the purpose of which was the government to invest in ‘concentrated living facilities’ for WuBao beneficiaries, that is, to establish ‘Central Respect-the-Elderly Homes’ (CREHs). As the ‘historic turn’ comment suggests, CREH differs from RREH in that the former receives funding from various levels of government and serves as a rural outpost that is directly managed by County Civil Affairs Bureau (CCAB). The word ‘Central’ in the title reminds one that this institution is part of a centralisation process, and the whole title – ‘Central Respect-the-Elderly Home’ – reminds one that CREH is neither entirely new nor old; it substantiates an old symbol - ‘REH’ - with the new content - ‘C’. Figure 0.1 illustrate the organisational change along the government hierarchical line.

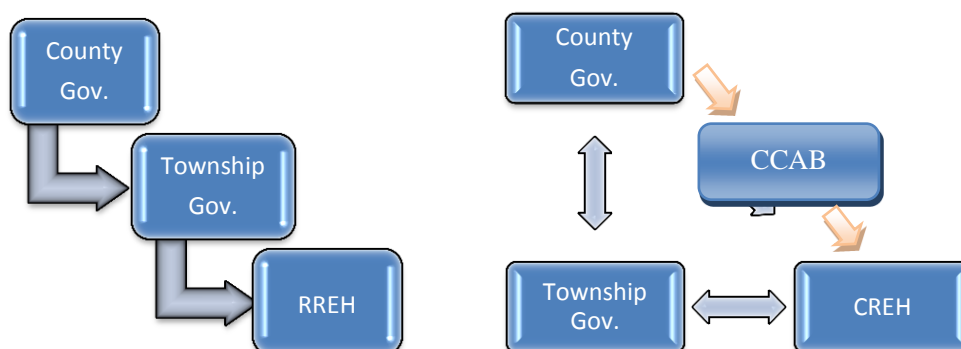


Figure 0.1: Administration Structure of RREH and CREH

In sum, we see strong similarities as well as dissimilarities between CREH and its Maoist predecessor, REH. Both emerge from the need to unite the local with the central authorities, have strong ideological connotations, involve material provision and the penetration into domestic domain, and reflect an ambivalent attitude of the Party to its body politic. Yet, the key difference between REH and CREH lies in that, under the CREH system, the state becomes the actual material provider and its bureaucrats the implementing agency, which renders local authorities secondary, whereas REH involves a charismatic national leader (i.e. Chairman Mao) and relies heavily on the enforcement by local authorities.

Furthermore, I want to pinpoint the state's continuing use of the logic of resemblance between state and family in the substitution of family and kin by the state in the context of WuBao-Elderly care. Though we might assume that a state institution is fundamentally different from a family, the opposite is true, which is that the Home is most eloquently represented as being 'like family'.⁹ There seems to be no alternative articulation of the government's conduct other than 'respecting the elderly', as derived from the value of filial piety (for a discussion of the lack of alternative perspectives, see Duara 1995). And most local people acquiesced in this ambiguity. The affinity between state and family may also give an explanation on the fact that the WuBao welfare programme is a pioneering state intervention in rural elderly support. In comparison to 'normal' elders, who are defined by their belonging to a family, WuBao-Elderly are the ones who fall out of this existing category. To put this in structuralist terms, WuBao-Elderly are people who are tacitly known as 'out of place' (Douglas 1966), with the 'place' in question being defined as family. Thus, they stand in structural opposition to the majority of old people who have families – an opposition also reflected in moral discourse. But this opposition is only partial, since they are elderly anyway. As a consequence, they are blanketed ambiguously at the interface of two categories: as elders, they should be respected; as childless elders,

⁹ Emmanuel Todd (1985: 17) aims to demonstrate that 'the ideological system is everywhere the intellectual embodiment of family structure'.

they are despised. Yet the symbolic ambiguity unique to them also makes it more obvious that the need to be re-categorised, which may explain the relatively rapid fulfilment of CREH projects (i.e. the state's redefinition of the locally ambiguous rather than the locally definite).

During my fieldwork, I was impressed by the ambivalence concerning WuBao welfare in the official discourse, in the attitudes of local villagers to CREH and WuBao-Elderly, and in everyday life within the Home. Firstly, the government rhetoric regarding WuBao welfare highlighted the moral value of respecting the elderly, but it also implied WuBao-Elderly as the weakest group in society. The choice of the institution's name highlighted the value of respect, and the newly built CREHs were typically more magnificent than other buildings in their rural surroundings. But at the same time, in the civil affairs bureaucracy, WuBao welfare fell under the jurisdiction of the Social Assistance Department [*shehui jiu zhushi*].¹⁰ WuBao-Elderly were classified in the same category as orphans and the disabled. These three different kinds of WuBao welfare recipients were never separated on paper, and all were housed in the institution of REH. WuBao-Elderly were alternatively called 'Three-No Elderly' [*sanwu laoren*], emphasising their tripartite deficiency: being unable to work, having no adult sons and having no other means of livelihood (Ministry of Civil Affairs 2004). The intertwining of these two aspects, respect and help, reflects the ambivalence in government discourse on this welfare service. Indeed, there may be nowhere else in the world where old people's homes for 'Three-No Elderly' are titled so euphemistically. But in the Chinese context, this apparent ambivalence was seldom a source of explicit concern for local people, so far as I could tell.¹¹

Secondly, a similar ambivalence existed in villagers' views of CREH and its residents.

¹⁰ *jiuzhu* is composed of two characters: *jiu*: save; and *zhu*: help.

¹¹ It should be noted that the phenomenon of the Chinese government intervening in the issue of old age care presents two important contrasts to neoliberal reforms in social care in most post-socialist countries. In the latter, firstly, the state is gradually withdrawing from this sector, leaving spaces for market, civil society, family and global forces, and secondly, the forms of social provision for individuals tend to multiply rather than reducing to one totalising source (Read&Thelen 2007).

On the one hand, most people, when asked whether the project to establish CREH made sense, would respond affirmatively – after all, respecting the elderly was a ‘Chinese national virtue’. Yet on the other hand, when referring to a specific REH, villagers would typically express negative feelings, such as indifference, scepticism and aversion. Similarly, while the moral principle of respecting the elderly was rarely explicitly challenged, in the specific case of WuBao-Elderly, its application became questionable. WuBao-Elderly were generally despised on a number of grounds other than being old, though the actual circumstances of individual WuBao-Elderly in the villages varied.¹² In bad situations, they were overtly insulted by villagers. Upon moving into a CREH, WuBao-Elderly no longer fell under the administrative purview of their home village or township, and instead re-registered at County Civil Affairs Bureau (CCAB) as a ‘collective residence’ [*jiti hukou*] as opposed to a ‘rural household residence’ [*nongcun hukou*]. This upgrade made the position of WuBao-Elderly relative to their peers in the village ambiguous; though the former were previously at the lowest rung of rural society, their direct affiliation to the state conferred on them an identity superior to that of the villagers in the eyes of most local people. The stereotypical local attitude to the Home residents became somehow different, which was most often modest or indirect gestures of disrespect, such as the bus driver whom I discussed at the beginning of this Introduction. Avoidance was typical of villagers’ conduct towards the residents. Though there was an atmosphere that made the latter palpably different from other local villagers, explicit expressions of aversion were rare.¹³

Thirdly, within the Home, ambivalence was similarly remarkable. The rhetoric used to describe the position of the staff relative to the residents was constantly shifting between two poles: one was a discourse of respecting the elderly; the other was of ‘managing/controlling the residents’ [*guanli yuanmin*]. Formal bureaucratic work

¹² This includes their being single and poor, which is further discussed in Chapter One. In this connection, on the continuing impact of Confucian family values on the social discrimination against childless couples in South Korea, see Yang&Rosenblatt 2008.

¹³ For discussions on the significance of indirect gestures in China, see Yan 2003; Kleinman 2011; Steinmuller 2013.

intertwined with informal practices in surprising yet often synergetic ways. For example, direct instruction or punishment often counteracted the efforts to make the residents' comply with the institutional rules; rather, it was often the creation, through various informal interactions, of a certain sense of intimacy between staff and residents that made the latter willing to submit to institutional regulations, or even to help make the rules more effective by suggesting clever ways for the management to use residents discipline other residents. And when the rhetoric of respect was employed by the workers, the result was often that the rhetorically respected went on to do what was required of them. Similarly, there was the peaceful co-existence of mutually exclusive perspectives. For example, in the eyes of the bureaucrats, the village was a problematic place in need of salvation by the state, and the residents were the symptom of the problem, who could not but rely on state welfare and be taught the right behaviour. In the eyes of the residents, however, who mocked the funny propaganda posters, dismissed the Home's charter as a painting on the wall and commented that the new buildings were ugly and inconvenient, it was evident that there existed a different set of self-consistent perceptions. While these two perspectives often provided contradictory views, in reality, logically consequential conflicts happened significantly less than might over-logically be expected. In sum, care and discipline, respect and management, and intimacy and violence, far from being mutually exclusive, appeared strikingly intertwined and co-existed in the generally smooth flow of everyday life.

The combination of WuBao welfare with the state and its bureaucratic system, and the prevalent ambivalence involving more than one cultural element make the assumption that this context is primarily about old age care untenable for the narrow scope of investigation it implies. This should explain why in this thesis the issues of aging and elderly care are rendered secondary.¹⁴ My fieldwork impressions oblige me to prioritise the examination of the Home as a new bureaucratic organisation and the interpellation of the benefactor/beneficiary relationship between the state and its

¹⁴ In addition, an eloquent account of the deconstructionist approach to aging, see Cohen 1998.

recipients reflected by it, which I hope the following chapters will demonstrate.

Situated in this context, we may wonder how the Home enacts these contradictions existing in both state discourse and village life in its everyday service provision. Are the low-rung residents being fed for free and at the same time respected? Why else might the Chinese government invest generously in the care of indigent rural elders? As a model institution, how is the Home's success defined and achieved? And how can these phenomena be properly explained by virtue of anthropological knowledge? To establish a comparative conceptual framework, I shall now review the western scholarship that informs studies on the rise of bureaucratic service-delivery organisations in the processes of modern state formation elsewhere.

Boundary, Order and Exclusion: A Review of Bureaucratic Organisations

The making of boundaries has been central to the elevation of science in modern Western thought as well as to the emergence of the modern state and its functionary, bureaucracy. Durkheimian sociology sets the boundary between the sacred and the secular, which has a profound intellectual legacy. Weberian sociology defines the bureaucratic system according to its main functions of inclusion and exclusion, which summates in the rational-ideal type when sufficient boundaries are in place to make the bureaucratic machinery function on its own. Earlier studies of bureaucracy focus on the making of boundaries, assuming that this is crucial for the effective functioning of the modern bureaucratic machine.

In his book 'Madness and Civilisation', Michel Foucault (1967) provides a logical perspective on the particular ways of perceiving the world in early modern Europe that came to inform bureaucratic organisation (Sheridan 1980). According to Foucault, the Classical Age of the 17th and early 18th centuries differs from the Renaissance that precedes it in the emergence of the perception of the world through the lens of rationalism, which makes the accomplishment of certain order become ever more important. The idea of taxonomy underpins rationalism and makes explicit the

phenomenal world through discrimination, division, naming, location and connection according to the essence of things thought to be intrinsic to them. In early modern Europe, equivalent modes of thought began to be used to govern social life, for which a forceful application of power is necessary. Bureaucratic organisations are the political approximation of taxonomies, resembling the vertical nature so that differentiated values and the unequal distribution of power are associated with different levels of bureaucracy.¹⁵ The turn in Western thought from the taxonomic accumulation of static forms to it as organic structure diverts attention to the internal relation between elements and the functioning of the whole assemblage. The interdependence between parts invigorates taxonomies with purpose and also instils social life with control. The hierarchical levels and categories are seen to belong more together than apart and all serve for systemic functioning.

Following this perspective, bureaucratic organisation is seen to be born with two authoring features of internal classification and external completion, namely, taxonomy and system. The boundaries that are set according to these rules work for their own functions as far as they can be developed to the most nuanced degree. The Panopticon, in Foucault's conceptualisation, is the epitome of a taxonomic individuation, the asymmetrical yet self-regulatory, power-disguising and systemic institution. In his book 'Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison', Foucault (1979) discusses the institutional effectiveness in achieving its goals: separation, numbering, surveillance, rationalising intension, is nearly full. Architectural design is itself sufficient for making and keeping its components the intended functional order. This is the ideational forerunner of what is later well known as total institutions, service organisations and people-processing organisations (Handelman 1981).

Foreseeing Foucault, Erving Goffman (1961), in his book 'Asylums', draws our attention to this type of organisation for a society of subtle coercion to come. Though concurring with Foucault in his evaluation of the absolute effectiveness of such

¹⁵ For a detailed review of the approximation of taxonomy to bureaucratic organisation, see Handelman 1981, 2004.

bureaucratic organisations, Goffman draws mainly on his personal observations of the face-to-face encounters between people in the setting of St. Elizabeth Psychiatric Hospital in Washington D.C. To Goffman, two institutional boundaries are key to the fulfilment of the function of processing inmates and the effective communication that takes place in it. The first is the totality of the institution, which separates it from the outside world and establishes it as a functioning whole, making any alternative way of life difficult to imagine. The totality of such an institution derives mainly from its encompassing nature in the provision of many aspects of the lives of its inmates and the strong implication in severing their ties to the outside world. Goffman (1961a: 11) defines total institutions in the fashion of a Weberian ideal type (Weber 1947):

(A total institution is) a place of residence and work where a large number of like-situated individuals, cut off from the wider society for an appreciable period of time, together lead an enclosed, formally administered round of life.

It is the peculiarity of the institutional arrangement (i.e. collective regimentation separating the inmates from the outside world) that makes the flow of power and symbolic interactions effective in reproducing the institutionally intended hierarchy and identity. The most important impact of total institution on its inmates is, instead of the alleviation of particular diseases, a systemic processing of the person, which Goffman (1961a: 71) calls a process of dehumanisation or stigmatisation. This is the result of the structural effect of the totalising institutional environment, which models the society as a microcosm, whereby an inmate is not treated only with the mental illness technically defined to be cured (i.e. as a person as a whole with a part dysfunction), but as a total problem, as Goffman (1961a: 164) asserts:

Built right into the social arrangements of an organisation, then, is a thoroughly embracing conception of the member – and not merely a conception of him qua member, but behind this a conception of him qua human being.

The second boundary is that between staff and inmates. Total institutions disrupt some barriers normal to life outside them, such as those between public and private and between work and entertainment, erasing the individuality of persons and treating them en masse, while at the same time, they create and emphasise this new boundary between staff and inmates. The division between the two is clear-cut and the higher position of the staff vis-à-vis inmates manifests on all grounds, such that staff generally feel superior to inmates by virtue of their claims to knowledge and the fact that they have normal lives outside the institution. Meanwhile, this superiority is implicitly acknowledged by the inmates, which makes the highly unequal power relations manifested in daily life one of order and conformity. To Goffman, the hierarchical division between staff and inmates is central to the operation of power within total institutions.

Common in these analyses of modern bureaucratic organisations is an assumption akin to Weber's rational-ideal type of bureaucracy, i.e. any human stuff is effectively got rid of, and the way this is achieved is discreet, indirect and subtle; no spectacle is needed and little resistance is aroused; the bureaucratic functionary is fully effective in its own right. One possible reason for this premise is the proximity of taxonomy (as a scientific mode of thought) to bureaucracy. So social science in its dealing with organisations sets up similar logics to its objects. Later anthropological and sociological efforts to understand bureaucratic organisations turned to focus more on actual human interactions with the premise that by doing so, it should verify the primary logic of bureaucratic design and thus permit a more nuanced understanding of the social life in such organisations.

Don Handelman has conducted a systematic study of bureaucratic organisations in Israel. In his earlier ethnography 'Work and Play among the Aged: Interaction, Replication and Emergence in a Jerusalem Setting' (1977), we see a synergetic attempt to integrate a structuralist approach with the interactionism enshrined in Goffman's earlier work. The merging of these two approaches presents life in the

institution in a way that smoothly diverts our attention away from the dominant staff-inmate dichotomy to multiple orders in which both structural replication and change are evident. Handelman's study is one of a series of works from the 1970s and 1980s that focus on the impact of a centralised bureaucracy in a modern industrial state and the world economy on people in various specific situations. His field site is a small sheltered workshop that is set up to provide employment for indigent elders who have no other choice but to depend upon public welfare. Though such a context is normally assumed only as a site to conduct a social gerontological study, Handelman endeavours to extract general structural ramifications from the institutional setting. This endeavour is bolstered by his ethnographically rich delineation of 'encounters', a term coined by Goffman (1961), in which Handelman shows the continuous connection between face-to-face interpersonal interaction and the social order within the institution.

By combining structuralism and symbolic interactionism, Handelman effectively challenges the assumed efficacy of such bureaucratic organisation by substituting the two main boundaries established in Goffman's analysis of total institutions (i.e. inside/outside and staff/worker) with a multiplicity of forms of encounter that replicate existing orders and also invite change. His attempt to blur bureaucratic boundaries is successful in the relatively indeterminate interplay of small-scale orders that substantiate and complicate the organisation and make it an integrated part of the wider social environment in which insiders of the organisation are also insiders (who in Goffman's case, are outsiders).

Handelman's later theoretical works on bureaucratic organisations attempt to identify the different modes of thought that co-exist in organisational settings (Handelman 1981, 1998, 2004). He argues that what is lacking in Weber's ideal type is the assumption that a bureaucratic organisation can be systemic and can thus influence the world holistically by modelling it.¹⁶ Acknowledging the actual existence of

¹⁶ However, Handelman also recognises that the other side of this neglect is that it is precisely the

rationality peculiar to bureaucracy, the distinctiveness of Western culture as secondary to consciousness and reason, and the dense mixture of complex, indeterminate and uncertain human feelings unfolding in everyday experience, Handelman proposes to sufficiently recognise the cultural locations in which bureaucratic assumptions unfold. He then suggests that the contingent encounter between cultural and bureaucratic logics may shift people's perceptions though not transform them into something entirely different. In his words, 'life is as before, but otherwise, officials and clients behave in recognisable ways, yet otherwise'. To capture this 'more or less' quality of freedom and constraint between bureaucratic organisation as conceptual abstraction and as actual practice, Handelman (1981: 12) develops the analytical concept of 'frame', which he explains as follows:

In analytical terms, framing is predicated on the assumption that one is predisposed to feel and think in particular ways, perhaps in terms of different logics, when one is within particular locales or settings which are relevant to the frame. ... The phenomenal world contains domains of phenomena which respond to such frames by yielding information which is understood as relevant.

To Handelman, unlike frames, which are made conscious through self-reflection, boundaries are the phenomenal counterpart of frames; they are the often taken-for-granted markers of transition and are experienced by people through senses. The bureaucratic-frame thus comprises those perceptions and practices that correspond more or less to the stereotypical idea of the bureaucratic organisation. Handelman juxtaposes the bureaucratic frame with three other modes of thought, i.e. the frames of ritual, play and charisma, and puts the four thought-frames on the two axes of secular/sacred, and order/disorder. While the bureaucratic frame is located in a position of order and the secular, the ritual frame represents order and the sacred, play

informative, as opposed to the normative, character of bureaucracy that allows both the mechanically repetitive behaviour of a group of people and the possibility of unknown invocation by competent and entitled users (Bittner 1974).

represents disorder and the secular, and charisma represents disorder and the sacred. Though these analytical sets are primarily in opposition to each other and confer quite different kinds of knowledge and sentiment, they nevertheless co-exist in a given organisational setting and often have an extraordinary capacity to counterbalance each other. Handelman argues that common to these other frameworks are their opposing effects on the bureaucratic frame as well as on each other. The radically altered logics contained in the perceptions of ritual and charisma, informed by a transcendental value, are at odds with those of the mundane on which bureaucracy is predicated. The play frame disturbs the bureaucratic frame by prioritising indeterminacy. The doubt inherent in it regarding social order undermines the premise of certainty and order characteristic to the bureaucratic frame. Therefore, when these mutually exclusive forms of frame co-exist in any given social setting, what should logically follow is the fabrication and proliferation of ambiguity and paradox, which are powerful in blurring bureaucratic boundaries.

In sum, boundary making is viewed as the principal instrument for exercising bureaucratic power, the refinement of which leads to a more effective and tacit production of power. Based upon this assumption, these researchers pay attention to the actions and practices in bureaucratic organisations that blur officially defined boundaries as a means of subversion and resistance. Nevertheless, the focus in these studies is always on the boundaries, however defined, between different forms of practice (e.g. official and non-official) or thought frameworks (e.g. bureaucratic and non-bureaucratic). My view is that the conceptualisations discussed above (see also Heyman 1995, on bureaucratic power; and Scott 1998, on state simplification) are all generative and can further our understanding of the complexities of bureaucratic organisations.¹⁷ However, each falls into the trap of assuming that only by blurring rigid institutional boundaries (i.e. through deviant modes of thought and behaviour) can the might of the bureaucratic machine be counter-balanced. Thus, though

¹⁷ Other authors investigating the blurring of bureaucratic boundaries have focused on the personalised and emotional life of institutions, see Bear 2007; Navaro-Yashin 2002; Taussig 1997.

enriching our understanding by adding flesh to the bureaucratic bones, these analytical frames might be questioned by their basic assumption that bureaucratic functioning depends on the making and refining of boundaries and that any cross-boundary existence is subversive.

This prompts one to search for alternative paradigms that outflank the implicit linearity in the above conceptualisation. It is at this point that I want to bring in the works of two further authors, both of whom draw our attention to how bureaucratic organisations become more powerful not by entrenching boundaries in a direct manner but by employing symbols often considered outside of, or irrelevant to, bureaucracy; in this way, bureaucratic functions are actually entrenched, though in the guise of blurring boundaries.

This line of thought may be traced back to Mary Douglas' path-breaking and systematic work on classification. In her 1970 book 'Natural Symbols', she reflects on the seeming 'naturalness' of the human body, which, she argues, is but a manifestation of individuals' various social experiences as determined by the interplay of the elementary forms of social life. A further development regarding this proposition is found in her 1987 book 'How Institutions Think', which draws on ethnographic studies of modern organisations. Two arguments in this book are relevant to the issue at hand. The first is that, like Handelman who proposes the analytical concept of the 'thought frame', Douglas assumes little possibility of the existence of a free-thinking individual devoid of any influence from the various institutions within which he or she is situated; in other words, institutions do have a substantial effect on how actors think. Crucially, however, Douglas goes further by explaining why this happens. She acknowledges that institutions do not have minds of their own and that they therefore do not think in a literal sense. But rhetorical metaphors that refer to institutions as if they have agency highlight the intrinsic value in it, which might be seen as analogous to conventions or common sense. Douglas explains this intrinsic value by way of an analogy between social order and natural order. Replication blurs. Therefore, 'socially

contrived arrangement is turned into a self-validating truth' (Douglas 1987: 48). This 'naturalising principle' of institutions makes it vulnerable to disclosure or reflection, as the latter are synonymous with the destruction of the former.

While many ethnographic works on the modern state and bureaucracy reflect political intervention by focusing on obviously intruding symbols (Binns 1979; Cohen 1974; Gajek 1990; Handler 1985; Kligman 1981; Linke 1985; Lofgren 1989), Michael Herzfeld, applying the above reflection to studies of modern state practice, calls our attention to unobtrusive political symbols that normalise certain bureaucratic manners and practices with the most taken-for-granted values. In his book 'The Social Production of Indifference: Exploring the Symbolic Roots of Western Bureaucracy', Herzfeld (1992) investigates the extraordinary affect and power that is derived from symbolic ambiguity when locally taken-for-granted values are merged into bureaucratic expressions. Taking the example of modern Greece, he inquires as to the 'roots' of the paradoxical phenomenon whereby a political regime intended to deliver democracy and equality to its subjects actually generates enormous cruelty to its clients. More profoundly, he questions why pervasive cruelty – bureaucratic indifference - often appears so natural and excusable to those subjected to it. Herzfeld's explanation is that the evil of bureaucracy does not lie in the failure of a certain office or bureaucrat to faithfully fulfil their intended function, nor in the fact that the state imposes powerful political intervention on the life of the populace. Rather, the 'roots' have to be sought at the level of transcendence and immanence. The reason for this, Herzfeld contends, is that when both bureaucrats and non-bureaucrats repeatedly grumble about bureaucratic dysfunction, it demonstrates, somewhat ironically, that all of them have in mind an ideal that should be not only perfectly functional but also wholly responsible for any dysfunction that takes place. This collective belief is analogous to religious faith in pre-modern societies, in that it exempts individuals from being accountable for their (mis)conduct and also largely mitigates the potential impact of segmental dysfunction on the authority of modern bureaucracy. For Herzfeld, nationalist ideology substantiates such belief and replaces

religion as the means by which the modern society worships itself. He coins the term 'secular theodicy' – the latter word borrowed from Max Weber – to encapsulate this paradox in modern bureaucracy.

Herzfeld argues that the relationship between bureaucracy and the state ideal resembles that between the ritual system and religiosity. In both cases, the former reifies, performs and refracts the latter while also being under the auspices thereof; they are one of representation rather than differentiation. Symbols matter. Therefore, by corresponding to those symbols taken for granted in nationalism – typically race, blood and kinship – bureaucracy defines its boundaries between insiders and outsiders in a way that resembles local moral values and thus makes these boundaries appear too normal to be felt. The most pernicious symbols are those that originally functioned to constitute the very banal and trivial everyday experiences of ordinary people. Once these unobtrusive symbols are borrowed and exploited by the bureaucratic system, they are fused with statist action. This combination synergises the most potent of the bureaucratic machine and at the same time makes it seem natural and reasonable. Here, Herzfeld departs from a Weberian perspective. For him, the problem of the bureaucratic system is not the fact that it has the tendency to function in a completely rational and impersonal manner; rather, it is the fact that it often decorates itself with the most commonsensical emotions and affectations, echoing the ordinary sentiments, and makes bureaucratic inhumanity feel normal and appear excusable.

Up to this point, we have seen a critical turn in the conceptualisation of bureaucratic boundaries: it is not simply the making of boundaries that allows bureaucracy to function; a deeper level of legitimacy derives from the blurring of these boundaries through the exploitation of symbolic ambiguity in a wider context. This conceptual turn is crucial, since it inverts the assumption that classification and precision are the norm of bureaucracy and line blurring (being anti-bureaucratic) the anomaly. In other words, the 'dirty' and the 'clean' – in Douglas' terms - are reversed. Furthermore, this

turn suggests the importance, when dealing with a specific bureaucratic context, of attending to the highly complex mutual implications of the inside and the outside – in particular consistency rather than difference – and of the institutionally intended rule and the folk beliefs in which the former is situated.¹⁸ What remains unchanged, though, is the assumption that bureaucracy excludes, either by setting up obvious boundaries or by appropriating natural symbols so that exclusion is less discernible.

We seem to be in an era when a direct exclusion of the subjects of the bureaucratic machine is becoming too obviously offensive to be accepted in any society where civility is increasingly highlighted and the ‘inappropriate matter’ of individuals is most often blamed in the first instance. However, I contend that it is precisely because of the peculiar disregard of the structural root of these phenomena and the inexorable attention given to the concept of the individual both in academic discourse and by the masses – despite the entrenched state control and structural inequality seen in many parts of the world today – that Herzfeld’s eloquent theoretical disclosure evokes academic conscience. Nevertheless, it is necessary to point out that, in my view, the universal validity of Herzfeld’s proposition, rather than being its emphasis on the unfavourable expression of indifference (as many readers tend to pick up from his book), is the suggestion of an analogy between stereotypes of bureaucratic buck-passing and that of self-excuse in ordinary life; for example, blaming the system to justify the indifference of a certain bureaucrat is similar to the phenomenon of a poor person blaming his or her poverty on the poverty of the family to which he or she was born; as if blaming, such reasoning is probably the most convenient and pernicious way that a sheer cruel status quo is unquestionably accepted. In other words, the essence is the analogy between ordinary people’s submission to ‘fate’, which is pervasive in many cultures, and the bureaucratic recourse to the ‘system’.

¹⁸ Many recent ethnographic studies of bureaucracy-client relationships have focused on the interface of theoretical boundaries (McGoey 2007; Scott 2010; Best 2011; Sandvik 2011; Scherz 2011). The analytical framework employed in these studies is analogous to the bureaucratic framework, with attention paid to the interface of analytically different domains in which conflict and manoeuvre are assumed to be likely to take place. This body of scholarship supports the proposition that boundary-blurring activities, though based on anti-structural assumptions, often result in a more effective production of bureaucratic power.

This is saliently structural. It is the mutuality between elements rather than the elements themselves that matters. This is to say, even if the denial of humanity – the ultimate evil of bureaucracy - is universal, the expressions of this denial may vary in different cultural locales since the cultural stereotype with which a particular expression is brewed, justified, or else taken for granted, varies. In this connection, a recent work by Akhil Gupta (2012), which examines a welfare service in India, points out that the most remarkable expression of the bureaucrats involved - doctor and tehsildar - is not indifference but rather arbitrariness or irony motivated by bureaucratic expediency (ibid.: 23). Nevertheless, the violent nature of the welfare service delivered through bureaucratic procedures remains similar – some gain and some lose, even though, again, the ‘system’ is supposed to benefit all equally.

Similarly, a serious application of Herzfeld’s intellectual insight to the Home project has to take into consideration the hierarchical nature implied in the value of filial piety. I argue that filial piety, as a national ideal that the modern Chinese state seeks to reify and that the ordinary people take for granted, forms a very different cultural background compared to those of Western democratic regimes. Unlike either Greece or India, where the polities are (at least) designed to benefit all citizens equally, filial piety is at the heart of a set of hierarchical rules. The fundamental logic behind this value is inequality rather than equality. By articulating how inequality and hierarchy are maintained through the nurturance of corresponding individual subjectivity, inequality and hierarchy become commensurate to harmony and humanity rather than being the signs of dominance and suppression. Holding this as the cultural foundation on which the WuBao welfare rests, we should expect different stereotypical bureaucratic expressions and the clients’ perceptions of the ‘normal’ way of delivering the service. In other words, we may ask, if the bureaucrats in a democratic regime end up stereotypically indifferent or arbitrary, might this also be the case in China, where the prevailing state ideology tolerates the legitimacy of differentiated treatment to otherwise equal citizens?

To relate Herzfeld's theoretical proposition to the issue at hand is certainly highly cogent, as the CREH project is framed within a discourse of respecting the elderly as a national virtue.¹⁹ Besides other implications, in my view, Herzfeld's exposition also evokes a deep paradox in the differentiated modes of thought, which is to say that while ordinary people's daily life, which largely adheres to convention, is often thoughtless in comparison to their more eventful actions, the political secondment of convention, ironically, seems to demand a higher level of reflection than those measures used to appease obvious rebellion. With this in mind, I want to point out that in order to understand what the state action of establishing CREHs may mean to the populace and what its actual impact may be, the *asymmetrical* modes of thought between the government's performance of filial piety as a political action and the folk interpretations of the performance in the framework of ordinary life must be considered. Specifically, there is, on the one hand, the unreflected assumption that filial performance equals to moral superiority held by many ordinary people whom I encountered in fieldwork, and, on the other, the political nature of the performance as an intentional state action.

Furthermore, in line with Herzfeld's analogy comparing the relationship between bureaucracy and the modern state to that between ritual and religion, the Home, as a bureaucratic organisation, might be likened to its religious counterpart. WuBao-Elderly, for their defining characteristics of being old and (most often) childless, are faced with the prospect of becoming 'orphan souls'. Therefore, the fact that WuBao-Elderly are now welcomed to stay in a bureaucratic organisation may be likened to the ritualised hospitality afforded to ghosts in Chinese popular religion described by Stephan Feuchtwang (2010). Feuchtwang points out that the tension between universalism and the equally universal me-centred loyalties is manifested in hospitality for, on the one hand, the 'centred dead', powerful, responsive and just gods

¹⁹ In folk and official uses, 'filial piety' is not so much related to *guojia* (state) as to *zhonghua minzu* (the Chinese nationality). While this can be explained as the bureaucratic use of national ideology to meet political purpose, it may also suggest that the masses do not consider that their commitment to filial piety equals to their loyalty to the current state.

who are venerated, and, on the other hand, ghosts, who are propitiated. These religious rituals of hospitality are full of paradoxes; while it is through these rituals that the distinction between ‘stranger ghosts’ and ‘our gods’ is enacted and reinforced, it is through the same process that the ambivalence created by this distinction is tolerated. For Feuchtwang, ghosts include the orphans, the forgotten dead without kin to care for them, and the dead of other-centred families and places by whom “we” might be threatened. In death rituals, they are charitably welcomed as guests, fed and clothed, and then dismissed again on the thresholds of houses and settlements. The hospitality given to ghosts, who are pitiable yet harmful, epitomises the ambivalence of hospitality: a ghost can turn into a god through such rituals, and both can be vengeful if not properly honoured. There are folk rituals and shrines in which the bones of dead people who have not been claimed are gathered and, for their capacity to respond, are individuated and transformed into gods. This is mirrored in the living world, where beggars, or any living beings considered dangerous, are likened to ghosts.

The ambivalent treatment of ghosts in Chinese death rituals has certain parallels with how WuBao-Elderly, as the living equivalent of ghosts, are treated in CREHs, in the sense of the subtle ambivalence that is contained: clustering is achieved in the same process of demarcation, and their anomalous status is always conveyed by the seemingly inconsistent expression of hospitality. One could also compare CREHs to the shrines for orphan ghosts. In both cases, the welcomed guest is structurally the other, but each receives a certain form of hospitality; these expressions are always mediated by material forms. This analogy may also broaden our perspective on the effect of the state project of establishing CREHs to host the WuBao-Elderly. One might speculate that the reason why the government deems WuBao-Elderly worthy of state welfare provision – in the form of being shut away – is not merely that they are old, but also that they are potentially threatening (being deviant) to the ordered society favoured by the state – an order that is defined in the Confucian doctrine that ‘all elderly are well cared for’ [*lao you suo yang*]. To host such individuals in CREHs is

also to put the locally loosely classified into the categories recognisable to the state. And to respect them is also to cleanse them of the impurity associated with them. If so, it then seems that the most intriguing question is how this ambivalent function is actually achieved in CREH – a new type of bureaucratic organisation that emerged in China at the turn of this century.

The Hypothesis of an Inclusive Heterotopia

In his book ‘Anthropology through the Looking-Glass’, Michael Herzfeld (1987) warns of the mirroring effect between how people are construed in the official discourse of Greece as a modern nation-state and how they are represented in ethnographies, as the two constructions can be traced back to a similar mode of thought. He argues for an experimental anthropology that may contain the seeds of an alternative perspective. Following Herzfeld’s line of thought, I propose that, accepting modern bureaucracy as the political twin of the scientific discipline of taxonomy, anthropology, as a social science, bears the risk of being etymologically identical to the subject of its study when its gaze is turned on bureaucratic organisations. For this reason, the exploitation of boundaries, however defined, whether by specifying or muddling them, is to various degrees epistemologically trapped in this affinity.

I propose that an alternative frame of analysis might be obtained if we avoid using terms that imply bias towards any single perspective or order or that fabricate artificial constructs according to their assumed theoretical importance. The work of ethnography should represent the world, and particularly its messiness; very often this means that it should allow theoretical contradictions to co-exist in a consistent manner, as they do in reality. In this regard, the title that I use to capture CREH in the first section – ‘a theatre of respecting the repellent’ – is exemplary. It is a combination of three different perspectives: the term ‘theatre’ connotes the filtering of reality through an interpretive anthropological prism; ‘respect’ evokes the Home’s official rhetoric; and ‘repellent’, though bearing the criticism of being disrespectful, reflects the general perception of residents by local people. I put these terms together in a fashion

akin to bricolage to reflect the synthesis of perceptions and ethnographic materials in this thesis – a self-ridicule that an anthropological work is actually produced in a mode not so different from the mind of its classic subject – not to classify according to a certain presumption and for a certain purpose, but to put together whatever is available so as to see what will be generated. In a similar vein, the abovementioned conceptual paradigms on bureaucratic organisations, though inadequate in each of them as frameworks through which to explicate my fieldwork context, synergise in a surprising way when put together. Boundaries exclude but also include, defining difference yet also making the original artificiality of otherness seem natural. And ironically, when we acknowledge these paradoxical functions of boundaries, the analytical robustness of focusing on boundaries is also simultaneously highlighted and undermined.

In attempting both to capture the otherness of the Home and to open an alternative analytical horizon, I take the concept of heterotopia from Michael Foucault as a point of departure. In a 1967 paper, Foucault draws attention to a type of space that is distinct from real spaces, which he calls heterotopia, literally means ‘other places’. The otherness of such spaces lies in their status in between the utopian and the real; they permit one to imagine a utopia yet have a very real presence. Heterotopia has a series of attributes: it has a very specific function in the synchrony of a given society, which may change in tandem with the latter; as the other to real space, it is superior to the latter in the sense that it is capable of juxtaposing many real places; in similar connection to time, it coheres itself by embracing heterochronies; it is semi-open space, the isolation and penetrability of which are two sides of the same coin – a pair of co-existent oppositions; and, last but not least, its connections to all the spaces that remain are intrinsic.²⁰

To Foucault, a mirror is certainly one heterotopia for the very quality of reflecting the real yet representing an actual existence between the real and the unreal (i.e. the

²⁰ Arguably, Foucault’s proposal of the concept of heterotopia was also influenced by structuralism in vogue in France in the 1960s (Saldanha 2008).

image reflected in the mirror). Coming in pairs, the old people's home is a heterotopian institution which, as the modern replacement for the forbidden places in primitive societies where people in a state of crisis were sent, accommodates anomalous persons who are considered to be in crisis, and, as they are somewhere else, the social pollution of such crisis is only considered legitimate when it happens in these other places. As Foucault (1967) writes:

One should perhaps add retirement homes that are, as it were, on the borderline between the heterotopia of crisis and the heterotopia of deviation since, after all, old age is a crisis, but is also a deviation since in our society where leisure is the rule, idleness is a sort of deviation.

I borrow from the concept of heterotopia two characteristics for my analysis of the Home. The first concerns the intrinsic otherness of a heterotopia deriving from its unique position of being between ideal and reality and thus being neither of them. Like a mirror, a heterotopia distinguishes and separates without making a clear mark of boundary. In this sense, it is a boundary-less other. The second characteristic is the heterotopia's capacity to include rather than exclude. Again, like a mirror, which reflects all images in front of it, a heterotopian institution may accommodate whatever happens outside it in certain ways. Ideal and reality can coexist within it. They ultimately come to accommodate and depend on each other, and are constitutive of the fulfilment of institutionally intended agendas without incurring obvious suppression or rebellion. Moreover, to embrace ambivalence by combining opposites might be a defining feature of a heterotopia. If so, the distinction between order and disorder becomes secondary, as they are but mutually indispensable parts in an order-less heterotopia which comprises a higher level of differentiation encompassing both order and disorder. In all, parts validate each other, which is also the relationship between parts and the whole. The immense accommodative capacity of such institutions deriving from structural dependency between elements is what I intend to delineate.

Furthermore, this thesis also inquires as to the ultimate function of a bureaucratic organisation that appears to be all encompassing. This question is inspired by Herzfeld's (1992) criticism of the previous studies which, by focusing exclusively on the practical functions of bureaucratic organisations, fail to reveal the symbolic root of bureaucracy (e.g. Goffman 1971; Handelman 1976; Schwartzman 1989). His analysis of the latter, apparently elevating the discussion to a higher level, also makes me wonder whether there is a 'root function' of bureaucratic organisations, different from their practical functions, which corresponds to the level of symbolic root. As I have made the hypothesis above, mirroring the shrines for ghosts, the Home may possess the distinct function of turning polluted inhabitants into purified subjects favoured by the state. Adding to Foucault's exegesis on heterotopia, more than merely considering the old people's home as the modern equivalent of the pre-modern institutions that provided a place elsewhere to accommodate anomalies, I also examine whether it has a more substantive function such as refashioning, or reflecting, the residents into that which is normal and desirable to the state.

This inquiry is addressed mainly by engaging with Maurice Bloch's (1992) illuminating theorisation of the political consequence of religious ritual. Salient in his analysis is how the ritual elders substitute themselves for the commonsensical life-givers of the ritual participants through a two-stage sequential process that features 'rebounding violence'. In this model, ritual participants are divested of their native vitality through symbolic sacrifice; they are then sent elsewhere to consume and possess the vitality of others, after which they return with new vitality and become the other to their original self. After this process, the ritual elderly replace the original life-givers and the communal order is reinforced, replacing the commonsensical order such as family and natural nurturance. The ethnographic material that Bloch uses to support this argument is drawn mainly from small scale-societies, but the idea of a higher authority reinforcing its might by making itself the life-giver of the subjects through ritualistic processes, in my view, might also be applicable to the exchange logic in the state-self relationship in China. Adding to the

powerful national symbols that Herzfeld has identified, namely race, blood and kinship, the state appropriation of the notion of life-giving benevolence may generate no less might through bureaucratic delivery.

Fieldwork Context

The fieldwork for this project, which was conducted between April 2010 and June 2011, took longer than I had planned. The focus and framework of the research changed although the general subject matter remained the same, i.e. the cultural logic that sustains social provision to the elderly in China. The objective of the research as outlined in the original proposal was to explore the connections between the revival of filial piety and dramatic economic growth in rural China over the past thirty years. To this end, I targeted one ‘model village’ – Dongshan - in Shandong province (as I mention at the beginning of Chapter Three), which had a population of over 100,000 residents and was celebrated as a ‘small China’ [*xiao-zhongguo*] for the two defining characteristics of exemplifying filial piety and having achieved incredible economic advancement through industrial manufacture. In order to gain access to this village, I mobilised my personal connections, including those with high officials, which was known to be the only way that one would be granted a permit to conduct research in so extraordinary a place. I was smoothly introduced by one official to another on my journey from Beijing to the village. In one week’s time, I found myself sitting comfortably in a five-star hotel in the village waiting to meet the village secretary, which was seen to be a great honour. The Publicity Department of the village was assigned the task of assisting me with my work. I explained to them in detail my personal background and my research plan, including where I came from, what I wanted to do, the length of period I needed to stay, and so on.

Though I was kindly advised by the local persons in charge that there was no need to stay for so long for a research like this and that I should reduce the time period to the minimum possible, and that I could not have access to the factories, my other requests seemed to be accepted. I was granted access to local households and to the village’s

old people's home, the former having been requested by myself, and the latter having been recommended by the local organiser. However, soon after I started to work, I realised that I was accepted without actual acceptance. My movements were heavily monitored. All the people and households with whom I had contact needed to report to the person in charge on what they had talked to me about. I had hoped that the situation could change until after nearly five months I found that the 'reporting' task was instituted as their routine work. By comparison, my work in the old people's home was made relatively straightforward. Though the manager of the institution was also required to report my activities, the residents didn't have to. And from the accounts of the latter I learned just how complicated and unique the situation of the village was, which seemed beyond what I could study in one year of fieldwork.

This experience taught me many lessons. First, I became aware that 'top-down' introductions and *guanxi* (personal relations) can actually be fatal for long-term fieldwork. To host me in the five-star hotel was how the local authority presented the local world to someone introduced by high officials; and this made the village look very different from the picture presented by the residents in the old people's home. And my high-profile entry made my access to the latter unusually difficult with all the surveillance on me. The second lesson was that, to explain to the local people exactly what I wanted to do did little good and even nearly jeopardised the whole fieldwork. Thirdly, to show my foreign 'faces', such as my membership of a university in the UK, or the fact that I needed to drink coffee every day instead of tea, for the most part, added unnecessary troubles. Nevertheless, the most rewarding outcome of this fieldwork experience was the realisation that for many rural Chinese people, no matter how economically advanced, they submitted to the idea of a central authority, be it local or state, and that the authority had the imperative to exemplify moral superiority, which was epitomised by the issue of elderly support. Nothing can only be wasted. All these lessons and revelations paved the way for the next stage of my

fieldwork.²¹

I then decided to embark on a journey by myself. I searched the Internet for old people's homes and soon found the Sunset Light project on WuBao welfare, for which Sichuan was selected as the pilot province. Chengdu, the provincial city of Sichuan, was where I was born and spent my childhood. I had also done substantial fieldwork with development experts in the rural areas of Sichuan before I began studying anthropology. These may all have been subconscious motivations in my decision to adventure in Sichuan again, which I did in August 2010. I identified several CREHs and visited them one by one. This time, I introduced myself as a young researcher from China Agricultural University (CAU) in Beijing, with which I was then affiliated. I explained that I had been assigned to the region for one year to familiarise myself with rural areas, and that my main research interest was rural elderly support, so I wanted to base myself in an old people's home. These proved to be acceptable explanations to the persons in charge. The decision as to whether I could stay seemed to be down to the directors of these institutions, whose responses varied. Some refused out of apathy, while others accepted on the condition that I provide them with an official 'introduction letter' [*jieshao xin*] from CAU, which I did. The Home, for its part, accepted me right after my first visit without asking me to prove anything.²² After I gave the above explanation, the directors and some of the staff immediately started to discuss how to arrange my accommodation. The director suggested that several young teachers from a nearby school rented some rooms in one residence block, and as I was more or less in the same category as them (for being from university), I should choose a room next to theirs. I agreed on this proposal happily, and moved in the next day. I soon gained access to three old people's homes situated

²¹ The material in this village will be in separate publications; and in the dissertation, I reserve the space to focus more in depth on the next case.

²² On this note, I once asked the director why they had accepted me without asking for any document. His answer was that 'when you see/judge a person, you see his/her temperament and atmosphere [*kanren kan qise*], not the introduction letter'. To be accepted without document was one of several reasons that I decided to focus on the Home. It poses a different scenario from the 'connection', or *guanxi*, paradigm most often stereotyped in China. And to study something different was my exclusive interest.

adjacent to one another: one was a private old people's care home and the other two were CREHs. In the two months that followed, I visited them in turn by bus travel. Then I decided that the Home would best meet the ethnographic purposes of this project and stuck to it to the end of my fieldwork.

One good thing about doing fieldwork in a highly disciplined institutional setup was that it created an environment in which the rather oppressive social demands I would have encountered on the outside, particularly evening events such as dinner banquets, could be largely avoided, so I was able to write field notes in peace, which normally amounted to four or five thousand words per night. Reflecting on my fieldwork experience in and around the Home, I think the following four points are particularly noteworthy.

The first is concerned with keeping a balance between different sub-groups, such as staff and residents. If I became closer to one side than the other, it incurred tension among/from the latter. In some instances I also benefited from the tension between them, since each sub-group came to me to complain about the other. Unable to maintain the same distance from everyone, I set myself the basic principle that I should not let the differentiated relations blind me from seeing other realities. Some degree of spatial separation proved helpful. I never joined dinner with the staff in village restaurants as this would have upset many residents (the reason is provided in Chapter Seven); however, I had meals with the staff in the county city, since it would affect my relations with them had I always refused their invitations. Many of my interviews with individual residents were conducted in private either in their home village or in my dorm (the reason provided in Chapter One). In addition, I also gave countless small gifts to nearly everyone, which proved enormously effective at making connections as well as mitigating tension.

The second is to keep relatively equal access to men and women as a female fieldworker. The gender boundary was subtle in this area. As far as I observed, married men and women did not normally socialise with each other, and if they did, it

aroused rumour. Men predominated in the public domain. Coincidentally or not, in each of these institutions there was a similar gender pattern in how I was received: it was always women who ushered me in and then handed me to a man who was supposed to make a decision on my stay; if I was accepted, I would be handed over again to women to follow up corresponding procedures. However, my identity as a scholar automatically classified me as less of a woman, and I was treated differently from local women. Even so, I still made additional efforts to conceal my femininity. I always dressed in unisex clothes, wore a hat to hide my long hair and consciously behaved in a gender-neutral manner. These presentations proved useful: women were generally at ease with a masculine female scholar, and though it was sometimes difficult, interacting with village men, whether married or not, was far from impossible. Notably, I did not feel that gender was a particular problem to affect my interactions with the residents.

The third is about the use of language. Speaking the local dialect (as I can do) certainly expedites local integration and immediately creates a kind of intimacy and trust. Indeed, the local people were generally more spontaneous to someone (even a stranger) who spoke local dialect than those who didn't. However, I also found that this type of intimacy could blind me from seeing their other faces that they might show when speaking other dialects. For this reason, I ended switching between Mandarin Chinese, Chengdu dialect and the local village accent in different situations as I saw fit. And when I did so, some locals also switched between these dialects in their responses to me, which allowed me to see the distinctness that is related to the use of these sub-languages.

The fourth is on my dual roles of being a researcher and being someone who, as the local understood it, could potentially do them a personal favour. On the one hand, as a model institution to exemplify perfection, the Home was potentially resistant to a long-term visitor. I was soon suspected by workers and residents alike of having been sent by the Central Party to monitor the performance of the management, which

created corresponding dynamics. On the other hand, the staff, and some residents, saw me as someone who could potentially help with their children's higher education for my being a scholar from CAU, which proved decisive in their acceptance of me as one of their 'own people' [*ziji-ren*]. After I told the director that I was from a university in the UK, his hospitality towards me reached another level. He said his daughter liked reading, even English novels, and suggested that I move from my existing lodging to his own dorm, which he did not use and was much better furnished and more secure than the ones for teachers. And some female care workers proposed to follow me back to Beijing to seek their fortune with their children. These suggested that my potential to offer personal favours could seriously undermine the public interest that the locals were assumed to safeguard. I might review my very existence around the Home to cut across the boundary between outsider and insider. Correspondingly, there were moments when I was treated as intimate personal friend and others when I was excluded; and there were occasions when I became more inside than many insiders, such as when individuals shared with me personal secrets unknown to their peers. This fluid and somehow ambiguous position of myself, though also having brought me other troubles, in my view, had the main vantage point to open many horizons that one single identity is insufficient to see.

Chapter Outline

Chapter One gives an outline of the context of the Home. It compares the human geography of the Home to that of Hongfan village where it was located, and suggests that they mirror each other as heterotopian sites. It then discusses three interlinked structural reversals taking place following the establishment of the Home project, which concern changes in the residents' identity, in their relationship to home villages, and in their links to family and kin. It concludes by summarising the heterotopian qualities of this field setting reflected in these facts.

Part I (Chapters Two to Four), 'At the Points of Conjunction', captures the occurrences at the conjunction of various orders that coexist in the Home including

the institution's intended order. It describes these different orders and reveals the mechanisms that make the theoretical exclusion between them much less significant in practice. It further suggests that the coexistence of structurally oppositional orders is conducive to the maintenance of the overall stability. The titles of each chapter in this part contain three parts: in the quotation mark, it is the typical rhetoric of the residents in confronting these conjunctures; the word after 'and' points out the most significant practice or phenomenon therein; and the subject matter of the chapter is indicated after the hyphen.

Chapter Two takes dining practices as a system of signification that contains a set of structural relations representing the overall order of the Home. It examines what constitutes a meal and whether and how other food values are accommodated. Starting from my observation of the diet board, this chapter introduces the three words used for 'having a meal', proceeds with a thorough description of the everyday institutional ritual of organising dining for residents, and explicates why eating of this type creates the residents' dependency on the state. It also depicts an alternative form of eating in which residents set up 'wild stoves'. It concludes by deducing from these practices the structural relationships of residents and workers, the institution and the state and by suggesting how they remind one of a heterotopian institution.

Chapter Three is concerned with the mutual implications of hygiene work and spatial allocation. It outlines the spatial specificities of Fankou (the village centre) and compares them with those of the Home, noting their high degree of resemblance. It follows the description of the intimate experiences of villagers and residents which show their senses of confusion following the radical spatial reconfiguration made by the building of Fankou, including the Home. It then focuses at the remarkable phenomenon of emptiness, as how hygiene work is aimed at, and explores the mechanisms that maintain it. Finally, it reveals that hygiene work is actually viewed similarly by residents and management. It concludes by expounding the two phenomena highlighted, namely, emptiness and resemblance.

Chapter Four presents the qualities of the Home that demonstrate it to be a set of heterochronies. The first section delineates a series of binaries representing the institution's intended temporal order and the others, and shows how they play out in reality. The second section shows how the past, present and future are intricately accumulated within the Home with reference to respective symbols. The third section depicts the pervasive phenomenon of waiting among both residents and staff, and interprets it as motionless action signifying a temporal orientation towards utopia. It concludes that all of them count for the Home to be a temporal heterotopia.

Part II (Chapters Five to Seven), 'Engender the Opposite', examines the discursive consequences of this state welfare intervention, which often engender the opposite side to what is initially claimed. The ethnographic materials in this part are organised around individual cases, with which it reveals how inverted outcomes are generated as a systemic effect in the same process of delivering the initial claim. Again, these seemingly counter consequences are not only accommodated but also, more importantly, play a decisive role in realising the ultimate function of a bureaucratic organisation to serve the benefactor rather than the beneficiary.

Chapter Five inquires how a state institution conveys a familial aura by examining the ways in which the notion of family permeates the work of the staff. It delineates two levels of entanglement, namely, ideology and everyday practice. By presenting and analysing detailed ethnographic material on the family life, work motivation and professional performance of three workers, it illustrates three kinds of state and family entanglement in the institution's service delivery, which also suggests how non-bureaucratic modes of recruitment and work are encompassed in the Home.

Chapter Six addresses the uncertainties associated with the residents' deprivation of property, and inquiries why a welfare service originally intended to provide security to recipients effectively divests them of their valuable belongings. It presents three examples of residents' property dispossession by home village cadres, kin and an individual worker respectively. In light of the concept of 'cultural intimacy' (Herzfeld

1996), it also reflects on incidences where residents exhibited various gestures of disclosure on how their previously intimate others had fooled them on these matters, and discusses the implications of these on residents' relations with these previous groups as well as with the Home.

Chapter Seven inquires as to the overall condition of the residents by differentiating between the concepts of state and bureaucracy and questioning the nature of the bureaucratic refraction of a proclaimed free gift from the state. Adapting analogically the hunter-prey ritual processes theorised by Maurice Bloch (1992), it is substantiated by three case studies. The first case presents the upward route of Old Xu, who progresses from being an ordinary resident being punished to being a member of the Elderly Committee. The second case of Old Wu illustrates an opposite trajectory from being a proud Party member to a victim of the Home's order-guardian and subsequently marginalised. The third case concerns a high-profile wedding ceremony organised by the management and how it came about over time. It concludes by pointing out how a free state welfare, delivered by a bureaucratic organisation like the Home, informs the condition of the residents.

The concluding chapter summarises the three main findings that emerge from the ethnography.

Chapter One

Field Setting

– The Home, Heterotopia and Structural Reversals

At a conference of the Sichuan provincial civil affairs bureaucracy in November 2010, the then director of the ‘Hongfan Central Respect-the-Elderly Home’ (the Home), Zhu Dawei, gave a long report on behalf of the Yinhe County Civil Affairs Bureau (The Bureau) on the progress of the ‘Central Respect-the-Elderly Home Project’ (the CREH Project) after about four years of operation. A series of workshops and meetings had been organised at the provincial level for this project to ‘research and discuss’ [*yanjiu taolun*] the issues considered important to its success. In a high voice and typical local accent Director Zhu announced the ‘quantified’ achievement with an engaging and proud tone:²³

Among the total number of 4,655 WuBao-Elderly in our county, 2,798 have indicated their willingness to move into the CREHs. So far we have successfully reached the objective to mobilise and ensure that a hundred percent of the WuBao-Elderly who are willing to spend their late life in the CREHs have actually had their wishes come true!

His speech was followed by long and vehement applause. It was under such government attention that the history of the state directly taking care of WuBao-Elderly unfolded in Sichuan, the most populous province in southwestern China. Sichuan province had been selected to pilot the Sunset Light (SL) welfare project at the turn of this century, and subsequently, Yinhe was identified as one of several counties to implement this project. Over three years, nine CREHs had been built in the countryside of Yinhe, among which the Home, situated in Hongfan village, was the largest and also the ‘model work unit’ [*mofan danwei*].

The Bureau was located at the county city, Huangzhen. After having been selected as

²³ Typically, official discourse uses numbers to indicate performance. On the mathematical orientation and the numerological tendency in the Chinese way of comprehending things, see Stafford 2009.

the implementing agency, the Bureau set up a new office, the ‘CREH Managing Office’, to steer and coordinate all matters concerning the operation of these new CREHs. The Managing Office was located in the building of the Bureau and had three staff: one office chief and two assisting members. It then recruited tens of employees so that each CREH could be allocated a director and a deputy director. These directors were formal ‘government employees’ [*gongwu yuan*]. Mostly living in the county city, they were directed to base themselves at respective CREHs and required to attend the Bureau periodically to make routine reports and deal with other management issues such as reimbursing running costs. Meanwhile, each CREH also recruited a number of care workers, who were not formal government employees but worked on renewable contracts. They were also called ‘temporary workers’ [*linshi gong*]. Most of the care workers were villagers living not far from the CREHs.

Like other CREHs, the Home was assigned two directors: Zhu Dawei, the director, a man in his late thirties, and Lu Xiuyun, the deputy director, a woman in her early thirties. It had sixteen care workers, twelve women and four men. In sharp contrast to the size of the staff, the Home had a much larger number of residents – for a while, it hosted six-hundred WuBao residents coming from nine townships and averaged about five hundred. Formally associated under the Bureau and thus being a bureaucratic organisation, the Home was located in a village with which it did not have any formal administrative connection. This status, i.e. belonging to the county bureaucracy but being rooted in the countryside, in my view, prescribed a unique condition of the Home to be neither fully ‘state’ nor ‘village’,²⁴ but a structural distance from, as well as proximity to, both the state, to which it is affiliated but physically detached, and the village, in which it is situated but administratively separated.

This chapter gives an outline of the context of the Home. It first describes and compares the human geographies of Hongfan village and the Home and suggests that they mirror each other as heterotopian sites. It then describes three interlinked structural reversals taking place following the Home project, which respectively concern the changes in the identity of the residents, in the relations of the residents to their home villages, and to family and kin. It concludes by suggesting some

²⁴ The lowest-level government in present Chinese bureaucracy ends up at township. Village administrations are not included.

characteristics in this transfer.

Hongfan Village: Centre of the Future and Margin of the Past

Yinhe County lies at the northeast edge of the Chengdu plain in the middle of the Sichuan basin. Sichuan province is in the southwestern region of China. Historically, Sichuan has enjoyed the fame of being the ‘Kingdom of Heaven’ [*tianfu zhiguo*], mainly for its fertile natural resources and the basin topography. Its north, west and south are all surrounded by mountains; and the only natural exit is opened by the Yangtze River cutting off mountainous areas and running towards the east. Its hinterland, in particular the Chengdu plain, historically is shielded from many natural and human disasters. In recent decades the economy of Sichuan has lagged far behind that of many eastern and coastal provinces. In the new national economic development blueprint, Sichuan is taken as a large agriculture-based province in the ‘western region’ of the country. In the west/east economic topology of China, ‘the west’ [*xibu*] implies the lagged behind. As such, Sichuan becomes a main target in the national ‘Development Campaign of the Western Regions’ [*xibu da kaifa guihua*] and the site of many development projects. Chengdu, the capital city, is the centre witnessing the vicissitudes of the province.



Map 1.1: The Map of China

Administratively, Yinhe is one of six counties under the jurisdiction of Chengdu municipality government. The county city of Yinhe is Huangzhen, located about

thirty-six kilometers by road from Chengdu. Official data show that Yinhe County covers an area of 1,156 square kilometers. It is composed of 21 townships with a total population of 883,000, of whom 88 percent are agricultural. As an agriculture-based county, Yinhe is relatively underdeveloped in comparison with other districts and counties of Chengdu. Though not very far from Chengdu, Yinhe falls into the ‘third circle’ – the outmost - in the overall zoning plan of Chengdu’s economic development. The grid blueprint takes the innermost circle as the first, and being ‘the outmost’ also means the last. One might say that economic lag behind cum geographical adjacency to Chengdu characterises the human geography of Yinhe.

In folklore the geographic outline of Yinhe is likened to a lion. The county town, Huangzhen, stands right at the mouth of the lion - a location considered signifying good dynamics and geographic advantages. On this lion map, Yinhe County is divided into ten concentrically circled districts with Huangzhen as the centre. These districts are associated with differentiated economic and political significance in proportion to their relative geographic distance from Huangzhen. The five closer ones are called ‘upper-five’ [*shangwu*] and the rest ‘lower-five’ [*xiawu*]. The ‘upper-five’ have more advanced economies and are the base of most industries in the county. The ‘lower-five’ are mainly constituted of small agricultural households and are inhabited by agricultural people. In this topology, Hongfan village is almost at the middle of the ‘lower-five’, the bottom of the lion, about forty-five kilometers from Huangzhen. Previously, its only connection to higher levels of administration was the roads passing through several townships to Huangzhen where the sole road connecting the county to the provincial city of Chengdu was found. Buses provided the main means of transport between Huangzhen and Hongfan village; the journey takes about one hour. The stereotypical local perception was that this part of the county was more backward and much duller than Huangzhen and the ‘upper-five’ districts.

Hongfan village came to its current shape after the latest local ‘administrative division adjustment’ [*xingzheng quhua tiaozheng*] in 2004, during which four nearby villages previously belonging to three townships were amalgamated into one administrative village and given the name Hongfan. During my fieldwork, Hongfan had a population of about 6,000 people, 1,668 households and 36 production brigades, and covered an area of 6.15 square kilometers, including 2,914 *mu* farmlands. Featuring an economy

of small agricultural households, the main crops being maize, rice, potato and peanut, the natural abundance of Hongfan was seldom mentioned but mainly referred to as evidence of ‘economic under-development’ [*jingji bufada*]. Except for being the base of the Core Orange Production Project, there were not many ‘investment projects’ [*touzi xiangmu*] in this village, which was however seen by local people as being the way to generate wealth. Official figures showed that the average annual personal income in Hongfan was 3,186 yuan, and local villagers’ estimation on this figure ranged from five to six thousands.²⁵ The better-off local households earned their money by agricultural business such as scaled livestock-raising.

Spreading over a hilly area, many parts of Hongfan can only be reached on foot. Often when I walked along the ups and downs of the muddy field ways in the village, I could not but compare the countryside scenes with the big cities that I am more used to. One thing that frequently struck me was the very different composition of the nature-culture dichotomy. While walking in a typical street in London, my occasional wish to look far into the distance is often frustrated by over-crowded architecture, and nature, be it clouds or blue sky, is but a patchy decoration between giant artifacts. By contrast, walking along the field passes of Hongfan, it was the hills that obstructed my view, and houses and other constructions often looked like tiny toys scattered in the midst of valleys and bushes, which did not seem to matter too much.

Yet, other ongoing government infrastructure construction in the province has been subtly changing the human geography around Hongfan. For example, the post-2000 construction of the national highway network added a new locational significance to Hongfan village. Around 2009, an inter-provincial highway connecting Chengdu to Shanghai was completed, which cut through Hongfan village. An exit was opened right next to the centre of Hongfan. This highway then connected Hongfan directly to large cities such as Chengdu, which effectively transformed the geographic remoteness of Hongfan and made it become closer to higher centres than Huangzheng and most other areas in Yinhe County overnight.

At the time of my fieldwork, official visitors to the Home from provincial or higher

²⁵ Sometimes official data were deliberately lower in order to compete for development projects intended at poorer localities. And on the other hand, many villagers owed the discrepancy between official data and local knowledge to their own lack of *wenhua* (literacy).

levels no longer followed the old zigzag roads passing by all administrative levels. They took the shortcut on the highway from Chengdu directly to Hongfan. Sometimes, the visitors also requested a look at Hongfan and adjacent villages, and thus the whole area was seen as ‘sharing the light’ [*zhan guang*] of the Home in that it also benefited from ‘leaders’ care’ [*lingdao de guanhuai*]. Meanwhile, to receive these official guests who took the highway shortcut, county cadres based in Huangzhen also needed to leave their offices for Hongfan. In this way, Hongfan village, with its adjacency to the newly-built national highway and hosting of pioneering state infrastructure such as the Home, was about to create an alternative centre within the county, in juxtaposition of the county city, if not to replace it.

This changing geography was mirrored in the jokes made by the Home workers. The two directors and some workers lived in Huangzhen, and most days they commuted between Huangzhen and Hongfan village. Director Lu found it ironic that, unlike most people nowadays who went to a city to work, they were the ones who lived in the city but went to the village to work, and that it was as if Hongfan was a place of higher importance, since they were required to be available 24/7 on their mobile phones, in case they were needed at this lower place.

The dynamics and relativity of being both centre and margin in the human geography of Hongfan village are also evident in the following dialogue. I once asked some local officials why a ‘red flag’ model unit, the Home, was built in a place originally with inconvenient transport and a less developed economy, rather than in a more developed environment. Their seemingly joking replies certainly contained truth.

Nowadays it is much easier to find good places than bad ones. But if you built such a thing in a rich area, how can you find so many WuBao-Elderly to fill it?

We civil affairs bureaucracy do not have much money. If we built such a building in a well-developed area, it would look like nothing; but in this village, as you can see, what a significant contrast it is to the surroundings!

Economic and political lag-behind, in this view, qualifies a place a candidate for state welfare. In the transition of the stated overall national agenda from an economy

oriented development to a ‘harmonious society’ [*hexie shehui*] through a renewed redistributive system, the potential of attracting welfare provision may also mean to change a place from the margin to the centre. In this sense, Hongfan village is an example of the ones at the conjuncture of changing government plans.

The centre of Hongfan village was a relatively ‘developed’ area. It was called Fankou, literally ‘the mouth of Hongfan’. Mirroring the geographical position of Huangzhen - the county city - as being at the ‘mouth’ of the lion map of the county, locational advantage was also a main factor in Fankou’s development. Fankou was then located at the border of the two townships of Gaosheng and Haitao, about ten kilometers by road from, and administered by, the town of Gaosheng. Fankou was the only gateway on the old road linking the town of Gaosheng to Huangzhen, and was also right at the side of an exit of the new highway. In local people’s accounts, Fankou had long been a transport hub of this area and a relatively busy and messy place, as one aged villager remarked:

During the Guomindang period (about between 1911 and 1949), Fankou was literally a place of ‘a mixture of fish and dragons’ [*yulong hunza*] (a metaphor implying a mixture of good and bad people), and there was basically little more than floating people playing all tricks on the road to make business.

Fankou was originally a short distance of road with both sides full of two-storey houses which belonged to villagers in one brigade of Hongfan village and most were then used as shops, restaurants or small workshops for transport businesses. Administrative amenities such as the village committee office and township hospital clinic were also found here. In recent years, Fankou was extended to a much larger area after it was selected as the site of ‘Central-Village Construction Experiment Project’ [*zhongxincun jianshe shidian xiangmu*] (the Centralisation Project). This five-year government-led project had many components: the main concept was to merge three adjacent townships into a large one with a centralised area for residence with necessary facilities and supplies, and then the vast emptied areas, originally used for villagers’ housing foundations or agricultural production, were subject to ‘uniform planning’ [*tongyi guihua*], such as renting to investors for large farms and factories.

In Fankou, new facilities were constructed, including the earlier establishments of the Hope School and the Home. Most notable was the relocation of all villagers from their original one-floor houses to the newly constructed apartment buildings in the extended area of Fankou.²⁶ In villagers' and local cadres' rhetoric alike, the sub-project of housing relocation came to be referred to as the 'going-upstairs campaign' [*shanglou yundong*]. In addition, the owners of the road-side houses were also heavily subsidised by local government in renovating the roofs and exteriors of their houses to give a unified look.

The Home: The Resplendent Re-Entry of a Repellent Previous Existence

The Home was initially a significant architectural feature in this prospective centre. The title of the Home – Central Respect-the-Elderly Home – is a reminder of its part in the overall Centralisation Project (CVEC). Covering an area of eighteen *mu*, the main buildings of the Home were five three-storey blocks built in a square-shaped circle below a small hill, named Niubi Niangzi (Bull Nose Hill). It had a large garden in the middle of the buildings, a front square, a pool, vegetable fields, and other facilities.²⁷ The construction of the Home started in the summer of 2005 and took eighteen months to complete. The inauguration of the Home, then the largest CREH in Sichuan province, marked the start of a new state institution to deliver welfare services to WuBao-Elderly, operating in the midst of an insignificant village.

Officially viewed, the Home had been running successfully for four years at the time of my fieldwork. It was awarded the 'Red-Flag Exemplary Work Unit' [*hongqi shifan danwei*] and 'First-Class CREH' by the Provincial Department of Civil Affairs (PDCA) and was certified by relevant government agencies as a 'Moral Education Base' [*deyu jiaoyu jidi*]. Periodically primary and secondary school pupils and undergraduates were sent to the Home to learn how the moral principle of 'respecting the elderly' was practiced in a state institution. In addition, publicity through the media and personal networks attracted NGOs and entrepreneurs to come to show their, quoting one visitor's words, 'loving-heart' [*ai 'xin*] to the elderly'.

Two years before the Home was set up, a school supported by the Hope Programme

²⁶ More description on spatial reconfiguration of these new apartments is in Chapter Three.

²⁷ The ground plan of the Home is shown in Figure 3.1.

had been inaugurated at Fankou, and was then the largest building in the village. Later on, the Home was established on the opposite hill further from Fankou. Since then these two buildings set up by the state to provide welfare services for the young and the elderly have become the most significant developments in this area. Entering a small street on one side of Fankou one can immediately see the Hope School. Walking past the school and stepping down a small slope, the Home standing about one mile further away on the opposite hill then came into one's sight. The two buildings' physical superiority made a sharp contrast with the adjacent two-storey houses which accommodated most local businesses and manufacturers. The contrast reminded one of the might of the state in providing welfare facilities and the relative insignificance of the local economy.

Close as the Home was to Fankou then - a three-minute walk over a stretch of land which belonged to the Home and was used to pasture goats - the Home was initially felt to be an integral part of Fankou. One year before my fieldwork, another inter-county road was built right through the lower land between the Home and Fankou, which turned out to be a troubled disruption. Previously the residents of the Home had walked freely across this area to Fankou. After the road came into use, several residents died from car accidents on this road. Although some measures were later taken to prevent further accidents, the new road de facto presented a barrier between the Home and Fankou. Thus while the new inter-county road bridged other places, it also had the external consequence of separating the Home from Fankou spatially and practically.

The stereotypical image of RREH both as portrayed in newspaper articles and from the accounts of the residents who had previously lived in RREH was that they were small, simple and shabby: the provision was often mean and unstable; good management was mostly a matter of luck – and bad management meant that one's life could be highly problematic; and most importantly, it was a place of shame. To give some impression of how RREH was perceived by a wider public, it is helpful to cite my own relatives' (who are middle-class urbanites) reaction when they heard that I was conducting research at this type of institution. Their responses varied, but all were expressed in a dramatic tone. One relative screamed at me, 'Ouch! Good Heavens! That's the place to jail rural widows!' When my aunt, who had known that I

had been doing reasonable work in international development and had enjoyed a relatively lucrative income, learnt that I was then staying in an REH with the sole aim of recording everyday life, she concluded with a grain of salt, ‘So, you must only work for a ‘personal hobby’ [*geren aihao*] now? Otherwise how can you endure it?’

These reactions may help to explain why the many high profile events the Home had hosted were often uttered in villagers’ accounts in a tone of surprise. For example, according to local custom, any physical construction was considered a disturbance of the soil and thus before and after any such work, ceremonies of firecrackers and fireworks should be held to show reverence to the Land God and plead for peace for the new establishment. The larger the construction, the louder the bangs should be. Many aged villagers recalled that the firecracker ceremony for the inauguration of the Home was possibly the most elaborate they had ever experienced in this village. ‘It was like an earthquake. I then thought it was to build an airport, but it turned out to be a place for WuBao-Hu (WuBao-Household)’, one villager said. Villagers also emphasised that in 2007 – when the Home opened - the unknown village of Hongfan started to receive visits by higher level leaders. The Vice Chairman of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) and the Vice Minister of the Ministry of Civil Affairs (MCA) also visited subsequently.

These high profile activities did not automatically integrate the Home into the social life of the local villages. Those who had experiences of RREHs were convinced that they were places of bad conditions and shame, and the ‘newness’ in the Home was most often a source of confusion or suspicion. Many villagers showed explicit indifference to the institution, which might be related to the understanding that it only served WuBao-Elderly. Younger villagers typically knew little about it, nor were they actually interested in knowing. Others felt that the Home was not part of the village because of its administrative association with the county bureaucracy. In addition, there was obvious doubt from the locals regarding the value of money that was spent on an infrastructure for WuBao-Elderly. But the message in it, i.e. respecting the elderly, was rarely challenged, though a few disputed whether WuBao-Elderly should be counted as elderly. The unchallenged idea that elderly people should be respected was coupled with unease about WuBao-Elderly being treated well and the government investing in fancy homes for them may encapsulate the ambivalence that many locals

feel towards the Home.

Meanwhile, Director Zhu had more than once shared with me that after his initial effort to engage with village life, he gave up. He disclosed that he finally realised that his task was only to manage the Home well and that village life was just too complicated and disappointing to be involved in. In general, contact between Home staff and villagers was mostly restricted to practical matters of welfare service provision, such as purchasing food. The Home did not normally allow local villagers in and indeed many villagers had never visited it. Most contact seemed evidenced in often missing vegetables from the field belonging to the Home, which the Home management firmly considered to have been stolen by nearby villagers. During my stay an important item on the agenda of the Home management was to build another wall along the edge of vegetable fields to prevent further theft, in addition to the walls and gate surrounding the residential buildings.

My presence seemed to have the dual effect of making clear villagers' disapproval of the Home and also somehow to alter it. As a researcher from Beijing, my long-term stay at the Home increased villagers' interest in it. In the beginning, local villagers expressed mainly negative sentiments about the Home, such as suspicion, indifference and scorn; yet closer to the end of my fieldwork, I was increasingly inundated with questions from these same villagers on life inside the Home, particularly from those aged villagers who were struggling with dissatisfactions in their own mode of life which was closely entangled with their adult children.

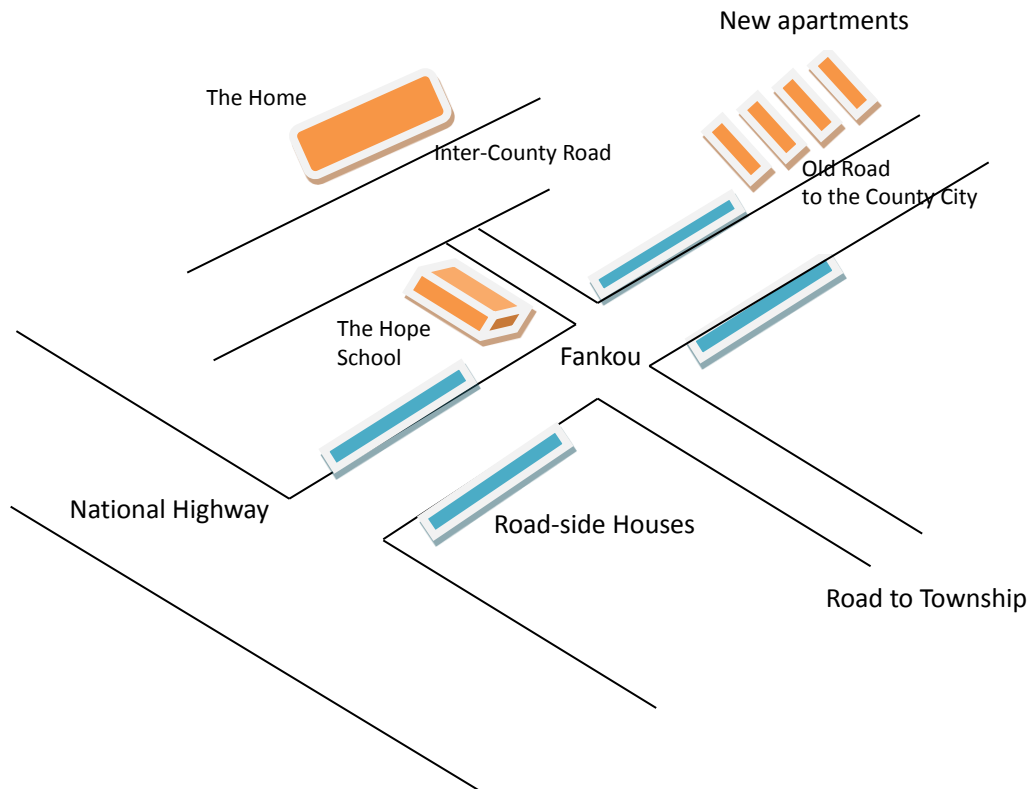


Figure 1.1: Fankou at the Conjunction of Three Transport Infrastructures

To summarise, in a tempestuous historical trend of establishing the Chinese modern state, Hongfan village becomes the conjunction of three interlocking state infrastructures: The old administrative and transport system, a newer one activated by the nation-wide inter-province highway system, and the newest inter-county roads as the result of provincial development. Hongfan village is a marginal location on the old maps, but is increasingly becoming a centre with the ongoing constructions guided by future plans. As a margin of the past and a centre of the future, it is a heterotopia location in the present, combining both and not entirely belonging to either category. The Home mirrors this status of Hongfan village: It is a state institution yet rooted in a village with which it has no administrative association. It is intended to exemplify the state effort to respect the rural elderly yet causes confusion as the elderly it hosts are the ones locally despised. It is an integral part of the overall Centralisation Project, yet the later spatial interruption of it from Fankou by other public infrastructure is not negotiated. These self-contradictory characteristics also attribute the Home an in-between position corresponding to the concept of heterotopia. Stepping back, it seems doubtless the driving force of a developmental state imbues both Hongfan

village and the Home with these characters. Furthermore, the establishment of the Home brings about a series of structural reversals, as the following sections will show.

The Residents: From WuBao-Household to Daughter-in-Law of the State

The WuBao welfare recipients were called ‘WuBao Laoren’, literally WuBao-Elderly, in official language. There was clearly defined eligibility in policy regulation to register one into this category. In contrast, the WuBao-Elderly whom I encountered in the Home and in the surrounding villages were highly heterogeneous on many levels.²⁸ Their ages ranged from fifties (or even younger in special cases) to nineties; some were, or had been, married; some had daughters; some had their own house and land; some earned an income from small businesses; some had wide social contacts; some were literate, even to a very recognisable degree, others weren’t. This high degree of heterogeneity may partly be a result of the hastiness in the political task of mobilising sufficient WuBao-Elderly to fill the Home, a situation that I will discuss soon. Even so, it is fair to say that there was a wide variation between individuals within the group labelled WuBao-Elderly.

Despite this internal differentiation, WuBao-Elderly as a welfare category were typically genuinely unwelcomed by local people.²⁹ In local dialect, they were called WuBao-Hu, literally, WuBao-Household, which was a depreciative address by itself.³⁰ The reason for the rather remarkable attitude of disgust towards them, as far as I discerned, was not so much their being old as two other attributes. One was their lack of family, particularly male offspring, which was considered a serious personal failure and a source of shame. Childless old people were locally thought to be undeserving of any reciprocal support on the grounds that they had not sacrificed anything for their family, particularly on child upbringing. In this connection, the linkage between

²⁸ On the state’s ability to define new categories despite internal heterogeneity, see Akhil Gupta 2012.

²⁹ On the implications of cultural notions on welfare categories, Matthew Kohrman (2005) has traced the emergence and evolution of the social category of *canji* (disabled) in China, and showed how public knowledge and imagination about Deng Pufang (the paraplegic son of China’s former leader Deng Xiaoping) and the bio-mythology of statesmanship has heavily influenced the folk understanding of this welfare category.

³⁰ This should also be a strong evidence to show that the primary unit in village was a household, instead of an individual. Villagers, not only WBE, were related to a household in their addresses. Furthermore, since more family members were considered a sign of prosperity, a WuBao-Household, for its implication of being a one-member family, is problematic.

family and old-age support was not only considered common sense, but also the only option that gave one ‘face’ [*mianzi*]. Adult sons were the subject that most local villagers immediately started to evaluate when I initiated the topic of elderly care.³¹ For those who did not have a son, a discussion on this topic often evoked their admission of bad fate. The personal manners of WuBao-Elderly were typically viewed as unrefined and they were also considered to be of ‘deviant heart’ [*xinshu buzheng*], all of which were generally seen as the result of being a singleton and thus lacking familial discipline.³²

The second was about being poor and having fewer social connections; and it was mostly in this regard, that their aging mattered, which was considered a sign of decreasing ability to keep up with new things or to make money. In addition, ‘no family’ and ‘being poor’ were also seen as closely related matters; both rendered a person potentially problematic, particularly in terms of old-age support. While the ability to form a family directly affected a person’s financial circumstances in old age, one’s financial circumstance was also a key cause of one’s marital status. Without money, male peasants particularly were unable to marry and thus entered their later years as WuBao-Elderly.

Why Did These WuBao-Elderly Move to the Home to Stay?

Most of the residents in the Home had lived independently, or with relatives, in villages and received a cash subsidy. This may induce us to ask why they chose to move to the Home. As described at the beginning of this chapter, Director Zhu spelled out that, ‘there was the work to mobilise the WuBao-Elderly with such willingness to realise it’. His rhetoric may sound perfect on the surface as it combined government responsibility to motivate the elderly and the freedom of individuals to make their own choice. But, on second thoughts, if there was already individual willingness, why was ‘mobilisation’ needed? The following four cases help to give a sense of the

³¹ There are both cultural and legal sources for this connection. The legal source can be traced back to the Marriage Law (1951), which stipulates that adult son has the obligation to support one’s parents. Prior to the introduction of the universal pension system in 2009, sons were the only legal source of support for rural elderly in China.

³² Relating to Donzelot (1979), we may note that in this local perception it is not only children who are disciplined in family life, but also their counter-part, parents.

various realities to the official discourse of ‘mobilising an existing willingness’.³³

Yan Dahe was a single man and one of the few relatively well-educated residents. He was also a member of the ‘Elderly Committee’ (EC) in charge of ‘culture and propaganda’ [*wenhua xuanchan*]. He had a brother who was single as well, almost dumb and was eligible as WuBao-Elderly. Yan told me that his brother did not want to go to the Home because he did not want to lose his ‘freedom’ [*ziyou*]. Whenever villagers went to his brother to do ‘thought work’, he pretended to be completely dumb and deaf, even though he could actually hear. Otherwise he would just run away to avoid the encounters. Unable to deal with his tricks, no one could get him to move to the Home. On the point of freedom, Yan said that he himself did not mind it that much; and he could not imagine any sort of freedom if one became too old to even work or cook for oneself. As a person with *wenhua* (literacy), he thought it was not a bad choice for a ‘state institution’ [*guojia jigou*] to take care of a single man’s late life. Even so, Yan himself did not claim WuBao status until he was sixty five, because:

You know, although it may be different now, for so many decades, it was shameful if one was classified as WuBao-Hu. Villagers would always laugh at you and make jokes about you in one way or another. And even if you were not officially classified as WuBao-Hu, but you stayed single, others might still call you WuBao-Hu just to insult you. You ‘cannot raise your head as a person’ [*zuoren taibuqitou*]. And also, there was almost no actual benefit for WuBao-Hu in the past. In a whole year you might only receive some small gifts from leaders at Spring Festival and even this little thing was not always given. In fact WuBao-Hu received more shame than benefit in the past. Only very recently have they started to receive a cash subsidy regularly.

Tang Zhenxiu, a sixty-five year-old male resident, who had previously lived with his brother’s family, had been living in the Home for over two years. Initially when I asked him why he had chosen to come to the Home, he always looked at me for a second, smiled and replied that it was because ‘this place is good, there is the state to

³³ Charles Taylor (2007) gives a theoretical reflection on mobilisation as a governance technique in this era. Josiah Heyman (1995) reviews how, by doing thought work, certain bureaucratic ideas are injected into the work mode of staff. Mobilisation through doing thought work was still widely used in this part of rural China. In this thesis, it is further mentioned in Chapter Three and Seven.

take care of you'.³⁴ Once in private conversation, Tang shared with me his experience of a rather involuntary transfer to the Home:

That year I went to the township (government) to discuss with them my situation and wanted them to certify me with WuBao status so that I could start to collect the subsidy. They considered my case and told me that it was fine but it would be best if I would agree to move into the Home at once. Before I could say anything, they issued my certificate and sent it directly to the Home. If I had been given the certificate earlier to myself, I would not have come here! You have seen my boy (his nephew), he is only six years old and he needs money. We have so much land, so I need to work at home. How can I feel settled just to stay here? At that time, they also asked other villagers to do thought work with me. They told me that I needed to 'renew my mind' [*gengxin sixiang*], and that I can't just expect to live with my brother forever, and that to let the state take care of my old age is the best solution. In fact I was also confused in the end and was not clear about what was good or bad. No other option, I came here in a daze.

Zhang Honglin and Shen Hengzhi were one of the few couple-residents at the Home. They had no children, but they did not need to be classified as WuBao-Elderly. They had the ability to work, and in fact they were better off than the average in this area; and Shen was only fifty-five year-old, which was not yet eligible for WuBao-Elderly (defined as above sixty). Zhang told me on and off that Shen had many health problems and that they had to spend a lot of money on her medical fees. Once in a chilly evening in their room, Zhang shared with me his private consideration of why he decided to come to the Home. The following is my transcript of his words:

Think, we have been married for nearly forty years and haven't had a child. Although we have earned some money and can still run a small business, she (Shen) has to spend so much time in hospital every year which costs a lot. So we actually don't have much savings. I am a lot older than her. If I died, how could she manage her life? This place guarantees everything and these guarantees are promised by the state. It should be most reliable. And we also

³⁴ Though not convinced, I never pushed the residents on their stated reasons. Very often, after some time, they would automatically come up with something different.

have kin, her niece, near the Home. At that time when the Home was just built, I thought that if we did not move in immediately, there might not be a vacant place later on. So I decided to sacrifice myself a bit and to occupy a place for her first. I had good relations with our village cadres. When they came to persuade me to come here, as I was a WuBao at that time, I agreed immediately. But I told them that the pre-condition for me to come was to certify my wife a WuBao as well. She was then still too young to be eligible, so they refused. Then this matter ran into deadlock for months. I could not make any concession, could I? They felt it urgent to find enough people to fill the Home, but I did not. And whenever they came to me to talk about it, I just called them ‘inhumane’ [*bu-renxing*]. Finally, they accepted my condition and both of us moved here.

Wu Dakun was a ‘production brigade secretary’ [*shengchandu shuji*] in the 1960s and had four daughters who had all married.³⁵ Wu maintained a relatively good relationship with his daughters, but when he had to make a decision on whether to spend his old age with one of his daughters’ families or live in the Home, Wu chose the latter:

You know, although my daughters are good, who knows what their husband thinks about (my living with them)? If I stayed at their place for a short visit, it would be fine. But if I stayed forever, there must be trouble. To stay at the Home will not have those problems. The state is reliable, the same as in the old days. I can have my own place and I can also go to my daughters’ families to visit.

I selected these four cases to show the diversity in individual circumstances regarding entry to the Home, which certainly cannot be simply reduced to the binaries of willing or unwilling, voluntary or involuntary, state-imposed or not, or structure or agency. Bearing in mind the ‘separation constraint’ in Chinese sociality thoroughly elaborated by Charles Stafford (2000), the complexity in these cases makes it inappropriate to simply identify the binaries of the mobiliser versus the mobilised, as each person is simultaneously mobilising and being mobilised in that the political agenda is in

³⁵ Old Wu is further discussed in Chapter Seven.

juxtaposition to cultural stereotype. This is to say, the advantage of the state institution seems to be built upon the local stereotype of family and kinship which emphasises family and adult sons as the only (dignified) source of support and has already rendered WuBao-Elderly vulnerable despite their actual circumstances.

The local cadres use this local stereotype to persuade the WuBao-Elderly to move, and the WuBao-Elderly calculate using the same logic in their decision to move. In other words, the state intervention and the local stereotype sympathise each other, which together reinforce the WuBao-Elderly as the anomalous and the problematic. This may also serve as a general explanation of why these people become residents of the Home, leaving only those who do not subscribe to this stereotype at large in the village, such as Yan's brother. Therefore, instead of speaking about state-society in its conventional sense of provocative cadres and WuBao-Elderly responders as the main binary, it might later become the people involved in the Home and those who refuse to get close to it.

Male Predominance in Population: Is Male to the State as Female is to Family?

The Home had hosted six hundred residents who came from nine adjacent townships, including about twenty from the brigade of Hongfan village where the Home was located. Except for about twenty women, all were men and there were fewer than ten couples. At the time of my fieldwork the total number of residents was about five hundred after some had been relocated to other CREHs and some had died. There were only very few newcomers to the Home during my stay.

Before I focus on the change of the identity of these WuBao-Elderly before and after they became Home residents, let me briefly discuss the remarkable gender imbalance in the number of residents.³⁶ On this question, in fact, no one at and around the Home did give me an answer. Director Zhu, who was adept at almost everything, always went blank when I tried to discuss with him any issues related to gender. He was unclear about the number of female residents, which he did not think to be an issue. Indeed, the insensitivity to gender in the local perception of WuBao-Elderly was

³⁶ Comparing to other old people's homes that I visited, this gender ratio - nearly 1:25 - was striking, also Wu et al 2008, 2009.

impressive.³⁷ The gender of a WuBao-Elderly was seldom mentioned automatically, and by default it was assumed to be male. This may be related to the fact that for decades since the creation of this welfare category, it has mainly been composed of men; thus as time passed, villagers took it for granted.

Nevertheless, I discerned some possible clues to the preponderance of men in my fieldwork, and I list three below. Firstly, for the old villagers, marriage would only have been possible if the groom could have afforded a certain amount of bride-wealth, which was not so much a problem for the side of the bride. And so it was often men who were unable to marry because of poverty. And this also applied to re-marriage. Secondly, aged widows tended to prefer to stay with the family of an adult child (no matter daughter or son) whereas widowers would rather stay independent so that they did not need to compromise with their adult children. As these independent widowers needed to cope with routine life by themselves, such as cooking for oneself every day, it made the provision in the Home more attractive. Thirdly, women often showed a lot more skepticism to a new state institution in contrast to men. On the last point, the following two contrasting episodes concerning newcomers to the Home may provide a good illustration.

Two Handover Ceremonies

One day a car from a nearby township government brought an elderly widow to the Home. Prior to this the woman had lived by herself and had refused the township officials' request to demolish her house for other use and refused to move anywhere else. Then she was forcibly sent to the Home. Upon arrival the woman screamed, struggled and refused to get off the minibus. She screamed that the Home was a jail. The noise her arrival made attracted villagers to gather and watch, including a man who was the richest person in this area running a good rabbit business. This man was known as a 'folk hero' [*minjian yingxiong*], as he often fought with local officials whom he considered to bully ordinary villagers. He then argued for the widow in legal terms, e.g. that it was WuBao-Elderly's right to choose whether to move to the Home or to stay at one's own place, and warned the township officers that if they insisted on leaving the widow at the Home, he would not mind the effort of taking

³⁷ For the debates on the mutual impact between age and gender, see Gutmann 1987; Sinnott 1986.

them to the court. Finally, the township officers conceded and the woman was taken back home.

Another time a similar minibus stopped at the Home gate. Director Zhu and two care workers came out to receive the guests. Two young men emerged from the front door first. Director Zhu went up to them and shook their hands warmly. They then said something to each other which I could not hear clearly. During this time, three old men emerged from the rear door and went up to them. After a while one of the young men turned to the old men and said in a much louder voice, as if he was making an announcement:

This is Director Zhu. Now I formally hand you over to him. From now on here is your new home. Remember in future whenever you have any problem, instead of coming to us, you should go to Director Zhu for help and he will decide everything for you!

The three old men nodded slightly. Instead of taking the chance on arrival to look around, they were apparently more occupied by the handover and their new director. Director Zhu took over the speech and greeted them. ‘Welcome! Welcome to the Home! My surname is Zhu and I am the director here. From now on we are ‘one family’ [*yijia ren*].’ He then turned to the head care worker, Zhiying, and instructed her, ‘Take them to their rooms and show them around.’ Very efficiently, the old men went inside with Zhiying; and the young men from the township went into the office with Director Zhu.

I was also given many accounts of spectacular and chaotic scenes when the six hundred residents arrived all at once after the completion of the Home. Notably, residents vividly portrayed their coming to the Home in the metaphor of a remarriage. One resident explained to me that as WuBao-Hu, they felt they had been once married to the township government which had been responsible for their elderly life for a long time; and then, by coming to the Home, they were divorced from the township government and remarried to the Home. As an institution specifically set up for them by the state, the Home then became their new *po-jia* (husband’s family); and they themselves, accordingly, became the daughters-in-law of this new family.

Compared with the village committee or township government, the former *po-jia*, the Home had much better ‘hardware’ which the residents immediately felt. But more importantly to them was that this was a place where, as they were told, they would be cared for directly by the state, not only in receiving cash subsidy, but in everyday care and material provision; and this was a place where the ‘Chinese national virtue’ [*zhonghua minzu de meide*] was to be embodied, that is, as old people, they would be respected and loved. No longer having to endure insulting jokes from other villagers, some residents had expected to start a new life in a place where everyone had the same status as the ‘home people’ [*yuan-min*]³⁸, and the state became much closer overnight and was supposed to directly monitor the fulfillment of these promises.

Meanwhile, outside the Home, the residents seemed indeed to be treated differently by local villagers from how those WuBao-Elderly living in village were treated. In a nutshell, instead of shaming them directly, local villagers tended to exclude or avoid them. In my observation, this particular distance was not so much a result of their ‘foreignness’ as having come from other villages as of their being WuBao residents. This was most evident in the socialisation in Fankou. As the only public market place in this area, like local villagers, many residents used to come to Fankou to ‘hang out’. Yet, in later years, increasing numbers of residents would rather remain in the Home bored than go to Fankou because of their countless bad experiences. For example, they would be the first to be suspected of theft if anything went missing while they were there; and if any dispute occurred, they were seen as the troublemaker by default. They were refused entry to some tea shops as they were suspected of not having the money needed to play Mahjong. Doing my fieldwork, I was initially very sensitive and felt uncomfortable to see how easily and naturally local villagers could dismiss the residents; yet later on, I also learned not to wave to a passing-by resident if I was chatting with villagers, since if I did, it often resulted in the end of the conversation.

Home Village: Previous *Po-jia* to Present *Niang-jia* (wife’s natal family)³⁹

³⁸ The residents were officially addressed as ‘*yuan-min*’, literally ‘home people’. This title immediately set a rhetorical opposition to *cun-min*, literally ‘village people’, normally translated as villager. The character ‘*min*’ is understood in literature as connoting a particular Maoist notion of ‘people’. In this thesis where the term *yuan-min* is emphasised, I translate it as ‘home people’; otherwise I use the word ‘resident’.

³⁹ *Po-jia*, husband’s natal family, literally, mother-in-law’s family; and *niang-jia*, wife’s natal

The State Council Order 456 (2006) stipulates that township governments should sign a contract with CREH to formalise the trusteeship that due services regarding WuBao provision are delivered by CREH on their behalf. These institutions - township government and CREH - also have the right to delegate this duty to other villagers when necessary (Item 17 Chapter 4, Order 456). The income from the land of WuBao-Elderly remains under the elderly's title even though its cultivation is delegated to others (Item 11 Chapter 3, Order 456). These articles further legalise the transference of responsibility for the WuBao-Elderly from the township government to the CREH. As one party of the contract, the township government becomes the legitimate agency of contact for CREH when needed. This contrasts to the previous situation in which the township government had the main responsibility for WuBao-Elderly, and kin were the contact point in emergency. The changed relationships are illustrated below in two triangles:

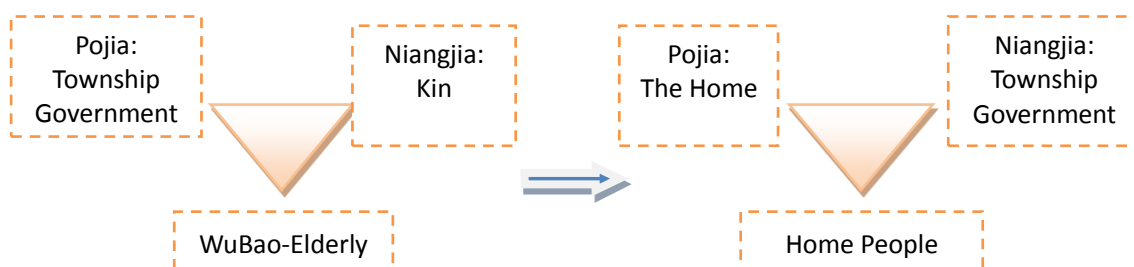


Figure 1.2: The Changed Support Relations after WuBao-Elderly Become Home People

‘Home village’ thus refers to the place individual residents had lived before moving to the Home.⁴⁰ The distances of the residents’ home villages to the Home were most often described by them with reference to bus journey times - for those who lived farther away, it would take about three hours. Though most of these villages were beyond the scope of my fieldwork, I nevertheless introduce them for their relative position to the Home, since dislocation of these WuBao-Elderly from their home villages did not mean to the residents a sudden and complete break with the former.

family, literally, mother’s family.

⁴⁰ The Chinese word the residents used to refer to ‘home village’ is *lao-jia*, literally ‘old family’. *Lao-jia* to the residents meant the place where they were born. The use of the word *jia*, family, in this phrase might be read to reveal more. For one thing, it implied a kind of affinity between how home villages and families were perceived; and for the other, it conveyed a kind of logic featured by ambiguity, i.e. *lao-jia* did not equate to any administrative boundary, nor to family, but shared some similarity with both.

What it meant for them, however, was a uniquely transformed position of these villages in their eyes.

I noticed this by the residents' joking metaphor that their home villages were like their previous *po-jia*, ceasing to be their *niang-jia*. This metaphor likening the domain of family and kinship to the political was certainly significant. Among others, it reminded me of the entanglements in this transfer which encompassed a seemingly radical disconnection of these residents from their home villages at the point of their moving to the Home and the re-connections that were later resumed through other policies, continuing personal relations and complex emotions.

As far as residents explained, this metaphor mainly referred to the practical functions of these public institutions for WuBao-Elderly, which were similar to what family was to normal villagers. For most villagers, the important issues, such as old age care, land and housing, were considered domestic and addressed in the patrilineal group once a person married. Yet to WuBao-Elderly, the agencies responsible for these issues had been the township government or village committee from which they had collected their subsidy. After the establishment of the CREHs, the everyday life of the WuBao residents was contracted to this new institution in a package, which also marked that their home village or township no longer needed to undertake those functions like a *po-jia* and became secondary to CREHs.⁴¹

However, it did not mean that home villages then had nothing to do with the residents. Conversely, the residents soon found that they had to go back to their home villages to deal with many practical matters. For example, the new national welfare policy on universal pensions for rural elderly, coming into force in 2009, required WuBao-Elderly living in CREHs to return to their home villages to go through the bureaucratic procedures. Equally unsettled were the issues regarding residents' houses and land, which often became a major source of dispute between residents and their previous local administrations.⁴² These matters might seem trivial to most people, as the amount of money value involved was insignificant; yet to these WuBao-Elderly

⁴¹ Yan (2003) questions the long-standing proposition of the Chinese peasants being particularly rational. This metaphor, emphasising the similarity in the practical function of family and these public institutions, may rather suggest that rational calculation does define a main mode of thought of these Chinese peasants.

⁴² The case of Laoshi-ren in Chapter Six gives further illustration.

who did not have anything else, these were their major ‘heart matters’ [*xin-shi*].

Associated with these practical disconnections and reconnections were complex emotions. Residents often talked about their home village; and they also went back to visit relatives and neighbours, not just for practical purposes. When they recounted their past confrontations with village or township administrators, sometimes they would pause for a while, adding the same comment that ‘no need to mention these again, past is past; just let it go’, which sounded obviously a tone of resignation. In addition, there was also a message palpable in their accounts, that their home village was always the place of their roots which could not be replaced by the Home. Both the tone of resignation and their feeling of root attachment to their home village confirmed to me the strength in their seemingly casual analogy of home village to their present *niang-jia*, which implied that despite the loss of practical importance, their home village was still held as a necessary place - the necessary other - in addition to the Home.⁴³

There is a Chinese proverb which says that, ‘a single tree does not make a forest.’ It is exactly so in my attempt to investigate the forest that these home villages present to my sight in the light of the Home project and thus my field site is expanded from the Home to these villages. Yet compared with ethnographies that drop their anchor of study in a village settlement, these home villages are only a backdrop to my field. They do not by themselves illuminate the stage. It is in acknowledgement of the need to reflect their unique attribute in this context, which combines divisibility from and dependency on the Home, that I echo the metaphor of *po-jia* and *niang-jia* from my old informants. I thus also paint their appearance in my field setting with a faded colour and consider them necessary but secondary to this ethnography.

Kin: Previous *Niang-jia* to Illegitimate Custodian

Order 141 (1994) assigns the task of supporting WuBao-Elderly to the collective and also confers government authorities with corresponding rights. For example, it stipulates that the property of WuBao-Elderly remains theirs until their death, after

⁴³ In my trips with individual residents to their home villages, I was impressed by a reversed sentiment. While I myself felt much more at ease in the Home than in these villages, obviously the residents were more relaxed in their home villages.

which the village committee assumed rights over it (Item 18 and 19, Chapter 5, Order 141). These policy provisions ensure the connection of WuBao-Elderly to the state agencies of township government and village committee; but at the same time, they also disconnect them from their biological and affinal kin on the same issues. And thus, unlike other rural elderly who had male adult children as moral and legal supporters, WuBao-Elderly were not entitled any right or obligation to their relatives. However, despite the legal stipulation, those WuBao-Elderly who lived among their kin in the same village nonetheless retained many connections with them simply because of their locational adjacency.

Order 456 (2006) and the move into the Home further distanced residents from their kin, as above mentioned. In my fieldwork, it was rare to see the relatives of the residents in the Home. ‘Invisible kin’ was the phrase constantly hovering in my mind. A good example was the handover ceremony that I mentioned earlier in which the people participated were township officials and the Home workers. Kin were also often absent when a resident was sick, and it was normally the bus from the township hospital which came for transport the sick person. Neither did kin have to come when a resident died, since according to the new contract, the township government was the agent to contact in such a circumstance.⁴⁴

At the times when residents’ relatives appeared, the scenes of their visits may do little more than confirm the paucity of their contact. Many of these visits took place at festival times when the residents were preparing to go back to home villages. Then it was often a nephew of a resident riding a motorbike to the Home to pick up his ‘second or third father’ [*erba*, *sanba*]⁴⁵. Such pick-up scenes often attracted the attention of other residents, while the resident being seated on the back of the motorbike left with observable contentment. This was in much contrast to the presence of family and relatives of the staff in the Home, whose visits were taken by the residents as normal and casual and never crowd together to watch.⁴⁶

I then studied the family and kinship practice of other villagers in order to gain a basic

⁴⁴ In most cases, the relatives did come after a resident had died. More on this are in Chapter Four and Six.

⁴⁵ These kin titles indicate one’s seniority among brothers.

⁴⁶ This is further discussed in Chapter Five.

sense of local stereotype. The main kinship organisation in this area was patrilineal. Family obligations were organised through the male line and post-marital patrilocality was both considered appropriate and most popularly practiced. Land tenure rights changed upon marriage. When a daughter married out, her piece of land inherited from her natal family was returned to the collective, and a different piece of land would be entitled to her in the groom's village. On the issue of elderly care, most old people thought their own son(s) to be the best option, even if this expectation often met with difficulty in reality.⁴⁷ It was obvious to me that, to the majority, the ideal of raising a son to take care of one's old age remained, that family and reproduction were directly connected to one's sense of long-term security, and that whether or not one was able to make this condition was monitored with local value judgments.

Although I was often frustrated by the data collected through formal fieldwork methods on kinship, I was nonetheless convinced in the process that excitement came from a general atmosphere of boredom - no convention, no invention. I enjoyed an additional observation, which was that village life, in particular regarding the domain of family and kinship, was particularly emotionally intensive. To many villagers, the richness of everyday life seemed, rather peculiarly, mainly to come from the conflicts-laden entanglements in family and kinship, even though they complained about it all the time.⁴⁸

For a long time, I did not find anything stimulating on this aspect of the residents other than some verification of local kinship patterns, such as the residents who did not have biological offspring were most likely to take the sons of their brothers as the first point of reference, though many residents were much keener and open to talk about their kin than were others. Often a resident would first come to me wanting to report a complaint about the management of the Home. Yet, maybe due to nervousness deriving from 'betraying' the management, their accounts tended to be sparse and incomplete. But if I took the chance to ask them more about their families, they would often perk up, 'on this matter? Days are not enough.' It was in those long chats between individual resident and me that kin relations were revived in their

⁴⁷ There were many reasons for this, including younger people outmigration, sibling conflicts, and so on. The conditions of aged villagers also varied greatly. For the rich elderly, adult children may largely depend on them and the family dynamics was very different from the average.

⁴⁸ But I cannot push this point further to make assertion on whether kinship is determined by the emotional life.

emotional and detailed accounts.⁴⁹

The turning point came incidentally. Once in a chat with a resident, Zhang Haiyang, I complimented him on his new hat and asked if it had been given by his kin. Touching his hat with complacency, he admitted the compliment but corrected me, ‘No, not my affinal kin, but my family’ [*bushi qinqi, shi yijia-ren*]. Later on I verified that the one who gave him the hat was his sister-in-law, literally his kin, not family (in normative term), nonetheless Zhang insisted that she was his family member. His firm understanding on this connection reminded me of many similar occasions that the residents actually mixed up a great deal family and kin. I started to seriously reflect on what family may mean to a person who did not have it in an environment of the prevalence of family culture. Obviously, this demanded me to rid myself of my preoccupations with normative family patterns and to immerse myself in the very special realities of the WuBao-Elderly to understand how close relations were defined in their terms.

Most residents used to have close family-like relations with some relatives. While they were considered by residents as if their own family, such family forms were nevertheless considered locally as anomalous; and such understanding seemed to be increasingly so. Notably these non-standard forms included living with one’s brother’s family, with one’s parents or, in particular, mother. Further extension of this kin map concerned the making of kin. For many residents, adoption was part of their life, but this was often denigrated by local villagers as a result of failing to have one’s own biological offspring. My observation largely convinced me that making-kin was much more ‘natural’ to WuBao-Elderly than to others, either in terms of making stranger into kin, or making particularly close ties with certain kin.

In the residents’ oral collections, the making of these anomalous families often involved unusual individual effort and sentiment, particularly the involvement of women. One resident, Zhou Dayou, often talked about his sister-in-law, who used to keep ten yuan each year as her ‘private money’ [*sifang qian*] in the hard times of the 1960s without her husband’s (a county cadre) knowledge, and gave it to Zhou because

⁴⁹ I quickly sensed that much kin stuff was not to be talked publicly. But in safe and private environments, some residents can be very frank and elaborate to bring up their kin stories. So, most detailed accounts of the sort were collected privately.

she felt sympathetic for him being the only bachelor living in the countryside in the kin group. Under her auspices and care, Zhu never *felt* a lack of family. Another resident had lived with his mother all his life and was a well-known 'filial son' [*xiaozhi*]; he refused to marry in order to take revenge on his father - who had seriously violated his mother - by refusing him grandchildren.

If we compare these actually existing, or previously existent, intensive kin relations to the current Home phenomenon of 'kin invisibility', we may have to ponder on the radicalness in the change from a different dimension. I want to suggest that the state welfare to WuBao-Elderly matters a great deal to the actual kin relationship of the guaranteed. What is denied is certainly not the stereotypical local family pattern and kinship norm, which are in fact much commensurate with the welfare design for its claim to only guarantee the locally uncared. What is actually denied is rather these locally deemed anomalous relations and over-intensive human sentiments illustrated by the above cases. Kin invisibility at sight might be a misleading phenomenon, just as the more visually striking phenomenon of the savior hand from the state to take over the old age support of WuBao-Elderly makes much invisible to others that it simultaneously sets up the barrier between these residents and their kin networks.⁵⁰

Conclusion

The Home mirrors Hongfan village in that they both epitomise the historical condition of a developmental state running into a future of modernity. The state produces and reproduces multiple layers of infrastructures in a short period of time, and specific localities and institutions are then laid at the juncture of rapid state refashioning and often have to confront the task of embracing inconsistencies, contradictions and messiness. In doing so, these special existences cannot be comfortably put into any existing category, they become heterotopias.

Maybe nothing is more cogent than the Home as a heterotopia. Standing in front of its gate, I envision that the Confucian moral ideal of respecting the elderly and the Communist utopia of building a welfare society coincide in microcosm, that the WBE become a peculiar disease with the Home being the hospital where the state antidote is

⁵⁰ The case of Old Yang in Chapter Six further illustrates this.

provided for free, that demonising and rescuing a group of people unfold in exactly one process, that anomalies are accommodated with a loud expression of respect, that intimate kin terms are appropriated to undermine strangeness, and that a range of reversals have occurred, as if seeing through a crooked mirror.

By moving into the Home, WBE change their identity overnight from demeaned WBH to respected elderly and guaranteed ‘home people’ at the auspice of the state. This transfer endows them with a close connection to the state unavailable to other villagers, though the swift imposition of categorical clarity is tantamount to the production of symbolic ambiguity. The previous primary groups of WBE, their home village and kin, are distanced in sequence, whose relations with WBE suggest a situation of chiasmus, namely, the familisation of the state and the statisation of family.

Notable in this transformation is the eradication of non-standard and idiosyncratic practices that do not match local stereotypes, but not local stereotypes themselves. Particularity is to be substituted by universality. By subsuming irregular practices into one discourse of vulnerability, previously diverse practices are simplified into two categories – adult son family care and state care. Certainly, we can explain this trend in the need of the modern state to see to be governing, as James Scott proposed (1998). Yet, I may also add that, while the changes in this transfer are obvious, the previous and the present practices also seem to mirror each other in the consistency each accords to visibility, i.e. the previous practices tend to favour ‘not to see and not to be seen’, while the present one demands both ‘to see’ and ‘to be seen’.

I thus define my fieldwork setting: it centres on a heterotopian institution, the Home, and extends to its surroundings however they are refracted. The fading into the distance of the light from the Sunset Light programme circumscribes its boundary. The otherness of such a space and the value of studying it anthropologically are self-evident. The results I will explore in the following chapters.

Part I

At the Points of Conjunction

Chapter Two

‘Let It Go’ and Leakage

– On Eating, the ‘Heaven’

‘Why did I come? Because at this place I don’t need to cook! To cook by oneself is very troublesome for people like us – old bachelors.’

-- A male resident, questioned on why he had chosen to come to live at the Home.

‘You young people don’t have the experience. But old people, like us, who survived those years of hunger, would never forget how important food is. Yes, we care about it, very much.’

-- Another resident, questioned on why eating seemed so important to him.

‘You don’t know. The Chinese are like this: if they eat well, anything else is easier to negotiate. ‘Food is the heaven of the people’ [*minyī shì wéi tiān*]. This rule also applies to the management of a respect-the-elderly home.’

-- Director Zhu, explaining why he considered eating, in particular rice provision, to be the ‘first-class matter’ [*tóudēng dāshì*].

The world of food in the Home was disclosed to me on my first day there. Upon my arrival, Director Zhu gave me a tour. Walking down from his office, the first place he brought me to was the kitchen, on the wall outside of which hung a blackboard displaying the weekly menu. Stopping in front of this ‘diet board’, he said to me:

Look, this is the food that we provide for ‘aged people’ [*lǎonián-rén*]. Our principle is that breakfast needs to be nutritious, so an egg must be guaranteed; lunch needs to be substantial, so a meat dish must be provided; and dinner should be simple and plain, but with variety. This design matches the ‘scientific diet’ [*kēxué yīnshì*] for aged people, and is also realistic in terms of the budget that we can get.

After saying this, Director Zhu did not move. Presuming that he wanted me to read the diet board in detail, I did so. At a quick glance, the writing was neat and fresh. The

content matched exactly what he had just explained: breakfast always included an egg, at least one meat dish for lunch, typically ‘braised pork with white radish’, and one vegetable dish for dinner, typically ‘fried Chinese cabbage’; and rice was the main food for lunch and dinner. I kept quiet for a few seconds, as I was reading the menu, while Director Zhu became impatient for my opinion. He soon asked me, ‘How about it? Isn’t it good! Many leaders are impressed by our management on food.’

During my stay at the Home, I observed that on most occasions when visitors came, the diet board was the first object to be shown to them, just as it had been when I first arrived. Director Zhu would always give the guests a similar introduction and then await their feedback, which was often followed by the visitors nodding their heads while saying, ‘not bad, not bad’. In addition, I noted two other particular things about this diet board. Firstly, unlike the diet board in most institutional settings where it provides information to the diners, this one was for the most part intended for visitors. The residents rarely looked at the board. This was not only because it was located in a place where few residents normally went, but also that most residents were illiterate, so written texts simply made no sense to them. Besides this, perhaps more revealing was the residents’ indifference to the board. Many residents considered the main function of the board as being for visitors to look at, and not necessarily relating to what they ate. As long as the actual provision was satisfying, they could ignore the board altogether. As one resident said:

It (the board) is not important; it is for them (the management and visitors), not for us. What is important for us is the actual food we eat.

Secondly, what was generally written on the board was *more-or-less* the same as what was actually provided. By more-or-less I mean that the written diet was neither identical to, nor clearly different from, the actual meal. To give some examples, a dish described as ‘meat’ on the diet board often required the diners’ absolute attention to discern the actual meat therein, while a fried vegetable dish might be diluted into a vegetable soup. On occasions, what was provided was unrelated to what was written.

It was notable that the residents normally did not dispute the scientific rule about plain food being good, but they paid much attention to the content of their meals and often expressed tremendous dissatisfaction about it.

Like many such *gongshi-pai* (literally, ‘publicising board’) in rural China today, the diet board is required by the authority and at the same time intended for it (i.e. to be shown to official visitors).⁵¹ As a showy object, the diet board seems to have a similar function to the Home itself: while the diet board is often the first object to be viewed by visitors within the Home before seeing the other facilities, the Home is often the first place to show to outside visitors among this type of institutions in the province.

Three points can be made concerning the positioning of the diet board. First, it is for a means of communication between the Home management (represented by Director Zhu) and visitors (often officials) on what is expected by way of food provision in a state institution for WuBao-Elderly, and thus it is designed to approach a common ideal for both the two parties. Second, the *more-or-less* quality of the board with respect to the actual provision means it represents the food reality in the Home while simultaneously denying it. Third, the residents are actually separated from the board, either for practical reasons or due to their indifference to it, thereby making any mismatch irrelevant to them. Thus, while from a visitor’s point of view the board is supposed to represent the inside, from a typical viewpoint of the residents, it is supposed to be intended for the outside. The gap in their respective assumptions about the board makes the objectivity of the board a secondary matter. The board – hanging inside but alien to the experience of the residents while being intended for outsiders as an object within the Home – is therefore neither fully ‘the inside’ nor ‘the outside’. The both-and, more-or-less, and neither-nor qualities of the diet board open up the world of eating behind it, and introduce me to the heterotopian institution that the board epitomises.

⁵¹ Most times when I was introduced to a publicising board, the officers would add that ‘this is a must’.

Food plays a central role in both Chinese family life and the making of relatedness in a wider context (Yang 1994; Stafford 2000); and the stipulation on food has played an important role in forming and reinforcing the authority of the modern Chinese government (Jing 2000 et al.). Yet during the Maoist era, the collective approach to eating resulted in widespread starvation (Yang 2012). The WuBao residents, having experienced the Great Leap Forward and famine, have hunger as a part of their bodily memory, and eating is a primary practical reason motivating many residents to come. In the Home, providing food is not only the practice through which the free state welfare is most intimately felt by the residents, but also the one by which the institution's discipline is most intensively enforced. To paraphrase Liu Xin's claim that 'food is central to the organisation of social life in this part of rural Shaanxi' (2000, p.105), I claim that dining is central to, and characteristic of, the organisation of institutional life in the Home.

Following a structuralist approach (Richards 1932; Douglas 1966, 1975, 1984, 1987; Barthes 1973; Sahlins 1976; Levi-Strauss 1978; Goody 1982), I take dining practices and food symbols as a system of signification that contains a set of structural relations resembling the overall order of the Home. In this chapter, I delineate, on the basis of the ethnographic material on eating, what constitutes a meal in the Home, whether and how other food values are accommodated, what structural relationships that exist between the residents, the workers and the state can be deduced from these practices, and why they suggest the Home to be a heterotopian institution. To this end, I start by introducing the three words used in the Home for 'having a meal' for an overview of the food conditions therein. I then proceed with a description of the everyday institutional ritual of organising hundreds of residents to have meals, and explicate why eating of this type creates the residents' dependency on the state with reference to Maurice Bloch's (1992) theorisation of ritual practice. Finally, I depict an alternative way of eating, which is the residents' initiative to set up 'wild stoves'.

Three Terms for ‘Having a Meal’

To ‘have a meal’⁵² was referred to using three terms representing different types of meal provided at different times (see Table 2-1). On closer examination, I suggest that these three terms reflect the Home’s actual priority for meal provision, as well as how others, including the village values and the state utopia, are also incorporated.

Meal Type	Proportion of Constituents			Rhythm ⁵³
	Rice	Dish (veg./meat)	Alcohol (<i>baijiu</i>)	
<i>Chifan</i>	3	1	0	three times a day; seven days a week
<i>Dayaji</i>	2	2	0	Monday/Thursday lunch
<i>Jucan</i>	1	4	5	major national festivals

Table 2-1

Chifan, translated literally as ‘eat meal/rice’, was the most frequently used term for dining, and referred to the routine practice of having a meal (i.e. the three daily meals at 7.30am, 11.30am and 5.30pm).⁵⁴ The character ‘*fan*’ connoted either meal or rice depending on the specific situation: when it was used as a general term, it referred to the whole meal, including the staple food, rice by default, and the vegetable and meat dishes; and when it was used during the course of a meal, it referred to rice only, differentiating it from dishes which are called *cai*. For the meals in which the main food was not rice, the local people normally emphasised that they were eating, for example, noodles, but not *chifan*. The multiple notions of *fan*, both denoting meal and rice, might be best explained with reference to the local food habit that took rice as the survival food.⁵⁵ This had two levels of meaning: firstly, rice was the defining element for a meal, to the extent that it alone could constitute a meal; and secondly, it was inferior to both vegetables and meat, which constituted ‘dishes’ [*cai*], particularly

⁵² In Mandarin Chinese, ‘eating’ is pronounced *chi*. In local vernacular, it is pronounced *ka*. *Ka* was the second word after *gang* (which means play, pronounced in Mandarin Chinese *wan*) that I learned from residents.

⁵³ The temporal implications of dining are discussed in Chapter Four.

⁵⁴ The local language does not normally distinguish between breakfast, lunch and dinner.

⁵⁵ Rice is the main staple crop in the local agricultural economy.

meat. The relative position of rice to dish can be summarised as: a meal is not a meal if there is no rice, but a meal can only be a better meal if there are more (meat) dishes. This can be extended to a general analogy:

rice : (meat) dish :: safety : prosperity

Rice provision was not only guaranteed but also prioritised in the Home.⁵⁶ Although Director Zhu's introduction in front of the diet board emphasised the scientific criteria of the diversity and nutritional value of the food on offer, it was my observation that what was actually ensured in practice was the sumptuous provision of rice. Once, while waiting for a local rice seller to come, I joked with Director Zhu, 'if there was no rice, probably you'd have to prepare other stuff as a substitute, maybe potato or anything'. 'You cannot joke on this. Anything can be joked about, but not rice!' Director Zhu replied seriously. 'As long as rice is guaranteed, the basic is guaranteed; potato is only a dish.'⁵⁷ During my stay at the Home, I never saw any meal where rice was in short supply. In fact, there was always more rice prepared for each meal than was needed. Rarely did any resident complain that he did not eat enough rice. It seemed that I was the only one who commented that the excessive rice provision was a waste.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ In a recent article on China's current food-safety problems, Yan Yunxiang (2012) identifies three main types: problems of food hygiene, unsafe food and poisonous food. He argues that the second type caused by modern modes of farming is becoming dominant at present, and the third type is of most threat to society and governance. In the context of my fieldwork, villagers often exhibited complacency/pride of their food being more organic than those available to urban people. The Home defines food safety as the adequate provision of rice and kitchen hygiene, which may be related to the fact that starvation and food accident were at high stake to the Home staff, in particular the director, since any problem of this sort would likely make him lose his job.

⁵⁷ Goncalo D. Santos and Aurora Donzelli (2007) argue that though rice is a powerful operator of distinction and an essential mediator of human recognition, a rice-centred moral and political economy is inherently ambiguous since rice simultaneously reproduces hierarchy and social equality. They use the term of intimacy (Herzfeld 1996) to capture this underlying complexity. The situation around the Home regarding rice is, in many aspects, similar with those described in Santos' ethnography in the Harmony Cave village in Guangdong province. But with regard to the Home, the rice symbol seems to be inverted in two ways. Firstly, rice means the basic instead of distinction; and secondly, it is a matter that is too important to be joked about, or, too intimate to be intimate about.

⁵⁸ Mary Douglas (1984) suggests that particular type of food waste has its social and economic foundation. In light of her discussion, the phenomenon that the Home, as a place relatively short

But when ‘having a meal’ was referred to as *chifan* in the Home, it also coincided with, if not denoted, a relative scarcity in vegetables or meat. In this sense, while echoing the local food habit of rice, the Home refracted its meaning to mean hunger avoidance or safety insurance. Routine food often incurred residents’ complaints. This quote from one male resident is representative:

They also told us that dinner needs to be light for nutritional purpose, so often it’s just cabbage soup. At the beginning, I couldn’t get to sleep almost every night; I just felt hungry, you know – the feeling of emptiness. And that feeling makes you irritated, like you want to fight other people for no reason. But nowhere in this place can you find food other than these meals. What can you do? Learn to be tolerant [*ren*], or otherwise kill people!

Dayaji was used in the Home to refer to lunch on Monday and Thursday, when an additional dish was served. *Dayaji*, literally ‘have teeth sacrifice’, denoted having a sumptuous meat meal. This phrase was spoken in the local dialect and had many reported origins. The most popular version was that *dayaji* was a domestic ritual widely practised in earlier times, whereby at the start and mid-point of each month, meat was served first as a sacrifice to the ancestors and then shared by the living to worship one’s own teeth. Later, this term was used to refer to periodical sumptuous food in a generally plain provision; and during the hard times of the 1960s it became a widely used expression employed by urban and rural people alike. In recent years, as the general standard of living has improved dramatically, far fewer people have had problems with basic food and many actually enjoy frequent banquets; thus, the term *dayaji* has gradually dropped out of common usage, even in the village.

As I have noted above, there were contradictions in food symbols between the Home and surrounding villages: a meal constituted mainly of rice with a plain dish was regarded as the lowest in the local food-value system, yet it was authorised as ‘the

of funds, and the residents, many of whom were extremely thrifty by habit, were tolerant about the waste of rice, might be interpreted as a sign of the need of excessive security.

healthy diet' for aged people in the Home, backup by the authority of scientific discourse and became the routine provision. While meat was preferred locally for its signification of prosperity and richness, it was denied by staff as 'unhealthy' for the elderly. For these differences, *dayaji* may be considered a compromise solution to accommodate an 'unhealthy' meal in a generally 'healthy' provision. As such, I may argue that, though the Home adopts a food criterion different from that of the village, *dayaji* stands as an example to show how it also finds ways to accommodate the village 'culture'. This little compromise seemed to have gained a much larger impact. I had the impression that, for many residents, the climax of a week was not the weekend, but rather the two *dayaji* days, since they often counted days according to the benchmark of the latter. In addition, when residents planned overnight trips, many also sought to avoid the *dayaji* meals so that they did not miss the good food.

I would like to note that the actual difference between *chifan* and *dayaji* was in fact insignificant. They were composed of the same components but with variations in amounts – one additional dish in the latter case. Yet the highlighting, or exaggeration, of otherwise insignificant differences made the food provision *appear* much richer and more dynamic than it actually was.⁵⁹ Such making of difference effectively counter-balances, or downplays, the intolerable plainness in food provision. This reminds us that internal differentiation, articulated or actually existent, might be more necessary to the function of an organisation than the often assumed internal homogeneity. This differentiation allows other orders to permeate into routine institutional life, i.e. *dayaji* as the local in nostalgia, and thus to make differentiation is also to accommodate.

If *dayaji* differs from *chifan* without altering the structural rules of the latter, the third type of meal, *jucan*, I argue, represents an eating practice of qualitative difference. *Jucan*, literally 'gathering to dine', referred to banquet-like meals. During my

⁵⁹ Very often when residents complained about the plainness of ordinary meals (i.e. *chifan*), care workers would placate them by mentioning the forthcoming *dayaji*; and when *dayaji* was provided, its superiority to *chifan* was often excessively uttered, which was felt to have the effect of constructing additional value to it.

fieldwork, *jucan* took place on the three one-week national holidays⁶⁰ and the ‘Double Ninth Festival’ [*chongyangjie*].⁶¹ During the three one-week national holidays, most families got together to celebrate, inevitably involving sumptuous food, which was the same in the Home. The Double Ninth Festival was observed differently. It entailed elaborate celebrations in many old people’s homes, yet much less so by households.

Jucan at the Home was always a feast, during which many dishes were provided; liquor was for free, and it took hours to finish. It often gave hope to residents and mitigated their routinely accumulated dissatisfactions about food. Some residents started to talk about *jucan* months in advance. In stark contrast to dining in ordinary days, *jucan* allowed the residents to share food, free from queuing, and notably to eat in a visually chaotic manner: people toasted each other, making jokes that typically denied formal relations, and sometimes fought fiercely. Locally, similar activities, such as a banquet at a wedding ceremony or on someone’s birthday, were called *chijiu* – literally ‘eat liquor’. I once asked Director Zhu, though ‘*jucan*’ and ‘*chijiu*’ apparently share much in common – with many people coming together to eat, toast and drink, why it was called *jucan* in the Home instead of *chijiu*. Apparently unprepared for my question, he soon came up with an answer: ‘*jucan* sounds more civil [*wenming*].’⁶²

In my view, *jucan*, with its high resonance to national holidays and the subversion of routine dining rules, is reminiscent of the state utopia through a peculiarly inverted

⁶⁰ At the time of my fieldwork, the three long holidays sanctioned by the state, each involving a one-week holiday for all citizens, were Labour Day on 1 May, National Day on 1 October and Spring Festival on the first day of a year according to the agricultural calendar.

⁶¹ A traditional festival in China, observed by all family members climbing mountains and displaying chrysanthemums on the ninth day of the ninth moon (called double yang, because nine is the biggest of the yang (odd) numbers). It is traditionally one of the four festivals for ancestor worship. In June 2012 it was renamed ‘The Aged Festival’ [*laonianjie*] by the National People’s Congress Standing Committee.

⁶² His answer, whether premeditated or not, may reflect the cultural notion of liquor as a sign of incivility, and the value held at the Home to at least *speak* in a ‘civil’ manner. This may suggest that civil discourse was an important aspect of image building, though one understated consequence might be that uncivil behaviour was often articulated in civil discourse.

fashion. On the one hand, it combines the state ideal of using civil discourse and the generous provision of free food - the host being the state, *jucan* is its lavish hospitality; and on the other, it allows the subversion and denial of normal hierarchy through toasting and joking. The main material circulated in *jucan* is liquor, which, as Zhu explained, was a sign of incivility, but was indispensable to the national celebration. Therefore, I argue that *jucan* is the symbolic incorporation of the state utopia by denying state-demanded practices.

In sum, what I observed in the Home was that rice provision defined the basics and the norm of food guarantee; the routine deficiency in dish provision was regularly mitigated by the twice-weekly *dayaji*; and *jucan* presented on national holidays enriched the food dynamics by following opposite rules to routine norms. I may argue that instead of contradicting one another, internal differentiation and the subversion of normal rules are actually indispensable to the maintenance of an institutional life emphasising on safety and conformity.

A Ritual Analysis of Everyday Institutional Dining

Everyday collective dining in the Home is a spectacular scene. The residents are required to have the three meals at fixed times and following strictly prescribed rules. Each meal normally lasts for about one hour, starting from the broadcast of pre-meal music and ending with dining hall cleaning. During this time, all residents are served and finish their meals. In the following, I extract and depict the repetitive elements in this daily practice. I distinguish the two flows of the residents and food, echoing their actual spatial separation in which the movements of the residents typically take place on the left side of the dining hall (see figure 2.1 below), while food is moved on the right. They only converge at the dining hall where the residents consume food. Then, extending Maurice Bloch's (1992) theorisation of ritual, I explicate the relationship between the residents, the workers and the state that is established, reinforced and represented through this practice.

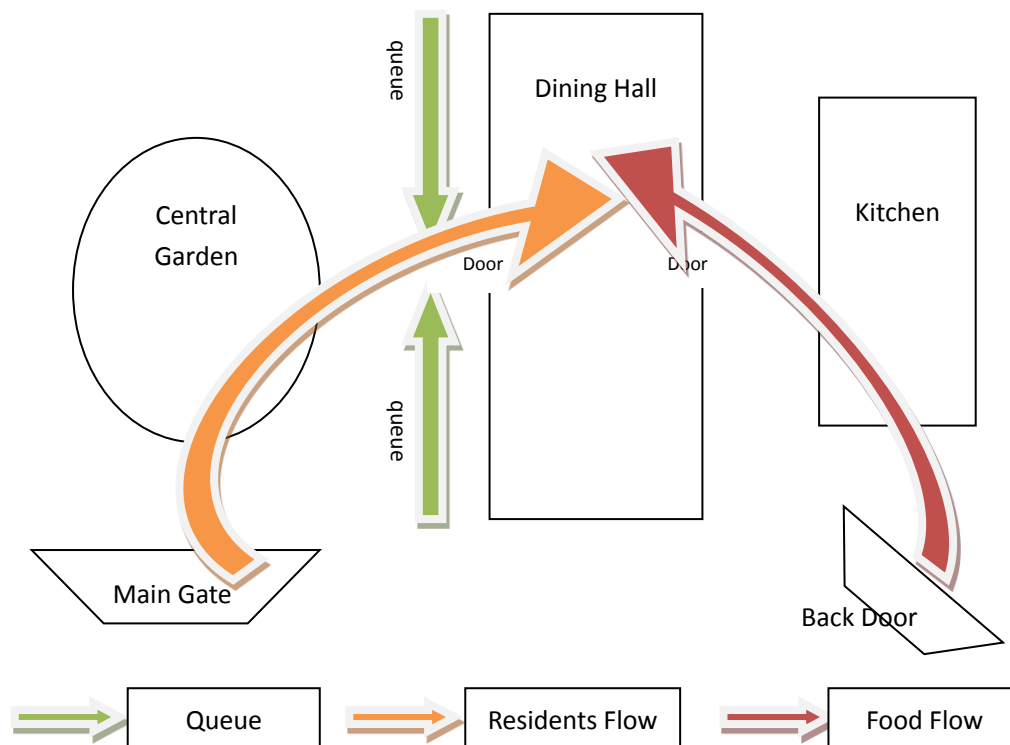


Figure 2.1: The Ritual of Everyday Institutional Dining

The Residents Flow: Queue in Sonorous Pre-Meal Maoist Paeans

Every morning was ushered in by the loud and sonorous broadcast of songs with the theme of the greatness of Chairman Mao, the victory of revolution or love of the country. The same songs would be replayed at 7am, 11am and 5pm (i.e. half an hour before each meal). The music came from a professional hi-fi system installed in the care workers' office, which was the most expensive piece of electronic equipment in the Home. The music was so loud that it carried far into the village; at times it resonated with similar music from the Hope School at Fankou, forming a unique symphony and added dynamics to the otherwise quiet village space. Each time it was played, the music lasted until the majority of residents had been served food.

During the first few weeks of my stay, the pre-meal music sounded irritatingly loud to me. Every time the broadcast started, I would relate it to the fire alarm in the student hall in the UK where I lived – they resemble each other, with the same startling

clamour that erupted. I asked care workers why the music had to be turned up so high, to which the answer was that if the residents did not hear the music, they would not know that it was time for a meal, and particularly those who were wondering around outside may miss the meal unless they heard the music. This practical use of turning the music up loud was also proved by my own observation. On one occasion I was chatting with some residents by the side of the highway about five miles away from the Home. One resident suggested that we go back, as he had heard the music – and it turned out that he was quite right, even though I myself was not aware of anything playing. Assuming that the residents generally should not be better at hearing than myself, their sensitivity to this particular sound was noticeable. The worker's explanation and my own observation reminded me that the strict time set for a meal was enforced, not by resorting to a modern instrument (i.e. a watch or clock that calibrates time, and assumes consciousness of it by everyone), but by broadcasting a particular kind of music in the public space loudly. In this way, the same end, to establish a standard time, was achieved by an alternative means which made sense to the residents.

The choice of pre-meal music was not random. Zhiying once gave me the following explanation:

We are a respect-the-elderly home. It is not good to broadcast 'messy' [*luanqi bazaar*] songs; otherwise, the impact is bad. Last time, we were asked to buy some CDs. Xiaoyang brought back those of popular songs. Our head [*tou'er*] laughed at her and asked her to take them to her own home to play. What an impression it would give if a formal organisation like us broadcast popular songs and let all the villagers hear it! It's a joke!

On this matter, Director Zhu gave the following explanation:

This is normal. To play music before meals not only reminds people of the time but also gives them the 'feeling' [*ganjue*] ... 'Eating should have its

(proper) image/posture’ [*chiyao you chixiang*].⁶³ We can’t play other music; these old people only understand these (Mao) songs. I let care workers buy discs. They can choose whatever they like, but the general direction must be this.

Though queuing is a widely observed social convention in this ‘modern’ world, it is not the case in Hongfan village.⁶⁴ Care workers recounted that, in earlier years, residents were simply a ‘messy crowd’ [*wuhe zhizhong*]: ‘each meal was a battle: it was like opening the barn to dispense free food to poor people in old society. The residents elbowed their way to grab food.’ Director Zhu used the word ‘terror’ [*kongbu*] to describe how he had endeavoured to put queuing into practice three years ago. He considered the image of dining highly important for establishing good order in the Home; and to queue was essential to this image. The Home then stipulated that whether residents queued properly before meals was an important indicator to measure their ‘quality’ [*suzhi*], distinguishing them from their previous identity of ‘low-quality’ villagers. Residents recalled that the queue rule was preached in meetings, that an enormous amount of ‘thought work’ was done with individual residents, and that violence was occasionally employed to punish a disobeyer. Supplementary rules were amended, such as care workers must be present once the music started, and that residents were chosen in turn to help to maintain order.

By the time of my fieldwork, the act of queuing before meals seemed to have become part of the residents’ routine practice, with most joining the line in an orderly fashion once the pre-dining music had started. One female resident remarked:

At first, I refused to queue. Look what kind of people they are, reeking like beggars. I would rather go there late and eat my meal cold than line up with

⁶³ This is a Chinese proverb, emphasising the importance of keeping good image/posture when eating, see Cooper (1986) on the importance of eating image in China.

⁶⁴ As I observed in the village committee office, when villagers waited for something, they were not in queues, but typically in a circular crowd, even though the latter also contained a kind of sequence.

these dirty people and have my appetite destroyed! ... Now? Nothing to say, I'm used to it; just do what you should do. No one can bear to eat cold meals all the time.

'Good queuers' were praised by care workers as '*tinghuade*' (people who listen and obey instructions) and '*dong daolide*' (people who understand rules). The residents also commented on the institutional queue rule, with their views being of two main kinds: the first followed the management's tone, which held that 'this is the rule; no rule no shape. To be a person is to follow rules'; and the second, in which a palpable dislike of the rule was covered up by other considerations, held that 'it (the queue) is a 'minor matter' [*xiaoshi*]. A person should always have 'big matters' [*dashi*] in mind, such as how so many things are guaranteed by the state. Once you have the big matters in mind, you can ignore minor ones.' In both cases, it appeared that the rule of queuing was not only observed by residents, but that it was also to some extent internalised by residents such that they could articulate it in a self-convincing manner.

The phenomenon of 'early queuers', as I name it, may suggest how deeply entrenched the practice had become. These individuals would congregate outside the dining hall up to two hours before the start of a meal, such that some would be spending almost six hours a day waiting for three meals.⁶⁵ To a lesser extent, other residents would place their bowls in a line well in advance and would return in person once the music started. In this case, a bowl represented its owner and their position in the queue, and this implicit rule was not disputed. Thus a rather unique scene could be beheld before each meal: a queue fronted by a dozen or so early comers and followed by a long line of bowls. Also to note, since residents' bowls were issued by the Home, most of them were identical. For a long while I was curious as to how residents could possibly tell their own bowls from those of the others when they were put together in a line. I later found out that residents agreed with each other tacitly to make a minor 'mark' on their respective bowls, such as by placing their chopsticks at a different angle, tagging a

⁶⁵ When there were visitors, these early comers would be warned not to queue on that day; and the edict was always obeyed unquestioningly.

plastic plot on the bowls, leaving their bowl bare if the neighbouring ones were wrapped up, and so on. These minor differences effectively avoided the kind of confusion that I had assumed.

During my fieldwork, the queue rule was rarely violated. But let me depict one such episode to illustrate how individual intrusion into the queue was dealt with, and to show the position and function of different roles in maintaining order. One day at lunchtime, a queue was forming as usual, when suddenly one male resident came and elbowed his way into the middle of the line. Murong, a female care worker, immediately went up to stop him, admonishing him sternly:

What happened? It has been said so many times that one should queue properly. You still don't listen to it? This isn't your own home. If other people are like you – not queuing – none of you would be served!

The violator did not listen to her, nor did he say anything or move. Then Murong grabbed his sleeve and tried to pull him out of the queue. The violator cast off her hands and shouted at her:

This is nothing to do with you! You come here to respect us elderly, not to rule us! What can you do to me if I just stood here today anyway?

Murong stepped back, apparently unsure of what to do next. Other residents in the queue all looked at the two of them and kept quiet. At that moment Director Zhu, whose presence had escaped me up to that point, showed up from somewhere and approached the violator with a serious expression:

You know how many mistakes you have made today? First, it is not right that you don't queue; second, you don't listen to the care worker's words; and third, you even swear at her. If you now move to the end of the line, I will not hold these against you. But if you insist on standing here, believe it or not I can let you have no meal today!

This time the violator did not fight back; he hesitated for a few seconds, and then went to the end of the line without saying a word.

After the incident, I gathered the opinions of the residents, care workers and Director Zhu. Many residents considered that, first of all, it showed the necessity of the care workers' presence in ensuring order. Their comments included the following:

There are always people who 'don't understand the rules' [*budong daoli*]; so there must be someone to ensure any violation is stopped.

We can't intervene. It is 'offensive' [*dezui ren*] (to the violator).

They (care workers) should be there. This is their job.

If they (care workers) were not there, those uncivil people would make it a mess.

It is better that they (care workers) are there. It makes you feel that 'someone is protecting/managing you' [*you ren guan*], and to be protected/managed is better than no one caring about you.

The care workers' comments, though acknowledging the necessity of their role and the responsibility of being present, stressed the indispensability of Director Zhu as the one who actually settled the problem. Their comments included the following:

Most residents are now 'obedient to instruction' [*tinghua*]; only very few are still like this. But it was lucky that the head was there the other day.

Of course, we must be there! If there was a problem, such as that they (the residents) fought each other, and none of us were present, it would be seen as entirely our fault. Who can take this responsibility? It (being absent) is much worse than if you were there but cannot handle the situation, since in that case you could just call your head who will take over the task of actually

dealing with the problem.

And Director Zhu offered the following view of the incident:

Very often I have to deal with problems myself; they (other workers) can't always sort them out on their own. It is not that you can't punish people; the key is that you can only punish someone when other people also think he deserves punishment. This is all about the 'form of working' [*gongzuo fangshi*]. These residents are actually afraid of me, as they know that normally I don't scold them; but once I do, there must be a strong reason, and I can also put words into action. But that incident (in the queue) was minor; we (himself and the violator) actually became friends afterwards. You know, 'no fight, no familiarity' [*buda buxiangshi*].

The Food Flow: Arriving at the Backdoor and Secrete Processing

As the red arrow in Figure 2.1 shows, unlike the residents who moved across the Home from the main gate, food was always directly transported to the back gate. Most rice and vegetables were bought from local villagers, who would normally send their products to the Home. The small open ground beside the kitchen was the place where food was offloaded and weighed. One or two care workers would be in charge of making a record; and a few residents, most often those in the production team, were there to carry them to the kitchen. Meat was seldom bought, with this mostly coming from the Home's own livestock.

Vegetables were consumed quickly and bought frequently. They were stored against the outside wall of the kitchen, while rice and meat were stored inside the kitchen which was normally locked. Residents were not allowed to enter the kitchen for reasons of hygiene. As I will describe in more detail in Chapter Three, the kitchen was a place marked by extreme hygienic sensitivity. Chefs and kitchen workers needed to wear gloves and rubber boots when working. The sign of 'disinfection' was marked at

several places. Each day, large quantities of vegetables were washed in two disinfected basins. The floor was required to be flushed every day. These methods were considered by the management to be necessary to ensure food safety. Meanwhile, food was often over-cooked with little oil, boiling rather than frying, reducing them to a soft, plain stuff that was considered easier for old residents to digest.

The process both of purchasing and processing the food was perceived to be very secret and invisible to most residents, who were suspicious and showed a great deal of dissatisfaction. Many residents considered that the food they ate was not equal to the value of their headcount subsidy, and blamed this on the management's corruption, although no evidence was forthcoming. For example, they complained that the purchased vegetables were all out of season and bought because of the much cheaper price.⁶⁶ Similarly, they complained that they only ate chicken necks after the slaughter of many chickens, and that they never knew the overall financial condition of the Home, which they thought they were entitled to know, as the money was given to them by the state. Not given much information, some residents monitored the size of care workers' bags to see if they were much bigger when workers went off in the evening compared with when they came in the morning; and if they were, residents suspected it was the foodstuff hidden in it. As I describe in Chapter Five, a resident kept peeking at the kitchen window to monitor if workers stole food.

Two Flows Converging in the Dining Hall: Serving and Consuming Food

Food and the residents met at the front door of the dining hall where meals were served, which marked the end of the bureaucratic processing of the welfare food. At mealtimes, the workers would move cooked food in flat trolleys from the kitchen through to the front door of the dining hall. Boiled rice was divided between many flat

⁶⁶ Residents made jokes on the bad quality of vegetables, such as 'old people eat old vegetables'. They suspected that some vegetables were bought from local cadres, for which they called these vegetables '*guancai*', literally official vegetables. There was an implicit irony in this: while cadres enjoyed banquets known as 'official meals', the residents took solace in these food parodied 'official vegetables'.

serving trays, while the vegetable dish was put in a large, deep metal drum. These facilities were then loaded down at both sides inside the door. Shortly after the pre-meal music started, the door would be opened and the workers started to serve food one by one. There were normally two workers at one serving point. Each holding a large spoon with a long handle, one served rice and the other the side dish. Residents handed their bowls to the servers and received one spoonful from each server. The repetitive motion of doling out the food generally held the attention of the residents as they moved up the queue.

As in the queue, most of the time nothing unusual would happen at the serving point, though minor conflicts occasionally erupted. Unevenness in food dispensing was the main problem, even though any actual disparity was minor.⁶⁷ The following ethnographic vignette represents the sort of problem that arose at this stage. Once, a resident, after being served, started to grumble, ‘What bullshit! A spoonful is a spoonful! Why do you have to shake off some of it and give me the rest? He (pointing to another resident) has one more spoon!’ Yimei, the care worker on duty, did not respond, so the resident refused to move on. Then Yimei became impatient. ‘Who doesn’t know you?’ she said, ‘how much can you eat? You don’t need that much, why do you ask for more? Move along; other people are waiting.’ The resident responded angrily, ‘How do you know how much I want to eat today? You aren’t a worm in my belly!’ Yimei stopped fighting back and continued to serve the other residents in the queue. The disgruntled man seemed to have no choice but to leave the serving point. He continued to complain after he had sat down. Those sitting near him, though they did not seem to share his vexation, nevertheless murmured conciliations:

Suanle, suanle (let it go). ‘Don’t bother’ [*bie jijiao*]! When one gets old, one doesn’t need to eat that much. If it’s not enough, you can go up and ask for more.

⁶⁷ If the dish was fried vegetables with meat, a typical complaint by diners was ‘why is there more meat in his spoon, when it’s all vegetables in mine?’ And if the dish was vegetable soup, a standard complaint was ‘why is it all water in my spoon while his has more substantial stuff?’.

Who can guarantee that each spoonful has the same stuff? If they asked you to do it, could you make sure of this? We should understand each other. Don't bother too much about minor things. *Suanle*.

The threat of physical punishment was also in place, particularly at the beginning when it was necessary to establish the queuing and food-serving systems from near chaos. A few residents had been selected as 'plain-clothes security guards' [*bianyi bao'an*] for this purpose.⁶⁸ What they did was hanging around the serving points at meal times, and if anyone did not queue properly, tried to make trouble or offended the care workers, they were entitled to take necessary action. Though actual physical punishment was rare, the presence of these guards and their occasional use of violence gave rise to a general atmosphere of fear and tension, which effectively reined in any would-be troublemakers.

Director Zhu occasionally served food himself, for example at the Spring Festival, with music playing as usual while the queue formed. When residents reached the serving point and saw that it was Director Zhu who was serving, many were quick to express their approval:

Oh, look, our leader *himself* [*qinzi*] serves us today! It is rare, rare [*nande*]!

The festival is really different from ordinary days!

Director Zhu focused on the repetitive movement of doling out one spoonful after another without saying anything. The atmosphere was cheerful. For once, the residents' attention seemed to be drawn to the person serving rather than the food being served. Though the food did not appear to be in any way different from that provided on ordinary days, no one complained about this, nor did anyone seem to pay great attention to the size of their serving compared to others. Even as an outsider, affected by this atmosphere, I also sensed that it was out of place to make any

⁶⁸ More on resident guards is in Chapter Seven.

complaint in that situation.

The pre-meal music normally stopped once everyone in the queue had been served. Except for a few exceptions, residents were expected to finish their food *in* the dining hall,⁶⁹ which was on the ground floor of Building V. There was enough space to accommodate all residents eating their meals together. The hall was locked outside mealtimes. Apart from some square pillars and white colour rectangular lunch counters with blue chairs fixed to the ground in neat rows, there was no other furniture or decoration in the hall, thus enabling the whole space to be visible from any point within it.

Compared to the frantic activity in the run-up to mealtimes, the actual dining experience was much quieter and briefer. Three rules were emphasised on eating: quietness – not to talk too much; rapidness – to eat fast; and cleanliness – not to make the table filthy. These were also asserted in order to present a good dining image.⁷⁰ There was no formal seating plan, and residents were free to sit wherever they wished. Neither rice nor the accompanying dish were shared; most residents had a bigger bowl for rice and a smaller one for the dish; and the rice bowl was always placed closer to the diner, with the dish bowl behind it. When the dish was a soup, many diners would mix it with the rice and then swallow them together without much chewing. Instead of chatting with others, most diners concentrated on their food and finished quickly, which is very unlike many other contexts in rural China where dining is viewed as an opportunity to socialise.

This was not to say that residents did not socialise or communicate with each other; it was simply the case that dining was not the occasion to do so. Though the hall accommodated several hundred people at each mealtime, once the music stopped it became very quiet, nowhere near the amount of noise such a large gathering of people

⁶⁹ This includes those with special duties, such as tending livestock, and those with physical difficulties.

⁷⁰ 'A good image' included that 'not to eat' looked better than 'to eat'; 'to eat faster' looked better than 'to eat slower'; and 'not to chew' looked better than 'to chew'.

would be expected to make. The care workers remained in the hall until all the diners had finished their food. They did not eat with the residents. Sometimes a care worker would stand in the middle of the hall, and with raised voice make an announcement, giving instructions like ‘when eating, please do not talk too much’, ‘when you have finished eating, make sure you clean your piece of table and wash your bowls before going back’, or else to count the number of residents. Mealtimes ended with all diners washing their own bowls at a row of sinks behind the hall and then exiting the room through the same door they came in. Once all the residents had left, the hall would receive a quick clean from the hygiene team, composed of the residents whose turn it was, before being locked up until the next meal.

Analysis

Based on Maurice Bloch’s (1992) theorisation of ritual processes, I would argue for an extension of the prey-hunter model to explain why an eating practice, instead of just bringing the proclaimed result of nourishing the diners’ bodies and producing healthy individuals, actually creates and reinforces the residents’ dependency on welfare provision.⁷¹

First, looking at the residents, before having a meal, they are required to queue against the background music of Maoist paeans. It demands a great deal of thought work as well as physical violence in order to turn the WuBao residents into proper queuers, since to queue is not a locally familiar practice. At this stage, the Maoist paeans provide a reminder that the communist state is the food giver.⁷² The queue practice

⁷¹ For other expositions on the effect of ritual on institutional life, see e.g. Meyer&Scott 1983; Friedland&Alford 1991; Bell 1992; Suchman 1995. Dacin, Munir & Tracey (2010), based on a qualitative study of formal dining in Cambridge, argue that ritual is important for institutional maintenance and the dining rituals in a Cambridge student hall contribute to the maintenance of the British class system.

⁷² Saying a prayer before meals is a common practice in many religions; though this differs in form, it nonetheless confers a similar sense of expressing appreciation to the one, a God, a deity or a plant for the provision of food (Curran 1989; Butash 2007). Pre-meal grace is also associated with the generation of a certain collective spirit, such as the case in military barracks, where soldiers must sing certain songs when marching to the dining hall. In these scenarios, eating indebts the diner to the food giver, and pre-meal exercise functions to pay back the debt by conveying a sense of dependence and appreciation.

effectively eliminates the ‘native vitality’ of the residents, which might otherwise drive them not to queue (as described by workers, they were like a ‘messy crowd’ who spontaneously snatch food), and at the same time increases their hunger in the process of queuing – in particular the ‘early queuers’. In my view, this stage can be likened to a ritual practice of depriving the native vitality of participants and sending them elsewhere. In this case, this ‘elsewhere’ is the dining hall, as the only place where a meal is allowed to happen. By the time the residents reach the serving point, they have already become what I call ‘weak people’.

Second, looking at the food the residents are given, the purchase of food is an issue that provokes complaints and suspicion in the residents. The main concern is that the value of the food they eat is less than what the state has given them. In other words, residents suspect that the budget allocated to buy their food is being secretly absorbed elsewhere in the enclosed process of food purchase; and as a result, the quantity and quality of the food are reduced. Furthermore, in the food-processing stage, we see a similar situation of ‘undermining’. This is made firstly by the emphasis given to disinfection availed mainly through separation of people from food – such as the use of gloves and boots, and banning other people from entering, which in effect reduces the ‘heat and warmth’ in cooking normally seen in households. It is secondly made by the emphasis given to over-cooking so as to make food particularly soft and plain, which also has the effect of ‘weakening’ the food more than normal cooking would. Thirdly, the subtle weighing in the action of doling out food to each diner controls the amount in a way that some get less. In all these processes, what we see is the weakening of food. In other words, the state welfare of providing food is filtered through the bureaucratic processes in a way that at the point when food meets its clients, it has become ‘weak food’.⁷³

⁷³ Recent works on food in China are also concerned with its social consequence. They take it primarily as the carrier through which hegemonic ideologies, from the state and the global, are mediated and transmitted into ordinary people’s minds (Mintz 1997 on the influence of modernity in East Asia through the increasing consumption of McDonalds; Watson 1997; Jing 2000; Farquhar 2002). Common in them, I argue, is that the food they study can be seen as ‘strong food’.

Third, in the dining hall we see the meeting of ‘weak people’ with ‘weak food’. I argue that the dining hall is absolutely an ‘other place’, which is otherwise locked and open only for dining. In this connection, the local proverb that says ‘eating is the heaven’ may be well evoked – the dining hall is a place ‘elsewhere’, where a ‘heaven-like’ human activity takes place. It is only in this designated space that, like those ritual scenarios described in ‘Prey into Hunter’, external vitality, the state welfare food is consumed by ritual participants: the residents. After each meal, the residents become the other to the original self in the sense that their life, maintained by the provision of new vitality through these meals, is now deemed to have been given by the state, which replaces any previous givers – whether their family, kin, villages or themselves. Dining is thus a frail moment for the residents during which they have already been deprived of their native vitality, but have not yet gained a new one. No wonder it was often at this occasion that care workers could become especially powerful, through loudly making announcements and issuing instructions.

The crucial point is that the external vitality – in this case the welfare food – is ‘weak food’. By consuming it, the residents are in a daily repetitive process of being deprived of native vitality and then consuming external but weak vitality. As a result, they are weakened in the same process of bodily nourishment through institutional eating; and the engendered weakness, in turn, increases their dependency on the food provider – their new life giver, the state.

There are three additional points to add to this main argument. The first point is on the queue, which contributes to the visualisation of an intended image and at the same time disciplines WuBao-Hu into the wanted ‘home people’. Queuing as a widely spread social phenomenon is interpreted in anthropological literature in relation to the politics of time – for example, with social inequality disguised by the assumed assumption that queuing is the rule for fair distribution of time (Mann 1969; Bourdieu 1977, 1998; Scott & Kerkvliet 1977; Ortner 2006; Auyero 2011). The ethnography provided here, though not disproving this temporal aspect, reminds us of two other

functions of the queue. Firstly, it puts the queuers in a situation of a zero-sum game. Secondly, it is the practice through which institutions enact and reinforce the intended order and relational positions of people.

Taking the incidence of violating the queue rule as an example, we see that by refusing to queue, the violator marks himself out as different from other queuers. This difference immediately invokes the rule of queuing; in other words, an incident starts from a difference emerging from assumed sameness. Other queuers, as followers of the rule, are seen to benefit from adherence and thus logically rendered victim of any violation of the rule, which should explain why, at the moment of the incident, though keeping quiet, they still expect someone to intervene in it. When the violator breaches the rule, he should either benefit from his violation at the cost of the other residents, or else should be punished for it. Putting their situations together, the rules surrounding queuing actually put residents in a dilemma: if any one of them breaches the rule, his action would be of detriment to all his peers; yet if no one disobeys the rules, all residents are seen as benefiting from doing so, but also becoming submitted to the rule.

Meanwhile, it also illustrates the roles of care workers and the director in disciplining the residents – depriving them of their native vitality. Murong is not herself the victim of the violation, but she is the one to monitor the enforcement of the rule; and thus it is her, instead of the residents, who comes forward to stop the violator. What she does is attempt to preach to the violator the need for queuing. But this proves insufficient to bring order to proceedings: the violator still refuses to queue. Then Director Zhu steps on stage – a seemingly indispensable and legitimate interference after Murong's defeat. He levels further accusations at the violator, listing his supposed mistakes. His tone is not like that of Murong, but notably more arbitrary, resolute and strong. He is the one person who can seriously punish the violator irrespective of the institutional rules (i.e. improvising forms of punishment, such as to threaten or to forbid him to eat for the whole day).

Though Director Zhu's threat towards the violator may be assumed to be arbitrary, it is not felt so much so in that context. In my view, there are a series of pre-existing assumptions that make his resolution seem to gain a great deal of situational legitimacy. This includes the implicit righteousness of obeying the institutional rule of queuing, listening to the care worker's interference, and the common benefit gained from queuing. With these presumptions in place, instead of being arbitrary Zhu's interference is felt to be reasonable. Thus the whole incidence does little more than reinforce what the institution has prescribed as the 'right' thing is right, and wrong is wrong.

The second point is about the dubious position of staff, including directors and workers, as both serving and controlling, and residents as both being disciplined and served. This is evident in two senses. Firstly, it is shown in the structural reversals seen in the comparison between queuing and serving food. In the queuing stage, residents are rendered into the position of being disciplined; the care workers watch over them to make sure everyone obeys the rule, while the director's role is to provide ultimate punishment when the care worker fails to enforce the rules. As individual queuers, residents are related to each other in the sense that any breach of the rules has a detrimental effect on the others. These relative positions are magically reversed at the next stage of serving food, in which residents become the ones who are served as diners, while care workers become the ones who provide service. Meanwhile, there is also an inversion of the monitoring gaze. As described above, it is now the residents who inspect the conduct of the care workers, and not vice versa.

Secondly, though at this stage care workers are visibly serving the resident, this position is ambiguous since they still control the actual distribution of food.⁷⁴ This dubious role is constantly disclosed by some residents, illustrated by the disgruntled man described above. The reaction of care workers in this situation is often silence or some kind of justification which may let the quarrel continue. Such a verbal fight

⁷⁴ For detailed analysis on how serving food can be a key source of power, see e.g. Johnson 1985; Whelan 2001.

often does not enhance service. In my view, such interaction between care worker and resident at the food-serving point reflects the intertwined relative positions between them: care workers are supposed to *serve* residents while they also *control* the distribution of goods; and residents are served without being able to steer the service. Having said that, the fact that residents do dispute the care workers' role, forcing the latter to justify their behaviour, may also indicate the limit of the care workers' position as 'controller' in this situation.

Similarly, Director Zhu is turned from an abusive punisher to a warmth provider when he himself serves the residents by doling food. The fact that many residents applaud Zhu's service on the Spring Festival suggests that the actual effect of his presence on that day goes beyond the mere need to maintain food service. I may interpret that his presence is first of all regarded to be a personal sacrifice, because he is not celebrating the most important holiday with his family, though he is entitled to so. Furthermore, the residents' compliments also convey a sense of honour at being served by Director Zhu: a sign of actually being respected. These non-material aspects of Zhu's service on national holidays endows an otherwise 'cold' institutional service with human qualities, and in turn invokes personal sentiments, such as the appreciation of the leader's consideration and warmth, and of being respected. This human stuff strongly counter-balances the deficiencies in the material aspects of the food service, i.e. plain vegetable soup as a normal source of complaint, and thus the dissolution of normally existing dissatisfaction.

The third point is about the specific mechanism that practically eases the great deal of tension generated in the process of establishing a severe dining order, which, I argue, is released by the frequent use of the phrase '*suanle*' (let it go). Indeed, '*suanle*' is used in many situations that are likely to cause direct conflict, such as when residents thought they were unfairly treated, when they were threatened with violence, or when they had to submit to rules that they did not like. There are also related expressions that convey similar implications to *suanle*, such as 'focus on big matters and not to

bother about minor ones’ – meaning let small nuisances go. The discourse of ‘*suanle*’ proves to be very effective in dousing the flames; and in fact this term is used not only by complainants and other residents, but also by the staff in corresponding situations.

In English, close expressions to *suanle* include ‘don’t make a fuss’, ‘let it go’ and ‘forget it’. They are close – but not identical – to *suanle*, because I sense that when the local people say *suanle*, they do not just convey straightforward concession but also a conviction about the righteousness of ‘not doing it’. For example, when residents recounted tales of past disputes or strict enforcements of the rules regarding dining, the tone was not all about resentment, fear or anger. Instead, they always remembered to express some degree of understanding, among which the following comment made by a resident is but an illustration:

Yet despite these, if it was not through those terrible times, it would not be possible for you to see such good order today... now it is much better than those times; there is no beating anymore.

If *suanle* reflects a way through which the residents convince themselves to submit to institutional discipline, there are also other activities initiated by the residents to mitigate the impact of the double-edged sword-like institutional dining. These include storing food in a private cupboard, going to a restaurant and cooking for oneself. Common in these activities is that they all had to be done more or less invisibly. In the following, I describe the ‘wild stove’ phenomenon and compare it with institutional dining.

Leakages: ‘Wild Stoves’ [*ye zao*]

In the past, residents were allowed to cook for themselves using the power supply in their dorms. But this right was suspended after a few cases of ‘improper’ use of the electric outlet. Since safety was unquestionably the main priority for the Home’s management, any potential threat to it should be eradicated. Many residents were

unhappy about the ban on using electrical appliances in their rooms, but they seemed unable to dispute the logic (i.e. risk prevention) of the ruling. Nevertheless, residents sought other ways to fulfil their appetite in their eating arrangements. Consequently, on a low ridge between two vegetable fields in front of the Home, there emerged a small area of ground where signs of cooking activity were often found. These signs were the legacy of *yezao*, literally ‘wild stove’, a term used by the residents and workers alike. Things that were cooked here mainly fell into two categories: meat and herbal medicine. The emergence of the continuous use of wild stoves served as evidence of the externality of the ban on power in dorms and the insufficiency of the food provided in the hall – i.e. residents’ endeavours to seek alternative modes of eating.

In comparison to the grand spectacle of several hundred residents eating together in the dining hall, wild stoves were visibly much less significant. The word *ye* (wild) in Chinese is an antonym of *jia* (home/domestic). The pair of opposites of *ye* and *jia* implies a hierarchy in which *ye* (wild) is inferior to *jia* (domestic). The wild stoves reminded me of the popular western recreational activity of picnicking. The picnic seems to satisfy people’s nostalgia for nature, which is increasingly set apart from them by modernity. To go for a picnic is considered more a quaint excursion than a serious adventure; people load their cars with all kinds of well-designed equipment and drive to a piece of reserved forest to enjoy nature. But nostalgia for nature was something too luxurious and too novel for the Home residents to think of; to them, nature meant hardship. In my observation, it was hunger and a sense to seek survival that motivated them to set up wild stoves despite many difficulties.

It was strenuous to set up a wild stove: one had to dig a hole in the soil (sometimes with one’s hands and sometimes with bricks), then found more bricks to build a foundation and collected enough wood fuel for several hours’ cooking. One also had to transport foodstuffs from one’s room to the site of the stove, and then spent hours either squatting on the ground or bending down to tend the fire – that I discovered

upon trying to be utterly uncomfortable postures. Meanwhile, many residents considered that ‘it (a wild stove) does not look good’ and that ‘it is not allowed; if you use one, it looks as if you are a thief or beggar’. These might partly explain why the number of residents using wild stoves was actually fairly small – averaging about twenty residents each day, though they couldn’t explain why these wild stoves never disappeared.

The Home management tried to stop the residents from setting up wild stoves on the grounds that they did not ‘look good’ and ‘affected image’; and they made this opinion clear to the residents. At times, the management would instruct Duck, a male care worker, to destroy the stoves, and he would in turn instruct some residents to do so. Normally, these enforcers would do this when no one was using the stoves in order to avoid a confrontation. At the same time, Duck would warn the users verbally. But none of these efforts by the management seemed to work effectively: every time the stoves were flattened, they would be rebuilt within a few hours. Thus the cycle of ‘elimination and reestablishment’ went on and on. The timing of the stoves’ destruction was uncertain and irregular, since it was often instantly pushed by oral instruction from the directors and related to whether there were outsiders coming to visit. Yet the reconstruction of the stoves remained constant; no matter when the stoves were destroyed, after one or two days they would invariably reappear.

Yet on the other hand, many care workers felt that as long as there was no formal inspection from above, there was no need to take these wild stoves so seriously. Murong once commented: ‘they (stove users) are pitiful, so why not just leave it, pretending we haven’t seen it... anyway, there are not many people using it, so it’s not a big matter.’ Zhiying said: ‘sometimes we just ‘open one eye and close one eye’ [*zhengzhiyan bizhiyan*]. They are not using any electricity, nor are they stealing; they’d like to cook, let them cook.’ The management did not formulate any concrete measures to punish those who set up a wild stove; and residents continued to do it. In this way, the matter fell into the so-called ‘grey zone’, and became something of a

'lajuzhan' (seesaw battle).

I talked with some users about wild stoves and their battle with the management. Their responses included the following:

Chairman Mao instructed us: 'When enemies come, I run away; and when they recede, I return'. No matter what they say or do, I neither hear nor see anything; I only know that I need to use the stove.

I am an indomitable little grass. Wild fire cannot eliminate me; once there is spring wind, I prosper.

Do it yourself, you get affluent food and clothes.

The unchanged is the best weapon to changes.

I was very struck by these proverbs and poets quoted by these residents to describe their attitudes to using the stove and to dealing with the management, particularly because these residents were often sneered at for being illiterate, and their heroic rhetoric was often uttered in situations when they were bending down to cook in a windy field.

In my view, the phenomenon of the wild stoves, as one alternative food practice, suggests that the institutional dining that prioritises image and safety is often contradictory to the individual need of the residents. At the juncture of contradicting agendas, the new reality of the wild stove emerges. If the institutional dining is presided over by the management, and the residents participate passively, then, in this new reality, it becomes the residents who take the initiative, and the counter-action is that taken by the management in destroying stoves passively. Consequently, a set of rules are reversed: no one queues, the time to do it is irregular, meat and herbal medicine are the most often cooked stuff, and one has to do it all by oneself. Moreover, wild stove users are determined to do so, suggested by the idiom

‘unchanged is the best weapon to changes’, while the attitudes of the management appear vague and noncommittal. Such oppositions confronting the wild stove to institutional dining makes it an effective means to counter-balance the institution’s effect of making the residents dependent. Furthermore, the residents’ success in this strategy mitigates their discomfort in institutional dining, and thus has the actual effect of reducing their potential rebellions. Therefore, by seemingly subverting the institutional rules, wild stoves are actually supplementary to the maintaining of the overall stability of the institution. No wonder the management sometimes keeps ‘one eye closed’, in particular when there are no further external pressures.

Conclusion

Food provision is the most highlighted item among the five guarantees. As the first shown object, the diet board, hanging inside, occupies the front stage for the management, but is seen as being the outside in the eyes of the residents. It represents the institution’s food conditions with its more-or-less quality, connects the outside visitors to the inside world and also disconnects them. I argue that it represents the Home as a heterotopian institution.

The three types of meal reflect how different orders are accommodated. *Chifan*, as the term for routine meal emphasises rice provision. And the local food pattern that values meat is reflected by weekly *dayaji*, which differs from routine meal yet without altering its dining rules. *Jucan* resonates with the national holidays and subverts the routine with a set of reversed dining etiquette and the inclusion of drinking. It is the practice in which a utopian state is called upon.

The everyday activity of institutional dining repeats the same pattern of practice. With strictly defined rules, I have likened it to a ritual process particular to this state institution. It provides a rich ethnographic foundation for showing how eating of this type creates the residents’ dependency to the state, and how discipline is enforced in exactly the same process of welfare provision. Meanwhile, as with the diet board, the

dining hall is the Home in miniature: it is a heterotopia where institutional dining with some accommodation to village meal categories takes place. As with their stereotypically indifference to the diet board, the residents avoid the dining hall when consuming alternative food.

If institutional dining others the Home from its surroundings – the village – the residents' efforts to set up wild stoves mirror the institutional othering by othering themselves from the institutional arrangement. In contrast to the diet board, the wild stoves, emerging outside the Home, are considered the back stage by the management, but are the intimate realities of the residents. Various alternative ways of dining exist with which the residents mitigate the impact of institutional dining on them, but which are also tolerated by the management with certain condition. Thus, instead of endangering or sabotaging the institutional order, these alternative endeavours largely supplement it, become constitutive to the institutional order and contribute to the maintenance of the institution's overall equilibrium.

Chapter Three

‘Simply Hide It’ and Emptiness

– On Spatial Re-Planning and Hygiene Work

My attention was drawn to the local effort given to hygiene soon after I started my fieldwork.⁷⁵ The first impression I was left with regarding the highly industrialised village of Dongshan was one of overwhelming emptiness – which, to them, was evidence of having done excellent hygiene work. I was not allowed to enter factories and only permitted to do my research in public areas or with households. Since most households were empty during the daytime – working hours were from 6.30am to 7.00pm – I spent much time wandering around by myself in public areas. Constantly overwhelmed by the desperate feeling of an absence of people around me, I watched cargo trucks and expensive cars passing by, wondering why they did not leave even a cloud of dust behind. Increasingly feeling it was hopeless to expect to do the kind of fieldwork that I wished, I diverted my attention to seize upon whatever tiny happenings I could find in the habitat itself. Amidst the pervasive emptiness, the people whom I could possibly meet were those involved in the work of hygiene. These people included not only cleaners who swept and scrubbed the street, clipped the hedges of the green belt, sprayed pesticide onto trees, cleaned exterior walls, re-painted advertisement boards and collected rubbish, but also those who did household cleaning, were responsible for checking the quality of others’ work, or who were, in turn, in charge of checking the work of these hygiene supervisors.

The domestic space of households, as well as of the old people’s home in that village, was also open to everyday hygiene inspection every morning starting from 7.00am. The hygiene criteria were elaborate. For ordinary households, they included whether there was dust on the floor, if bins had been emptied and objects arranged neatly;

⁷⁵ By this, I refer to the previous villages that I had been to before I chose the Home as the main site. Dongshan village, located in Shandong province, has gained great economic success, which was then boosted by a variety of manufacturing industries owned by the village authority.

while in the old people's home, they included how necessary items should be displayed, such as the way bedding was arranged and whether there were any unnecessary objects left in the room. Often, when the inspection took place, there was very little in the way of verbal exchange on the topic of hygiene itself during the brief encounter between inspector and inspected, though courtesies or views on other matters might be exchanged. The inspection was carried out rather tacitly, with only the inspector's eyes quickly taking in every corner of the room and discreet marks made on her notebook. The result of the daily check would only be revealed to householders in the next month's pay check to one of the adult sons of the elderly, in the form of the presence or absence of a fine.

The general conditions of the Home were rather different from this industrial village, both in its economic circumstance and relation to the state. However, the two places were similar in the extraordinary amount of attention given to hygiene, its definition and how it is implicated with spatial layout.⁷⁶ In the Home, hygiene was also referred to as 'work', namely, 'hygiene work' [*weisheng gongzuo*]. Hygiene work was taken very seriously by the Home management, with work teams composed of residents formed to be specifically in charge of this. All residents and staff were involved in the work in one way or another; and the whole spatial complex from the six-meter high gate roof to every corner of the toilet stalls was the subject of hygiene work.

The particular way that 'hygiene' is defined, how it implicates space and the mechanisms that maintain this reality are the issues addressed in this chapter. The way in which the underlying structure of a given society is represented by the hygienic status that objects are endowed with has been discussed in a number of classic anthropological studies (Douglas 1966; Levi-Strauss 1979). Louis Dumont (1970, pp.47 & 60) suggests that the purity and impurity distinction is a unifying rule underlying the successive approximation of social hierarchy. To him, hygiene is the secular counterpart to religious purity, with the latter being a higher level of rule

⁷⁶ Similar phenomena were also found in other old people's homes, officially assessed as 'good', which I visited during my fieldwork.

corresponding to civilisational order. In his convincing account rebutting the individualist West as a universal value, Dumont utilises, rather than denies, the binaries of purity and impurity to articulate the inherent inclusiveness in hierarchical India and other traditional structures of society. Mary Douglas' discussion on cleanliness suggests that the hygienic status of an object is defined in accordance with how the stability and continuity of a society is maintained: that is, the dominant ideology of a society, be it witchcraft or modern hygienics; and that hygiene is to defilement is as order is to disorder, and continuity to suspension. Most influential in her conceptualisation is the argument that 'dirt is matter out of place' (Douglas 1966, p.36), which connects hygiene directly to cosmological spatial categorisation. I may add that this conceptualisation has also assumed the existence of a singular order with which all things are identified; and accordingly, those that do not fit it find no other orders to authorise, which are then rendered as dirt.

Later works take visibility to be central to modern state governance. Don Handelman (1990) proposes that visual forms are powerful techniques through which authoritarian forms of government legitimise, display and reinforce their authority. James Scott (1998) pinpoints the cause of failure of many state-led projects as the peculiarly simplified way that a 'state' wants its subjects to be seen. Studies in a number of social science disciplines on post-socialist societies take 'space' as the object to collect empirical evidence to explain the poor fit between transition paradigms and post-socialist realities (Verdery 1996; Platz 2000; Ferguson 1999; Wedel 2001; Camaroffs 2000). Mathijs Pelkmans (2003), in his ethnographic study of a kindergarten in Ajoria, highlights the phenomenon that these new buildings were full of furniture but devoid of people to use them – a kind of emptiness – and expounds that the discrepancy between the unchallenged dream of modernity and the opacity of social reality reconfigures space in a way that emptiness becomes the inverted visual embodiment of the dissonance between a reality of internal continuity and a modern discourse of imagination. Similarly caught by the phenomenon of emptiness, yet with a different definition, I will return to the discussion of these

illuminating works in the conclusion of this chapter.

In what follows I present the relevant ethnography. In the first section I outline the spatial specificities of Fankou – the site of the village Centralisation Project – compare with those of the Home, and point out that they display a high degree of similarity. I then turn to describe some visually insignificant but intimate everyday experiences of the locals that reflect a great deal of spatial ambiguity engendered by the radical spatial reconfiguration. The ethnographies show that hygiene work is defined to keep certain spaces empty, and how emptiness is maintained. In the last section, I present a range of cases to show that hygiene work is actually viewed similarly by both residents and management. I conclude by expounding the two phenomena presented: namely, emptiness and resemblance.

Resemblance in Spatial Layout of the Centralisation Project vis-à-vis the Home

Recalling the ‘Central Village Construction Experiment Project’ (the Centralisation Project) introduced in Chapter One, during my fieldwork period a large area of residential blocks was under construction in the extended area of Fankou about five minutes’ walk from the Home. Most construction had been completed but the flats were still empty.⁷⁷ In my view, there were some features of these new constructions that were also easily identified in the Home.

The first is a radical break from previous spatial classification. The new plan preferred concentration to dispersion. This was most evident in the frequent use of the word ‘central’ [*zhongxin*]. The Home was ‘central’ and the prospective village in construction was also a ‘central’ one. Since ‘central’ was articulated in the official discourse of modernisation or urbanisation, its opposite, decentralisation, was then logically understood as backwardness. Centralisation also accompanied some related attributes. In comparison to the stereotypical rural household, these new residences

⁷⁷ Villagers explained this to be largely due to the difficulty in getting consensus between the villagers and sellers on payments.

were built much higher: all had four floors, laid out in square and neat rows rather than crowded together roughly in circles. The construction materials were much more ‘hardened’ – i.e. mainly using cement instead of clay and bricks. Meanwhile, the rehousing saw an arbitrary recomposition of people: previous neighbours and actual residential patterns were rendered irrelevant, since the new purchase spoke only of square metres and the money involved.

The second is the absolute priority given to the exterior rather than interior. These new dwellings had uniformly brilliant roofs and the exterior walls were painted bright white – remarkably lighter than the old houses – while the interiors were left unplastered. A similar difference could be seen with the refurbishment of the roadside households at Fankou, which were also the target of exterior renovation fully subsidised by the government. Their exteriors were all painted the same colour, and the buildings modified to fit into the same architectural style: adding to each an impressive new roof and generally making them look brand new and clean, as well as ‘cultural’. But all the work was restricted to the outside of the houses.

The third is the emphasis on orderliness and conformity. This was communicated by the similar outlook of all dwellings, the even spatial distribution, neat rows and the unified urban-style design of their exteriors and interiors. It was also seen in the polished technical plans used in promoting the flats, the professional architectural drawings and complicated modes of flat selection and payment. The uniform rhetoric used by the sales team and the seemingly certain promises of future job opportunities all conveyed the message of orderliness. In addition, these new residential establishments featured a well-controlled and unified temporal pace, evident in the discourse of the ‘construction phases’ [*jianzhu qi*] associated with specific time lines; flats built during different phases were subject to different policies.⁷⁸

Having said this, one might ask how the Home – a habitat mainly of hundreds of poor

⁷⁸ This was common to all urban residential construction.

and elderly bachelors – fits with the otherwise deliberate ‘beauty’ of the landscape. In my observation these characteristics of the future residential buildings actually have a striking resemblance to the architecture of the Home, to which I will now turn.

The Spatial Layout of the Home

Among the advantages that the residents recounted to me of living in the Home compared to their old house, one of the most frequently mentioned was the ‘hardware’ of the Home: namely, the living conditions improved by the housing facility alone. Typical of these comments were: ‘the ground is different, it does not spoil my shoes’; and ‘the wall is much whiter; the room is much brighter’. Residents also liked to make jokes about these improvements. Some improvised that the Home was like the ‘White House’ [*baigong*] of Hongfan village, and this gave birth to the nickname of the Home.

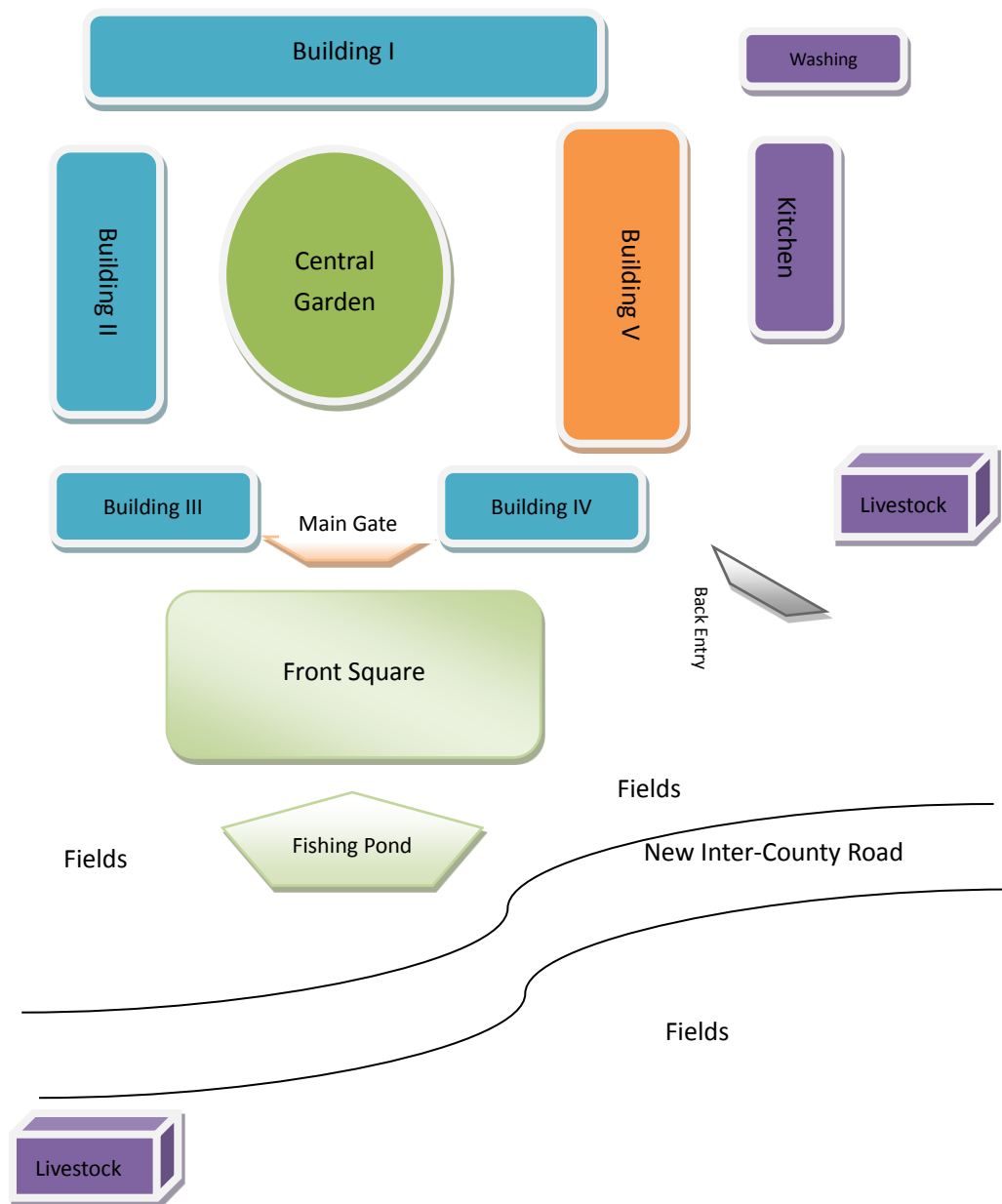


Figure 3.1: The Spatial Layout of the Home

The exterior of the Home was characterised by sophistication and magnificence. Elaborate decoration on outside walls was not considered untidy or messy, but an expression of honour and pride. In the winter of 2010, there was a major renovation project in the Home, replacing the original white mortar of the outside walls with pink ceramic tiles. This cosmetic project resulted from the director’s perception that the white mortar wall looked ‘untidy’ and was less brilliant than nearby new buildings,

which were covered by ceramic tiles indicating a better quality. He then worked arduously, and eventually succeeded in lobbying for more than one million yuan in sponsorship for the project from the provincial Department. The renovation lasted for three months, during which time the Home was really in a mess in my view. The existing wall surface had to be chipped off before new tiles could be attached, and in the process flying debris fell everywhere which was very dangerous for people passing under it. Yet, for the sake of exterior magnificence, all these problems were considered of secondary importance. The internal disorder, which would otherwise have been thought intolerable, was articulated by the management as ‘a temporary sacrifice for long term gain’, and the obvious danger of flying debris spurred on the creation of a new and serious duty for temporary ‘resident safety teams’, membership of which transformed potential victims into responsible resident workers.

The main gate of the Home was broad and high and much more significant than other parts of the architecture. Mainly fenced with solid steel bars, the top of the gate was nevertheless designed in the imperial Chinese palace fashion – the glazed golden tiles never failed to shimmer when there was a ray of sunlight. At one side, there was an iron board, on which eight Chinese characters were faintly painted: ‘esteem the elderly, respect the elderly, love the elderly, help the elderly’ [*zunlao, jinlao, ailao, zhulao*]. The main gate was normally closed leaving only a much narrower side door open. Next to it was an equally insignificant room, the main function of which was monitoring movements through the side door. There were two titles for this room: one was ‘receiving and sending room’ [*shoufashi*], the other ‘gate-guard room’ [*menweishi*]; and one resident and one worker were assigned to live here. In front of the main gate, there was a spacious square with some stone benches and exercise facilities at the edge. Further in front was a sizable fishing pond. Both workers and residents mentioned to me that this topography, with its ‘hill at the back and water in the front’ [*beishan mianshui*], was a sign of auspiciousness according to *fengshui* (Chinese geomancy).

As mentioned in Chapter One, the Home lay at the foot of a small hill. Though the hill slope was largely flattened, the foundations of the premises were still visibly slanted, which somehow made the Home look more magnificent than it actually was. Stepping into the gate, one could see five triplex buildings standing in a square surrounding a round garden in the middle.⁷⁹ Buildings were numbered in an anticlockwise sequence. The furthest inside block was Building I. It occupied a relatively higher position and was the broadest in width. Anticlockwise, Building II was on the left; followed by Buildings III and IV standing on either side of the main gate. Finally, on the right-hand side, was Building V, behind which were the areas for the kitchen, washing machines, boiler room, livestock sties etc.

Building V was where administrative offices and functional rooms were located; most formal activities took place in this building, such as meetings, receptions and banquets. The ground floor had a large square dining hall furnished with many white, square tables placed in neat rows – which was the place for daily dining, as described in Chapter Two. The first floor had staff offices, meeting rooms, medical care rooms and stores. At one end of this floor was a large hall, which was the only designated place for ‘entertainment’ [*yuleshi*]. The hall was visually divided into two parts. On one side was a 32-inch colour TV, with many fixed chairs in rows in front of it. Apart from the daily evening news programme from the Central Television Station in Beijing, these seats were seldom fully occupied. By contrast, on the other side, there were more than ten Mahjong tables, which were seldom short of players. The second floor was used as sleeping quarters for the care workers, with each being allocated a separate room; and some rooms were also used as communal kitchens by the workers.

What immediately set Building V apart from the others was the rich decoration on its walls. On the right-hand wall of the entrance lobby hung photos presenting the Home as a ‘moral education base’ for school students, a model unit which had attracted

⁷⁹ This was said to represent the Chinese cosmology of binaries of *tianyuan* and *difang* (round heaven and square earth) by the combination of the round-shaped central garden and the square-shaped buildings.

much attention from the leaders and, by extension, from all sectors in society. On the left-hand wall hung a large board on which the ‘goal plan’ [*mubiao guihua*] of the Home was printed in full detail, including short and long term objectives and the principles and methods developed to achieve these goals. The walls in the meeting room were full of certificates and commendations. In the offices, there hung many boards on which regulations for residents and workers were printed; and in the entertainment hall there was always a large banner with various slogans often starting with the phrase ‘Warmly celebrating...’. It should be noted that since Building V was the reception area for public events, these elaborate decorations were considered necessary, rather than messy.

The other four buildings were the residents’ dorms. Except for a fixed visitors’ route,⁸⁰ visitors were not allowed in these buildings. All three-stories high, these buildings differed mainly in their width. Building I had about 120 rooms, Building II 90 rooms, Buildings III and IV 45 rooms each. The interior of these buildings was markedly identical. Stepping onto any of the floors, one would see a long, straight corridor in the middle, which was dim and normally kept empty. Residents’ rooms were evenly laid out on both sides of the aisle. The walls along the corridor were required to be kept clear: the only object allowed was a square board hanging on the wall opposite the stairs on each floor, on which the names of residents on hygienic duties were listed. In principle, two residents shared each room, their names printed on a small piece of paper pasted to the door. The internal furnishings of these rooms were also largely identical. Each room had two single beds, two cupboards, one large mirror, two bed stands, two small tables and two single wooden armchairs. Other small items, such as hot water bottles, were instructed to be placed at a designated location. Personal belongings were not allowed to be displayed in visible places, such as on the table or bed, but had to be kept in drawers or cupboards.

The inner space surrounded by these buildings was a well-maintained garden. Mostly

⁸⁰ This included the model room and toilet, which I will describe later in this chapter.

covered with plants, it had four square stone tables with benches placed in the small space in the midst of flowers and trees.⁸¹ The construction of the garden had been contracted to a professional horticultural company on a relatively generous budget, since it was considered very important to the image of the Home. In my first visit, like other visitors, I was introduced to the deliberate design of the garden, in particular the planting in the form of the logo of the national civil affairs bureaucracy – the convex surface curved into the shape of a heart tenderly carried by a pair of open hands.

There seemed to be a striking resemblance between the spatial layout of the Home and the residences of the prospective central village. In both, priority was given to the exterior, relatively arbitrary spatial re-cluster of people, standardisation and visual neatness. The exterior of the Home was elaborately decorated and inexhaustibly highlighted – such as the main gate, Building V, the middle garden and outside walls. The overall architectural design favours squares and uniformity over circles and irregularity, as shown by the spatial allocation of the buildings, the shape of the rooms and the furniture inside, the shape of the dining hall, as well as the tables and chairs. These characteristics identify the Home with its surroundings, which, I suggest, makes the Home consistent with the blueprint of the Centralisation Project. Yet, from a different dimension, these radical changes and the apparent arbitrariness and artificiality in this newly defined space also induce one to ask how the old realities are actually attuned to this new order, if at all. In the following, I present the other side of the picture.

Spatial Ambiguity and Contestation

Very often, in the village committee office where the work to promote the new flats to villagers was conducted, one could hear the villagers complaining about the unfair price of the flats, lack of resemblance in the interior design to their old houses, much smaller size, inadequacy for practical purposes and lack of space to store agricultural

⁸¹ Residents did not use these tables often. The care workers liked to sit here knitting or chatting when they had no specific work to do.

tools; they also disputed such matters as the ground floors of these buildings being reserved for ‘useless’ shop owners instead of being given to village dwellers so that they could ‘maintain contact with the soil’ [*zhan diqi*]. Yet the working staff – a mixture of village cadres, undergraduate interns and estate agents sales people – saw these complaints as a sign of stubbornness, and insisted on talking about the ‘goodness’ of the new flats in new technical terms unrecognisable to the villagers. In my observation of the interactions between the ‘work team’ [*gongzuo zu*] of the Centralisation Project and local villagers, I was most impressed by the uniform rhetoric that the work team members used to introduce and promote this new project. Even the university students, who acted as ‘village undergraduates’ [*cunda*] to complete their internship, used the official discourse to answer villagers’ questions – such as, ‘These issues have already been considered by the government and will be addressed in sequence ... You don’t have to worry about them at all.’ The result was that the work to sell the apartments was prolonged and full of disputes.

Similar confusion and dispute about the new spatial arrangements were no less evident in the Home, and these were often reflected in matters regarding the hygiene work. For example, room inspection – authorised as an institutional regulation – legitimised the surveillance of the residents’ dorms to check hygienic conditions and attendance by care workers. However, such institutional legitimacy did not seem to be fully appreciated by the residents. In reality, embarrassing encounters often happened during room inspections.

One day after dinner, Hehong went as usual to check the rooms on her floor. She knocked at one door and asked if anyone was inside. After hearing somebody mutter something as if saying yes, she pushed open the door and stepped in. Then immediately there followed her loud scream and an intense quarrel, which automatically stopped me from entering the room:

‘You old shit, why not put on your pants! How ‘shameless’ [*buyaolian*]!’ Hehong roared.

‘You bitch! You come into my room and look at me! Is it you who is *buyaolian* or me? Why should I dress up in my room! No one invited you to come in! I should accuse you of having peeped at my body!’ The resident rebutted.

‘This is a public place and I come to inspect the room. It is not your own home! Do you know what it is to be civil? Who wants to look at your ragged body! Hurt my eyes! Fine! Fuck! I don’t want to say one more word to you! Just fine!’ Hehong’s voice again.

‘Fine? Shit! I fine you! You peeped at my body, I fine you! Go away!’ raged the resident, as Hehong came out angrily with a red face.

The issue of gender also at times became intensified on the matter of using the shared toilets.⁸² Although public toilets were equally distributed between men and women with gender marks on the doors, the fact that the majority of residents were men made these gendered toilets effectively genderless in actual use: male residents often used both. For the considerably fewer female residents, going to the toilet thus necessitated the exercise of particular caution. For example, Zheng Xiucheng, a woman resident in her forties⁸³ who was one of only two female residents on the third floor of Building I, had some disastrous experiences regarding use of the public toilet. Zheng had suffered from serious rheumatism since she was a teenager and had difficulty with many bodily movements. She told me that she used to take showers in the public toilet, and that she had had many desperate moments when some male residents broke into the women’s toilet while she was washing herself with her clumsy arms and made insulting remarks to her. Her problem was later recognised by a female care worker who felt sympathetic to her and found a way to move her to a room on the ground floor of Building III, with a private toilet.

⁸² The dorms and most facilities had no gender implications. All were the same. The toilets with their gender marks might be the only place where female residents were specifically represented.

⁸³ In addition to WuBao-Elderly, there were also a few younger people, with disabilities, living in the Home.

These emotionally intense encounters illustrate the confusion and tension experienced by the people living in this newly classified environment. The case of Hehong meeting the naked resident is a reminder of the ambiguity as to whether the space in residents' dorms is private or public; and by extension, whether the Home as a whole should be categorised private or public. Apparently, there was a lack of consensus. The reality was that the Home regulations legitimised Hehong's entering residents' rooms by defining it as the dutiful fulfilment of care work, rather than offensive intrusion. Yet it was contested by the naked body of the resident, which presented a tacit resistance to the arbitrary institutional imposition, relying on the implicit cultural rule that to expose a man's naked body to a woman was an offensive gesture.⁸⁴ The second case illustrates the 'gender' ambiguity of the toilets, which was largely caused by the contingent reality in a Home where male residents predominated. It effectively offset the civil norm on the use of toilets, which assumed that there should be an equal distribution between the genders. In other words, the arbitrary 'gender' of the toilets imposed by an assumed standard was subverted by the particularity of male dominance – i.e. at the interface of a standardised ideal and a non-standard reality, we see a toilet becoming characterised by gender ambiguity.⁸⁵ These contestations are a reminder that these spaces are actually seen as neither public nor private, neither male nor female, while being used as both; thus again, the Home as a heterotopia is evoked.

To summarise, spatial ambiguity is tantamount to the presentation of 'orderliness and magnificence' characteristic to the new spatial layout. In the next section, I describe how hygiene work is particularly defined and how it is correlated with this special spatial condition.

⁸⁴ Michael Herzfeld (1991) presents a similar phenomenon on how violence can be effectively used by the residents in a Cretan town in their struggle and negotiation with local planners.

⁸⁵ Structuralist interpretations of space and gender most often pay attention to how they reinforce each other. See Pierre Bourdieu (1973) on Kabyle houses; Humphrey 1974; Hugh-Jones 1979; Tambiah 1985. Yet here we see how a state project actually brings the effect of defying local gender sensitivity in everyday practice, though gender was symbolically represented by the gender mark on the doors of toilets.

Makeshift Reality: Hygiene as Surface Emptiness

When Hehong told me that her husband was in charge of township hygiene work, I clarified with her what exactly this job involved. She answered that it was mainly about housing planning, and that what her husband usually did was to carry a bag and wander around the countryside, stopping at places where there was a problem with a house or land, helping to solve it by, e.g. re-measuring and judging property size, locating new construction and adjusting blueprints. Hehong's description of her husband's job and her tone, which conveyed an obvious sense of confirmation, reminded me of a taken-for-granted connection between hygiene work and spatial planning in the minds of the local people.

Indeed, viewed in a wider context, the re-planning of rural space by the state was phenomenal, and its association with the discourse of hygiene was easily seen. Spatial dislocation is characteristic of many eye-catching events, including village administrative re-planning, enhancing the transport network, migration and schooling, as well as the rearrangement of WuBao-Elderly living patterns and support. To a great extent, the normality of these contexts is defined not by stability, but by structural readjustment, implying that most things are, or have the tendency to be, relocated and therefore out of their original places; and 'to be out of the original place' is also the overture to being in 'the right place' in the future. Likewise, the things and people that refuse to relocate, or those that are left untouched (i.e. unplanned), are becoming anti-structural, or potentially in 'the wrong place'. Meanwhile, the agents of these movements, be they the state or other forces, create counterpart actions and discourses that are consistent with, and supportive of, this hegemonic structural transformation. Thus there is the on-going 'Patriotic Hygiene Campaign' [*aiguo weisheng yundong*], which, as the title suggests, elevates hygiene work to the level of nationalism. Logically, any extant objects that are not commensurate with the state development plan are labelled 'dirty, messy and bad' [*zang, luan, cha*] – three otherwise not-necessarily-correlate words being used together in one slogan – which makes it

plausible that there is an intrinsic connection between hygienic condition (dirty), location (messy) and the value of an object (bad). In a similar vein, to have ‘messy stuff’ removed becomes legitimate. Though sometimes we saw vast areas seemingly deserted, these empty places were not much minded in official discourse that mostly referred to them as ‘in plan’ [*guihua zhong*], ‘clean’ [*ganjing*], ‘neat’ [*zhengqi*] and ‘awaiting a good future’ [*yingjie meihao weilai*].

In my view, hygiene, applied to most space in the Home, is manifested as ‘surface emptiness’. By emptiness, I mean that anything that was considered ‘unnecessary’ was equalled to dirtiness and should be removed. For example the ground of the courtyard in and outside the Home had to be maintained with ‘nothing’ on it, with tree leaves considered a typical enemy of environmental hygiene. In both big and small meetings, it was not unusual to hear the caution to ‘make sure that there is not even a leaf on the ground’, and care workers often habitually picked up any leaves left after sweeping. Soil was also seen as dirty by staff and residents alike. The soil-free cement road always appeared on the list of ‘three good things about life in the Home’ marked by the residents. Many residents revealed that the longer they stayed in the Home, the less they wanted to go back to their home villages, because the road there was muddy and full of soil and would spoil their shoes and trousers. Interior walls in residential buildings had to be kept blank and no one was allowed to paint or attach anything on it; this included the walls in residents’ rooms. Some residents stuck Mao’s picture on the wall in their room; this was treated as an exception and reluctantly allowed. Other pictures and decorations were summarily rejected in the name of hygienic concern. Additional strict hygienic rules were formulated to ensure emptiness in residents’ rooms; for example, all personal belongings had to be stored out of sight in cupboards or drawers, the small table had to be kept clear during the daytime and the bed had to be neatly made with pillow and quilt piled at the top. Under these hygienic criteria, an ideal room was one that primarily served the purpose of exhibition rather than fulfilling practical functions.

Once, during a discussion about insufficient budget from the bureau, I suggested to Director Zhu that, since residents spent their money outside the Home on food and other items, perhaps it would be a good idea to open a shop within the Home so that residents could save on their shopping trips and the Home could also generate additional income. Director Zhu rejected my suggestion immediately, with the straightforward response that a shop would make the Home a ‘mess’ due to litter such as alcohol bottles or snack packaging. The hygiene of the Home could not be sacrificed for petty business gain. If this were done it would be, in his words, to ‘pick up sesame at the price of losing a watermelon’ [*jianle zhima, diule xigua*]. As I was contemplating why ‘not making the Home a mess’ was so important to him, he added that the only way a shop would be possible would be if it was named ‘a love heart hut’ [*aixin xiaowu*], because it would then show to outside visitors how much love the Home had for the residents. Only for such a gain would he consider it worth the effort involved in setting up a shop and the risk of affecting the cleanliness and neatness of the Home that were so indispensable to any model institution.

The Myth of the ‘Model Room’

The ‘model room’ refers to the one selected as representative of all residents’ rooms, for the purposes of showing to visitors. No obvious sign indicated which room it was, but whenever there was a hygiene inspection, the inspectors were always taken to the same one. The location of this model room was on the ground floor of Building II, directly opposite the entrance. Old Tang and Old Du shared this room. The workers commented that Tang was a person who ‘never made fuss’ [*bu-reshi*]; Du could barely talk and had been diagnosed as suffering a light dementia. This room was kept immaculate almost every day: nothing was put on the surfaces and the wooden armchairs and floor were kept spotless and Tang often only sat on his dark coloured bed cushion so as to keep the other things pristine.

I noticed that the location of the room was actually very convenient for visitors, as it was close to both the gate and the building entrance. I asked various people whether

this room was designated as the model room because of its location, or because its occupants maintained it so hygienically. I was told that the latter was not the case and that such a perfect coincidence would be very unlikely; rather, I was informed, the Home deliberately assigned people who did cleaning well to live in this room. Because it was close to the entrance, the special location made it *look* like a random and casual choice for visitors. If the model room was located, for example, on the third floor of Building I, which was far inside the Home, it would *look* ‘fake/artificial’ to take visitors to visit that particular room by walking all the way there. In other words, it was the physical convenience of the model room, located close to both the inside and the outside of the building, which added a sense of ‘naturalness’ to its choice. It also seemed to me that such man-made naturalness was considered indispensable for a model room, even though its intrinsic ‘unnaturalness’ was also tacitly understood by all.

The model room, characterised by extreme hygiene (compactness and neatness) represents the ideal of how a hygienic room should look in this institution. As with the diet board discussed at the beginning of Chapter Two, I also consider the model room to be both connecting and separating the inside and the outside. It connects in the sense that, though it is not identical to all other rooms, it is one of the rooms, and its standard of hygiene one that the other rooms are required to emulate. Due to its convenient location, it gives the appearance of being a random choice, functioning as an impressive visual form from which the imagination of outsiders regarding other rooms departs, if not restricted by it. The way the model room is arranged may also comply with the pre-existing expectations of outside visitors. Yet, it also separates, because this room is indeed more prepared and much cleaner than most rooms; and this difference makes it the model room. We might actually consider the model room the ideal anomaly with respect to the other rooms, while it is portrayed as if normal to others by insiders, thus functioning as a hygienic barrier that refracts outsiders’ perceptions of an ideal. Meanwhile, most visitors seemed to be content to follow the visitors’ route and seldom questioned the representativeness of the room *vis-a-vis* the

rest. My observation was that the model room was both employed by the management and received by visitors as more-or-less reality – i.e. it is both a deliberate ideal and a concrete room – and it both represents other rooms and differs from them. Therefore, instead of being troubled by how authentic the model room is, perhaps what it is indicative of is the ‘more-or-less’ quality that makes it possible to combine opposite attributes, and is thus a reminder of the heterotopian quality of the Home that the model room is tacitly accepted as representing.

Toilets as a Point of Contrast with Rural Households

Toilets in the Home represented a stark contrast to their equivalent in nearby rural households (excluding the newly built flats). In a typical household in this area, the toilet was set inside the pigsty, which was usually right next to the kitchen. The normal interior structure of these pigsties was such that a hole was dug in the middle of the ground, with the pigs fenced in on both sides. People squat over the hole for comfort, often between squealing pigs. The urine and faeces of humans and pigs were collected in a tank underneath, which would later be used as fertiliser for crops. A biogas system had been introduced in recent years, designed to favour the adjacency of toilet and kitchen in these rural households, as excrement could then be used as a fuel for the kitchen. This type of household arrangement suggests that human excrement is not perceived as especially dirty by the villagers in the way that it would be by a typical urban person. Instead, pigs, human excretion and the kitchen are functionally complementary to one another through a cycling system that sustains the routine operation of a household. Human excrement, in this case, is appreciated for its practical utility rather than being considered as merely disgusting or offending a particular aesthetic taste.

The concept of toilet hygiene in the Home was drastically different. Here, the toilets were physically very much separated from the kitchen. Building I had public toilets on each floor, while rooms in other buildings had toilets built inside. Public toilets had gender symbols on the doors, but the inside facilities were identical (whereas for most

public toilets in nearby towns, men's differed from women's in that they featured a row of urinals opposite the stalls). Toilet hygiene was superbly emphasised, and ensured through various institutional means. Every day floor leaders needed to organise people to clean these toilets, and every week they were subjected to a more elaborate cleaning. A very strong disinfectant was used for toilet cleaning, which could even corrode shoes or trousers if they came in contact with it. On normal days, these flush toilets were kept odour-free and clean. It was even prohibited to leave toilet paper in the toilets so as to keep them looking empty enough to meet the hygienic requirements.

The public toilets on the ground floor of Building I were also a site on the visitors' route. By comparison, there was not a single occasion during my visits to private households on which the occupants deliberately showed me their toilet.⁸⁶ One possible explanation for this contrast is that, in the case of toilets, a different idea – presumably borrowing from the urban and modern stereotype – is employed, in which human excrement is considered absolutely dirty and useless, and thus the cleanliness of the toilet, and the ability to keep it clean, become effective referential points to identify one with the new stereotype. Meanwhile, it should be pointed out that while the mainstream discourse of the Home presents itself as a 'family', in the case of the toilet it does its utmost to contrast itself to rural households. This may suggest that the Home is actually struggling in the tension between two referential frames, i.e. household and state. Different symbols from different resources are adopted and applied to different aspects of the Home. Though presented as visual emptiness, the toilet is also a reminder that the Home is neither the state nor family.

'Kitchen Cleanliness is the Primary Safety Issue!'

The kitchen was not a place to generate social warmth. Many parts of the kitchen were marked as 'sterile zones' and the chef and other kitchen staff were required to

⁸⁶ Some, not all, households would exhibit a sense of embarrassment were their toilets to be visited by strangers, since they thought the conditions were bad.

wear gloves and special shoes while working. The pungent smell of a special type of disinfectant was characteristic of this space. Most residents were not allowed to enter, and outside cooking hours, the kitchen was locked. If anyone tried to peek through the barred window, the general impression was usually one of emptiness. As with the model room and the toilets, the kitchen was also a 'must see' place for inspecting visitors. Thus, in contrast with the empty interior, the outside wall of the kitchen bore two blackboards, one showing the menu for that week and the other bearing the names and specific positions of kitchen staff (which, again, were only partially true) and their photos,

The hygiene of the kitchen was excessively emphasised. One reason was that it was considered paramount to the issue of food safety by the management. Since food safety was a priority issue, so was kitchen hygiene. 'Untidy' food was not defined according to the particular food material; in fact, I never heard residents or staff mention any particular type of food as taboo. Food safety, for the most part, was considered to rely on the hygienic condition of the kitchen and the degree to which food had been cooked. Raw or semi-cooked food was considered unclean. Food had to be fully cooked to be hygienic, or, even better, over-cooked, as the softened texture was understood to be better suited for old people to digest. Bottled water sold in the shops was considered dirtier than boiled tap water. Since the kitchen was the place where food was processed, its hygienic condition became the most important guarantee for safe food.

Kitchen hygiene also mostly equalled 'thing-less-ness', or emptiness: that is, no food or anything else was to be left on tables except during cooking time. Among the many occasions when Director Zhu lost his temper with staff, those prompted by a mess in the kitchen were the most dramatic. Director Zhu told me that food safety was, of course, crucial to the management of an old people's home and that, as the director, he could afford just about any problem except a food-related incident. He said he personally continually monitored kitchen hygiene, and though he could 'keep one eye

open and one eye closed' on many things, he was prepared to fire anyone who dared to defy the absolute rule of kitchen hygiene by neglecting the cleaning or spoiling it with any extra things.

How is Hygiene Maintained?

Although apparently a superficial phenomenon, for a place hosting six-hundred WuBao residents with only around ten care workers, such neatness and emptiness cannot be assumed to be the result of little effort. In this section, I explore what happens beneath the emptied surface. In my view, the following cases all convey the message of making unappreciated existence invisible, albeit in very different ways.

The Cupboard as an Uncontested Space for Mess

Each resident had a cupboard – about 1.7m high and 50cm wide – and some drawers in the room. The space inside the cupboards was much more private than the general space of the residents' rooms in the sense that it was subject to much less surveillance – both management and residents considered this space as belonging to the individual resident. Most residents kept their cupboards locked. Since many residents brought all their valuables to the Home, and according to the hygiene regulation personal belongings should be put in the cupboards rather than being left around in the rooms, these cupboards became the space containing all the things that residents considered important to them.⁸⁷ As many residents shared, a shortcut to make the room clean was 'simply to hide all stuff' [*ba dongxi dou cang qilai*]. As far as I observed, these cupboards were often crammed full without any apparent order. There were typically three kinds of objects stored in the cupboard. The first was cloth products, including clothes and bedding. The second was small objects, such as cards, cash and personal photos. There were many cards of essential importance for residents, including, but not limited to, ID, WuBao, social security, land and forestry, pension and bank

⁸⁷ Sometimes, for the sake of surface neatness, all items, whether important or unimportant, were crammed into the cupboard.

account. Many residents stored them carefully and organised many activities on matters relating to these cards. The third was food, most often peanuts, which was a popular crop in the area. Many residents brought a bag of them from their homes or relatives and often had them as a snack with a drink. Peanuts were sometimes put at the bottom of the cupboard covered by layers of other items. Some residents told me why they would store them so secretly: ‘if you didn’t hide it well, who would be responsible if someone stole it?’; ‘if you store some food of your own, you’ll feel certain. Even you didn’t eat it, ‘in case’ [*wanyi*] there was any problem, you could have something to cope with.’⁸⁸

The stuff in these cupboards was apparently considered important to residents. Very often, when a certain resident wanted to show me something in the cupboard, he would impress me by the extraordinary caution involved – the room door was normally closed before the cupboard was unlocked. The other significant thing was the mixture of stuff – food, bedding and cards – that would not normally be put together. The mixture of irrelevant stuff and the visibly chaotic layout – sometimes stuff just spilled out when the cupboard was opened – plus the extraordinary value of these things in the minds of the residents, in my view, pose a stark contrast to the surface emptiness and neatness that these dorms exhibit.

The Marginalisation of a Critical Opinion Leader

Old Lin was disliked by all care workers as well as by the directors for being provocative and difficult. One of his eyes was blind, one leg lamed; and he walked with a stick. But he seemed to be very firm in his mind and was very insistent in raising radical views. Several male residents took his words very seriously; and they together formed a kind of group, among whom Lin was obviously the leader. His aura of being a folk leader was particularly impressive to me when one day I was somehow

⁸⁸ *Wanyi*, which I translate as ‘in case’, is literally ‘one of ten thousand probabilities’. Related discussions are found in Chapter Four and Six. The frequent use of this word may be interpreted as a reminder of a strong sense of insecurity.

secretly invited to his room by his men. While in his room, with his men guarding the door, Lin told me that he had finally decided to discuss some ‘serious stuff’ with me after having carefully observed me for three months. During the lengthy conversation, he also shared with me his opinion on the inconsistency of the notion of hygiene in the Home:

Did you pay attention to how they wash vegetables in the kitchen? They use a big hose to flush them. That is not the right way to do this work! To wash vegetable clean, one needs to rub it with one’s own hands, rub and rub, not just using a hose to flush like extinguishing a fire! My teeth have often been hurt by little stones in the vegetables. In all meetings, the director emphasises the importance of hygiene, saying that we should clean our room like a professional cleaner, wash our clothes frequently. And any neglect could cause a fine. But have they thought that what makes real hygiene is what goes into one’s body? Why does no one bother to inspect that? Once there was a leader’s visit; they (the staff) immediately called each other and organised all residents to do cleaning like hotel cleaners and asked the chef to cook better food. But who is responsible for the hygiene of everyday food that goes into our body? Water has the same problem. The pool in front of the Home is the source of our drinking water. But they also feed fish, geese and ducks in it. For a time the biogas pool was leaking and excrement flowed into the pool. But no one really bothered about that and it took several months to fix the problem. And the pool was even shown to visitors to demonstrate that the Home has a diverse livestock raising system!

Lin had previously been a resident representative, during which he had attended several meetings with the management to discuss how to improve services in the Home. He recounted to me that he had expressed similar opinions then, but before long he was removed from this position. At the time when I was there, Lin was still very unhappy about this, although it had taken place two years previously. Though he

continued to maintain an audience, such as the several men around him, he was always dissatisfied with the fact that his suggestions were not formally adopted by the management. But he considered that he was the one who could point out real problems. What actually happened was that the management simply avoided talking with him anymore.

'Dirty' Habitus and Methods of Resolution

Old Zhong was, according to care workers, very 'disobedient' [*jue*]. He continued many of his eccentric habits after moving to the Home. One example was that he liked peanuts, and he felt the need to pile as many peanuts as possible on his bed next to him so that he would feel safe and happy when sleeping. Hehong, the care worker for his floor, fought with him all the time trying to get him to comply with the rule that the bed must be kept empty during the daytime, but Zhong never listened to her. Often when Hehong went to Zhong to remonstrate with him about his messy room, Zhong would retort:

It's only because you are the wife of a bullshit land official that you dare to bully me. I'm just waiting here to see what you dare to do to me; kill me? I tell you that I am already of this age and I am not afraid of anything. This is my room, and you can never order me as though I were a prisoner!

Hehong did not take kindly to these words and the two continued to argue.

As their fight escalated, Director Zhu also became involved. At a certain point he became very hard-lined. He once took Duck and several other men with him to Zhong's room. Without saying anything, they started to throw his messy stuff out and told Zhong that if he insisted on disobeying the hygienic rules, he would be left in an empty room to sleep on the ground with his peanuts. Zhong roared and fought physically with these young men. Instead of surrendering to their physical vigour, Zhong was provoked to extreme anger and threatened to commit suicide if anyone

dared to move a single piece of furniture out of his room.

Zhong's unyielding resistance was a real problem for the management, and his resolution, quite literally, to defend his habits with his life was indeed effective. After some time, the management decided that Zhong was to move to a corner room on a floor under the charge of another care worker, Murong. This solution proved to be a wise way to deal with Zhong: the new room was quite invisible due to its corner location – seldom anyone passed by there, let alone visitors; and compared to Hehong, Murong had a much softer character and never quarrelled fiercely with residents. Instead of pushing 'stubborn' residents to do cleaning, she would often do it herself. Zhong actually continued his habit of piling peanuts on his bed after he moved to the new room, but he also compromised on many things, such as sweeping the floor every day, and did not make much extra trouble after these dramatic experiences.

Both Hehong and Murong suggested that I should not talk with Zhong, as nothing he said was likely to provoke good feeling. As it turned out, when I later found a chance to approach him, my temper was sorely tested, with our conversation starting with him accusing me of being sent by the police to arrest him, and declaring that I was dreaming if I expected him to tell me anything. I was struck by his lively imagination, though also the difficulty I found in interpreting what he said. In fact, despite the care workers' evaluation of him, Zhong's new room did not impress me as unacceptably untidy in any sense, even though there were, again, piles of peanuts on his bed and some other items leaning against the wall, including a plough. With the exception of its crowdedness, it was, in my view, clean.

Zhong's story was one of many cases in which individualistic preference was in conflict with the Home's hygienic criteria. As I have described, the solution, in his particular case, took the form of an uncertain and dramatic process of confrontation and aggression as well as trial and mutual compromise – involving a verbal fight with Hehong, physical abuse at the hands of young men, spatial relocation and personality re-matching. A distinctive feature of this process, in my view, was the effort to utilise

all available resources to eradicate idiosyncratic behaviour and transform it into a uniform institutional subject. Furthermore, even though the 'unclean' behaviour was not in fact eradicated, its invisibility, brought about by spatial rearrangement and personality accommodation, made it appear *as if* a successful reformation of an otherwise stubborn old village bachelor had been effected, and this was sufficient to end the matter.

A Work Mode of Emotional Intensity

Cleaning was a routine task for almost every resident, with the exception of those physically unable to do so.⁸⁹ Every day, this work began with morning cleaning and ended up with evening room inspection. It reached its climax during irregular ritualistic inspections by the Home management or outside supervisors. The forms of the cleaning work ranged from individual tasks, such as making one's own bed, to team work, such as sweeping the floor of public areas. Among the diverse, and often elaborate, ways in which hygiene work was actually carried out, I found one phenomenon in particular worthy of further attention: the accompanying atmosphere of emotional intensity.

Sometimes, cleaning was done jointly by residents, care workers and the directors. This often happened before an external inspection or festivals. Joint work was considered by the management to raise the morale of those involved, which was in turn necessary for the delivery of high quality work. Such morale, as far as I could observe, often involved the engendering of a warm but emotionally intense atmosphere. In one example, a toilet was sometimes passionately cleaned through the joint work of care workers and residents following a fixed pattern. Often, female care workers automatically became the leaders of the cleaning groups, working the hardest and shouting the most. Once, I saw Hehong, wearing a pair of rain boots, pull her head out of a toilet stall which she was cleaning and shout at two male residents

⁸⁹ These residents mainly included the chronically ill and those considered mentally dysfunctional.

standing outside:

Fetch me another bottle of oxalic acid! You guys are blind.⁹⁰ I have taught you that all corners need to be disinfected, not just to blow the dust off with your mouths! You don't have to pay for the acid! Just use it! You don't use it even if it's free! Hopeless guys!

One of the two men then ran towards the store room. After a few steps, he turned back and checked with Hehong again: 'How many bottles did you say, Mum Bao (Bao is the surname of Hehong)?' Without pulling her head out again, Hehong roared in the stall: 'One bottle! Deaf you are! Shit! It saves my energy to go to get it myself rather than asking you deaf men to do it!' 'No worry, immediately it will come [*bieji, mashang jiulai*].' The man turned again and went swiftly to the store room.

Occasionally, Director Zhu also joined in with these cleaning groups, often only by contributing his presence. I once asked him why he should be there, which in my view he did not have to do. He gave me the following explanation, with his facial expression betraying some sense of sympathy for my ignorance of the Chinese way of working:

It (my presence) will make a difference. If I wasn't here, their morale would be low, and they would feel [*juede*] that I was arrogant and the work was unimportant. Then the quality of the work might be bad. But if I was here, you see, they would feel that I was with them and concerned about the work. So they would be much more motivated, and would also show to me that they were dutiful. There is no need to say these (implicit rules). Even if I didn't really do anything, my presence makes a big difference. Things in China are like this: if the leader were not there, the morale [*shiqi*] would be

⁹⁰ In an abusing tone of intimacy.

low; and if there was no high morale, nothing could be done.⁹¹

Hygiene Work: Whose Means? Whose End?

In contrast to the ‘troublemakers’, most residents complied with hygienic requirements. Some bodily gestures involved in making the room clean, such as using one’s arm to sweep the bed linen, were typical points of etiquette in receiving guests to one’s room. All visitors seemed to be initially responded to by residents as potential hygiene inspectors. Almost always when I stepped into a resident’s room for the first time, the resident would perform such etiquette in one way or another.

While it was obvious that Director Zhu pushed hard on hygiene work in response to bureaucratic inspections and to maintain the image of the Home as expected, and care workers did so to fulfil Zhu’s instruction, the accounts that I collected from some ‘good’ residents on why they did cleaning so dutifully also revealed that they did so to fulfil their own agenda. For example, there was one resident who seemed to be much closer to care workers than most. He told me that he had not known any of these workers before he came to the Home, but very soon he managed to establish a relationship with them. I asked him how, to which he replied:

Simple! Since they liked to see my room clean, I just did it. So every time they came to check my room, they felt satisfied and considered that I was a good person. And later on they did not really check my room because they trusted me. And I didn’t fight with anyone either. Last time, my shoes were stolen and I did not trouble them but dealt with it myself. All these things made them happy with me.

⁹¹ The embedded entanglement of emotionality with bureaucratic work is discussed thoroughly by Laura Bear (2007) in her historical ethnography of India railway workers. There is no doubt that emotionality also permeates into the everyday delivery of welfare service in the Home. To have certain work carried out, the emotionality called *qi*, morale, is indispensable, since it has the effect of motivating others to work zealously irrespective of how the work might be deemed rationally.

I also further pushed him, asking why he thought it was important to deliberately establish good relationship with care workers. On this, I did not gain any fruitful answer, only his eyes widening in surprise, as if saying that my question was really absurd. He answered me that he had not thought about this, but that it was just basic common sense that anywhere one went, one should try to establish a good relationship with the people there.

For some residents, hygiene was an issue connected not only with their good relationship with care workers but also with self-protection. Tang Zhenxiu was one of the two residents living in the model room. I had visited his room in his old house, which by the Home's criteria would have been considered very untidy and contrasted sharply with his dorm in the Home. Tang gave me the following explanation on why he did such a good job with room hygiene in this place:

You might be bullied here by other gangster residents. So I thought that if I made sure that I did my cleaning well and fulfilled other duties, the management would have no problem with me and would take my side if other people bullied me. I was not allocated to live in this room at the beginning. After they noticed that I could keep my room particularly clean, they relocated me to this room. Since this is the model room, those trouble makers should remember this if they wanted to bully me.

Another resident, Old Zhu, told me that he could not stand fans or any light at night, so he could not share his room with other people. He had gone to the care worker of his floor, Jiannan, to talk about this matter many times and wanted her to allocate a private room to him, though he knew this would be difficult. Jiannan eventually solved this problem for him, and Zhu was very grateful. He then thought that in return he should keep his room really clean, not only because he was then solely responsible for his room, but also because he thought this would be a good way to reciprocate the favour Jiannan had done him.

Some residents also shared with me that to keep oneself clean was a way to gain dignity and to distinguish oneself from others. Many times in the middle of a conversation, residents would mention in passing: 'I am unlike the others; they are not cleaning, but I always make sure that I am clean'; and 'I don't like my roommate, because he is not clean, but I am.' These residents commented that to make one's room clean was, after all, good for oneself, and that they could not extend sympathy to those who fought a lot with the management on this matter. Bodily odour was also an important criterion in folk judgment (but not in any formal rules). One man proudly told me that he had always kept himself odour-free, and he refused to go to hospital even when he was sick, because he could not stand the smell there.

Common to all these diverse explanations made by residents for their hygienic habits was that none of them recognised that making the Home hygienic was a purpose in itself. To these seemingly obedient residents, hygiene was at most a means: an avenue to other purposes, whatever they might be. The intricacy is that these hidden individual agendas could only be met by fulfilling the required hygienic criteria. In this sense, it might be revealing to see hygiene as a connecting point where rich human wants and needs are exchanged, and where seemingly obedient behaviour is rewarded in such a way that real expectations are met as a result. In this regard, if we accept the dual function of hygiene work as both the disciplinary tool of the powerful and the instrument of the weak, maybe the question that follows is: at whom is such elaborate hygiene work ultimately aimed? In this sense, the ontological anxiety of hygiene work in juxtaposition to its existential intensity again presents a profound paradox that is a reminder of the intrinsic quality of the Home as an existence in-between the unreal and the real.

Conclusion

This chapter discusses the institutional emphasis on hygiene work with its relevance to spatial rearrangement. I want to summarise two arguments. The first is on the remarkable phenomenon of emptiness. I argue that it is a makeshift reality in the need

for showing the fulfilment of an unfulfilled task, or presenting orderliness in the condition of the lack of it. In this connection, disagreeing on the binary conceptualisation between purity and impurity brilliantly presented in the work of Dumont and Douglas, I claim that emptiness represents a zone in-between purity and impurity – i.e. between a magnificent exterior favoured by the state order and the messy interior designated to the residents and understood as disorder. However, it is this ‘third’ zone, rather than disorder, that is of most concern to the state order. Its lack of identification makes it the radical other – it is neither under the state order nor the disorder; its inherent ambiguity defines it as the ‘danger’ zone other than impurity. Correspondingly, the most radical solution is applied: namely, the requirement of nothingness. Relating to Pelkmans’ exposition mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, I concur with him in the sense that emptiness is an inverted representation of the complexity of transition; yet in this context, I wish to specify that it is the extreme form of governance in an authoritarian state that corresponds to the extraordinary precariousness peculiar to such space: a heterotopia.

The mechanism to sustain emptiness is that instead of eliminating anything that is not within the official plan, is simply to hide it and thus render it invisible. By putting ‘dirt’ in ‘designated’ areas, such as the private cupboard, the corner room and on the margins of the hierarchy, not only is the intended order prioritised, but also the disorder finds its corresponding place that legitimises its existence. In other words, the mutual compliance between management and residents to a certain type of spatial compartmentalisation – where a particular object should be placed and who can see it – allows opposite orders to coexist without blurring their respective status. Therefore, austere hygienic rules are not in contradiction to inclusiveness. In this connection, adding to Scott (1998) and Handelman (1990) – both of whom emphasised the supreme importance of visibility in legitimising authoritarian forms of governance and constructing the images of modernity – I maintain that invisibility and avoidance are the necessary twins of visibility and promotion. To make certain things visible can never be considered in its own right, as it has to mean the making of other things

invisible. Indeed, maybe the latter is more crucial for the governance in transition.

The second argument is on the phenomenon of resemblance, or mirroring effect. This is shown on two grounds. The first is the resemblance in spatial layout between the Home and its immediate environment of a village centre under radical spatial reconfiguration. The comparison of various architectural and spatial characteristics of Fankou and the Home shows that they mirror each other in the common preference given to visual neatness and exterior magnificence. Both as state-led projects, their spatial resemblance is a reminder of the preference for a single order in the new state governance. The second is the similar logic that explains why people at various levels obey hygiene rules. As these ethnographic materials show, while Director Zhu emphasises the hygiene work to gain bureaucratic credit, the residents undertake it dutifully to consolidate their own positions in the Home; and while Director Zhu complains about the austere external inspections on hygiene, residents complain about the strict enforcement by the Home management. In other words, they represent a pattern of repetition at various levels along the bureaucratic line. The resemblance between the management and the residents in treating hygiene work and their bureaucratic opposition reflect an ambivalent relationship that embraces both similarity and opposition.

Having said this, it is worth recalling that a crucial condition for these phenomena is that the new spatial order is envisaged to be in place within a saliently short period of time – ideally the sooner the better. Accordingly, many methods that are actually adopted have the common advantage of saving time, such as simply having messy stuff hidden. I thus consider the temporal specificity of this context crucial in understanding other phenomena in transition. In the following chapter, I focus on the temporal implications of this state project.

Chapter Four

‘You’re My *Jiejie* (elder sister)’ and Waiting

– On Temporal Re-Orientaion

During the time of my fieldwork, the Home had only one telephone, installed in the directors’ office. When residents wanted to make a call, they first needed to go to the care workers to make the request.⁹² Once in the care workers’ office, Hehong came back from the township hospital, where she had gone for treatment of acute abdominal pain, and arrived at the office complaining loudly:

What the fuck! *Nowadays* WuBao-Hu have much better ‘welfare’ [*daiyu*]⁹³ than us! They become the ‘treasure of the state’ [*guobao*]. And we seem to be born of the second wife, whom no one bothers to care about!⁹⁴ When they are sick, the hospital must immediately send a free car to pick them up; whatever pills or medication they receive in hospital, it is free of charge. Everything is *now* free of charge for them. What bullshit! They’ve *now* become the emperor! It’s so shitty that we have to pay everything ourselves and are paid nearly nothing! I had to pay for the motorbike to get to the hospital, and pay for the fucking useless pills. I told them (hospital staff) that I worked in the respect-the-elderly home and that we had sent them many patients, so they might consider treating me for free. But no, they said no way! Then I had to say nice words to the motorbike driver to give me a free ride back, as if I owe him some debt. ‘What a social condition nowadays’ [*xianzai shi shenme shidao*]! Bullshit...nonsense...

⁹² For practical reasons, for example the office door being locked and only the care workers having a key. Besides, most residents did not know how to use the phone.

⁹³ *daiyu* refers to how one is treated overall by one’s ‘work unit’, including one’s salary, housing and other welfare packages, which begins to enter popular usage during the Maoist period. I highlight it to emphasize that the Chinese translation for welfare, *fuli*, was actually rarely used in everyday language, but *daiyu*.

⁹⁴ When polygamy was common practice, the children of the second wife were said to have lower status than those of the first wife. Hehong used this expression as a metaphor to describe her inferior position to the WuBao-Elderly.

Hehong sat down in a chair, leant on the table, massaged her belly and continued to make complaints about all the issues that affected her, including the unpaid annual bonus, how her arduous work serving residents was almost certainly the cause of the recurrence of her illness, and how unlucky she had been the night before to have lost so much money on Mahjong. At that moment, a resident came in, looking around for a few seconds before his eyes fell on Hehong.

‘*Jiejie* (elder sister), could you please make a phone call for me?’ The resident asked Hehong cautiously.

Hearing this, Hehong snapped at the resident, ‘Who is your elder sister? Fuck, how old are you?’

‘You’re my *jiejie*. No matter how old we are, we should always respect you, and to show our respect it is right to call you *jiejie*!’ the old man responded fluently.

‘You can’t make any calls now. Someone just tried it and found it’s not working!’ Hehong replied, to my surprise since I knew the phone was working.

The old man continued as if he had not heard Hehong’s response: ‘Eh... but just a short call? I want to check with our brigade leader if the procedure for my pension has gone through. It has been several months already but there is still no news.’

‘Didn’t you hear what I said?’ shouted Hehong. ‘The phone is not working! Can you *wait* for a while and come back *later*?’ With great impatience, she buried her head in her arms again.

‘Right, right, I’ll come back later, later’, replied the old man, with a note of resignation in his voice. Still murmuring something to himself, he turned around and was about to leave when Hehong called out again:

‘Wait!’ She fished out a bunch of keys from her pocket, threw it to another care worker, and said, ‘Help him to make the call. My belly is painful.’

Though on average they are much older, the residents often refer to female workers using terms that usually apply to senior women in local kinship networks: such as *jiejie* or mum, as the above vignette illustrates. Reminded by Hehong’s resolute rebut to the resident who calls her *jiejie*, there is clearly considerable hierarchical ambiguity in the relations between residents and care workers. This ambiguity is brought about by the availability of more than one referential frame. As shown, there seems to be the option of taking age or generation as the criterion for hierarchy, and of treating workers as being senior to residents. This muddling relationship elicits the subtheme of this chapter, which interrogates whether and how different frames of time are represented, contested or coexist in the Home.

Primarily received as a concept prioritising spatial otherness, the fourth principle in Michel Foucault’s conception of heterotopia turns the focus towards its temporal quality. Symmetrical to its otherness in space, heterotopia represents heterochronies, that is to say ‘the heterotopia begins to function at full capacity when men arrive at a sort of absolute break with their traditional time.’ On this ‘absolute break’, Foucault thought of two possibilities. One represents an infinite accumulation of time, such as museum and library; the other kind speaks of time in its most flowing, transitory and precarious aspect, exemplified by fairgrounds. Yet both are heterochronies only in relation to modern western culture in which a particular temporal order is authorised.

In anthropology, there is a vast literature discussing time (Evans-Pritchard 1940; Geertz 1973; Bloch 1977; Gell 1992). All these authors distinguish the time observed in their respective fieldwork site from the linear temporal mode particular to the west originating in Christianity, which defines a sequential existence beginning with creation and ending in the Day of Judgment. I want to point out that a commonality in

many of the earlier ethnographic studies on time presented the co-existence of two or more temporal modes, the mutualisation of which is necessary for the full functioning of local life. More recent work on time engages the topic with the subject matter of politics and power (Greenhouse 1996; Munn 1992). Following the turn of the century, a range of literature has conceptualised the present global time primarily as a break from previous timescapes (Castells 1996; Guyer 2007; Adams & Groves 2007) – with the exception of recent research by Laura Bear and Stephan Feuchtwang (2011), which shows that all representations of time produce mediating practices in the present, along with side shadows of futures and pasts not taken, and emphasises a variety of time practices that produce polychromies that are negotiated by people and institutions.

Starting from this last proposition, in this chapter I present the qualities of the Home that render it a heterotopian institution from three angles regarding time. The first section delineates a series of binaries representing the institution's intended temporal order and that of others, and shows how they are played out in reality. The second section focuses on the heterochronies of the Home by presenting how the past, present and future are intricately accumulated within the Home with reference to respective symbols. The third section turns to depict the pervasive phenomenon of waiting among both residents and staff, and argues that it is a motionless action signifying a temporal orientation towards utopia. I will conclude by summarising how all of them together result in the Home being a temporal heterotopia.

The Institution's Temporalised Discourse and Practice

Sharing the same countryside space with local villagers, the Home distinguishes itself through a distinct set of temporal discourses and practices. In the following, I summarise the ways of classification on four matters representing the institution's intended practices on time vis-à-vis those not favoured. In light of the academic

discussions on temporal practice in relation to institutional structure,⁹⁵ I suggest that the double, and often contradictory, functions of the Home as a showcase bureaucratic institution on the one hand, and as a care-providing organisation on the other, should be counted as an important factor to explain the actual dynamics of these practices.

The Temporal Scales of the State and Those of the Local

Firstly, the method used to identify one's age changes following the shift in one's identity from villager to resident. In village practice, particularly for elderly people, one's age is calculated against the Chinese sexagenary calendar and the correspondent sign of *shengxiao*⁹⁶. For example, typically an aged villager would be quick to tell me he was born in the year of Dingchou, under the sign of the Ox (which means the year 1937); but cannot tell which year that was according to the national calendar. Otherwise, one might simply refer to one's rank and generation in one's patrilineal genealogy to position oneself. These calculating methods nevertheless became irrelevant when one applied for a certificate of WuBao-Elderly, or for living in the Home. Instead, two other measures for calculating age became necessary for these purposes. One was the newly issued ID card, and the other the date of birth printed on that card, which was supposed to follow the civil calendar. These artefacts were the only 'evidence' authorised and thus legible to the bureaucratic administration to prove one's right to stay in the Home and receive state welfare. They became indispensable to residents in verifying the legitimacy of their claim to welfare entitlement. Yet, since both the new ID card and the civil calendar were unfamiliar to most residents, the extent to which they were legible to the residents was rather doubtful. Many residents encountered unexpected difficulties when applying for an ID card or even

⁹⁵ For example, Carol Greenhouse (1996) relates time to the culturally specific formation of agency in its capacity to make people's compatibility or incompatibility within specific institutional forms. Nancy Munn (1992) theorises human perception of time as temporality and suggests that the inherent temporal character of social life is embodied in concrete temporalising practices, through which time is sensed, and by hinging subjects to wider social horizons, temporalising practices provide a field where the control of time is also a medium of hierarchic power and governance.

⁹⁶ The Chinese zodiac is a divinity scheme that relates each year to an animal and its reputed attributes according to a 12-year mathematical cycle.

reporting their ages according to the civil calendar for the purpose of application.⁹⁷ As a result, some residents told me that the year of birth on their ID card was just wrong, and others admitted that it was simply unrecognisable to them.

The supreme importance attached to these new techniques endowed the residents' ambivalent emotions towards them; however, these emotions were channelled by their flexible responses. On the one hand, many residents treated their cards dearly – wrapping them in handkerchiefs and storing them carefully. On the other hand, they were the cause of complaints, such as 'I don't count, my card counts', or 'the dead man continues to claim his welfare but the living one is told no additional quota applies to him'. Moreover, on some occasions when the residents did not need the cards, they easily ignored them altogether. Very often, when a resident was to celebrate his birthday, he did it elsewhere – and then both the age he counted for himself and the date of birth followed his previous habit.

Similarly, there was a 'normal gap' between the computerised data, legible to the state, and reality. The information of the Home – such as the total number of residents, their name, age and other specificities – were supposed to be inputted into the computer system and regularly renewed, so that the higher offices could monitor these grassroots institutions and make budget and other arrangements accordingly. Being the foundation for official decisions, like the ID card, computerised data, as part of the modern bureaucratic infrastructure, often took precedence to reality, to the extent that it spoke as if it were the reality. As such, it often became the field for manoeuvre. For example, the budget for Home management was calculated against the total number of residents, with each resident allocated 265 yuan per month. Since the 'total number' of residents referred only to the figure shown on the computer system, a change in this would mean a change in the Home's budget. What happened was that, at times, the

⁹⁷ I heard many accounts from residents on the difficulties they had encountered in the process of applying for an ID card. Their tone suggested that they saw the inability to obtain it a failure. But this does not mean that they 'take' it other than to use it in turn to cope with the state. The arbitrariness of ID card is not only seen in age, but also name. On state versus local naming practices, see Scott, Tehranian&Mathias (2002).

welfare entitlement budgeted for a resident, who had just died, was simply designated to a newcomer without renewing the computer data. This was not only because of the staff's concern not to reduce the budget, but also because to enrol another resident often meant delay due to bureaucratic predicaments, such as the new person not having the required documents necessary for formal approval. As a result, the renewing of computer data often required much attention from the staff, with serious or secret discussions between the two directors.

Thus the database, the purpose of which was to provide a modern technologised bureaucratic system through which the state could 'see and control' at a local level, was actually manipulated by local officers (in this case the Home management) to regulate what the state can see, such that their work can be put in a better light. In contrast to households, the individual particularity of residents also became much less important when they became easily replaceable and priority was given to an overall stable database. Similarly, the residents kept themselves blind to the state's techniques whenever they could; and by so doing, their ambivalent emotions to these new artefacts were somehow eased.

Another example is the different weight given to various holidays, manifest in the forms of celebration. I was very impressed by Zhiying's words on 1 May 2011, during the week-long national holiday celebrating International Labour Day. I asked her what she planned to do to enjoy the break. 'Nothing', she answered me. 'This is the state's holiday, not ours.'⁹⁸ Indeed, with only a cursory glance, one could discern that the holidays celebrated with most enthusiasm by local households were not identical to national holidays, and those observed in the Home were also different from those commemorated in local households. This was illustrated in the different ways the Home and most local households celebrated the Qingming Festival and the Chongyang Festival.⁹⁹ Locally, the Qingming Festival was practised seriously among

⁹⁸ From her point of view, the state holidays included Labour Day, Nation Day and New Year's Day, and their own holidays were Qingming Festival, Duanwu Festival and Spring Festival.

⁹⁹ Qingming Festival is the holiday for ancestors; and Chongyang Festival is for the elderly.

kin groups, often with patrilineal kin, having already divided into several households, gathering together to worship their common ancestors with the ceremony of ‘*saomu*’ (tend grave). Eating and playing Mahjong were the main activities undertaken after the ceremony, which lasted for the rest of the day. But the Chongyang Festival received little attention within households, and on this day the Home workers might, at most, go back to their parents’ home to have a meal together as a sign of celebrating the holiday. These two holidays were observed in opposite ways in the Home. It was remarkably deserted during the Qingming Festival (4 April 2011). This was not only because no special programme of events was organised, but also because many people were absent. Most workers went home to celebrate the festival with their own kin; and likewise, some residents also left the Home and went elsewhere to join their own families. In sharp contrast, on the day of the Chongyang Festival (16 Oct 2010) the Home was very busy, with visits not only of officials and the media, but also of students, who came to celebrate with the elderly residents and stage various performances for them.

Munn (1992, p.109) asserts that:

Authority over the annual calendar..., or of other chronological instruments like clock time, not only controls aspects of the everyday lives of persons but also connects this level of control to a more comprehensive universe that entails critical values and potencies in which governance is grounded.

In connection to this we may be impressed by the extent to which the proliferation of the means of state control actually leads to the increment of disconnections, gaps and thus more possibilities for the controlled to find alternatives. Similarly, if we recall the technique of broadcasting music as a reminder of the meal time, the ambiguity in the management’s introduction of a ‘modern’ timescale is manifest: the clock is denied in that it is not legible to many diners; yet clock time has to be stuck to. The interface of the two – the compatibility of incompatibles – is filled by the old

recognisable symbols: Maoist paeans, which are neither entirely the state status quo nor local, but function well as a combination of the two.

Temporal Uniformity and Diversity

A unified and rhythmic schedule regulating everyday life was favoured in the Home over individual autonomy.¹⁰⁰ The mainstream discourse started to construct a unifying identity of the residents when they moved into the Home, in which it effected a radical disconnection between the past and present by emphasising the overnight change on residents' identity from 'village people' [*cunmin*] to 'home people' [*yuanmin*]. Ignoring the actually unaffected habits and perceptions of these residents, the entitlement to a common new identity was propagated as if it was all. This elicited, and was consistent with, two temporal features later imposed on residents, i.e. uniformity and fastness.

As mentioned in previous chapters, many routines ought to be carried out at a fixed time; and the duration prescribed for these activities was notably short. These activities included eating, sleeping, cleaning and dispatching money. Taking dining as an example (see Chapter Two), each meal time was very brief: getting up later than 7.30am would mean not only that one missed breakfast, but also that one might acquire a reputation for laziness. Depending on the time of day, having a meal may be encouraged or else disallowed – in other words, whether 'eating' was considered a proper action was conditioned upon when one ate. Similarly, the work of cleaning one's room would obtain little institutional recognition unless it was in the morning before the hygiene check; and when a collective cleaning was undertaken, there was often an aura pushing it to be finished sooner rather than later. The residents who were unable to do it faster were easily left out. Individual movements were encouraged to be faster in general, for residents and workers alike. The Chinese

¹⁰⁰ Foucault (1979), on the temporal elaboration of the act, argues that an anatomico-chronological schema or programme for constructing an obligatory rhythm is set out which systematically segments the body into spatiotemporal units, see also, Bourdieu 1977.

phrase *dongzuo kuai* (literally ‘act/movement fast’) was often said in a complimentary tone. Likewise, those whose movements tended to be slow were often commented on negatively, implying that they were less clever, less capable, or as if ‘older’ than those who acted fast. When workers acted slowly, it was often remarked that ‘you are so slow, like a resident’. I wondered for a long while why it was so important to emphasise the speed of these activities, considering that they were not urgent, nor did the residents have other things to do; and a place like the Home was also assumed to be slow in pace. Nevertheless other activities initiated by individual residents were in comparison often done irrespective of time (quick or slow), if not interrupted by the fixed meal time.

In addition, there were also some methods developed to keep residents from leaving the Home. Time spent outside the Home was considered ‘dangerous’, while time in the Home was ‘safe’. If residents planned to stay outside overnight, they needed to fill in a leaving form, which included information on the proposed date of departure and return and, more importantly, their reasons for leaving. It was normal for care workers to actually fill in these forms instead of residents themselves, since many residents could not write. Often residents would go to the care worker’s office and talk to the one on duty about the stories behind his current request for leave. The care worker would often negotiate with the resident for a while, mainly to make some modification to the original plan such as a change of date or to shorten the time of the leave. Then the care worker would complete the form and give it to the illiterate resident to approve with a fingerprint. These forms were used not only as a record of one’s attendance, but also to gauge one’s performance for the annual assessment, that is, the fewer leaving days, the more credits one would be awarded, making one more likely to be labelled an ‘excellent’ resident.

Residents’ obedience or disobedience with regard to the unified institutional time was a sensitive parameter to induce awards or punishment. Residents who observed it strictly were often awarded a certificate of ‘Excellent Home People’ [*youxiu yuanmin*],

while individuals who dismissed the schedule could expect to receive a fine. Meanwhile, various forms of discipline were articulated through the discourse of the Home taking ‘responsibility’ over residents, or for the benefit of residents. In this way, discipline was made indisputable in the same language of care. Even though the residents often experienced them with discomfort, their general evaluation of these rules was far from negative.¹⁰¹

Yet on the other hand, the more emphasis given to conformity and fastness, the more alternatives were also incurred. For example, as I described in Chapter Two, residents went out of the Home to seek other food such as by cooking on wild stoves. Many residents stored a bag of peanuts to eat at any time. In the case of the leave form, some residents ignored it altogether at the expense of giving up all their pocket money.¹⁰² I frequently observed at first hand that a resident might easily ignore the pre-meal music if he was talking with me about something he was interested in, and would demonstrate a nonchalant attitude to missing a meal.

Life and Death

Among the five guaranteed items— dress, food, house, medication and cremation— my observation was that the first three were made much more visually significant than the latter two in the Home’s presentation of itself. No visitors were shown the cremation centre in the county town where deceased residents were sent. Notably, unlike local households for which a funeral was typically a loud and elaborate event, deaths in the Home were much quieter. There was no funeral organised in the Home, with the arrangements for following the prescribed procedures being left to Duck alone, at times facilitated by another care worker. Typically both the deceased resident and his belongings were quickly removed from the Home.¹⁰³ The handover of the ashes of

¹⁰¹ Such as their acquiescence to the queuing rule described in Chapter Two.

¹⁰² In the case of Old Wu in Chapter Seven, Wu spent four months at his daughters’ families without caring about pocket money.

¹⁰³ More on this is in Chapter Six. The practice of keep a distance between the living and the dead is also seen in the Vezo death practice (Astuti 1999) and the Chinese practice (Watson&Rawski 1988).

the deceased to his relatives, marking the end point of the Home's care service, was assumed, by default, to take place in Fankou, both the car from the cremation centre bringing the ashes and the relatives collecting them, being instructed to meet there, instead of in the Home. In those cases in which no relative came to collect the ashes, Duck was authorised to deal with the unclaimed ashes himself.¹⁰⁴

Similar invisibility, to a lesser extent, was also evident with regard to hospitalisation. The issues regarding hospitalisation were always talked about and dealt with in an atmosphere of secrecy. It was the norm for the two directors to go to the hospital to handle related matters. Other workers and residents were, in principle, not involved. There were two designated hospitals, one at Gaosheng township about five kilometres away, and the other one at Qinghe township about fifteen kilometres away, to which the more seriously ill were supposed to be sent. I was told not to go to these hospitals by myself, but could do so with the two directors. Accompanying them, there were many occasions, and areas in the hospital, where I was asked to stay outside. A similar barrier for visibility was also set between Home staff and higher offices in charge. Once, there was an internal survey of the Home's medical condition including the number of ill residents and the main kinds of illness. After the two directors had the information sheet from the township hospital, they noticed that the sheet indicated there were quite a few residents suffering from schizophrenia, which they thought made the sheet *look* bad, as if the Home was full of the mentally ill. They therefore decided to change this to another illness, which could make the sheet *look* nicer.

The presentation of these welfare services were obviously in sharp contrast to the spectacular scenes presented in dining, the elaboration of hygiene work and the magnificent architecture of the Home. Though I mainly want to present them only as social facts, their very existence may also remind us to think about what the residents' bodily enrichment and delay mean in such a state institution. My own guess is that bodily enrichment, representing the regeneration of life, is considered a sign of the

¹⁰⁴ Relating to the reunion constraint (Stafford 2000), many residents had prepared their tomb nearby the patrilineal ancestors' place.

state giving life to the WuBao-Elderly, which is what the Home is supposed to do as an exemplary institution; and it also serves as a reminder of the life-giving role the Party fulfilled amongst the people during the Maoist period. Therefore it is tacitly exaggerated. Yet the bodily decay of the residents, being considered to add little credit to the institutional mission of showing the favour of life-giving – if not being simply opposed to it – is logically rendered secondary and thus left much more invisible, even though it might be of the most concern to those involved.

The priority given to life over death also, incidentally, presented a reminder of the logic that this welfare poignantly stopped at the time of a resident's death, when the deceased was left free: either with one's ash collected by relatives and returned to one's patrilineal line to become an ancestor; or dealt with by Duck arbitrarily and turned into a ghost. In both circumstances there was a radical break from the state. In this sense, the Home is a place of both transience and permanence to a resident. It is permanent as long as a resident is alive, and it disappears once one's life dissolves. The combination of the temporal binaries of permanence and transience, again, demonstrates the Home to be a heterochrony.

Age, Generation and Organisational Hierarchy

Three frameworks existed by which one could measure seniority: position in the Home, age and generation. The first followed the bureaucratic logic, while the other two were to various extents more local. Since these three frames often brought about contradictory sequences, and there was never an explicit consensus on the most authoritative one, in everyday life what was actually seen was the interchangeable use of different frames and jokes on their mutual inconsistency.

The potential conflict among staff on the asymmetry between age and political position was seldom reflected on.¹⁰⁵ The matter was much trickier between staff and

¹⁰⁵ The staff saw an age pattern in which the younger occupied higher positions. The two directors were the youngest. Most care workers were older than them, on average in their forties. Zhiying, aged 39 then, was the second youngest among the workers, and she was the head care worker.

residents. On the one hand, the elderly were supposed to be respected, which implied a higher status than the staff; yet on the other hand, everyday practice reminded one that it was the staff that were in charge and the elderly could only follow the rules defined by them. This ambivalent relationship was also seen in the residents' frequent use of local kin terms for senior women, such as *jiejie*, when addressing care workers, particularly when a service was being asked for,¹⁰⁶ as shown in the vignette at the beginning of this chapter.¹⁰⁷ The use of kin terms obviously created a submissive intimacy between resident and care worker, and was also a reminder of the coexistence of more than one referential framework. In a similar vein, there were also this kind of rhetorical exchanges between Director Zhu and residents:

'Zhu *laoshi* (teacher) is getting off work today.' a resident greeted Zhu at the gate when Zhu was leaving the Home.

'You are my teacher; I am not your teacher.' Zhu answered.

'You are our teacher; we are not teachers. We are students.' replied the resident

'I am a student.' Zhu responded and walked out.

Among the residents, the inverted age-seniority pattern (i.e. younger being senior) was not so obvious; and in fact many residents observed deference to seniority based on age and generation. This accorded to the local kin practice in which seniority was primarily based on generation; and within each generation, on age. If there was a clash between age and generation (such as someone in a senior generation being younger), he would still be accorded the senior title but often treated as a younger one.¹⁰⁸ A tendency that favoured the younger only emerged when some residents were included in the management. As Table 3.1 shows, the average age of the

¹⁰⁶ These kin terms were not used so much with male care workers.

¹⁰⁷ Typically, Hehong was called 'Mum Bao' [*Bao ma*]; and Murong was called 'Elder-Sister Pu' [*Pu jie*].

¹⁰⁸ It was also observed that one's political office permeated in kin practice to measure one's overall seniority.

residents in these function groups is in the sixties, which is below the mean of the ages of all residents (above seventy). And there is no one over eighty years old in these groups.

Functional Groups	Average Age
Elderly Committee	68
Floor Leaders	65
Production Team	66
Livestock Team	68

Table 3.1

I would argue that the above four binaries on the temporal rules practised, and intended to be routinised, reflect the Home's capacity for accommodating other practices without affecting those favoured by it as an exemplary bureaucratic organisation. The more one side is emphasised, the more the other side is activated, such that the proliferation of means of control is tantamount to an expanded space for manoeuvre; and the more referential frames there are, instead of only bringing conflicts, mean more ways to recast mutual perspectives. The capacity for combining opposites for the sake of prioritising one side, in my view, effectively suggests the quality of the Home as a bureaucratic heterotopia. In the following section I go on to investigate the Home through its heterochronies – i.e. whether and how time in it radically differs from its local context.

Heterochronies: The Accumulation of Future, Present and Past

Future, present and past, infused with relevant 'retensions' and 'protensions' - to use Husserl's terms (1964) - were all present in the Home, associated with different symbols. Instead of being conceived primarily as a homogeneous whole, the Home was perceived as containing separate parts with each representing a temporal territory by the people in it. Typically, the past was attributed to the residents, the present to the workers and the future to the state, each with sharply contradictory qualities and the corresponding mechanism that allowed contradiction to coexist. In the following, I describe these attributes which, I argue, structure the Home as a heterochrony.

Regular students' visits to the Home certainly brought different futures into the Home. These visits were part of the inter-sectoral exchanges popular in current government practice. As a 'Moral Education Base', the Home received students from primary schools to university for the claimed goal of letting students see and learn the Chinese national virtue of 'respecting the elderly'. In my observation, it was remarkable that these visits followed a similar programme, with a three-stage formulation in which both residents and students were watched and served: upon arrival, the Home as whole was introduced to the students, during which both residents and staff were literally under the latter's gaze; the second stage saw the students being literally watched by the residents, as they danced or sung to show their respect; the third stage was always designed to be less formal, in the sense that students were asked to care for individual residents in whatever they saw fit, such as helping them to clean their rooms. My observation was that students were often more genuinely excited than residents in these visits. While the arrival of students doubtlessly extends the timescape of the Home to the far future, it is also a reminder that for residents to be respected is to be present for students to see how the 'state' [*guojia*] respects the elderly. For this reason the 'state' emerges at the interface of the dual statuses of the residents of 'being respected' and 'being seen to be respected'.

The 'state' was *in* the Home, typically represented by the housing facilities. Most residents considered the state to be the owner of these facilities. In their reasoning, since the state invested in these houses, it should own them; and since the state invested in these houses *for* the residents, they should be the owner of the properties when the state was absent, instead of the staff. The staff was thus differentiated from the state. A Chinese proverb frequently quoted by the residents made explicit this differentiation. When chatting about the relationship between state welfare and the local implementers, residents often preached, '*tieda de yingpan, liushui de bing*' – literally, 'fixed barrack, floating soldiers', in which 'fixed barrack' implies the houses invested by the state, and 'floating soldiers' are the metaphor to the workers. This proverb originally refers to the dialectics of military camps and soldiers, emphasising

their contrast of eternity and transience – that is, the former is static and enduring, and the latter is mobile and in flux. This proverb was used as the title of a military song in the 1980s and became very popular in many areas in China. In folk usage, it is extended to imply the general situation in which institutional infrastructure, in particular physical dwellings, is much more stable and reliable than the personnel working within it. People may change, but the infrastructure is always there – a typical similar pair being temple and monk.

In using this proverb, residents implied that the dwellings signified a stable and guaranteed future, which was associated with the state; and the care service making the present every day was, in comparison, more uncertain due to the higher possibility of change in staff. In this way, the houses were differentiated from care services, in an analogous way to that between the state and the staff, and the future and the present. In my view, by using this metaphor, it strongly suggests that the Home is not primarily considered a homogeneous whole, but rather consists of different elements imbued with different temporal implications. Since the transient is equated to the present and the lasting to the future (i.e. as the service is to the houses), it also has implications for the relationship between the present and the future. This means that the future and present are not conceived by residents as two slots spreading along a temporal spectrum whose poles can be labelled sequentially. Rather, the repertoire of transient presents constitutes the future. In other words, instead of taking the future as sequentially following the present, it might be more accurate to claim that, in the eyes of the residents, the future is comprised of many presents; and this is analogous to the relationship of the Home to the state.

The houses then, reifying the state as an unidentifiable benefactor, played an important role in making the residents feel certain about the future of this welfare provision. While routine bureaucratic checks on the Home paid most attention to the care service delivered by staff, the evaluation from the side of most residents actually always took the housing infrastructure itself seriously. Yet this is not to say that

houses and the idea of a general state are sufficient to secure the residents' certainty about their future. On the contrary, residents were not sure and were much concerned about the future stability of the WuBao policy. Though regular meetings in the Home provided the channel for related policies to be announced, the most favoured means for many residents was to listen individually to the news by radio.¹⁰⁹ Very often, when a quarrel or dispute occurred among the residents or between the residents and staff concerning what would happen to rural old people's policies, the news heard from the radio was drawn upon as strong evidence. Accordingly, those who had heard the news *directly* from radio were often felt to be the most authoritative by others, followed by those who had heard the news from those who got it directly, with those who had not known anything having the least chance to speak. Meanwhile, rumours on whether there would be bad changes in policy occurred from time to time, such that residents would soon be evacuated and the Home would be used as the site of a new hospital. Often rumours were only dispelled when nothing actually happened.

The care services provided by the staff – whose existence was considered 'floating' and their services relatively unreliable – were representative of the present. As the vignette at the beginning of this chapter shows, the actual availability of particular service at every trivial moment of demand was not guaranteed. The emotionality of an individual worker can easily prevent help from being offered; and indeed, individual personalities made a great difference in deciding the actual quality of everyday service. Yet on the other hand, the unpredictability of routine services seemed to be well balanced by equally fluid individual responses, such as the residents' calling Hehong *jiejie*, and Hehong's quick change of idea to actually offer the help. In other words, while the certainty and uncertainty regarding the future and the state were mostly balanced by reifications of the state – such as house and radio – those of the present everyday was more a result of unpredictable personal interactions which did not mean that problems could not be solved.

¹⁰⁹ Many residents considered radio news was more reliable, because it was unaffected by local officials.

When residents complained about the present, the past was often invoked as a dose of placebo representing something ‘even worse’, so that the present was felt to be better. For example, many residents liked to draw comparisons between the accommodation provided in the Home and their own former dwellings, noting the relative magnificence of the former in order to highlight both the benevolence of the state and their own inabilities. In a similar vein, the care services, despite their failings, were constantly contrasted with those that would have been provided by the residents’ own families on the justification that anything was better than nothing.

This elicits the third association, namely that between the residents and the past, which also differentiates the future and present from the past – a difference not identical to that between the future and the present. The Home did not have a significant ‘past’ of itself, simply because it had only been there for four years or so; and the prehistory of the Home, such as how and why it was established in this place, was largely not bothered about by the local people who showed gestures of indifference, or sometimes provided mythical narratives, such as owing to the auspicious *fengshui* of the village. There was no one in the village who could offer me a seemingly complete answer to questions such as why this village was selected as the site for the Home, or how this particular architecture was chosen. But tellingly, instead of struggling with the actual dearth of information on why ‘good’ projects, such as the Home, arrived at Hongfan village, local officials tended to choose more convenient ways to convince themselves – typically by appealing to local knowledge of *fengshui*. By doing so, the mystery derived from the concealed nature of the state selection process seemed to be rendered much less problematic. The mystified explanation corresponds to the enclosed nature of the identification of a state project, and thus actually functions to provide the locality with a sense of certainty.

It was the residents that limitlessly extended the temporal scape of the Home, either by bringing their own histories into it or by making the history of the Party present,

such as pasting a picture of Chairman Mao on the wall.¹¹⁰ In official discourse, the past of residents was, as a whole, articulated as failure. As I mentioned in the Introduction, the mainstream discourse most often referred to the residents with the blanket term of WuBao-Hu, which conveyed a strong message of negativity. Their being included in this category was talked about largely as the result of a failed past, including the failure to form a family, or have more money, for which the person himself should be responsible. That a failed past did not deserve the present welfare was a constant reminder by care workers and at times between residents. It was not unusual to hear care workers complain to residents: ‘You don’t appreciate what you have now. You never think about what you had before. Could you find anyone to feed you or manage you like this in your own home?’ Generally being deemed to have a failed past, it became more touching to see with what nostalgia the residents sometimes deemed their past. Though the residents also acknowledged failure in their own depictions of the past, such failures were often considered accidental, momentary or fateful, rather than being essential to themselves, while there were those who were actually proud of their pasts.

Recording the oral history of individual residents was one of the very few things that I actually enjoyed throughout the fieldwork. These oral accounts opened a wide landscape with a coverage from Xinjiang to Hainan province - from the northwest corner to the most southern part of China, evoking histories that ranged from voluntary troops in the North Korean War to those of the ‘Military Coops’ [*juntuan*], and involved intimate recollections of failed love stories that accounted for their life-long status of being singleton, instead of what others considered to be poverty. These diverse pasts were private and often not at all felt shameful by themselves. More importantly, there were often some relics through which these pasts were presented in the present, though often only locked in the residents’ cupboards. Gao

¹¹⁰ Drawing on her ethnographic study of a silk factory in China, Lisa Rofel (1999) warns caution on over-application of Foucault’s Panopticon surveillance in contextualised settings. She pinpoints the influential force of past spatial relations that are carried into the present through subaltern memories, which significantly modify the government’s alleged faithful reproduction of Western modernity and transfigures it into an alternative reality.

Chengfu, a male resident, had been serving as the ‘personal bodyguard’ [*shiwei yuan*] of Yang Rudai¹¹¹ for four years in the 1950s when Yang worked as a county government officer. For some reasons, Gao did not follow Yang when Yang was promoted to another position, even though, in Gao’s account, Yang suggested he should do so. Over the following decades, Yang moved up to a very high position in the Party, which Gao only discovered through the media. As a result, those years of close service to this ‘big man’ became a life-long source of honour as well as pity for Gao. He often repeated, ‘Had I followed him all the way through, I should now be a senior retired cadre who enjoys good welfare [*daiyu*] in Beijing.’ This precious history of his was carefully protected by Gao using two objects: one was an introduction letter from Yang for his next job; and the other was a photo of a child, the son of the big man taken during his service. Both were wrapped in a handkerchief, stored deep in his cupboard and not known to people that he did not think deserved seeing them. These small objects, being secretly kept, in my view, powerfully balance the stereotypical evaluation of the residents, and provide them with a sense of honour unknown to others.

In summation, I want to highlight three points. The first is temporal accumulation. The temporal scape of the Home is significantly extended into an endless future associated with the state and a wide range of pasts by the residents, which are distinct from any other institutions in the village, let alone the ordinary household to which the Home claims to liken (for its claim to be like a family). The second is the ability to combine opposites. In each of these temporal slots (i.e. future, present and past) we see the co-existence of sharply contradictory attributes, such as the strong certainty and uncertainty associated with a state-sponsored future, the twist of indifference and intimacy in everyday service, and the overstated shame and honour regarding residents’ pasts. The third is inversion. In connection to Maurice Bloch’s (1977) reckoning of the two cognitive patterns on time of linearity and cyclicity – whereby

¹¹¹ Yang later became the CCP Chief of Sichuan province, and then the Vice Chairman of the 13th Politburo of the CCP, one of the top governing bodies of China.

the former is acquired by the individual in everyday experience and the latter is ideological for the sake of suppressing doubt on authority and denying the attempts of change – what we see here is the inversion of the two: the state institution prescribes a progressive temporal mode that negates the past and glorifies the future; yet the residents tend to behave otherwise. For these reasons, the Home suffices itself to be a radically different temporal existence to other institutions. I summarise these heterochronic characteristics in Table 3.2 below.

	The Home as Heterochronies		
Temporal Scope	past	present	future
Representative	individual resident	the staff	the state
Main Symbols	privately-collected objects	everyday services	housing facilities radio
Opposing Characteristics	shame and honour	unpredictability and predictability	certainty and uncertainty

Table 3.2

Waiting as a Strategic Action towards Utopia

The mutual effect of everyday practice and a person’s consciousness about time has been widely discussed (Bourdieu 1977; Foucault 1979). I now turn to a most common way that the people in the Home spend their time: namely, waiting. On closer inspection, these waits have distinct temporal orientations, with those engaged in by different roles being different. The things that Director Zhu was often waiting for were mostly concerned about the future; those for the care workers concerned the present; and the residents were constantly waiting for something to do with their past endeavour. While the temporal orientation in these waits is certainly a reminder of the organisation’s hierarchy, a more important implication of waiting in this context, in my view, is that it is an agentic action aiming towards a better status, or utopia, and thus is a reminder of the heterotopian quality of the Home.

In this connection, I want to relate my discussion of this phenomenon to the waiting observed by Vincent Crapanzano (2003) and to the anxiety complex about the future discussed by Charles Stafford (2007). To briefly summarise, Crapanzano, drawing on the waiting phenomenon in South Africa among the whites in the final period of apartheid, argues that waiting is a structural effect that reflects the emotions and

attitudes that govern society at large, and interprets it as a state of absolute paralysis: a paradoxical result of the hopelessness of extreme hope, which distances the self from utopia, a state which the extraordinary hope directs. Stafford, from a different angle and drawing on the case of an aged villager in northeast China, argues that there are two ways of obtaining control of the future: a more universally recognisable logic of predicting the repetitive patterns of universe and knowing one's position in it through quantification; and a more socio-cultural specific sociality pattern that relies on continuous circles of separation and reunion. The former allows less individual strategic action to manipulate, and the latter allows more. This suspends the Chinese in a status of partial anxiety about the future not so different from people elsewhere in the world. Let me leave these discussions for a while and come back to them after presenting the waits that I observed in the Home.

Director Zhu and the Waiting for a New Start in the Future

During my fieldwork time, Zhu increasingly spent more of his time waiting. There were the moments that he was waiting for some concrete and impending activities, such as standing at the gate to wait for some leader's visit, or staying in his office after work for another one or two hours to wait for the dinner banquet taking place much later. In addition, he was also in a general state of waiting for the time when he could be transferred to the county bureau to work (which meant promotion). Zhu took his waiting positively, rather than complaining about it as a waste of time. This observation of mine was also verified by his explanations, such as:

The most important thing for a state institution is the leader's attention; for any organisation, if no leader comes to visit, it's a sure sign that something is wrong. But you cannot drag the leader to come to visit. Sometimes the only thing you need to do is to learn to be patient. Just wait.

I am not sure to what extent this 'waiting' technique mattered, but compared to other institutions of the kind, the Home did seem to have attracted more attention from both officials and the media, evidenced by their frequent visits and much publicity. Such success was widely considered to be the result of Zhu's excellent work. Indeed, Zhu had been highly active particularly in the first three years of his tenure, especially in

fund-raising.¹¹² He also spent a large amount of time doing ‘thought work’ with workers and residents in order to ‘enhance their competence’ [*tigao sushi*] and to ‘conform understanding’ [*tongyi renshi*]. He established the ‘Elderly Committee’, composed of five residents, as part of the management structure and set up several ‘function groups’ with selected residents to facilitate routine services. He organised the resident workers to prepare adjacent land for vegetable cultivation and in raising fish and livestock. Putting all these experiences together, he drafted a ‘management manual’ [*guanli shouce*] specifically for CREHs, which was accepted as the ‘standard model’ [*biaozhun moshi*] by the Civil Affairs Department of the province, and disseminated for other CREHs to follow. These made the Home more dynamic than peer institutions, and certainly demonstrated Zhu’s ability as a bureaucrat.

Yet, though the many plaques and awards in the Home recorded certain recognition of Zhu’s work, what Zhu was most concerned with – his promotion – seemed very elusive. Having worked hard for nearly four years in this post, Zhu confided to me that though this work had opened new horizons to him, allowing him to know many people and to gain new understandings that would be impossible had he remained in the township school where he had been working, he thought what he had done for the Home was enough to bring him a promotion. In his words, ‘I am not sold to the Home, and I cannot spend all my life here’. Nearly one year previously, Zhu had started to make various endeavours to smooth his way for promotion.¹¹³ He was then given the hint of possibility that promotion was imminent. However, he seemed to become trapped in an endless cycle of ‘waiting and checking’; and the responses from higher persons were always more excuses for delay. For a whole year, nothing actually happened and Zhu gradually realised that to be promoted was something much less to do with what one did than with other ‘disarticulate’ factors. As a result, the more his attempts failed, the more Zhu spent his time playing Mahjong with residents to fill in the time of waiting. With every occasion of disappointment, he would swear to do something else. He swore that he would continue to study; and he thought maybe it

¹¹² Such as renovating the exterior wall, discussed in Chapter Three.

¹¹³ Including spending quite some time accompanying his superiors to banquets to drink; though utterly a burden to him, he thought it was necessary.

was also a good idea to return to the educational sector to live a ‘simple and innocent’ life. Or he swore to stay in the countryside forever to enjoy the relative independence and autonomy.¹¹⁴ The following words of his may help to discern the subtlety in his waiting:

Having worked nearly four years in this institution and put everything in order, I don’t want to do any more. I’m now just waiting for the promotion I deserve. The thing is that it is too complicated and difficult to articulate clearly how one gets promoted here in China; it’s not like ‘abroad’ [*guowai*]. To be promoted here, one needs to both actively work for it and patiently wait for it. Several years’ work experience in a grassroots-level institution is necessary, but not sufficient. Sufficiency means that all those ‘disarticulated conditions’ [*shuo buqingchu de yuanyin*] are turned positive, which includes, most importantly, ‘leader’s acknowledgement’ [*lingdao de chengren*]. But whether a leader acknowledges you is something utterly disarticulate. Anyway, I think I’ve done what I can do. The rest is not my bit. It’s one’s fate. I’ll just wait for my promotion to come. ‘If it doesn’t, let it go’ [*longbucheng jiu suanle*].

Care Workers and the Waiting for Contingency in the Present

Care workers, mostly women, were required to stay in the Home twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, yet much of their time in the Home was not, so to speak, spent on ‘working’. What actually occupied much of their time were activities such as knitting sweaters for a relative to return ‘human sentiment’ [*ren qing*], watching soap operas attentively, chatting aimlessly, cooking, or taking care of their children. I asked some of them why they did not return home after completing the day’s main tasks, such as serving meals or inspecting the room, to which I was told, ‘our job is to be

¹¹⁴ Zhu considered that being the Home director was different from working in the county bureau. This was not only because the latter meant promotion, but also because it was a ‘real’ bureaucratic position characterised by ‘complicated relations and dreamlessness’. In comparison, being a CREH director was much simpler and freer.

here at all times ‘in case’ [*wanyi*] anything happened’.¹¹⁵ Reminded by this comment, I started to observe the function of their job as waiting. The following two kinds represent the result of my identification.

The first type of waiting was to be prepared for dramatic contingencies, in which care workers acted as crucial connecting points. These situations included when a resident was dying or became seriously ill, a resident’s relatives coming to complain about something or an accident resulting from a fight between residents. When these happened, it was the care workers’ responsibility to report the emergency to the directors or the concerned institution *immediately*. Precisely, their responsibility was not so much to resolve emergencies, as to report them *in the first instance* so that their superiors and other institutions were informed. In addition, they were available to fulfil immediate instructions. During my fieldwork, bureau inspections became irregular, with no advance notice. Accordingly, the Home paid more emphasis to routine cleaning. As the Home was only informed of most inspections on the day, sometimes when the inspectors were en-route, the constant presence of care workers became crucial in organising a preparatory cleaning or final check immediately before the arrival of inspectors. Thus the job of awaiting contingencies became an indispensable part of the problem-solving mechanism.

The second type of care workers’ waiting was associated with insignificant matters. The vast majority of the time no dramatic events took place, yet minor disputes or problems emerged very often, the tension in which was said by care workers to need to be released *timely*. To be fair, it was not unusual to see individual residents who had lost their temper come to the care workers to provoke things further, such as insisting on having a nap there. Comparing this to the care workers’ enforcement of explicit institutional rules, it was remarkable to me to see how tolerant they could be at these moments – often they only responded trouble makers by keeping quiet. Such response initially made little sense to me until Murong revealed to me the subtlety in

¹¹⁵ Another case of using *wanyi*, one of ten thousand probabilities.

it. She explained that actually a very important part of their work, as experience had taught them, was simply ‘to be the listener when someone lost temper’, and that ‘the key is not to quarrel with them, since no war bursts out when only one party takes part’. To be a listener was important, because otherwise these bad-tempered men could find nowhere else to release their ‘unknown anger’ [*wuming huo*], which might, in the long run, generate much larger trouble. To be a listener, then, meant that when an angry resident came up to provoke, the care workers were always there ready to listen without fighting back. It also meant that when someone was drunk, or became aggressive, or refused to queue or do the cleaning, the care workers, without needing to bother with other things such as the incivility of such behaviour, should always be there functioning as a placebo to calm them down. Indeed, much of such tension was relieved simply through the workers’ presence. More than one care worker agreed that their job was to take care of a group of particularly bad-tempered men, and that to be able to appease these people who have ‘no quality’ [*meiyou suzhi*] was key to maintaining everyday stability and thus was what the service was meant to be.

This may provide another case to show how two seemingly opposing functions are fulfilled in the same process: the care workers’ all time presence has the function both to be listeners to bad-tempered residents – a locally tacit and intimate way of providing care not so much taken by state standards – and also to help maintain the stability in the Home, which is emphasised in the state order, and thus achieves the combination of two orders.

The Residents and the Waiting for the Completion of the Past

That the Home provided for residents’ daily necessities also meant that residents were left with more free time than before, and their everyday activities were literally turned from ‘production-centred’ to ‘consumption-centred’ – that is, from organising their everyday schedule around activities such as agricultural work, to those of eating, sleeping and play etcetera. Official discourse drew on this change as evidence for having provided good welfare to WuBao-Elderly. Yet to the residents, this change

seemed to mean something different. Though admitting to have had more free time than before, many residents described the ways they spent their time as ‘not doing anything’ [*mei gan sha*]:

‘What are you doing?’

‘I’m not doing anything. Just have a walk and a look around.’

Dialogues of this sort were a common way of greeting. ‘Not doing anything’ was probably the term used most frequently by residents to describe what they got up to in their free time. Among the activities that they considered ‘not doing anything’ were walking around, sitting somewhere to watch cars and people passing by, watching TV, listening to music, and watching others play Mahjong. Waiting was one instantiation of ‘not doing anything’.

My attention to the phenomena of residents’ waiting started from noticing the ‘early queuers’ who spent several hours outside the dining hall (Chapter Two). If waiting for a meal can be interpreted as waiting for the repletion of the everyday process of physical depletion, there is a further kind of waiting that it may be instructive to parallel with it, which I characterise as waiting for the completion/repletion of a person as a social being. This latter form refers to the prolonged periods of time that residents spend waiting for someone to visit them. In most cases, they waited for their relatives; occasionally, they waited for a cadre or someone from their home village. Very often after receiving a visitor, residents would come to me to share the news, aglow with excitement. To illustrate this point, let us consider the example of my first encounter with Wang Hengzhou, a 66-year-old man, when he was waiting under a big tree at Fankou.

On most days, the bottom of the Sichuan basin was grey and cloudy, and it was one such afternoon that, wandering around Fankou, I came across an old man standing under the thickset tupelo at the crossroads. He was gazing into the distant traffic, his

eyes somehow shimmering. I could not at first tell if the redness of his eyes was caused by dust in the air, or if he was in fact heartbroken, as he appeared to be. But I was struck by the scene, particularly by the man's facial expression, which conveyed a mixture of hope and hopelessness and stood in stark contrast to the crowds moving around us, who paid little attention to this old man standing under a leafy tree.

Although I knew this man to be a Home resident, we had not yet been acquainted. But I resolved to strike up a conversation regardless. 'Hi, are you alright?' I enquired. He turned his head to me with a look of surprise, maybe at being disturbed or else at having someone show interest in him. When he saw it was me, he turned back to the passing cars, shaking his head with a bitter smile, and murmured, 'nothing, nothing'. 'Are you waiting for a bus?' I asked him again. 'No, no. Nothing.' He did not seem to want to say anything to me, but rather headed back to the Home.

I decided to follow him, remaining a few steps behind at all times, with neither of us saying anything. Soon we approached the gate of the Home. Xiuyun was doing exercise in the yard. Seeing me enter behind Wang, she called loudly to him, 'How come you let teacher Liu follow you! If teacher Liu wants to talk to you, remember to be more cooperative!' Hearing this, Wang seemed suddenly to awake from his somnambulant stupor. He turned back to me and apologised: 'Sure, sure, sorry. Come on, let's talk.'

We then walked back to my room, where before I started to say anything, he already started complaining about his nephews. He called his nephews 'three tortoises' sons' [*sange guierzi*] (abbreviated below as TTS).¹¹⁶

'The TTS haven't come to take me back! How irritating! I gave them so much money when they were young, (without which) can they be whom they are today? But they don't even come to take me back!'

¹¹⁶ Many abusive words were aimed at one's parents, such as 'tortoise' in this phrase.

‘So, you were there waiting for your nephews?’ I asked him.

‘What else!’

‘Why not go back yourself?’

‘That’s different! There’s ‘no face’ [*mei-mianzi*] if I go back myself! I don’t mind waiting for a while, but ‘the rule’ [*daoli*] is that they should come to pick me up. Oh, right, I can’t talk to you for long; otherwise if they came, they wouldn’t be able to find me! TTS!’

‘Of course. Let’s go back to wait for them, and I’ll join you if you don’t mind.’ I tried to follow him.

‘Join me? No need. I can talk with you later.’

Many residents longed for relatives, or people in their home village, to come to visit, or take them back, particularly on holidays. To have someone come to pick them up was perceived very differently from going back oneself. Yet this wish was rarely expressed explicitly, at most through bewildering apathetic allusions, such as ‘who bothers if anyone comes or not’. But as I observed, for example, during the Spring Festival of 2011, many residents became visibly anxious after they finished the festival lunch banquet organised by the Home, which was normally the time for most to go back to their home village or a kin’s family.

Analysis

	Director Zhu	Care Workers	Residents
Reality	not being promoted	emergencies	no visitors
Heterotopian Practice	the motionless action of waiting		
Utopia	being promoted	stability	visitors come

Table 3.3

As Table 3.3 shows, firstly, the kind of waiting that Director Zhu engages with is concerned with his upward move in the bureaucracy, which to him is the ideal. He understands waiting as a wise way of action. And for the time being, with promotion out of his control and subject to opaque factors, the ability to wait patiently becomes more important. As Zhu constantly exhibits, instead of being troubled by uncertainty or anxiety, while waiting he starts to think about other options and portrays them as beautiful. These alternatives have effectively counter-balanced the uncertainty of one future with the possibility of many futures. The rhetoric of fate may also be interpreted to have the function of making one become indifferent to one's future, since 'fate' is the 'other' to a self-controlling 'self'; and to leave the future to fate is thus to alienate the future from the self.

Secondly, care workers are waiting in case there are contingent happenings in the present. Their waiting is indispensable for both the provision of care service and maintaining the present stability; and to a large degree, it is itself the action that represents service and stability. On the one hand, care workers are largely in a status of passivity vis-à-vis the things that they are waiting for, since they can neither predict what will happen, nor are they in control of the solution. But on the other hand, such waiting is a powerful means in itself both to serve residents and to fulfil instructions, and seems irreplaceable. Again, it should be understood as a positive action containing and foreseeing uncertainty.

Thirdly, though residents talk about the ways they spend their free time as 'not doing anything', 'not doing anything' is never a literal state of affairs – any act can be understood as doing something. Thus, I may rather interpret their rhetoric denial of the substance of the activities so labelled to convey the message that those activities are not the things that the residents consider as 'things' – that is, things of much meaning to them. The fact that the rest of their days is fully guaranteed by the state seems to have the effect of closing their thoughts about the future, since the future is in an extraordinary ambivalent status of absolute guarantee and total dependency. The

residents seem to consider themselves in a condition that what they can do actually *means* nothing to them.¹¹⁷ I argue that to understand their waiting, this general psychological status of indifference should be taken into serious consideration; and because of this, their waiting on kin or peer villagers becomes an agentive action, since it evokes hope in comparison to the normal status of nothingness. The longing inherent in their waiting also seems to have some force on the visitors, such that ‘he is waiting’ is often said to describe how one feels obliged to pick up a waiting resident.

Apparently, waiting is an act common to all of them in dealing with the realities partially beyond their control. Yet all these waits prove to be actually a powerful means in itself for dealing with the matter concerned. They are thus motionless yet agentive actions, which correspond cautiously to the subtle reality in which one can do little to achieve the desired state that one is waiting for.¹¹⁸ In this sense, agreeing with Crapanzano, I suggest that these waits are a temporalised practice reflecting a wider social condition that the Home mirrors. Yet disagreeing with him, I want to highlight the active force in waiting: i.e. to wait *is* to act towards utopia rather than to distance the self from it, and thus it is a sign of approaching utopia while rooting oneself in reality. This is what a heterotopia is supposed to be. Returning to Stafford’s analysis, I may add that the universal anxiety about the future derived from a lack of control may be seriously compromised by the psychology of indifference to the future if such lack of control reaches an extreme, such as the condition that these residents are facing.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have summarised a series of temporalised discourses and practices that are intended in the Home vis-à-vis those not favoured, and showed how the latter

¹¹⁷ This may remind one of Galtung’s notion of violence (1969), which stresses the *condition* that renders the maximisation of one’s potential impossible.

¹¹⁸ Compare the Balinese social life in Clifford Geertz’s (1973) summation, claiming that it takes place in a motionless present.

is accommodated for the maintenance of the former. Following that, I discuss how the future, present and past are accumulated in the Home, each with opposite representations nevertheless coexisting, which qualify the Home as a set of heterochronies. I then focused on the pervasive phenomenon of waiting to show how, counter-intuitively, it acts as an agentive expression towards desired statuses.

I hope these materials support my overall argument on the Home as a heterotopian institution from distinctive angles: for the function of combining both the favoured and otherwise, as shown in the first section, it represents both the ideal and the real; for the function of accumulating far-reaching pasts and futures, as shown in the second section, it breaks radically from the temporal pattern of its surroundings and thus reveals heterochronies; and for what these specific waits suggest, in the third section, the people in the Home are neither in a state of the desired nor the undesired, they wait towards the desired. The ‘both-and’ and ‘neither-nor’ statuses, and coexistence of transience and endurance, I argue, qualify the Home as a heterotopia containing opposites.

Part II

Engender the Opposite

Chapter Five

State and Family – On the Staff

The families of the staff were involved in the bureaucratic work in various ways. Firstly, unlike the residents' relatives who were seldom seen in the Home, the family and kin of the staff were often present, which was certainly one of the few things literally adding a 'family' atmosphere. It was too normal to deserve anyone's attention to see the family and relatives of the staff coming to the Home, and some care workers' children even lived with them there. Secondly, some routine services were only delivered by involving substantial help from family and kin, or the use of staff's private resources; and sometimes, vice versa.¹¹⁹ Thirdly, the local recruitment of care workers reflects the significance of kin relations. All female care workers had strong local connections, such as being wives or daughters of village cadres. These phenomena lead one to ask: if the Home is supposed to be the reification of the state, how to understand the multifarious presence of workers' family and relatives in it?

This inquiry may directly relate to the question of what constitutes Chinese bureaucratic work. The academic discourse to understand bureaucracy in the formation of modern states has not gone beyond the categorization between patrimonialism and the ideal bureaucracy set by Max Weber (Adams and Charrad et al. 2011), in which patrimonialism is less divided from 'society' than legal-rational bureaucracy is supposed, ideally, to be. The application of the term 'state involution' to the Chinese context (Duara 1987; Siu 1989; Wang 1991; Lu 2000; Murphy 2007) also holds the premise of an opposition between a formal modern bureaucracy and the Chinese traditional patrimonialism when reviewing the 'state', with an implicit tone

¹¹⁹ For example, fifteen yuan were supposed to be given to each resident per month as 'pocket money' [*linghua qian*]. There were many practical difficulties regarding this task. Staff needed to collect the money from the Bureau on a set date each month but there was often a delay which led to complaints from the residents. Also, the Bureau only gave out one-hundred yuan notes instead of smaller denominations and the vast majority of the residents would not be able to supply the change required. If the Bureau was late, often Director Zhu withdrew his own money to forestall complaints. And the families and relatives of the workers were involved in sourcing large quantities of smaller denomination notes so that residents received their allowance.

assuming the persistence of the latter being problematic (Bray 1986). And this, in my view, also poses a potential limit to their alleged aim to blur the state and society boundary. Seemingly making a dissonant voice from the Chinese government which hails the establishment of the modern state, the ‘involution’ proponents are nevertheless constrained by the same conceptual framework they hold with the state. Hans Steinmuller, based on his recent study, endeavours to further blur the state-society boundary by envisioning an intimate state as a constitutive force at the heart of the social world (2010: 541). In his analysis, the state-society boundary does not disappear, but is substituted by those between more than two culturally intimate communities who make manifest their boundaries mainly by the gestures of irony.

Reviewing these explanatory paradigms, we may sense a similar predicament as well as insight, which are, on the one hand, there is a consensus that the modern Chinese state is not, for the most part, modern; yet on the other hand, there is an unavoidable embarrassment in the existing explanatory paradigms which have to take the ideal type of legal-rationality as the standard.

Examining the work-family relations of the Home staff may allow an insight to supplement the existing understandings of the constitution of bureaucratic work in contemporary China, which is the task of this chapter. In my observation, there are two levels of association between the work and family of these workers. Firstly, at the level of ideology, Confucian values are seen to inform the workers’ career choices.¹²⁰ Or in other words, certain coherence between the Home project and the workers’ choice to work in this institution is discernible as both hold Confucian values as the hidden transcripts. Secondly, at the level of everyday practice, family and bureaucratic work are intermingled in multifaceted ways from symbiotic to antithetical. My finding

¹²⁰ Regarding the intertwinement of work with the wider arena of life, Olivia Harris (2007: 137) draws our attention to the matter of work motivation by claiming that ‘the question of what makes people work is a central feature of the way that human existence is understood within different cultural and historical repertoires ... and a satisfactory understanding of the nature of work requires a broader understanding of value (also Graeber 2001)’. Her main concern is to counsel caution with regard to the current careless application of the Western conception of work, which, with its particular historical origin in the Greek and Roman philosophies, attaches a negative evaluation to work by equating the obligation to work with coercion, to other parts of the world.

is that the Home has accommodated these theoretically boundary-crossing practices, tensions and entanglements in various ways beyond individual intention; and more importantly, this may not only demonstrate how bureaucratic deviants are contained, but also suggest one step further on the overlapping of the concepts of state and family.

To substantiate this argument, I present the family life, work motivation and performance of three workers. Each illustrates this relationship from a different angle. I will conclude by summarizing the mechanisms that make the Home encompass non-bureaucratic orders in its service delivery. In the following, I put the summary information of these three workers in Table 5.1.¹²¹

Staff	Gender	Age	Current Position	Current Family
Zhu Dawei	M	39	director	wife: deputy director of another CREH child: one nine year-old daughter
Zhong Yimei	F	42	kitchen helper	husband: the village secretary of Hongfan village child: one 20 year-old son her mother: 67 year-old (living with them)
Kang Zhiying	F	38	head care worker	husband: village secretary in a nearby village (living separately) children: two daughters of 11 and 15 respectively

Table 5.1

Zhu Dawei: A ‘Filial’ Person and a ‘Capable’ Director

Director Zhu, (or Zhu in the following), was then 39 years old.¹²² At the time of my

¹²¹ These workers were also labeled by ‘heart’-related phrases, which were supposed to indicate their key characters. Zhu was known to have a ‘filial heart’, Yimei a ‘selfish heart’, and Zhiying a ‘responsibility heart’. The word ‘*xin*’, literally ‘heart’, has a particular importance in Chinese philosophy. In Laozi, *xin* is synonymous with Tao, which refers to the Way of the whole cosmos. *Xin* is also a central term in Confucianism. Qian Mu (2004) makes an eloquent neo-Confucian proposal in his book ‘*Linghun Yu Xin* (literally, ‘Soul and Heart’)', which emphasizes that the ultimate meaning of life is to establish an extended social network through which one’s *xin* can be transferred to another. In this way, *xin*, initially equal to one’s physical existence, transcends the latter through its connection to other *xin*, which makes possible the spiritual immortality of each individual. The Chinese anthropologist, Wang Mingming, in his book ‘*Xin Yu Wu You*’ (2006) (The title refers to the interactions between *xin* and all objects in the cosmos), suggests that in Chinese philosophy, *xin* is the property in the human being that corresponds to the natural orders of Heaven and Earth; it refers both to the way in which human beings conduct their lives and to the perspectives they adopt in order to perceive the world; and when *xin* is correctly established, it results in harmony between Heaven, Earth and people.

¹²² ‘Director’ is my translation of *yuanzhang*, as how Zhu was addressed. *Yuanzhang* is literally

fieldwork, Zhu had a two-bedroom apartment in Huangzhen (the county town of Yinhe), where he lived with his wife and nine year-old daughter. His wife was a deputy director of another CREH, and his daughter a fourth-year student in a primary school in Huangzhen. Zhu loved his daughter very much. The screen of his mobile phone always displayed a picture of her, which he showed to me the first time we met.¹²³ Zhu often said that if he had a holiday, he would like to take his daughter to visit Beijing.

Zhu was born to a peasant family in a village about thirty miles away from the Home. He was one of the very few in his home village to pass the university entrance examination, eventually gaining a bachelor's degree in 'economy management' [*jingji guanli*] from a university in Chengdu. Like many of his peers, after graduating he worked at a trading company in Chengdu as a salesman, but he soon found that 'that job did not fit my values. It was not a 'serious business' [*nahuishi*]. He then returned to Yinhe county where he thought might have more chances to find a serious job. He was soon recruited as a teacher in a township middle school where he worked for the next ten years.

His position in the school was *jiaowu zhuren*, literally, Director of Educational Administration, which included the task of facilitating students' moral education. Zhu never tired of recalling his excellent performance there. In his accounts, he had been particularly successful in motivating students to study hard by instilling them with moral values, such as filial piety.¹²⁴ One of his innovations was an essay-writing competition on the topic of 'the most moving story involving me and my parents'. To the judges' (composed of school teachers and cadres) pleasant surprise, some candidates, who had never previously shown any ability in writing, excelled at this, some essays even moving the judges to tears.

'the head of the Home'.

¹²³ One important reason for Zhu to allow me to stay may be that, as he explained, I was a researcher from China Agricultural University, and so I might be helpful in the future regarding his daughter's higher education, as well as that of the children of all the workers.

¹²⁴ Demotivation in study was a common phenomenon in students in local schools.

After the event, Zhu displayed the best essays on the school notice board and compiled some into a book. He then used these materials to give speeches at inter-school and -bureau meetings, where he shared his experience in motivating students to study and fostering moral spirit. In one of these meetings, Zhu caught the eye of a senior official in the Bureau, who recommended him to the Bureau as a suitable candidate for Directorship of one of the newly established CREHs. He also contacted Zhu and convinced him to take this new job.

Zhu described this transfer from the educational to the bureaucratic sector as a significant change in his life; inter-sector transfer at this level was not a regular practice. On why he wanted to change, Zhu quoted the Confucian precept of ‘*xueeryou zeshi*’,¹²⁵ which prescribes that the right career trajectory for a Chinese gentleman is to first gain scholarly excellence and then aim to serve the government. Zhu saw being the Home director as a first step on the bureaucratic ladder. Although his bureaucratic future was not guaranteed, this transfer offered possibilities otherwise unavailable.

When I started my fieldwork in the Home, Zhu had been director for four years. His work was assessed by the Bureau as excellent, evidenced by the many awards given to the Home.¹²⁶ Needless to say, the mission to put six hundred residents into an intended order and make the Home a model institution was challenging. As described in other chapters, the mixed use of care and discipline, support and violence, thought work and imposition, scolding and irony, and other improvisations permeated everyday work. Zhu impressed me with his versatility in knowing when and how to use which. In his words, management needed to have both ‘the ability to reflect and talent’ [*wuxing*]; and among others, a most important rule was to ‘open one eye and close one eye’. In addition, I was also impressed by Zhu’s enthusiasm for work (as

¹²⁵ Literally, excellent scholarship is for the pursuit of becoming a government official.

¹²⁶ This may recall the validity of the claim made by Stephan Feuchtwang (2004), which highlights a close causality between the process of place-making and the development of a sense of belonging to the locality in the creator. Indeed, most of the awards and activities in and around the Home could be traced back to initial mobilisations by Zhu, and these aspects of the Home were, in turn, displayed in a way that he was satisfied with.

described in Chapter Four). For many reasons,¹²⁷ I continued to question what motivated him to work so hard. In Chapter Four, I discussed the phenomenon that Zhu was often in a state of active waiting, in that he was looking forward to an opportunity for promotion, which may serve as one explanation for his motivation to work, i.e. that his actions obey a universal logic for bureaucrats to work hard in order to earn credit and so be promoted. But my gut feeling in fieldwork was that this was not sufficient to explain the particular enthusiasm that he displayed.

Once on the way back to Huangzhen, I complimented Zhu that he worked so enthusiastically and he was obviously doing a lot more than he was obligated.¹²⁸ This comment prompted him to (emotionally) recall scenes from his past – his family and adolescence:

I am the youngest of my siblings; none of them read as much as I do - I am the only one who gained a 'university admission notice' [*luqu tongzhishu*], and it was my father who did everything to support my university study. You may not understand why I work so hard. My family was very poor and my mother died young. My father was an ordinary peasant and he brought five of us up just by doing physical labour in agricultural work. All of my elder sisters did not read much and were married out early. My father always felt that I could be the one who could 'have achievement' [*you chuxi*]. I don't know where he got this feeling, but then he never let me 'eat bitterness' [*chi ku*], even in those hard years. When I received the university admission – at that time my sisters had all left and my father started to become visibly aged – there was a serious financial problem. But he did not say a single word to me on this matter; nor did he ask for any help from my sisters. He only insisted that I should continue my study and that he would take care of everything else. I knew very well what that would mean for him, but I

¹²⁷ Including his low salary - 2,100 yuan per month according to him - and that this type of institution featured inertia and lacked obvious competition or pressure.

¹²⁸ Most days Zhu commuted between Huangzhen and the Home, and we travelled together. These trips provided a unique space for us to talk privately.

thought maybe the best way to express my ‘filial heart’ [*xiao-xin*] was simply to follow his ‘heart message’ [*xin-yi*].

So I went off to Chengdu to study. The income from land alone was far from enough to cover my expenses, and my father also went to Chengdu frequently to do petty business, mostly selling oranges. I knew how hard his life was – he often carried those heavy orange baskets for long miles merely to save several yuan bus fare – but he insisted that I was not to bother about it, and only to concentrate on my study, and that my accomplishment was all that he worked for. I continued to follow his expectation. I didn’t feel too guilty about living on his hard labour, because I was also confident that once I finished studying, I would have a decent job and then make sure he no longer had to do any dirty work but to live a comfortable old age.

What was completely unexpected to me was that only one month before my graduation – (Zhu said this twice before continuing) – only one month before that, he died suddenly on an orange-selling trip to Chengdu. It was so unexpected, and when I rushed to hospital, I was not even told what his illness was; maybe it was just due to exhaustion. His death caused tremendous trauma in my heart; no one knows how much impact it has on me, a ‘permanent scar’ [*yongyuan xiaobudiao*]. Soon after that I graduated and also got the job as a teacher quite smoothly. I then worked myself really hard, since I thought this was the only way that I could show my ‘filial heart’ to him, and he would be happy in Heaven if he could see that I was doing well and I was ‘having achievement’ as he had hoped.

‘Yes, yes, I understand,’ I said when he paused, noticing that my heart was also beating faster as he was becoming emotional in recalling this. I found myself short of words to follow up. I was simply connected to his sentiment and intuitively felt that what he had just said was something heartfelt.

After several seconds of silence, I felt that I should try to console him, so I said: ‘It’s such a pity. But it also turned out good, didn’t it? If it were not like this, you might not have worked so diligently and achieved so much.’

‘No, maybe not. I might have only taken it on as a normal job, and ‘only done what should be done’ [*gai zenme ban, jiu zenme ban*].’ Zhu became calmer.

Zhu indeed impressed me as a filial person. After he married (during his township school teacher time), he and his wife had lived with the latter’s grandmother for about eight years until the grandmother died in her nineties. Zhu often recounted to me the memories he had of the grandmother, including that he used to go to her room last thing at night to make sure everything was alright with her. He said that it was a treasure to live with an old grandmother who, having been among the very few in her generation to have acquired a good education and remained ‘empathetic and reasonable’ [*tongqing dali*] throughout her life. During my fieldwork, Zhu spent the Qingming holiday (Tomb Sweeping) with his wife’s family to go to the cemetery in a mountain park not far from Huangzhen where the grandmother was buried. I once asked Zhu a conventional interview question rather thoughtlessly, ‘You had been tending her for so many years. Might it also have been burdensome to you?’ Zhu’s somehow impatient response, obviously an expression of being slightly offended by my question, was imprinted on my memory: ‘No, it’s ‘not that direction’ [*bushi nage fangxiang*]. It’s that I’m ‘willing to do it’ [*yuanyi zuo*].’

Analysis

The important decisions in Zhu’s life are informed by Confucian values. His decision to go to Chengdu to study at university is in obedience to his father’s wishes; he soon gives up his first job as a salesman in Chengdu and goes back to his township because he finds the job of being a salesman is not a ‘serious business’ – meaning it does not match his values as much as being a teacher; his working hard is a way of following his father’s ‘heart-message’ – a filial behaviour; and his decision to change from the

educational to the bureaucratic sector is to follow the Confucian doctrine of ‘scholarship first, and government service second.’ In all, these important steps are Confucian value driven.

With regard to the above ethnographic material, a more cogent question is that what motivates Zhu to work so hard and how we can deduce a certain relationship between family and state from these materials. To answer these two questions, let us first look at the formation of Zhu’s filial subjectivity, its transmissions, and the current statuses.

Zhu’s childhood memory reveals a strong relationship between him and his father.¹²⁹ The extraordinary sacrifice Zhu’s father made for him – both the hardship he underwent and his unexpected death – is transformed into the formation of Zhu’s willingness to satisfy his father’s expectations – the highest status of filial piety. This particular type of filial piety, being one moral framework, is resonated by the individual’s ethical reflection on it through the attainment of submissive subjectivity. Taken one step further, it suggests that in this dynamic, a collective morality is merged with individuals’ ethical reflection, and thus an analytical framework based on an a priori distinction between the two needs to be further scrutinized.¹³⁰

Since Zhu’s father’s expectation was that Zhu would work hard and achieve, the best way for Zhu to demonstrate his filial piety, according to the rule of filial obedience, is to realize this expectation, or in his words, to follow his father’s ‘heart message’

¹²⁹ Contradicting the predicted shift from vertical to horizontal family ties in modernization theories (Goode 1963, 1982), the ethnographies on China show that inter-generational relationships are, in fact, intensified. Kipnis (2009) finds that it is common for poor rural parents to make disproportionate economic contributions to ensure that their children are able to obtain city-level intellectual and nutritional substance. He suggests that such economic sacrifice is exercised as a powerful kinship strategy that can generate unusually strong emotional ties between parents and children. Fong (2004) suggests that in urban China, family honour and future prosperity are still the most important considerations for Chinese families and the child is seen as the ‘only hope’ to fulfil these goals. Against a background of rapid economic growth and increasing social disparity, one finds not only financial investment in, but also extraordinary attention given to, the next generation.

¹³⁰ Ames and Rosemont (2009) have made an insightful interpretation of the Classic of Family Reverence by pointing out that Confucian role ethics requires a thick and engaged intelligence rather than an objective rationality, and that it is holistic where means and ends are the same, and that to behave is the rule itself, and that there is no distinction between morality and ethics in traditional Chinese lexicon.

[*xin-yi*]. The relationship of the state to the individual, in this instance, might be understood as a coherent extension of the father-son exchange, i.e. to reciprocate one's father is also to serve the state. In this way, a cross-domain synergy is generated, that is, Zhu keeps studying and working hard; and working hard in order to have achievement *is* being filial. It thus seems well-founded to summarize that the value of filial piety is activated by Zhu's father's sacrifice for him, which is effectively transformed into Zhu's 'filial heart' through a kind of 'understanding/empathy (*lijie*)' derived from the same ideology. While the expression of Zhu's 'filial heart' is his passionate work, the work-related achievement fulfills the inter-generational expectation, where the initial motivation to work is rooted.

Roles	Circle	Practice	Feature	Condition
Zhu's father	input	brings Zhu up	extraordinary sacrifice	expecting Zhu to achieve
Zhu as the son	reciprocate	study hard	willingness to be filial	meeting his father's expectation

Table 5.2

Acquiring this filial morality, there follow two transmissions. The first transmission - shown in the fact that Zhu recalls what he did for his wife's grandmother as prompted by an internal experience of joy, rather than as a liability external to him - should also be understood in the light of his having acquired the highest status of filial piety, i.e. being filial in the practice of everyday tendering is a source of his own happiness.

The second transmission is the one into the domain of his work.¹³¹ In both Zhu's jobs, as the school's director of educational administration and as the Home director, Zhu works very hard and seems to have had good recognition. There are two characteristics in his work. One is the art of 'open one eye and close one eye', the other improvisation that involves a great deal of individual capability to mobilize others in order to fulfill new endeavours. Zhu's organization of students in the middle

¹³¹ Steven Harrell (1985) gives an exposition of what makes the Chinese work so hard, in which he argues for a particular notion of entrepreneurial spirit aimed at long-term familial improvements and security, and that this goal-driven economic rationality rather than a general belief that work is good (Olsen 1980) has more explanatory power of the Chinese stereotype.

school writing on the topic of filial piety influenced them with *his* value of filial piety. The enormous amount of ‘thought work’ he has been doing in the Home seems to be largely effective in influencing others to conform and he is regarded as a person of ‘special aura’ [*qichang*] who can influence other people. There is reason to assume a connection between his filial subjectivity and the special ability to influence others; in other words, we might question what makes a charismatic person in this context. In addition, the fact that when Zhu showcased the essay-writing in an inter-bureau meeting, he was acknowledged a filial person by a senior official and his subsequent appointment as Home director all suggest the bureaucracy’s ability to assimilate non-bureaucratic attributes to contribute to its function. Both the school and the Home, as bureaucratic organizations, accommodated Zhu’s improvisations thus demonstrating the capacity of such institutions to utilise non-routine and idiosyncratic behaviour which contribute to the function of bureaucratic organization.¹³²

Family	Transmission to		State
familial attention (as the one among siblings to achieve)	filial subjectivity	charismatic mobilizer	bureaucratic recognition

Table 5.3

At this point, one model of the mutual implications between family and state emerges, which may be summarized as the family produces the kind of person who is motivated to serve the state and such personhood is coherently transmitted between institutions and domains. And since the original motivation remains domestic, to serve the state - the expression of filial piety - eventually serves the family. These logical connections, involving both chorological sequence and paradigmatic structure, implicate inter-generational transmissions, and cross the boundary between the domestic and the public spheres.

¹³² Feuchtwang and Wang (2001), in their examination of the conceptual validity of ‘charisma’ in modern times, conclude that expectations of the extraordinary could (though not in their own case studies) perpetuate bureaucratic rationality and managerial efficiency and that charisma may thus flourish alongside processes of secularization.

The Domestic Domain	the unfinished one-dimensional inter-generational exchange, from Zhu's father's sacrifice to Zhu's willingness to be filial (i.e. to meet his father's expectations)	
Crossing Domains	transmission between families	filiality to Zhu's grandmother-in-law
	transmission to the public domain	the motivation to work hard
The Public Domain	Zhu professes the value of filial piety to students and receives the social recognition that a filial person would be a good candidate to manage a CREH	
	the new career as the director of the Home to perform the morally valuable task of 'respecting the elderly' on behalf of the state	
The Domestic Domain	reciprocating father and familial honour	

Table 5.4

The current situation seems to suggest some hints of change, shown in the predicament in Zhu's promotion that I mentioned in Chapter Four and the difficulty in striking a balance between his work and his current family, and the sustainability of his work motivation as one rooted in familial relations.¹³³ These may contain the seeds of change. Nevertheless, the relationship between Zhu's family and his work is mostly mutually reinforcing. It demonstrates how the Confucian ideology of filial piety informs domestic practice as well as supports the 'state'. No wonder, though seemingly inconsistent to bureaucratic logic, Zhu's endeavours are so much recognized in the bureaucracy. The following examples of female care workers present two other situations of this relationship.

Zhong Yimei: A 'Filial' Daughter and a 'Selfish' Worker

Yimei, then working as a kitchen helper in the Home, was the wife of the secretary of Hongfan village. Her home was two or three miles away from the Home, where she lived with her husband, son and mother. At the time of my fieldwork, her son had just started work in the local township police station.

Yimei had not left the village since she married in about twenty years ago. Known to everyone, Yimei had the reputation of being a filial daughter and a capable [*nenggan*] woman. As far as I was able to ascertain, the former part of this was to do with the

¹³³ Zhu's wife wanted to have more of a private and family life with Zhu, and complained that she could do little but tolerate that Zhu often just frowned and was quiet when he was at home. Zhu's explanation was that he always felt 'heart exhausted' [*xin-lei*] after having 'worked hard' outside, and thus did not want to say anything at home.

fact that she had brought her mother from a nearby village to live with her family after her father died. Nearby villagers often said that her mother ‘had luck’ [*you fuqi*] to have such a filial and capable daughter, who could take care of her and save her from suffering hardship or being involved in the disputes over elderly support common to many local elders. It was often said that, ‘to have a daughter like her was better than to have a son.’ Her reputation of ‘capability’ referred to the fact that she was able to ‘manage family well’ [*hui guan jia*], such as doing domestic chores effectively, cleaning, being quick to prepare an elaborate dinner when guests came, knowing how to help her husband to deal with extended familial relations,¹³⁴ and being able in managing domestic economy. In addition, it also referred to the fact that she had previously had her own chicken raising business, and used to make a good income.¹³⁵

Before Yimei came to work in the Home, she had planned to expand her chicken business. More than once she emphasized to me that, had she not come to work in the Home, she would have become ‘very rich’ [*fale*] as the market price of chicken had been increasing quickly and steadily in recent years. When asked why she had given up a profitable business to work in the Home, Yimei gave two reasons. The first was that, when she had first heard about the possibility to work in a respect-the-elderly-home she had felt excited. She thought that it would make her ‘look noble and moral’ [*kanqilai hencongao*], since respecting the elderly was a national virtue. By comparison, to do business for the explicit aim of making a profit was much demeaned in local culture. The second was that, the Home was a ‘state work unit’ [*guojia danwei*], association with which not only granted one a higher status than being a villager, but also implied ‘safety and stability’ [*anquan wending*].¹³⁶

When she first started work at the Home, Yimei was assigned to be in charge of a

¹³⁴ Her husband had two brothers. All three of them were married with children, living separately but next to each other. Her parents-in-law lived with one of her brothers-in-law.

¹³⁵ Yimei’s chicken-raising activity attracted more local attention than the economic activities done by Zhiying or others who migrated to cities, regardless of the quantity of the actual income. It appeared that the visibility of Yimei’s activity to the locals was the source of the attention.

¹³⁶ Although, as with the other workers, she worked on a yearly contract, she regarded its renewal as a bureaucratic formality.

‘face-floor’ [*mianzi louceng*] in Building I, which was designed to be open to visitors. This specific job was considered more important than that assigned to other workers. Yet, four years later – at the time of my fieldwork – Yimei worked as a kitchen helper. Each day, she made three round trips between her family and the Home in order to cook six meals – three for her own family, and three for her job in the Home. Though she was kept busy, the change from a main care worker to a kitchen helper was interpreted by the residents as a demotion. The kitchen work was away from the front stage of the Home, involved little direct contact with the residents, and was much less significant than managing the ‘face-floor’.¹³⁷ The downward track of Yimei, from a central to a marginal position, was certainly intriguing. To understand this change, let me present some fieldwork notes about her.

One day at midday, the usual quietness was broken by the noise of a loud quarrel. Along with others, I went to the balcony to find out what was happening: in the central garden, Yimei was surrounded by several residents, with whom she was apparently arguing. I went down and joined the crowd. It quickly became clear that several residents had caught Yimei cutting a flowering branch off a tree, and accused her of trying to take their property away.

‘How dare you steal our goods? Are you going to sell them in the market? If you dare to take it home, we’ll beat you up!’ one resident was railing.

‘Which rural people will bother to buy your flowers? There are so many of them, not only here, but everywhere. What harm will it do if I take a small branch away?’ Yimei replied.

‘Whatever you say, you just cannot take our goods from our place!’ another resident shouted at her.

¹³⁷ By contrast, Yimei herself always emphasized that working in the kitchen was ‘much easier’ than being in charge of the ‘face floor’, as she then did not have to deal with the residents directly, and she had more time to take care of her own home.

While the quarrel went on, more residents gathered to watch, echoing their peers. Other care workers also came out and tried to mediate. Perhaps pressured by the increasing size of the crowd, Yimei's anger seemed to give way to embarrassment. She threw the branch away, saying: 'Stupid guys, how valuable your flowers are; I don't need them.' and then walked away.¹³⁸

The flower turmoil was not the first time that Yimei had been found conducting wrong deeds by the residents, and even attacked by them. A couple of weeks previously, she had been punched in the head – which resulted in bleeding – by a male resident, who, after he had spied on her through the kitchen window over several days, confirmed that Yimei often took meat home. After the punching incident, Yimei's husband – the village secretary – went to the Home threatening to beat the attacker in return. This incident was addressed formally in this way: Yimei was sent to hospital immediately, where she received treatment, including six sutures for the wound, and the treatment fee was covered by the residents' Wubao subsidy. The perpetrator was sent back to his home village to 'reflect on his wrong deeds' [*fansi cuowu xingwei*]. And Zhu went to Yimei's home to have dinner together with her husband to have this matter further communicated.¹³⁹

Residents were keen to gossip about these events and their judgments on her attacker were divided: some admired and hailed him as a hero who had fought for justice for the residents whilst others thought he was completely uncivil because whatever the cause, he should not assault other people so violently. More interestingly, the punishment dealt out to the perpetrator – that of sending him back to his village – was interpreted by some residents as a solution with dual implications. On one hand, it was a very serious punishment; yet on the other, it was also a way of protecting him,

¹³⁸ On one hand, many residents claimed ownership of the properties in the Home, as one resident said, 'everything here is an endowment from the state to us WuBao-Elderly – not to the staff, nor to anyone else. The staff should serve us and help to take good care of our property, not take it away to their homes.' On the other hand, all workers took things home, though the residents' reactions differed in individual cases.

¹³⁹ Zhu often complained about the recruitment situation: 'It is hopeless. All women are unprofessional and employed through 'relations' [*guanxi*].'

since he was then shielded from other possible forms of retribution he might have encountered had he remained in the Home. By contrast, most residents showed little sympathy for Yimei, and rather considered that because she had a ‘very selfish heart’ [*sixin taizhong*], it was the right decision to have had her relegated to the kitchen from the ‘face floor’.¹⁴⁰

Analysis

Firstly, unlike most care workers, Yimei has never left the village for migrant work and her household is one of the richest in the village. Thus, she is representative of a local well-off woman. The same as Zhu, Yimei had been engaged in economic activities locally (chicken-raising) before she worked in the Home. Her reason for choosing to work in the Home is related to the Confucian value of ‘respecting the elderly’ as more ‘noble and moral’ than doing business (which Zhu also felt not to be ‘serious’). This gives a second example of the extent to which Confucian values informs local people’s practice, which is realized by the state institution of the Home.

Secondly, both labeled filial people, Zhu and Yimei present sharply contrasting implications to their respective work in the state institution. Zhu’s work is largely lauded, while that of Yimei is considered mostly problematic. In Zhu’s case, the expected expressions of being a filial son, a dutiful husband and father all converge at a single point: that he should ‘have achievement’. Yet the filiality of Yimei is often explained with reference to the fact that she has her own mother living with her, and serves the life [*shenghuo*] of her family well.¹⁴¹ While the notion of filiality that is

¹⁴⁰ To note, these incidents were not what caused Yimei’s demotion to kitchen. They were illustrations of what the residents saw as ‘selfish heart’ and similar to the one that led to her demotion.

¹⁴¹ The fact that Yimei had her mother living with her was locally viewed as the evidence that ‘her words counted’ in her family. Yan Yunxiang (2003) asserts that ‘one’s words count’ is an important sign of the rise of women’s power (over men), which, I argue, is highly problematic, since being able to make decision on some matters is insufficient to demonstrate one’s overall status. Furthermore, his proposition that the rise of women’s power is tantamount to the crisis of filial piety is also questionable. Yimei’s case shows that the fact her ‘words count’ actually leads to the fulfilment of female filial duty which would be impossible had her words not counted. This is further connected to Charles Stafford’s (2000) proposition that *yang* (nurturance and support), emphasizing the making and emotional qualities of kinship, is central to Chinese kinship, and that

ascribed to Zhu coherently reinforces his actions in the public domain that ascribed to Yimei apparently largely functions to confine her within the domestic domain, emphasizing her familial obligations which are largely irrelevant, even antithetical, to her responsibilities in the public domain. This may well be the reason she constantly took items from the Home back to her family. The cases of Zhu and Yimei then suggest that the gendered nature of filial obligation affects a person's role in the domestic and public spheres differently, i.e. Yimei, as a filial daughter, is a 'selfish' worker yet that very same selfishness is presented in the same process of contributing more to her family, i.e. taking goods back home.

Thirdly, in my view, as the wife of Hongfan's village secretary, the activities associated with Yimei reflect how the Home, as a new state centre in the village, interacts with other village authorities; and how the chaos generated is accommodated in the Home. Let me elaborate on this correlation. The Home, as a state intervention, disturbs the locality by way of adding a new identity to the members of the local population with whom it is directly involved. Yimei is typical of female workers in the sense that they all have various kinds of strong local connections through marital and descent ties. These connections have an influence on their work from the moment of recruitment. As locally perceived, these connections are 'relations' that enable them to be recruited in the Home. In Yimei's case, it further enabled her in her initial appointment to the important position of managing the 'face-floor'. After being recruited, the new job imbues them with another identity, i.e. that of a care worker in a state bureaucratic institution. The new identity of these women as worker demands of them a set of behaviours – though these are not yet clearly defined – consistent with employees in a state institution. The above ethnographies have shown that this new identity is for the most part antithetical to their other, familial/village identities. As the chart below shows, we find a tendency that from the upper levels of the bureaucratic hierarchy to the lower ones, there is an incremental trend from single and clear identity to ambiguous identity, i.e. the multiple identities of one person in increasingly

women are the key agents.

intimate locality.¹⁴²

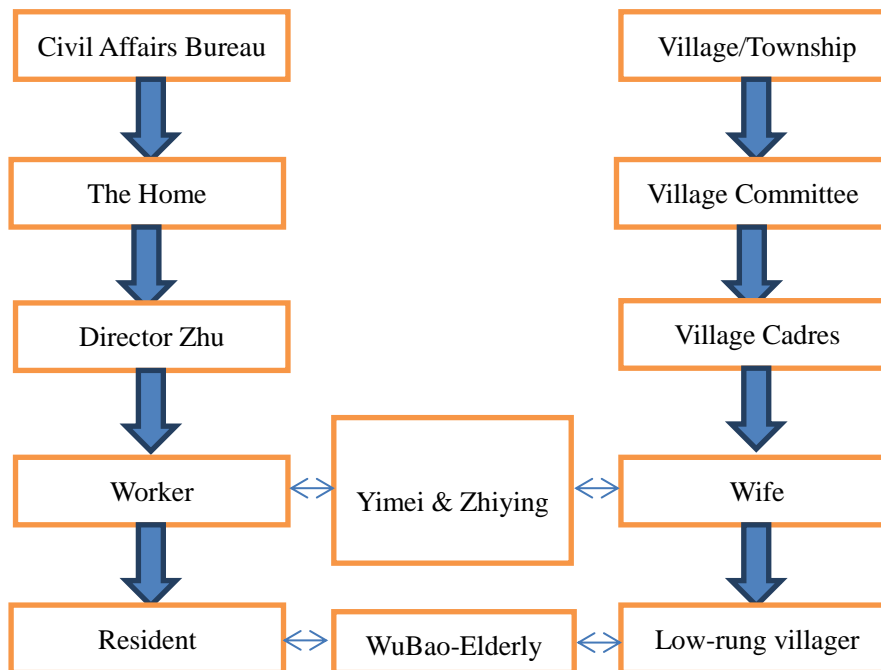


Figure 5.1 The Identities of Residents and Workers at the Conjunction of Two Institutional Lines

It is thus at question how the Home accommodates these ambiguities. The goods-taking incidences of Yimei are good examples for analysis. Yimei, by taking the goods in the Home to her own family, practices one form of boundary-crossing between the domestic and the public, which is rule-breaking in a state institution. But it serves the family, since the things that Yimei takes from the Home are not for her own use, but for her family.¹⁴³ Nevertheless, this behaviour is heavily criticized by the residents, who consider her to have a ‘selfish heart’. Yimei is constantly mistrusted, monitored and found guilty by the residents. As such, each time she does something wrong, it is the residents who cannot wait to punish her. This means that before Yimei receives any formal punishment from the management, the situation has already become much more complicated as she has already suffered an (informal) punishment at the hands of the residents.

¹⁴² This is to say that though people at higher levels also have multiple identities, they tend to have more separate spaces to exercise these identities, whereas in the village scenario, the multiple identities of a person are enacted in a small place and contradictions are immediately visible.

¹⁴³ For example, most often she took meat, which she did not eat due to her concern about ‘fitness’ [*miaotiao*]. This was also a reminder that the local judgment of selfishness included, if not equated to, one’s family-centred behaviour.

The perception of Yimei as victim, not as one who breaks rules, prompts the active involvement of Yimei's husband, in his role as her husband, to come to the Home to claim to seek retribution from the residents. In fact, Yimei's husband is often involved when disputes of this sort take place. The involvement of the residents and Yimei's husband do not follow formal bureaucratic rules but are nevertheless existent and effective in influencing the management's later formal solution. In other words, the disorder, initiated by Yimei's actions, proliferates quickly before a formal solution is reached. Therefore, the Home reacts, not only to the single matter that Yimei takes goods away, but also to the complicated realities including that she is injured by a resident, and that her husband, as the village secretary, interferes.

Zhu's complaint that it is difficult to manage care workers reveals his position of embarrassment: While Zhu expects to enforce the regulations strictly, which is his primary interest in making the Home the intended order, such matters as punishing bad behaviour on the part of the workers are in fact compromised by the complexities in reality. The solution given to the incident above is that the perpetrator is sent home arbitrarily though with a tricky implication, i.e. sending him away is also a way of protecting him – one way of accommodating disorder, and that Yimei is cured and retained. In my view, the institution's solution to Yimei (for her deeds of this kind), i.e. demoting her to the lower position in the kitchen, which keeps her away from both the residents and the front-stage of the Home but still retains her on the staff, represents a classic balancing point at the interface of the state encountering the local. This action is neither entirely according to the local principles of *guanxi* (personal relations) or *renqing* (human sentiment), by which Yimei could be exempted from any punishment, or strict bureaucratic rationality, for which Yimei should be dismissed; but rather a rapprochement of both and finds the actualization as the kitchen position. In this sense, I also suggest that the kitchen position, accommodating those who are locally strong, but do not fit the state standards, is certainly a heterotopia where incompatibles are combined.

		Structure		
		Family		The Home
Yimei	Process	locally prestigious	'face-floor' manager	high rank / visible
		bringing goods to	↓	taking goods from
		the victim		the accused
		protection	kitchen helper	low rank / invisible

Table 5.5

In addition, the fact that Zhu communicated with Yimei's husband about the solutions offered to Yimei may suggest that Yimei should not be considered so much as an individual taking full responsibility for her own work, but partly as the conjunction of two centres, i.e. the Home and the village authority; and through her, the two men, i.e. Zhu and her husband, being representatives of the two centres, negotiate the points of balance.¹⁴⁴ In all, the disorder that Yimei causes to the Home and the solution to it represents the Home's situation, as a new centre, interacting with local authorities and making compromises to keep overall order - including a balance with the local authority which is, in turn, indispensable to the order within the Home. The kitchen position shows the elasticity of a bureaucratic organization in accommodating the less qualified synergistically. Furthermore, Yimei's remark about her current job being an easier one, rather than a lower one, is a reminder of the existence of more than one referential frame by which the same symbol can be interpreted differently.

Kang Zhiying: An 'Unfilial' Daughter-in-law, the Head of Family and the Head Care Worker

Zhiying was the head care worker. She, along with her two daughters who attended school in the village, stayed at her dorm in the Home the majority of the time. Her husband lived with his parents and brothers in a nearby village where he was the village secretary. Zhiying only visited her family occasionally.

¹⁴⁴ To what extent Yimei's words actually count and the gender implications of the Home project are in question. In this connection, Ellen Oxfeld's ethnography (1993) of a community of Hakka Chinese tanners in Calcutta shows that the role of women recedes to family as community business expands, and men gradually take the helm of the work force and take over most key positions initially occupied by women.

Before taking the job in the Home, she had worked in cities for many years. Initially, a production-line worker in a shoe factory in Chengdu, she had gone on to start a shoe-making business with her husband and two acquaintances. Zhiying soon had serious disagreements with her husband over how the business should be run: she considered product quality to be integral to the success of the business, but her husband felt it more important to maintain and expand his social networks, through which he might obtain more information and opportunities. This he did by spending the majority of his time drinking and playing Mahjong with his ‘brothers’ [*xiongdihuo*].¹⁴⁵ After two years of this Zhiying decided to leave the business and moved to Guangdong where she found a job in a shoe factory, was quickly promoted, and ended up with a very good wage of four thousand yuan per month.

Whilst she was in Guangdong the business run by her husband went into bankruptcy and her husband returned to the village. His return was interpreted by the villagers as a capable man who had acquired good social skills after many years ‘pushing and fighting in society’ [*shehuishang chuang*], who had accumulated a wide social network, and had rich experiences with which it was possible to ‘activate the village’s economy’ [*gaohuo nongcun jingji*]. He was soon elected village secretary. At around this time, the Home was built and Zhiying’s husband suggested that she come to work at the Home, since she could then look after their two teenage daughters. Zhiying agreed. However, she emphasized to me that she did not come back because her husband asked her to, but because she thought that it would indeed be better for her daughters if she could be with them and have a reasonable job.

Having returned to the village, Zhiying still lived a largely separate life from her husband.¹⁴⁶ This was partly because of her previous unhappy business experience with him; and also, it seemed, her generally strained relationship with her

¹⁴⁵ *Xiongdihuo* is literally ‘brother guys’. The phenomenon of male sociality was remarkable in business networking, particularly among married men. The sociality of married women was typically confined to other women, and that with men was often with the presence, or knowledge, of one’s husband. This was so both in Huangzhen and in village.

¹⁴⁶ Regarding the option of divorce, Zhiying said, ‘it is impossible, since we’ve already had two children.’

parents-in-law dating from the birth of her first daughter, rather than their longed-for grandson, and which worsened with the birth of her second daughter.¹⁴⁷ There may have been other reasons, but these seemed to be borne out by her words: she often said to me, ‘instead of wasting my time begging for money from him (her husband) and losing dignity, I’d rather earn it myself.’ She had her own separate bank account. As both her daughters were in middle school, she was in need of money;¹⁴⁸ her salary in the Home was about 800 yuan a month, and she was living off her previous savings. She continually complained that the wage for a care worker was not even enough for the ‘liquor cash’ [*jiuqian*] that was unavoidable in living a village life, let alone to cover other costs. She often swore that when the children had finished their education and started work, she would definitely emancipate herself by going to the city to work again.

In this situation, one might envisage that the low-paid job in the Home might demotivate Zhiying and result in a lack of concern. However, as far as I observed, this was not the case. On the contrary, there seemed to be a stronger relationship of affinity between Zhiying’s responsibility for bringing up her children and her equally evident commitment to the work in the Home. The former was obvious; she lived with her children, took care of them and paid their school fees. The latter was observed in a broader sense, not only from her proven capacity to solve difficult problems,¹⁴⁹ but also from the extra things she did for residents over and above her prescribed duty.

The members of the ‘production team’ [*shengchan zu*] lived in Building III.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁷ Comparing Zhiying’s case to Yimei who has one son and sound familial relations, one may suspect that the sex of the child charges familial relations heavily, i.e. to have a son facilitates. Further, comparing hers to Zhu who loves his daughter, one may see the existence of alternative ideologies.

¹⁴⁸ Junior middle-school education was included in compulsory education in rural China, which meant that the tuition fee was waived. But the school charged for other items which actually cost the family more than the tuition fee.

¹⁴⁹ The case of Old Xu in Chapter Seven gives another example.

¹⁵⁰ The production team was one of the function groups, which was responsible for the agricultural work on the rented land. The product supplemented the food provision of the Home. This team had more than twenty residents.

Several care workers were assigned to manage this building, all of whose work was soon considered unsatisfactory. Some residents explained that this was because production team members were generally disobedient [*jue*], and more likely to dismiss the rules than other residents, since they considered themselves to be making a special contribution to the Home by producing extra food. In fact, the production team members were given more privileges by the management than other residents, such as not having to eat in the dining hall and being allowed to drink in the entertainment hall. The task of managing Building III was finally given to Zhiying, who continued to do it throughout my fieldwork.

Zhiying shared with me that, given the special status of the production team, her strategy on managing them was to ‘open one eye and close one eye’. In her explanation, to ‘open one eye’ meant to be steadfast when what she considered the bottom-line was crossed. One example she gave was of a resident who flouted the Home’s (health and safety) ban on bicycles and continually rode his bicycle around the Home. One day, Zhiying went to his room, held him against the wall with her elbow and threatened him by swearing that if he continued to do so, she would definitely ‘give him colour to see’ [*geita yanse kan*].¹⁵¹ Her violent threat proved much effective in solving this problem: the resident stopped using the bicycle, made no fuss, and considered Zhiying’s violence was ‘for his own good’ [*wei ta hao*]. To ‘close one eye’, on the other hand, meant that she was consciously more flexible with them regarding the enforcement of other Home regulations, particularly those regarding dining and hygiene. To keep a balance between ‘open one eye’ and ‘close one eye’, according to her, relied on the use of ‘human common-sense sentiment’ [*ren zhi changqing*] and ‘having primary principles’ [*you yuanze*].

The second case concerned the new road, which was constructed right in front of the gate of the Home and completed during my stay. It ran directly through the main area where the residents had previously socialised, and it was also the only road

¹⁵¹ This is a local colloquium implying violence, such as a beating or other forms of physical punishment.

connecting the Home to Fankou (described in Chapter One). Even when opened to traffic, the residents continued their habit of socialising in this area. Inevitably accidents occurred, and several residents lost their lives. Zhu twice reported to the Bureau about the safety issue caused by this new road, but never received a concrete reply. It seemed that the Home could do little to prevent more accidents from happening.

Zhiying had no direct responsibility for taking any initiative to solve a problem caused by a new transport situation, but she felt compelled to do something; in her words, 'I never think if this is my duty - where is the document that says what my duty is exactly? I just feel that I have the responsibility to make them safer; common-sense sentiment, very simple.' Zhiying thought an effective way to avoid accidents was to encourage the residents to stay within the Home, and thus reduce the chances they would go out onto the road. Unable to forbid the residents from leaving the Home, she thought of looking for work they could do within the Home. She finally found it in a fabric factory in Chengdu - manually unraveling cloth into curly thread for reuse in aircraft cleaning. She thought this work would be ideal for the residents, since it could be done within the Home, demanded neither efficiency nor particular skill and at the same time a small wage could be earned. She also took on the responsibility of transporting the cloth to the Home and the unraveled threads back to the factory.

Analysis

As with Zhu and Yimei, Zhiying had also been engaged in business before coming to the Home to work. Unlike Yimei, Zhiying represents most female workers who have many years' experience of doing migrant work. What informs her choice of work in the Home is not directly related to the feeling of 'looking more to respect the elderly', but the much more pragmatic reason that she wants to look after her two daughters. In this regard, her promotion to the head care worker proves that the care service is assessed officially with little concern about the workers' 'morality' per se. Yet,

stepping back, we may also find a Confucian ideology which prescribes women's role of mothering.¹⁵²

Though having a very similar family status to Yimei - both husbands being village secretaries, Zhiying's conjugal tie is much more dysfunctional. This dysfunctional conjugal relation has the two roots of her failing to give birth to a son and the unhappy economic cooperation with her husband.¹⁵³ The fact that she works hard, both previously in shoe factories and currently in the Home, arguably has something to do with this unsound relationship. As she explains, she would rather take on the responsibility of bringing up her two children by herself; since if she could manage to do so, she could save herself from the face-losing nuisance of asking for money from her husband. Putting the cases of Yimei and Zhiying together, it appears both have maintained an antithetical relationship between their family and work, as indicated by the disproportion between the degree of family function and the rank in the Home after four years' employment, though for different reasons. The commonality and difference of Zhiying and Yimei on their family-work relations are shown in the two tables below:

Commonality	
Level	Relationship
Ideology	Synergetic
Everyday practice	Antagonistic
Event (employment/firing)	Synergetic

Table 5.6.1

Difference			
Workers	Key Character	Conjugal Tie	Rank in the Home
Yimei	Selfish heart	Functional	Low
Zhiying	Responsibility heart	Dysfunctional	High

Table 5.6.2

¹⁵² Many feminist works suggest that the entry of capitalism into developing countries worsens women's status by increasing their work load without ridding them of their cultural burdens. For example, the empirical studies done in the 1970s in Hong Kong and Taiwan on this issue suggest that the ability to gain personal income has enhanced women's autonomy, but it does not necessarily make daughters equal to sons in terms of family status (Salaff 1976, 1981), see also, Boserup 1970; Brain 1976; Chaney&Schmink 1976; Dauber&Cain 1981; Jones 1982; Ahmed 1985; Zhang 2007.

¹⁵³ On the phenomena of son preference in China, see e.g. Croll 2000; Bossen 2002; Gupta 2003; Pieke 2003; Attane 2009; Murphy, Tao&Lu 2011.

What differentiates Zhiying from other care workers is her much more effective work. Though empirically difficult to prove, I nevertheless get the sense that there is a close affinity between her two main roles and the responsibility associated with them, i.e. what Zhiying feels toward her daughters, and what she exhibits in her work in the Home.¹⁵⁴ The former is mothering in the private domain and the latter is mothering in the public domain (in the sense of supervising other workers and actively caring for the residents). This resemblance makes Zhiying more responsible than other care workers, which is articulated as her having ‘responsibility heart’ [*zeren-xin*]. In addition, her emphasis on the mixed use of ‘common-sense sentiment’ and ‘having primary principle’ in the work suggests a similar rule to Zhu’s articulation of the art of management and on how the incidences of Yimei are dealt with, namely a mixture of different rules, including *renqing* (human sentiment) and rationality.¹⁵⁵ As the head care worker, her words reveal much about the nature of the care service delivered in the Home: It is the human fluidity in the actual working that allows the bureaucratic organization to function.

In addition, consideration should also be given to the impact Zhiying’s many years’ experience of migrant work, might have on her current job in the Home. As the above ethnographic material shows, she seems to be much more economically active and capable than other workers, as shown by the job of tearing cloth she brought to the residents. Strictly speaking, the county civil affairs bureau puts many constraints on the Home’s economic activities, for example that its agricultural production should only be served to the residents and not sold in the market. Yet, in the face of the threat

¹⁵⁴ Zhiying’s family pattern, i.e. separating from her patrilineal family and consolidating with her daughters, is reminiscent of the model of ‘uterine family’ coined by Margery Wolf (1968, 1972, 1987). To Wolf, the value of this model is to loosen the formal lineage paradigm characteristic of Chinese kinship authorised by Maurice Freedman (1979) by presenting the creation of a family within the formal family; to consolidate with sons is also to secure one’s position in the patrilineal family. Zhiying’s case may add that she does so may not necessarily tighten her relationship with her husband. More interesting is that her keeping her children in the Home does not lead to being accused of wrong-doing, as in Yimei’s case, but is for the most part ignored, if not applauded, by the residents.

¹⁵⁵ In this sense, in relation to James Scott (1998) on the state’s need to make legible its subjects and Liu Xin (2000) on the ordinary Chinese use of confusion, ‘confusions’, such as disarticulation, mixture, flexibility, are not so much a problem to state governance as an effective tool to it.

posed by the new road, Zhiying's economic initiative, otherwise not allowed in the institution, is turned into a synergetic means and accommodated. This suggests that in a context of general transition, the intrinsic instability in wider environment influences the internal organization of the Home in a way that what is commensurate to it can actually be much more flexible and situational.

Finally, let me compare the above three cases to see the interaction of family and work. While Yimei stands as an example of being in the standard gender division of being inner, i.e. primarily functions within the domestic, Zhiying's case, I argue, reminds us of the fluidity of the gender boundary when she manages to perform the main roles in both inner and outer domains. Zhiying differs from Yimei in that she performs well in both her two main roles in the domestic and the public domain, i.e. her domestic role as mother and her supervisory role at work. This suggests that gender may not be an essential category in defining the implications of familial roles on bureaucratic work. But the fact that Zhiying does so at the price of conjugal dysfunction also reinforces the stereotypical gender dilemma in this situation, in particular taking into consideration the case of Zhu, whose devotion to work is understood as the best expression of his fulfillment of familial duty. I summarize these three cases in the table below.

Individuals		Zhu	Zhiying	Yimei
Sex/Gender		M	F	F
Family	Inter-generational Role Function	son/father +	mother +	daughter +
	Conjugal Role Function	husband +/?	wife -	wife +
Work	Position Function	director +	head care worker +	kitchen helper -
Note: the roles of Zhiying as daughter and daughter-in-law and that of Yimei as mother seemed less significant. Zhiying only went to her parents' to visit. And Yimei's son had started work and appeared relatively independent.				

Table 5.7

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have presented three ways in which the workers' family life is intermingled with their work in the Home. However, this 'intermingling' has not necessarily led to anti-bureaucratic results; rather, at times it is absorbed by the organization, or else has contributed to the smooth functioning of the bureaucracy.

The case of Zhu shows how a 'filial subjectivity' is formed and transferable to other institutions and domains. His special ability in influencing other people to be filial presumably has something to do with the acquisition of this particular subjectivity and becomes synergetic to his work in the township middle school and the Home. The 'newness' of the Home demands precisely someone who 'improvises' rather than 'maintains' so that the state intended order can be established from scratch. While Zhu's unusual work motivation validates the bureaucratic work, the historical contingency of the Home with no pre-existing model to follow accommodates Zhu's improvisations.

Yimei's example shows what happens when formal bureaucratic work contradicts the local power structure. She represents the female workers who are recruited primarily through nepotism. Her family-centered 'heart' transgressions incurred the residents' wrath. Yet, the gap between the regulatory ideal of dismissing her for the faults and the inappropriateness to do so according to the local logic does not cause the predicament or bureaucratic dysfunction generally called corruption. Rather, the kitchen position not only accommodates the two contradictory agendas but also allows Yimei's interpretation of it being an easier job. In this sense, to keep Yimei on staff is also to keep the harmony – part of the intended order - of the Home to its environment, i.e. to accommodate disorder is exactly to make order.

Zhiying is an example of a woman household head who comes back from many years' migrant work and has a dysfunctional marital relationship. Her ability to flexibly use various rules and the extension of her 'responsibility heart' from her children to her

work prove salutary to the work in the Home. Furthermore, her active economic activities, which are technically banned, are balanced by the reduction in the contingent threat posed by the new state infrastructure of the road.

Putting these cases together, it is not only important to note that the actual delivery of the welfare service by the staff is heavily influenced by their familial conditions, but also that the way in which family influences work can be specified with reference to two dimensions. The first is the gender aspect that a male-gendered filiality is more coherent with one's work in a state institution, while a female filiality tends to be an obstacle to it; and the second is that inter-generational obligations in this ideological context are less antagonistic to the fulfillment of public commitment than are marital ties.

Nevertheless, the Home accommodates these presumably non-bureaucratic existences and presents them with a linear bureaucratic hierarchy from high to low that extends from Zhu, the director, through Zhiying, the head care worker, right down to Yimei, a kitchen helper. I may summarize this chapter by noting that the mismatch between the Home's formal presentation of its staff/organization and the actual chaos in its everyday work is consistent with the situation that clarity as demanded by the modern state is merely a utopia, and thus ironically, the extant mismatch functions to make the Home accommodate the local reality on the one hand and deal with the state's demand for an ideal on the other while becoming neither. For this reason, I may rather envision an explanation of the Chinese equivalent of state - *guojia* - literally state-family, that the Chinese state exactly foresees the possible numerous combinations of the ideas of state and family; and it encompasses family rather than implies to be its opposition. Following this paradigm, perhaps the vitality of the Home, as a heterotopia, comes from the coherence generated between its apt self-refashioning as different faces of state-family combinations, and what the Chinese state is conceptually meant to be.

Chapter Six

Guarantee and Deprivation – on Residents’ Property

'Current matters are difficult to understand [*xianzai de shi bu-haodong*]. Previously, we received the WuBao allowance in full, with no restrictions on how we spent it. Now, we don't get any cash, but can't do this and that. It's difficult to make sense of it.'

--Touching his head, the resident looked seriously confused by this situation.

'When a man attains the Tao, even his pets ascend to heaven.'

--'On Judgment', Wang Chong, Han Dynasty

As I stated in Chapter One, home villages and kin are the primary groups the WuBao-Elderly had before the arrival of the Home project, which they now described using the *pojia* (husband's family) and *niangjia* (wife's natal family) metaphors. Unsurprisingly, these relations were altered in various ways once the WuBao-Elderly moved to the Home. What was significant, however, was the de facto cruelty in the treatment of the WuBao-Elderly by these primary relations. This was incisively reflected by the uncertainties associated with the residents' property and money. According to the formal regulations, residents' property remained in their own name irrespective of whether they moved to CREHs, but in reality they became a field of contestation. Most property misappropriation cases were executed by residents' home village authorities and relatives. It was not that everyone lost their property, but the prevalence of this phenomenon obliges one to ask why a welfare service originally intended to provide security to its recipients often, in effect, results in the latter's loss of valuable belongings.¹⁵⁶ Following this, another significant phenomenon was that, in the Home, there were pervasive, direct or not, gestures of disclosure of the crimes that these close relations committed, which the Home staff largely ignored.

To explain these phenomena, I build on two theoretical sources. One is the concept of

¹⁵⁶ Put in this way, the question re-phrases the one posed by Michael Herzfeld (1992) inquiring why a polity, in the case of Greece, designed to benefit all its citizens actually results in the callous neglect of the needs of its people.

‘structural violence’, coined by Galtung (1969);¹⁵⁷ and the other is Herzfeld’s (1997) ‘cultural intimacy’. Structural violence, according to Galtung, does not denote a direct act of force that causes physical harm to a person; rather it refers to the condition that makes the achievement of one’s full somatic and mental potential impossible. No one person can be identified as the perpetrator, nor can any targeted person escape such violence. Akhil Gupta (2012) uses this concept to analyse the ethnography of an Indian welfare project, and argues that the very process of bureaucracy in India, characterised by frictions between institutions, generates a structural effect that turns a well-intended state agenda into an arbitrary unequal distribution of resources among its recipients. I concur with Gupta on the ‘structural’ nature in the production of such violence and the bewildering entanglement between the provision of care service and violence.¹⁵⁸ I also want to add two points on the basis of the following ethnographic material. The first is that the ‘systematic process’ is not only confined to the bureaucracy which officially delivers state welfare, but also extends to wider social institutions, including family, local community and even those who are violated, which reproduce the malicious effect and contribute to the structural effect of this violence. The second is that, though no particular criminal is identifiable, it does not mean that no one gains from this violence. I claim that, in the case of the Home project, the state benefits by having its targets rendered more dependent on the state through this systemic and discursive process of deprivation. Having said this, the question remains as to how structural violence is actualized. If, in the Indian context, it is the frictions between institutions that realize the structural violence in practice as Gupta asserts, then what is the Chinese equivalent? My observation is that the cultural stereotype which sees WuBao-Elderly only deserve basic provision legitimizes the deprivation of any excess and serves to keep their status quo on the lowest rung of society’s ladder. In other words, the social classificatory system facilitates various

¹⁵⁷ Galtung (1990) develops the term ‘cultural violation’, defined as the symbolic sphere of our existence that can be used to justify or legitimize direct or structural violence, and claims that generally, a causal flow from cultural to structural to direct violence can be identified. In my view, this term echoes well to Herzfeld’s analysis (1992) of the analogy between bureaucracy and the world outside it.

¹⁵⁸ This latter point will be further developed in Chapter Seven.

seemingly incidental cases of WuBao-Elderly's property deprivation, a point ceaselessly made by a number of structural functionalist anthropologists as well as continental philosophers.

Michael Herzfeld coined the term 'cultural intimacy' (1997) to explain the cultural solidarity of peasants who share certain intimate knowledge, which, very often, in face of modern state formation, becomes a source of external embarrassment. Building on this insight, I may imagine that the state project does not stop at embarrassing the subalterns, rather, its ultimate mission is to control them. So the next question should be, how, then, are uncomfortable sentiments such as embarrassment turned into state control of its subjects as desired individuals. My argument is that the Home, as an intimate state intervention, destroys the local 'communities of complicity' (Steinmuller 2013) with its significantly generous material provision, symbolic superiority, and the apt appropriation of local knowledge. This is largely realized because of most WuBao-Elderly's enduring trust in their previous culturally-intimate groups who, however, betray them in the face of the new state intervention. In this context, intimacy makes deprivation convenient. And thus, in the Home, we see the residents, instead of trying to cover up the (shameful) actions of their intimate relations, are at best torn between exhibiting gestures of concealment and disclosure, and often opt for disclosure only. The result is that WuBao-Elderly are absorbed into the state at the expense of a break with their previously trusted groups. Furthermore, both the loosening of previous ties and the building up of new ones by sharing the secrets associated with intimate property deprivation and accepting a place in the Home, increases the residents' dependency on the Home both emotionally and materially. Perhaps this also explains why the prevalent phenomenon of residents' property deprivation is often achieved with the connivance of the Home management.

To substantiate this argument, I present three ethnographic cases of residents' property, each reflecting the involvement of one intimate institution of the residents. The first case illustrates the involvement of the residents' home village authorities in the case

of a resident nicknamed Laoshiren (an innocent person). Laoshiren constantly questioned why his house and land were claimed by his home village cadres in a way which he felt to be wrong. The second case shows the involvement of the residents' relatives by presenting the ethnography of a resident called Yang Xingzhou. Yang entrusted his bank account to his brother's family, which he had treated as his own, but they cheated him out of it. The social life of his bank account illuminates the break of intimacy between residents and their relatives, and how this in turn influences the residents' relations with the Home. The third case presents the involvement of a male care worker, called Duck,¹⁵⁹ who deals with residents' mortuary matters and puts a constant threat on the remains of deceased residents.

Laoshiren and His Confusions

Before I present the ethnography of Laoshiren, let me first briefly introduce how residents' personal property should be dealt with in their transition from village to the Home, as overtly agreed. The principle of the land of a WuBao-Elderly was that it was owned by the collective, to which it should be returned when a WuBao-Elderly moved to the Home. The rules governing houses were such that if the house originally belonged to a WuBao him- or herself, it remained his or hers; otherwise, it should be returned to the owner. In reality, these principles were often taken only as guidelines and individual circumstances varied greatly depending on which official was dealing with the case.¹⁶⁰ Some residents were content to have found a way to keep their house and land in their name irrespective of the rules; others, meanwhile, were dissatisfied with the way their property was dealt with and constantly exhibited negative emotions ranging from confusion to irritation. The necessity of rearranging one's properties, the variation in the actual arrangements among residents and the possibility/hope that anyone's arrangement could be bettered seem to me the main

¹⁵⁹ Duck's official name was Cai Shiding, which was not used in everyday language but only on official documents.

¹⁶⁰ Many residents considered that the outcome of a case depended on which official was dealing with it. In their words, 'it mainly depends on the person [*zhuyao kanren*]'. Local officials were typically scrutinized by the residents as a whole person, rather than only on their political capability.

factors that make their previous assets a continual focus of attention to the residents and motivate their ceaseless efforts to improve existing arrangements.

Laoshiren was among the few residents who never failed to obey the Home's rule that residents should always wear their Home ID card around their necks.¹⁶¹ In the first few months of my stay, although I came across Laoshiren several times, I did not know his name or how to strike up a meaningful conversation with him. One possible reason for this was that whenever I spoke to him he would just respond with 'yes' or 'what teacher Liu says is right', and contribute no further, all the while holding his photo card firmly in his hand, even though it was already safely hung across his chest.

Eventually, I learnt that his nickname was Laoshiren, which fuelled my curiosity. The Chinese word *laoshi* is composed of two characters: *lao* and *shi*. *Lao* literally means old, while *shi* has many connotations, such as substantive, reliable, solid and true; the final character, *ren*, means person. In Chinese, the word *laoshi* has three meanings: the first is honest; the second is following rules/not causing trouble; and the third is that it is a euphemism for 'stupidity'. When I attended primary school in China over twenty years ago, I was taught that to be a (good) person one should be *laolaoshishi*, in the sense that one should be honest and law-abiding; and since it was something that one *should* be, pupils were taught to think of *laoshi* as a positive attribute. Reflecting on this inculcation now, the positive character associated with *laoshi* at that time is understandable: in an educational system where one's loyalty to moral values and certain ways of behaving were held in great esteem, the overall judgment on *laoshi*, a word comprising the above three elements – honesty, submissiveness and 'not so clever' – would overall be positive. With this in mind, I was naturally intrigued by the different evaluation of *laoshi* in the context of the Home: During my fieldwork, almost every time I heard people use the term Laoshiren to address the resident in question, there was a clear note of scorn in their voice, often followed by a

¹⁶¹ The Home stipulated that residents should always wear their ID cards so as to present a unified image of the institution and to reduce missing cases. In practice, most residents did not wear it for many reasons, including that they felt it looked silly or shameful, such as Bai's response to the bus driver to erase the Home logo described at the beginning of Introduction.

burst of sympathetic laughter. At some points, it seemed to me that nothing was worse than being *laoshi*.¹⁶²

One day, four months into my fieldwork, Laoshiren came to me wanting to ‘talk about some serious matters’ [*shuodian zhengjingshi*]. In a sincere manner, he said that there were some matters that he could not understand and about which he wanted to get my opinion. The first was why his previous production brigade had confiscated his old house without giving him any compensation. The following are his original words:

Teacher Liu, you must know the policy well. The house is mine. They sold it after I came here. That’s fine. But I think the money (from the sale) should be given to me. But they refused and said that the state is already taking good care of me so why do I need that money? Do you think what they say is right? I still think they should give me the money, since the house is mine. Do you think my reasoning is right?

The second issue that Laoshiren did not understand was why a resident had assaulted him when he felt that he had not done anything wrong. Laoshiren described the incident as follows: one day, a resident (a ‘gangster resident’) was mopping the corridor when Laoshiren happened to pass by. The resident stopped Laoshiren, told him that he was cleaning and asked him to take a detour. Laoshiren replied, ‘It’s so spacious here. I walk on my way – I’m not even near to the place you are mopping. Why does my movement bother you at all? Why should you stop me?’ At which, the resident poured his entire bucket of water over Laoshiren, beat him up and shouted, ‘Now you know what it (your passing by here) is to do with me!’

When Laoshiren shared these experiences with me, what struck me most was not the stories themselves, but the sense that Laoshiren was not preoccupied by anger, but

¹⁶² One resident had died in his room without anyone noticing for several days. Some residents considered that failure to gain other people’s attention was also due to the character of *laoshi*; a *laoshi* person did not know how to make himself well known, so other people tended to ignore him. In extreme cases, this could result in one’s death going unnoticed.

rather seemed sincerely confused; his delivery was more like a question than a remonstrance, even though there was a slight suggestion of complaint. The following queries articulated by Laoshiren appear several times in my field notes:¹⁶³

Teacher Liu, my old house is mine. What do you think of the fact that they've sold it but do not give me the money? They said this was because I no longer needed it and the state can take care of me. It sounds alright, but not completely. Do you think their explanation is right? Some people here told me it was right, but I still want to ask you.

Teacher Liu, can you tell me why he beat me? Yes? I walked on my way and he did his cleaning. I did not interrupt him. What bothers him? Do you think he is right to beat me? Do you think I should report it?

Laoshiren was very persistent in approaching me in the hope of finding answers to his questions. He even asked me whether, if I did not know the policies on these matters myself, I could take them to the Central Party [*dang zhongyang*] to check when I returned to Beijing. Once, Laoshiren started to talk about these matters to me together with other residents. Instead of answering his questions, the other residents mainly laughed at him. One said, 'you are too *laoshi*. What's the use of saying these things again and again? Teacher Liu is not the city mayor. She has said that she cannot help on these things.' Laoshiren was not put off by them, and continued with his protest in repetitive fashion, 'Teacher Liu should know if they are right or wrong. I obey all the rules, and what mistake have I made ...?'

I never knew how to reply to Laoshiren when he approached me with his quandaries. On the above occasion, I said to him, 'I cannot answer your questions. I've come here to learn from you all and understand rural life. I am actually more confused than you are. I am a student and am also very *laoshi*.' I guessed that Laoshiren mostly took my

¹⁶³ He repeated it. Repetition seems a powerful weapon of the weak, particularly the desperate. In the novel 'New Year Sacrifice' (written by Lu Xun, one of the greatest novelists in 20th century China), reiteration is the only thing Hsiang Lin's wife can do to make her mischief public.

responses of this sort as some humble rhetoric, though he never said so but kept returning to me to seek answers. By contrast, my awkward use of the term *laoshi* to depict myself was immediately denied by other residents. One commented:

No, no, if you are a *laoshiren*, we are all sheer fools. You don't fit this categorization. You are well protected by the state.¹⁶⁴ It just 'doesn't matter to you whether you are *laoshi* or not' [*bucunzai laoshi bulaoshi*].

I discussed the meaning of the term *laoshi* with a number of residents and received similar explanations from them. The following account was offered by Tang Youcai, a resident who was very close to Laoshiren:

Laoshi is only to know the surface and stick to it. You would not be called *laoshi* if you knew the overall situation, your position in it, and how you should behave. But Laoshiren doesn't know these things. When provoked by the gangster, he didn't walk away but rather confronted him directly and reasoned [*jiang daoli*] with him. What's the use of talking reason to that kind of guy? In that situation, one should just walk away to avoid further fighting. Similarly, if you did not have a good relationship with your brigade cadres, who were going to care where the money for your house went? It is not simply an issue of whether it is your property or not. But he (Laoshiren) does not understand this.

Following his comments about Laoshiren, Tang turned the spotlight on himself:

I know these things much better than him. You see, I never offend those gangsters, but I've also told them that I have 'good muscle' [*jirou fada*] and can fight; and I say 'sweet words' [*tianhua*] to care workers so that I can have a better relationship with them.

¹⁶⁴ I understood that this comment referred primarily to my identity - as I had explained to residents - as a young researcher from a university in Beijing, whose only job over one year was to familiarize herself with rural life, which they thought was too 'light' to be a serious job.

Intrigued by Tang's self-assessment, I pushed him further. 'Do you mean that avoiding gangsters and saying sweet words to care workers signify *bu-laoshi* (*bu* is a negative prefix)?' Tang flatly denied this interpretation too. 'No! They don't mean that I am *bu-laoshi*', he replied. 'It's just that I am not *laoshi* [*bushi bu-laoshi, zhibuguo bushi laoshi*], and I know how to deal with these people.'

Analysis

Laoshiren's case illustrates the responses from local authorities, i.e. his home village cadres and the gangster-resident in the Home, to the state welfare provision and the local realities of the state provision mediated by these people. It shows that state intervention in the form of the Home, as a new symbol, is nevertheless interpreted differently by the local people - not only the WuBao-Elderly. Yet, these diverse interpretations are re-ranked so that new realities are accordingly made, having incorporated the intervention but without altering much of the old structure. In other words, the local reality in which WuBao-Elderly have the lowest status tends to remain despite the state's provision of generous facilities to respect them. This structural tendency makes the phenomenon of property deprivation prevalent. In Laoshiren's case, the interpretation that he no longer needs the house is used to deprive him of it. As a matter of fact, for Laoshiren, moving to the Home is not an isolated matter; rather, it is tantamount to the loss of his property.

We might assume that in front of me and other residents, considering the 'territorial bond' in Chinese culture, Laoshiren might well protect the reputation of his home village, or at least not disparage it. This was not the case, however. In my view, the enclosure of Laoshiren to his home village as one entity is broken by a series of events after his decision to enter the Home: Firstly, it allows the material means for Laoshiren to leave the village but still be sure that his needs will be taken care of; secondly, his village cadres reinterpret the welfare that Laoshiren receives to mean that his house is of no use to him; and based on this reinterpretation, take it over and displace Laoshiren altogether, thus breaking the bond between Laoshiren and the

village; thirdly, Laoshiren is not convinced by the explanation provided by his cadres, since he cannot ignore the first principle, namely, that the house is his private property and should therefore belong to him irrespective of whether or not he needs it. Unable to alter his village cadre's decision, Laoshiren discloses their deeds by repetitively questioning what has happened with an outsider to the Home. The second matter of Laoshiren being assaulted by the 'gangster' resident provides us with a similar insight.¹⁶⁵ While we might assume the internal organization of the residents to be a secret to an outsider, it is, in fact, constantly disclosed by the one being bullied. What is different with Laoshiren is that, instead of fighting back directly, he broods on it and discloses it indirectly by constant questioning of what has happened.

Laoshiren's response to what happens to him, expressed as raising an 'innocent' question repetitively, is thus notable.¹⁶⁶ In my view, it has two interpretations. The first is that it is a mild gesture of disclosure of the secret hidden in his previous group - the current *niangjia* - his home village. Having lived there his whole life, Laoshiren was certainly aware of the existence of implicit rules, such as making personal relations, but he refused to allow them to take precedence over his belief that things should be done in the right way as overtly agreed. As a person of low status, he can only question the phenomena that do not fit this belief. To question an existence has the potential to reveal the secret in it, thus the break of the tie he has with his home village on this matter. Though most often a target of fun, I doubt whether every resident equally believes that what happens to Laoshiren is purely due to his hopeless character of being *laoshi*, without any reflection on what *should* happen.

The second is that Laoshiren's acting in this way instead of taking any overt rebellious action is also an illustration of how the arbitrary re-interpretation by local authorities of a state welfare benefit does not, in reality, necessarily cause significant turmoil.

¹⁶⁵ More about gangster residents is in Chapter Seven.

¹⁶⁶ Liu Xin (2000) makes a thorough description on the phenomena that villagers in a northern China village utilize symbolic ambiguity – confusion – in their practices of residence, marriage and eating. Laoshiren's case may support it by showing that the failure to do so – cannot make sense of confusion - leads to dysfunction.

The first matter shows that the differing interpretations establish the possible legitimacy of more than one rule, which de facto make the two realities – his status and the case for his house in his village and the free care provided by the Home until the end of his life – irreconcilable (i.e. only one is realized). Yet, Laoshiren's resultant confusion functions to make the arbitrary incompatibility of these realities conflict-free. The violence towards him illustrates the irreconcilability of his imagined version of life at the Home and the reality of it; although Laoshiren sees himself as autonomous and equal to other residents, this assumption is at odds with a reality in which power struggles and inequality between residents are unavoidable. Again, it is Laoshiren's confusion that bridges the disjuncture between his vision and reality. Putting these two functions together, we may summarize that on one hand, Laoshiren's explicit confusion destroys, on this matter, his loyalty to his home village and reveals the secrets within the Home among residents, yet on the other, it constrains the consequence of these disruptions thus avoiding serious conflict.

The residents' general response to Laoshiren, such as mocking him for being too *laoshi*, in my view, also has two functions. The first is that, by doing so, they contribute to bringing the prevalent implicit village rules into the Home, the state institution, and then have the incidence of Laoshiren's property deprivation normalized. They continue to take it for granted that *knowing* to make personal relations and *submitting* to the local hierarchy are the actual rules that make things work. As Tang makes clear, it is important to know the 'whole structure and one's position in it', rather than to 'stick to the rule of the protection of private property' or to 'talk reason with gangsters', as Laoshiren does. The complete incapability of Laoshiren in realizing his claim, according to Tang and other residents, is due to his performed ignorance of these actual rules. The second is that, by sharing the secret Laoshiren had with his home village cadres, new communities, informed by the reference to the state if not beyond, are forming, be it with other residents, the staff or me.

Yet, laughing at Laoshiren's loss of his properties is certainly a gesture of indifference to his mischief. The cause of this is the fact that the majority has already taken a reality of injustice for granted. Their laugh – a gesture of cultural intimacy – thus contains bleak indifference. We might claim that intimacy, in this context, creates indifference. This is mindful of Herzfeld's pinpoint of the social root of bureaucratic expression, in this case, the ordinary villagers' common acceptance of the rule of 'relations' and their indifference to the local cadre's abuse of political office, provide fertile soil for the pernicious tree which Laoshiren, alone questions.

In addition, I contend that Laoshiren, instead of standing as an anomaly to his peers, represents an important common status of all residents. This is because the residents in general lack any assurance about what happens, or will happen, to the policies on WuBao-Elderly, particularly given the unprecedented level of state intervention in this matter. A general sense of ambiguity, resulting from the need to play with a rapidly changing and not-quite-understandable new state, captures the state of all residents, including Laoshiren. The reality is that no one is absolutely sure about why things happen the way they do, as illustrated by the quotes at the beginning, and thus everyone, at different times, asks, checks, reckons on, or follows the rules without really questioning why they do so.

The fact that 'I' am considered by the residents to be included in the 'state' category and thus irrelevant to the term of *laoshi*, in my view, shows a stereotypical opposition between the 'state' and the 'local' in their minds, as well as the 'local' nature of the term *laoshi*. It implies that 'to stick to formal rules' is how things work in their imagination of the 'state', and not to do so is how they work in the 'local'. These binaries are so entrenched, which may explain why the events in the Home are hard to pin down: as the 'state' in the 'local', we see the continuing existence of the local, yet also the formation of new groups and state presentations. We see concealment and disclosure, as well as continuity and change. In all, Laoshiren, being a local, discloses internal secrets to an outsider, who is supposed to represent the state in the local place;

and he does so in a state institution situated in the village, the Home. The conjuncture of these fused situations loosens previous solidarities, i.e. that of Laoshiren with his home village and may form new ones, i.e. he with the state.

Yang Xingzhou and His Brother's Family

Many residents turned their previous assets into cash prior to their move, primarily because they felt that this would allow them to better cope with the unpredictability of the new life.¹⁶⁷ This in turn generated other problems, such as how to store this cash. Mirroring their lack of assurance about their future lives in the Home, residents were not certain whether their money could be safely kept there.¹⁶⁸ Some residents then chose to keep it at the home of a kin member, which they considered safer than the Home; some kept their cash on them all the time; and others put it in a bank account. However, as it turned out, none of these methods guaranteed their financial security. Complexities related to residents' personal property, in my view, typify those of many matters behind the Home's presentation of a simple guarantee of free old age support.

Yang Xingzhou's relationship with his brother's family is representative of many of those residents who had formed family-like kin relations during their lifetimes. Yang had three brothers: two older and one younger. His older brothers were from his mother's first marriage, while Yang and his younger brother were from her second.¹⁶⁹ Yang's father died early and his mother later remarried. Yang and his younger brother lived together throughout these childhood years of familial changes; and as a result, Yang considered his relationship with his younger brother to be closer than most. When Yang reached marriageable age, both brothers were very poor and he resigned himself to the fact that he would never marry. Some years later, when Yang's younger

¹⁶⁷ These assets included residents' houses and other items. For example, one resident told me that he had sold more than 3,000 *jin* rice – his most valued asset – in order to have sufficient cash to prepare for unforeseeable contingencies in his new life in the Home.

¹⁶⁸ Access to financial services was very limited among these residents. Many residents either did not trust financial organizations, or did not know how to apply for a bank account.

¹⁶⁹ It was said that whether siblings were born to the same parents mattered greatly to the relationships between them as well as to one's position in a family. In Yang's case, he took it for granted that he should be closer to his younger brother than to the other two.

brother was of a similar age, though still poor, he told Yang that he really wanted to get married. Yang shared with me his then thoughts:

‘One’s eldest brother is like the father’ [*zhangxiong weifu*].¹⁷⁰ At this point, I thought that I myself had already missed it and that if I could not help him, the family would not be continued. I felt obliged to help. To help him to get married, we had to have enough money. But just working on our small piece of land wasn’t enough (to have money). So I decided to go to the city to earn money. That was the start of my migrant work. I did many jobs and even did a bit of business myself, such as selling eggs. And I was lucky and started to really earn money; you know, I am a peasant with ‘no education’ [*mei-wenhua*]. But anyway, I earned money, and with my help my brother later got married and had two sons.

Yang described his younger brother as an incapable [*bu-nenggan*] person, by which he meant that his brother could not earn enough money to provide for his own family. Being single himself, Yang had always lived with his brother’s family and had made substantial financial contributions. Yang liked to recall that he alone had paid all the school fees for his two nephews - 128 yuan per year for each of them. Yang also promised the two boys that as long as they were successful in their studies, he would continue to provide them with everything they needed for their further education. However, it turned out that neither of his nephews were particularly academic. Yang was very disappointed about this, describing the boys as ‘two tortoises who were never up to his emotional expectations’ [*buzhengqi de guierzi*].¹⁷¹ The ‘tortoises’ stopped studying after middle school and went to Guangdong to look for work. Yang continued to subsidize each of them with 350 yuan per month. In the following, I offer excerpts from Yang’s description of his two nephews which accounted for most of his conversation with me:

¹⁷⁰ This is a Chinese idiom.

¹⁷¹ *Qi*, includes the notions of agency, charisma, atmosphere, aura and emotions. Ying Xing (2007) argues that *qi* provides a powerful analytical framework to understand the social and collective actions in rural China.

Before I came back to the village, I worked as a care worker in a big hospital in Chengdu. I was on call 24 hours every day; whenever there was a request, I was ready to work. I earned a lot on this job. I rented a small room near the hospital. Later the two tortoises came back from Guangdong and wanted to work in Chengdu. They said that they did not want to stay elsewhere but just wanted to stay with me. I was, in fact, very happy about this – the two tortoises ‘had conscience’ [*you liangxin*]! My room was very small but had a large bed; the three of us bunched up together to sleep. But soon I found it a trick again! I realized that by staying with me, the two tortoises could monitor my working hours: if I was not in the room, I must be working at the hospital. They then can calculate exactly how much money I earned, and thus they knew how much money they could make out of me!

While working in Chengdu, Yang became ill and decided to return to his village to live with his brother. He stayed with them for several months before the Home started to ‘recruit’ residents. Both his brother and his wife said they thought it would be better for Yang to move to the Home, and eventually Yang agreed. At that point, Yang still had over 6,000 yuan savings in the bank from his work in Chengdu. According to Yang, it then seemed to become more difficult to decide what to do with his money. His brother’s family, especially his sister-in-law, suggested that he leave it at their place, since they thought that the Home, while a nice place for Yang to live, might not be a safe place to keep bank account documents. Yang told me that he had been very hesitant about doing this. But in the end he followed his relatives’ advice and left the account book with them.

After moving to the Home, Yang initially went back to his brother’s regularly. However these visits were increasingly marked by conflicts, particularly over money. On one of his visits about six months later, Yang made a passing mention of the money he had stored at their place. To his great surprise, his brother and sister-in-law responded elusively– it was a clear signal to Yang that they were trying to act as if he

had not. (Yang left a bank account book with them). Yang was very angry and frustrated. He described his feeling as ‘the dumb eats bitter foodstuff’ [*yaba chi huanglian*] – unable to utter the bitterness, since he did not have any evidence to show that he did put the bank account there! After some time wondering what to do, Yang decided it might help to talk to his nephews, so he set out for Chengdu to look for them. When Yang finally found the elder nephew in a hotpot restaurant where he was working as the head of the security team, he was again rebuffed: on seeing Yang, the nephew at first pretended not to recognize him and later asked him to leave and not make a fuss at his workplace, which would make him lose face. Yang went to Chengdu once more to pursue this matter, but both visits were ultimately futile.

Yang recalled that this had vexed him for nearly two years. I tried to clarify with Yang whether he was hurt by the loss of the money or by his brother’s emotional betrayal. After considering for a while, Yang replied that it was difficult to tell, but all these problems, in his view, were definitely caused by his sister-in-law, who was ‘uncivil’ [*bu-xianghua*]. Having said all this, Yang also emphasized that he had already distanced himself [*xiang tong le*, literally, ‘think through’] from the dispute. He reasoned that as long as the two boys worked hard in the city and found good girls to marry and have children with, he would not insist on reclaiming his money, as he would see it as his contribution towards the boys’ future and the continuation of the family.

Prior to the Spring Festival of 2011, Yang told me firmly that he would be spending the holiday at his brother’s and would stay there for at least two weeks. Yet, it later turned out that Yang stayed for only half a day. His planned two-week visit had been thwarted by many unpleasant occurrences. The first was that his nephews had not come to the Home to pick him up contrary to what he had expected. Yang described his feelings:

I waited for them to come, but they never did, so I made the journey myself.

Think about it why should I not go back? It is my home, to which I have

made a great contribution. If I did not go back merely because they did not come to pick me up, then I would have fallen into their trap! Of course I should go back anyway! But then I thought I might stay there for a much shorter time. Why? Because I can't let them feel that I *want* to go back or am abandoned, and I need to let them know that I have a secure place elsewhere and I just go to 'have a look at' [*kanyixia*] them; I don't need to rely on them for anything!

After he had made his way to his brother's by himself, his sister-in-law, upon hearing of his plan to stay for one or two weeks, suggested that he should give them some money for his stay. Her argument, according to Yang, was as follows:

Now the state pays everything for you. But we have to work for ourselves. If you stay here and eat with us, how are you going to spend your WuBao subsidy? You just waste it? If so, maybe it'll be better that you give it to us to help us poor people.

These words prompted an eruption of anger in Yang, and he somehow 'turned his face against her' [*fanlian*; fall out], as he described:

'In a fit of anger' [*yiqi zhixia*], I came back. It's fortunate that I have this place (the Home) to go to. I told her (his sister-in-law), 'whatever difficulty you might have in the future, don't come to me for help anymore. Now I have the state and the Home to rely on, I don't need anything from you. But don't come to me if you need more money. Your sons are 'wandering around' [*hunzhe*] the city, changing jobs all the time and haven't found suitable girlfriends. Don't come to me if they make you bankrupt one day. I'll just stay here to 'watch this fantastic show' [*kan haoxi*]¹⁷²

¹⁷² I want to highlight that while the residents continued to visit their home villages and kin, many returned to the Home in advance of plan because of the frustrating experiences of this kind. I call them 'early returnees'. This phenomenon, in my view, strongly suggests that the Home is

It is notable that, in comparison to Yang's attitude towards his sister-in-law, which appeared stable and largely negative, his emotions towards his nephews were more ambiguous. And the latter, as far as I observed, greatly affected his day-to-day mood. Although Yang often expressed disappointment in his nephews, these complaints were nevertheless mixed up with his recurrently expressed satisfaction with them. Once, the Home received a donation of jackets split equally between large and small sizes. Most of the residents were fairly short; and there were not enough of the small jackets to go around. It was then suggested by care workers that allocation be done by means of a lottery. Yang, though small in stature, was allocated a large jacket, and his attempts to get the care workers to give him a small one instead met with little success. Very unhappy about this, Yang later came to me with two jackets for comparison. 'My nephew is good,' he said, 'he gave me this jacket. Look! Count this on his conscience [*liangxin*]! This is their work uniform. Since he is the head of the security team, he manages to spare one for me. I take this as his 'having heart' [*youxin*]! It fits me. Look at this one (the other jacket from the Home), it looks like a ship on me. What's the use of it? Lucky that I've got the one from my nephew; count on the tortoise's conscience! I can dress comfortably.'

Analysis

For those residents who do not have a family of their own, it is often the family of one's brother which fills this void (in the patrilineal culture).¹⁷³ Yang's case, among this group, features a rather substantial tie with his brother's family i.e. not only conforming to the patrilineal rule, but also emotional and financial entanglements. Yet, by moving to the Home, we see Yang loosening this primary tie and tightening that

becoming increasingly indispensable to residents not only as a place to meet practical needs but also one where they can escape, or counterbalance, the many vicious forces coming from their previous neighbours and kin.

¹⁷³ The main debate about Chinese kinship is about a formalist vis-à-vis a practice-based perspective. The former has been established since Maurice Freedman (1958, 1979), and the latter is held by many later opponents, e.g. Liu 2000; Stafford 2000; Judd 1989, 2009. The anomalous families of WuBao-Elderly are significant cases of 'making kinship', and the rather easy disaggregation of these families in the face of a state project, in my view, supports the formalism stand.

with the state. Again, in this process, there is tension and cohesion between the culturally intimate group and the new material arrangement for WuBao-Elderly.

Unlike Laoshiren, who complained publicly in the Home, Yang never mentioned his problem with his brother's family when other residents were around.¹⁷⁴ In his account, the formation of this family (i.e. he remains part of his brother's household) has particular historical roots, such as the changes of their parents in their childhood, poverty, co-residence and co-dependence between him and his brother, and their joint effort to realize the latter's wish to marry; and after his brother gets married, his inability to support his own family makes Yang's role continue to be functionally necessary. He not only makes financial contributions to the family, but also devotes all his attention to it. These special experiences give natural rise to an unusual family structure, which also explains why Yang has a strong sense of ownership over this family, despite it not being his own according to custom.

There is cohesion as well as tension in this family. Yang's opinions on the future of the family, or the role of its members, are increasingly contested or ignored. His brother's wife seems to stand as a crucial figure who, for the most part, functions to undermine Yang's position in the family. In Yang's view, it is primarily her barbarism [*bu-xianghua*] that ruins many of his plans and wishes, in particular her failure to properly educate her sons, let alone her ceaseless pursuit of money from Yang's pocket, including cheating him out of his bank account and wanting to take over more of his WuBao subsidy.¹⁷⁵ It is Yang's relationship with his two nephews that keeps him tied to his brother's family. To Yang, his brother's sons represent the future of the family, which he considers to be his own future. Even though most of the things that his nephews have done come as a disappointment to Yang, he exhibits a great deal of tolerance and forgiveness towards them, and blames the bulk of their problems on his sister-in-law's failure to educate them. In Yang's mind, his generosity may still be

¹⁷⁴ This may best be explained by the Chinese proverb of '*jiachou buke wailou*', literally, 'familial scandal cannot be told to outsiders.', or 'not washing your dirty linen in public'.

¹⁷⁵ For a fuller discussion on the rise of women's power in family life in rural China, see Yan 2003.

reciprocated if and when his nephews live up to his expectations, such as by finding good jobs and marriages.

It is against this background that the Home intervenes by providing a free solution which enables Yang to spend his old age independent of his brother. The fact that his brother's family suggested that Yang move to the Home may be read as a signal that they do not consider Yang to be a member of the family – contrary to Yang's perception. After Yang is settled in the Home, his bank account becomes a point of discord. By agreeing with his brother's family to leave it in their house, we may discern that at that moment Yang still considered this family as the private group and the Home as the other, a comparatively less safe place for money, which reflects his trust of them over the Home, i.e. a trust of family rather than the state.

As it turns out, after Yang moves to the Home, his relationship with his brother's family becomes increasingly strained. Starting with the loss of control over his bank account, Yang is constantly upset by what his brother's family does to him. Unlike Laoshiren's case, in which the village cadres did at least give an explanation of their actions, however unsatisfactory, what Yang's relatives did was rather pretend that nothing had happened, i.e. avoid confronting the situation explicitly. In other words, the strategy used is a kind of 'quiet delay'. By doing so, they effectively obtained the money, but also caused tension in their relationship with Yang. The disarticulate deprivation of Yang's money by his brother's family betrays Yang's initial premise that his brother's family is a safer place to store money than the Home, triggers Yang's anger, and makes him disclose this private consensus that doubted the Home. Thus, by occupying his money, his brother's family breaks their previous tacit consensus - the intimacy; and by disclosing what they did, Yang further reinforces this cut-off. On the back of these interlocked breaks, it is doubtlessly the provision from the state to Yang personally. Though Yang eventually decides not to make a fuss about the money, it is his move to the Home that results in the appropriation of his money against his wishes. In addition, in comparison to the case of Laoshiren, in which

reliance on ‘personal relations’ in the public sphere is cherished by most people, the effective takeover of Yang’s money by his brother’s family shows that, strikingly, in the private domain, ‘personal relations’, i.e. Yang with his brother’s, are becoming unreliable. Yet, they both show us how previous groups are loosened, not only with the residents’ physical removal from these groups, but more importantly, the loss of their cultural intimacy.

A remarkable response from Yang to these disagreements is his declaration to root himself in the Home, enjoying guaranteed support and ‘watching whatever fantastic spectacle’ might befall a family that breaks the rules of civilization [*bu-xianghua*] by refusing to treat Yang with due respect. This is notable, since it signals that now for Yang, the Home is not just a place where he is fed and housed, but it is becoming the place where he anchors himself and observes the world. In other words, there is a shift in his understanding of where he belongs. At many moments of conflict with his brother’s family, Yang chooses to emphasize, or exaggerate, his independence, in particular by returning to the Home earlier than planned. This may be read as being prompted by Yang’s attempt to maintain his self-esteem whilst his influence over his brother’s family is diminishing. To root himself in the Home is to create new intimacy with new partners. In a nutshell, we envision that Yang is becoming increasingly alienated from his brother’s family, caused in no small part by the theft of his money, and in the process of moving his sense of belonging to the Home.

To residents like Yang, while their problems with their kin seem relatively clear to themselves (e.g. unfulfilled reciprocity), it remains largely uncertain what the newfound independence afforded by the Home actually means for them. Although the welfare provided in the Home is portrayed as a free gift from an increasingly responsible and moral state, the notion of such charity does not fit well with the residents’ primary logic that old age care is the due return on one’s previous investment in family or kin. Also, the institutional and social relations that may exist in the Home, unlike those with one’s kin, will be subject to new exploration. Thus,

while the case of Yang is primarily about his relations with kin, it also suggests that residents like him are in the transitional stage of moving from an unsatisfactory but familiar web of kin relations to a guaranteed but uncertain institutional setup. Given this, claims to independence made in front of kin may be seen as the beginning of residents' increasing dependence on the Home.

Several familial ideologies help to explain the prevalent indifference to matters of this sort. Firstly, as I mentioned, Yang himself seldom mentioned it to others. Usually, he boasted about his nephews, conforming to the expectation that 'familial shame cannot be released to outsiders'. Secondly, on the part of the management and other residents, there is also a strong tacit consensus of 'non-intervention in other people's private matters'. This cultural stereotype largely justifies their indifference to other people's suffering in family life. Thirdly, though the paradigmatic structure (Yang with the couple of his brother) of Yang's kin map is altered upon his entry to the Home, the syntagmatic relationship (Yang with his nephews and the primacy of the ideology of family continuity) does not seem to be particularly affected. In other words, while Yang's current familial relations appear to be undermined, they seem to be restored in Yang's belief that his brother's family is his own family, and thus that a prosperous future for the family is in their common interest regardless of their current separation and strained relations. His unshakable conviction in working together for the future prosperity of the family, in my view, explains why his deprivation is made possible as well as conflict free. These cultural stereotypes should help us to understand why this painful loosening of primary ties does not always lead to conflicts as expected.

Duck and the Residents' Assets

I now turn to the residents who kept their money on their person at all times. As mentioned in Chapter Three, each resident was allocated a lockable cupboard, which was their only private store place. Residents normally put all their personal possessions, including valuables, in these units for safety as well as to satisfy certain hygiene rules imposed by the Home. Even so, some residents were not very confident

about the security afforded by these cupboards. It was not unusual to hear the following worry from residents, ‘*Wanyi* (in case of one in ten thousand probabilities) someone stole it, no one would bother about the theft and by no means would you get it back.’ Given this sense of insecurity, some residents simply carried their cash on their person at all times. Two residents showed me how they stowed their money in a small pocket sewn into the innermost layer of their clothes, just next to the skin, in winter and summer alike. They told me that many residents kept money in this way, which they felt was the safest option.

The uncertainty associated with personal money was particularly evident when a resident died. Cremation was one of the five guaranteed services provided by the Home. The normal procedure following the death of a resident was that the Home workers would inform the cremation centre in the county town; and the latter would send a car to the Home. They would also ask the relatives of the deceased to collect his or her personal belongings. Duck, a male care worker, was the one to remove the body, escort it to the centre and later collect the ashes to give to the relatives: this marked the end of the services provided in the Home. Duck is central to this exploration of the uncertainties surrounding residents’ personal remains; so, in the following, let me briefly introduce him first.

Duck, as portrayed in the jokes of other care workers, was a person who lived on government’s ‘heart of sympathy’ [*tongqing-xin*]: Duck had adopted a baby girl when he was single in his early thirties and since then he had received a government allowance for being a single father. After some years, he agreed that a woman with epilepsy could live with him, and subsequently received a further ‘minimum income supplement’ [*dibao*] in this woman’s name. Furthermore, the two-storey house that he then lived in was the result of a vice-mayor’s visit three years previously, during which, Duck was introduced to the mayor as a ‘representative of a poor household’ by village cadres; he was then given a substantial subsidy by the mayor to refurnish the house and to register a formal marriage with the woman he lived with.

The work that Duck did in the Home was much harder to pin down than the jobs of the other care workers. If a resident went missing, Duck was the one responsible for finding them. When residents became violent, he was able to utilize his physical strength to restrain them. And when female care workers had difficulties dealing with mentally ill residents,¹⁷⁶ Duck was the one to whom they would turn for help. Moreover, since Duck lived at Fankou, which was just a short walk away from the Home, he was always available in emergencies. These actual jobs that Duck performed differed remarkably from his job description which was to ‘safeguard and undertake routine care work in Building IV’ on the same terms as other care workers. His formal ‘office’ was in the ‘guard room’ beside the main gate, yet he was seldom found there which was consistent with the gap between his job description and the work that he actually did.

At the beginning of my fieldwork, Duck appeared very civil; he introduced himself to me with an elaboration on his determination to ‘devote his heart and effort’ [*jinxin jinli*] to this ‘respectable’ [*gaoshangde*] job of serving the elderly, emphasizing that this commitment would not be affected by his personal financial difficulties (a wife in need of expensive medical treatment and two daughters to raise). His self-presentation seemed to bear out the comments made about him by the directors, which were that Duck was dedicated to his work and his personal circumstances deserved other people’s sympathy. However, about two months into my fieldwork, I started to notice that many residents had very different opinions of Duck. A typical comment about him was that he was a person with a ‘black heart and rotten lungs’ [*heixin lanfei*], a thoroughly derogative appraisal that implied an inherent immorality.¹⁷⁷ Some ‘brave’ residents approached me with various stories to demonstrate how ‘black’ Duck’s heart was. Covering a range of issues, these tales nonetheless conveyed a fairly consistent connotation of what it meant to have a ‘black heart’.

For example, the matter of how Duck dealt with dead people’s remains was a source

¹⁷⁶ Such as when they refused to take pills or eat meals, or became violent.

¹⁷⁷ An essentialist term referring to a person who is evil by nature.

of their anger. The instance of a deceased resident called Zhou Daohe was much gossiped about. Unlike similar disputes which had resulted only in verbal fights between relatives and the staff, this one went to court. Zhou was known by a few close friends in the Home to have had 4,000 yuan on him shortly before his death. Zhou had previously discussed with them the best way of keeping his money secure, but had not found a better solution than just to carry it on him. He had, however, told his relatives that he had this money, and that in the event of his death, they should come to the Home to collect it. When Zhou died, it was Duck, as usual, who wrapped the body, sent it to the cremation centre and contacted Zhou's relatives to come and collect the ashes. When Zhou's relatives arrived, they searched his room but could not find the cash they had been told of. Growing suspicious, they asked Duck about the money but he denied knowing anything about it. Not convinced, Zhou's relatives eventually filed an appeal in a local court which judged that the Home should return 2,000 yuan to Zhou's relatives. Following this incident, Duck was seriously scolded by Director Zhu who made him pay the sum of money awarded by the court. Duck did it in acquiescence, a sign of acknowledging the theft he committed.

The staff showed a great deal of ambiguities in the ways they dealt with Duck. Director Zhu admonished Duck severely when Duck's actions were made public in court, damaging the reputation of the Home; yet at the same time, as Director Zhu told me more than once, it was difficult to find someone prepared to do this kind of work which was however essential in running the Home. Other care workers were contemptuous of Duck for living on government subsidies and scraping together money by exploiting every possibility, but they also appreciated his help at work. As far as I could see, implicit condemnation in the form of teasing, satire and mockery was most commonly expressed by other care workers to Duck. In most circumstances, his dark side was simply ignored. Furthermore, in fact, the ownership of deceased residents' assets was one of those issues that were themselves yet to be agreed upon. Director Lu articulated a common concern regarding this matter:

Why should these relatives think that they deserve the estate? When the elderly were alive, they never did anything to care for them. You have seen how rare it is for anyone to come to visit. It is us who input labour and time instead. Yet, in the end, it seems that we don't deserve anything, but they do.

The residents also exhibited mixed feelings towards Duck. Many seemed to have accumulated a great deal of resentment particular to him which was often overtly expressed, while the reasons for the anger were more privately elaborated. There were both ironic and straightforward versions that conveyed the same message. The ironic one was that Duck was in fact acting as the 'little secretary' [*xiaomi*] of Director Zhu. According to residents, '*xiaomi*' referred to someone being a watchdog [*zougou*] for the boss, whose protection and favour they garnered by serving the latter's agendas faithfully and with little restraint. The straightforward rhetoric, as mentioned above, was that Duck was simply 'black heart and rotten lungs'. Yet the fact that Duck was the first and sometimes the only person to deal with residents' mortuary matters seemed to have granted him a special power that actually haunted most residents, keeping them in a state of fear.¹⁷⁸ In addition, the seemingly rather tolerant attitude of the management toward Duck and subsequently the levity of the sanctions imposed on him meant that there was a great deal of room for Duck to manoeuvre. Unlike the fearless ones who disclosed tales of disputes, there were equally those who opined that '*duoyishi buru shaoyishi*', literally, 'fewer troubles are better than more fusses'. Following this principle, they sometimes said to me that the best way to deal with Duck was to try to get along peacefully with him, so that there was a greater chance that he would do things properly when they themselves died. Indeed, even the 'fearless' residents, who had the courage to tell me how 'black-hearted' Duck had been, also often remembered to add that the 'now situation' was much better; and this addition was, to my view, at least partly, a sign of resignation.

Analysis

¹⁷⁸ In their words, 'dare to be angry but dare not to speak it out'.

The case of Duck shows how individual workers in the Home may also be part of the structural effect of depriving the residents of their properties. Whilst providing an intimate mortuary service, Duck also appropriates the remaining money and breaks the tie the resident has formed with the Home; this is further disclosed by the relatives; and in this sense, facilitated by Duck's behaviour there is a reunion of the resident with his relatives at the moment of his/her death at the expense of a break with the Home. For this to happen, in my view, the condition that there is the gap between the ideal of meeting the state expectation of a model institution presenting a perfect image and the reality in which available workforce and means are far from sufficient to fulfil this task cannot be overlooked. From this inadequacy there often emerge dilemmas between simply having an agenda fulfilled and having it fulfilled in the 'right' way. As the ethnography shows, the former is often prioritized. And thus, the 'secondary' nature of having the work done in the 'right' way also means that alternative ways, often judged morally 'wrong' ways, are accommodated. Again, this situation recalls the notion of cultural intimacy which explains the phenomenon that internal disorder is tolerated for the sake of the mutual benefit of insiders in dealing with another level of existence.

As shown, Duck's relationship with the directors and other workers is characteristic of inconsistency, tolerance and compromise, which seems to correspond well with his mixture of good and bad actions. While many of Duck's actions, such as stealing deceased residents' money, are considered reprehensible and explicitly condemned, his unique capacity to deal with awkward/difficult matters makes his role indispensable; and this in effect makes the directors much more tolerant of his otherwise illegal acts. In a similar vein, though other care workers show contempt for Duck's ways of making a living, they need his help to do their work. The contrasting attributes that Duck possesses give rise to a special institutional space for Duck to simultaneously contribute to, as well as undermine, the intended order of the Home. Both are accommodated since they are two sides of the same coin. In addition, there seems a clear threshold which, when crossed – when his behaviour affects the

reputation of the Home – leads to institutional punishment. This may also confirm that what matters is not so much the estate of individual residents, but the reputation of the Home as a model institution.

Similarly, the residents hate but tolerate Duck. Though most residents exhibit a straightforward anger towards him, this sentiment is largely compromised by their concern that their mortuary matters will eventually be dealt with by him. A range of institutional loopholes, rather than the institutional frictions described by Gupta (2012) in the Indian bureaucratic context, make Duck's role particularly crucial to many residents. Firstly, Duck's misconduct is loosely connected with the Home management's punishment. Secondly, most residents have relatively little contact with their kin whose help is often unreliable. And thirdly, there is no alternative institution to which residents can effectively lodge a complaint against Duck in order to enhance their own mastery of the situation.¹⁷⁹ In this connection, Stafford (2007) explains the state of anxiety observed in an old peasant in north eastern China with reference to the interplay between the Chinese proto-scientific numerical cosmology and relational sociality. He largely explains this phenomenon as a lack of control over what will happen next. In this context, we see that the residents' lack of control over what will happen to their money after they die prompts the forming of small groups with close friends in the Home to share this anxiety as a way of coping with it. In this sense, intimacy is generated by anxiety, which in turn contributes to the ease of anxiety.

In addition, a recent work by Charles Stafford (2012) on ordinary ethics in China also facilitates the discussion. This book presents various situations in which ordinary Chinese people's actions are constantly subject to moral judgement and explains them by focusing on the episodic/ordinary, collective/individual, success/failure, and self/other binaries of the subject matter. For further study, Stafford proposes that the tension between laying blame and being generous and forgiving is a crucial one in everyday ethical experience. The case of Duck may enrich this sub-inquiry by

¹⁷⁹ Taking a matter to court is not normally an option for residents who often lack either the money or knowledge (or both) needed for this process.

drawing our attention to the significance of a third party in affecting local moral evaluation, i.e. the beneficiary/victim of the conduct vis-à-vis the judgment on it. Specifically, Duck is tolerated by the directors because his moral conduct of solving difficult problems for the institution benefits the Home, yet his immoral conduct, as long as not reported publically, only harms the residents. In other words, enabling the Home to function is in itself considered to be a moral good. Similarly, other workers are generous with Duck because his immoral conduct is directed towards the residents, yet his moral conduct, such as offering help, benefits the care workers. To residents, his proved immoral conduct is directed towards other residents, yet their hope for him to behave morally is a selfish one. These structural fissures, embedded in the institutional context, between the beneficiary/victim of Duck's behaviour in effect undermine otherwise sheer moral punishment for his immoral behaviour of stealing money.

Overall, this case shows that the absolute priority given to the fulfilment of institutional tasks in a situation of profound inadequacy facilitates the emergence of anti-institutional behaviour, which causes the residents' anxiety and leads to the subsequent formation of intimate groups. Duck's actions are accommodated in the Home for a variety of reasons as discussed above. In addition, as with the above two cases, the potential threat posed by Duck's unruly behaviour also causes the residents' widespread fear of him, which, ironically, has the effect of generating in the residents a compliance with the Home. In other words, the 'anti-institutional' acts of Duck also, again, contribute to the consolidation of the 'might' of the institution and the incidental violence it does to the residents.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed the phenomena that guaranteed social welfare provision coexists with the deprivation of residents' personal properties in three circumstances. The para-phenomenon of property deprivation is made possible through the involvement of the agencies and individual persons presumably not

necessarily related to the issue in hand. This recalls the 'systemic' nature that a specific state project is processed at the grassroots, namely, specificity has to be turned into the opposite – an encompassing process. In this process, we see a tendency of the loosening of primary groups and the forming of new ones. But all are partial, i.e. old norms seriously inform the formation of new ones. The Home, for various reasons, not only accommodates these deviant phenomena, but also benefits from the de facto result that, being deprived of personal properties and effectively divorced from their previous intimate groups, the residents become more dependent on the Home, materially and emotionally. In this regard, these often labelled unintended or unpredicted consequences of a state intervention might just be more than predictable when situated in a higher level of explanatory paradigm. The importance of the material base that the Home provides seems beyond question in altering all these relations. It is in this other place – a state institution in the local place – that concealment turns into disclosure, deprivation is made a pervasive fact without causing disaster and guaranteed social welfare provision becomes more indispensable to the residents because of its local consequences. In all, these may suggest that the co-existence of opposites is actually constitutive to the very existence of the Home.

Chapter Seven

The Served and the Serving – On the Condition of the Residents

This chapter illustrates and expounds upon the ambivalent status of the residents - being of service while being served. This service is two dimensional, directed towards the state and the Home as a bureaucratic organization with its own mission respectively. To delineate these two levels, a distinction between state and bureaucracy needs to be clarified. My fieldwork observation convinces me that the local people differentiate between these two concepts. Above all, in the local vernacular and Mandarin Chinese alike, state is referred to as *guojia* (state-family), and bureaucracy as various, often concrete terms, such as *zhengfu* (government) or *ju* (bureau), or metaphorically, such as *miao* (temple), etc. Meanwhile, the stereotypical degree of reflection accorded to state-family and bureaucracy is obviously different. The definition of state-family, or whether it is good or bad is seldom questioned, and all residents accept that the five guarantees are endowed by the state-family. To a large extent, the idea of state-family being the authority and benefactor is accepted unquestioningly by the residents. By contrast, bureaucracy is a battlefield. It is loaded with local people's questions, complaints and suspicion. To put the two concepts in a simplified relationality, most residents would consider the state as a positive constant and bureaucracy a variant which is currently problematic.¹⁸⁰

This differentiation is reflected in how the WuBao welfare delivered in the Home is perceived by the residents. As discussed in Chapter Four, the residents took the housing facilities as a sign of the state and future, and differentiated it from the

¹⁸⁰ Regarding the relationship between bureaucracy and state, in a recent study on the Indian state welfare programme, Gupta (2012) argues that the well-intended state agenda is ruined by the process of its bureaucratic delivery which is fraught with friction between institutions and consequently generates structural violence which determines the arbitrary unequal benefit of the state provision among intended recipients. In this analysis, there is an assumption of a well-intended state, which seems to bear a striking similarity with the taken-for-granted idea of my informants, which is that the state, as the free gift giver, is good, and all problems are ascribed to the dysfunction of bureaucracy.

everyday care service delivered by the staff. Correspondingly, the residents were appreciative of the state for bestowing free provision, yet complained to the staff about problems, accusing them of having mismanaged the state-provided subsidy. This perceptual differentiation reflects the dual identity of the Home: in its very existence, it is the reification of the state; and as a model bureaucratic organization in its own right, the Home steers its own, often different course. I call this latter part the 'bureaucratic refraction' of state welfare. I argue that the condition of residents is simultaneously informed by these two levels of existence, and thus they need to be differentiated and synthesized so that their aggregate impact on the residents can be deduced.

General theories on modern nation-state and bureaucracy emphasize the synergy between the two (Gellner 1983; Anderson 1991). Nationalism represents a unifying collective cultural identity, a radical break with an authorized history so that modern state governance is legitimized and all citizens are imbued with a homogeneous identity congenial to the needs of industrial mass production. Technicalities and institutions, such as education, medication, media and bureaucracy, are geared to support national solidarity and establish state authority. Overall, the primary task of both nationalism and modern institutions is to serve modern state governance. China, and other civilizations that become nation-states, such as India, had a unifying cultural concept long before the rise of the modern nation-state (Duara 1995; Peter van de Veer and Feuchtwang 2009). In other words, the concept of Chineseness and its function in uniting the Chinese people are not reliant on the construction of the modern state. In Chinese history, both spiritual and political authority exists in one entity and state-family has been a constant authority figure, cognitively precluding alternative paradigms, which has never fundamentally changed in the modern era (Duara 1995, 2009). This suggests that the paradigmatic relations of the modern state and its infrastructures cannot just be assessed independent to its particular historical legacy.

Meanwhile, western scholarship assessing the development of a modern state in China with its focus on whether the bureaucratic machinery functions 'formally', finds no alternative language but to implicitly admit its failure by agreeing on various versions of state involution, namely, a patrimonial content persists beneath the modern bureaucratic form (Elvin 1972; Wang 1989; Huang 1990; Lu 2000; Murphy 2007). In my view, this conceptual paradigm is premised on the incorrect assumption that bureaucracy can be viewed independently of its cultural and political specificity, and thus, it renders the relationship between bureaucracy, the particular state that it is supposed to serve, and the culture it is entangled with, secondary, if not completely unimportant. I argue that a particular bureaucracy should rather be assessed on the basis of how it accords to a particular nation-state, rather than whether it is formal in its own right. Following this argument, the failure to develop a formal bureaucracy in China can be reinterpreted as the consistent bureaucratic mirroring of the modern Chinese nation-state which has never been modern itself. It is the paradigmatic consistency that explains why patrimonial bureaucracy works in China. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to discuss the relationship between nation-state and its institutions, but it appears that there is an intriguing gap between state and bureaucracy, and to assess each, their mutual implication should be taken into primary consideration.

To embed the intrinsic structural relation of bureaucracy and state in the exploration of the function of the Home, in the Introduction I borrowed the analogy proposed by Herzfeld (1992) that the relationship between bureaucracy and the modern state may be likened to that between ritual and religion. By extension, that of the Home to the Chinese state may be likened to that between the shrine for ghosts and popular religion in China. I then draw in the shrine of orphan ghosts discussed by Feuchtwang (2010) and hypothesise that, like the ghosts transformed into gods in these shrines through ritual processes, the residents may also be transformed by participating in certain events in a bureaucratic organization.

To explore this kind of function of the Home, I find it helpful to build on the theorization of ritual processes elaborated by Maurice Bloch in 'Prey into Hunter' (1992). In this theoretical essay he aims to delineate a quasi-universal structure in ritual processes and experiences, and discloses the political outcome of religious action (Bloch 1992, p6). Bloch characterizes this model using the idiom of 'rebounding violence' to refer to a two-stage sequential conquering. The first stage bears the metaphor of a departure of ritual participants to the other world, whereby their native vitality is eliminated through symbolic sacrifice; the second stage sees a return to the 'here and now' after the successful conquest of the vitality of an outside force. The returner is then different from the original self in that his or her native vitality has been replaced by an aggressive consumption of other vitalities. Violence is central to this process of conquering and consuming, and the result is the replacement of the common sense life-giver by the ritual elderly who preside in these ritual processes.

In my view, the above theorization can be applied analogically at two levels to understand the impact of the Home on the residents. The first level addresses the mere fact of the WuBao-Elderly moving from their previous home villages to the Home to receive state welfare. The Home is an 'other' place vis-à-vis the home village, whose mission is to exemplify a certain image to satisfy both official inspections within the civil affairs bureaucracy and visitors from wider sectors. For this purpose, simply delivering state welfare is inadequate; the Home must also be a state exemplar. Therefore, in this place, the residents consume free material support but have to conform to the Home's rules, which can be likened to the deprivation of their native vitality and the consumption of an external vitality provided by the state (see Chapter Two's discussion of the everyday institutional dining, revealing how weakness and dependency are created and reinforced in the process of consuming food). In this circumstance, the nourished body cannot maintain itself; rather, it becomes increasingly dependent on state provision which further allows the intricate intertwinement of discipline and support. Similarly, the phenomena of property

deprivation and intimate betrayal discussed in Chapter Six also demonstrate the systemic effect by which residents are rendered practically and emotionally dependent on the Home.¹⁸¹ In sum, at this level, the state welfare delivered in the particular form of the Home has a strong effect on all residents, attaching them firmly to the state. The nourished bodies of the residents, for the most part, serve to exemplify state benevolence more than existing for their own sake due to the defining condition of dependency.

The second level of regeneration, closely related to the first, is concerned with the fact that individual residents are mobilized and organized according to a certain bureaucratic logic. This is to say, instead of being simply excluded or treated as equal welfare recipients, residents are differentiated between: some become part of the management, some receive awards as ‘excellent home people’, some are marginalized and others explicitly punished. The re-ranking of individual residents is neither arbitrarily imposed by the management nor seriously disputed by the residents, as the cases below will show. In these processes, violence is a constitutive force of differential inclusion, which is presented in bewildering forms such as symbolic respect or material incentive; and the circulation and re-composition of vitalities are inevitable. These characteristics in making internal organizations bear similar elements to that of rebounding violence. And again, the residents are in service, i.e. serving the Home to make it a model bureaucratic organization in its own right.

These two levels of regeneration are what I call the ‘bureaucratic refraction’ of state welfare, a closer examination of which will allow further discussion about the relationship of bureaucracy and state. The first level of regeneration has been addressed in previous chapters; this chapter is mainly concerned with the second. I intend to examine the processes through which individual residents are differentiated and re-organized in the service of the Home as a model bureaucratic organization and

¹⁸¹ This is reminiscent of the claim made by James Laidlaw (2000) that a pure gift makes no social bond (mentioned in the Introduction). The complicatedness of a free gift with an identifiable giver is that the ties it potentially generates are not explicitly prescribed, which often proves to be of multiple benefits to the gift giver.

examine how this can facilitate our understanding of the triangular relationship of the state, the Home and the residents. The cases of three residents are presented here to illustrate. The first presents the upward route of Old Xu who progresses from an ordinary resident being punished to a member of the ‘Elderly Committee’ [*laoren weiyuanhui*]¹⁸² (EC). His case reveals how a resident crosses the staff-resident boundary and becomes a resident manager. The second, Old Wu, presents an opposite trajectory. Wu comes to the Home as a proud Party member, becomes a victim of the Home’s order-guardian – the resident in charge of security, is being subsequently marginalized and develops a desire for revenge. The third case concerns a high profile wedding ceremony held by the management and traces its development through time. I conclude by summarizing what effect free state welfare, refracted by a bureaucratic organization like the Home, has on the condition of the residents.

Old Xu: From Punished to Punisher

Before I present the case of Old Xu, a 78 year old male resident who was instrumental in turning ‘pocket money’ from a cash subsidy to a disciplinary instrument, let me briefly introduce the change in the form of the WuBao subsidy after them moving to the Home. Living in a village, WuBao-Elderly typically made a living from their land, and also received a monthly two-hundred yuan cash subsidy. Living in the Home, most residents either returned their land to the administrative village or let it to others to maintain (mostly with no rent). The cash subsidies were redirected to the Home as provider of daily needs. Therefore, a resident, having no need to worry about everyday living costs, typically had no cash income. The exception is the Bureau stipulated fifteen yuan monthly ‘pocket money’; this was the only regular cash received by all Home residents.

Xu had been a production brigade leader for more than twenty years before retiring

¹⁸² An Elderly Committee was established during my fieldwork to include the residents in management processes. The EC with five members and four staff then formed the Management Committee, the decision-making body of the Home. The EC members are in charge of, respectively, production, security, hygiene, culture and coordination.

and he was among the earliest batch of residents. After being an ordinary resident for two years, he became floor leader of the third floor of Building I and was later appointed a member of the EC in charge of hygiene. Xu's promotion, in my view, provides a good insight into how and why a certain resident becomes a 'home people manager' [*yuanmin guanlizhe*] and thus part of the management.

In the early years when Xu came to the Home, the Home rules had not been clearly established. Once, Xu asked for three days' leave, which was granted, but he was away from the Home for 43 days. When Xu came back and went to Director Zhu to claim his pocket money for the period, he was surprised to be told that he was not entitled to any because he had been away for much longer than had been agreed. Xu felt this refusal seemingly justifiable, but he was unhappy about it. After some thought, he went to Director Zhu again to claim his 'meal money' [*fanfei*]; he thought that as he had not consumed any food provided by the Home during his leave, the equivalent monetary value - about 4.5 yuan per day - should be returned to him. Again, he was refused. This time, the justification was that food was arranged at the 'macro-level' [*hongguan cengmian*], which meant targeting all residents, and if some people did not consume their share, it only meant that other residents had more to enjoy. Xu was very unhappy about this, although he admitted to me that he then felt somehow 'lack of justification' [*likui*] on his side, and thought perhaps he should learn something from these lessons.

At some point, Xu's floor leader relocated to work in the kitchen, and recommended Xu as his successor. When Director Zhu went to Xu to talk about the new position, Xu turned him down. Xu told me that he did so because he was still unhappy about the money denied to him. After some time, Zhiying approached Xu about it again. Xu told me how Zhiying had convinced him to accept the position:

Xu *daye* (big grandpa), your surname is Xu; and this is also my mother's surname. So, we can be counted as 'people of one family' [*yijiaren*]. 'Given this affinity' [*kanzai zhefenshang*], can you just count it as doing me a

personal favour to help with the cleaning work? We won't talk about being a floor leader or not, just do me a personal favour to make the cleaning work continue first.

In addition, Zhiying also promised to add another ten yuan each month to Xu's pocket money to thank him. This time, Xu agreed. After Xu had worked for several months cleaning the area around the television hall, Director Zhu called him to his office and brought up the matter of being a floor leader again:

Xu *daye*, you have been sweeping the floor of the TV hall for so long and been doing a very good job. In fact, I never took you just for a cleaner; and I have always regarded you as a floor leader. Why not just take the post formally?

This time, Xu accepted and has been a floor leader ever since.

Once, Xu and I sat at the side of the fishpond in the front of the Home after dinner, where we had a long chat until very late, and Xu shared his thoughts about his work in the Home:¹⁸³

'Managing people' [*guanren*] is the most headache-inducing work, as you always have to think about others before yourself. My experience is that if there are no rules, a human being is nothing but an animal. Then you also need to have the means to enforce rule; otherwise it becomes an 'empty word' [*konghua*]. A brigade leader can more or less be 'counted as a cadre' [*suangeguan*], but the positions here (floor leader and EC member) are funny ones. I can only *talk* to people to ask them to keep things hygienic; if they didn't listen to me, I couldn't do anything more about it.

When I was a floor leader, I started to think about this problem and then

¹⁸³ I've selected the parts of the transcript which I regard as relevant to the issue at hand.

figured out that the pocket money might be a solution. You should not think the pocket money is only a pittance; if these people can't get it, it will immediately become a big problem. Consider me - I was fined once and I always remember it. So I suggested to the management that if they really wanted to have the hygiene work done effectively, they needed to use pocket money to punish those residents who did not do their bit.

They (the management) did not adopt my advice at first. As a floor leader, I started to experiment with this idea on my floor. Of course, I felt uncomfortable about offending [*dezui*] other people; but I insisted that the rule had to be enforced before anything else. After one year, I collected more than 300 yuan in fines after fighting with many people. But the outcome was good - my floor was far cleaner than others. Everyone saw it and couldn't deny (the effectiveness of) my method. Then they (the staff) accepted it and rolled it out to other floors.

As you can see now, all is clean. They then asked me to be in charge of overall hygiene supervision in this place and to be a member of the EC. We are WuBao-Hu, and now five of us are elected onto the EC. In the Cultural Revolution, there was the 'Gang of Four';¹⁸⁴ and I say to them that the five of us on the EC can be called the 'Five-Guaranteed Gang of Five' [*wubao-hu wuren-bang*]!

Though appearing a very individual case at first sight, Xu also represents many residents in the sense that they, to various degrees, submit to the Home management. Once, Xu and several other residents were called to the Bureau where they were asked about the behaviour of the staff, since it had been reported that violence was used

¹⁸⁴ The name of a political faction composed of four CCP high officials, including Mao Zedong's last wife Jiang Qing, the leading figure of the group, and her close associates Zhang Chunqiao, Yao Wenyuan, and Wang Hongwen. The Gang came to control the CCP during the Cultural Revolution (1966–76) and was charged with a series of treasonous crimes soon after Mao Zedong died.

illegitimately on residents. Xu did not respond directly to this interpellation. Instead, he used this chance to express his view that the Home was itself not a place to respect the elderly at all; he asked the officials to come to the Home to experience for themselves whether they could respect anyone as the staff were required to do. He said that the residents were a ‘mess crowd’ [*wuhe zhizhong*], full of beggars and uncivil people and that the use of violence was understandable as a tool to manage an organization like this. Xu considered that his view was taken seriously and helped a lot, as nothing happened to the staff afterwards.

Analysis

I will focus my analysis on the series of causes and consequences of the changes in Xu’s role in the Home from an ordinary resident to a member of the EC. This process reveals the dynamics at the interface of the staff-resident dichotomy as Xu crosses the boundary, revealed by analyzing each of his steps in this process.

Roles Issues	Zhu	Zhiying		Old Xu			Result
	director	care worker	local villager	resident	local villager	local cadre	
Xu claimed pocket money	😊				😊		Xu was refused
Zhu asked Xu to be floor leader	😊				😊		Zhu was refused
Stage One: Main Structural Opposition: Zhu --- Xu							
Zhiying asked Xu to clean floor		😊	😊	😊	😊		Xu agreed
Zhu asked Xu to be floor leader 2 nd time	😊			😊			Xu agreed
Xu initiated pocket money fine	😊			😊		😊	Xu’s advice was taken and Xu was promoted
Stage Two: Main Structural Opposition: Zhu/Zhiying/Xu ----- the rest of the residents							

Table 7.1

As shown in the above chart, Xu's first two encounters with Director Zhu signify a direct structural opposition between them, which results in a lose-lose situation. When Xu asks Director Zhu for his pocket money, he is refused. To refuse Xu the pocket money is a manifestation of the bureaucratic refraction of state welfare; in other words, Zhu uses the WuBao subsidy to enforce the Home's order. A state gift is thus turned into a means of punishment. When Zhu later asks Xu to be a floor leader, Xu, in turn, because of the pocket money incident, refuses. At this stage, the direct confrontation between Director Zhu and Xu, representing the Home intended order and that of the village with no mediation, causes only dysfunction.

In the next stage, Zhiying's intervention turns the picture upside down. The way in which Zhiying does her work is characterized by the employment of the village order, such as addressing Xu with the colloquial term *daye* (big grandpa), emphasizing the common surname of her own mother and Xu to establish personal affinity, and providing material incentive as a personal gift, i.e. promising to give Xu an extra ten yuan per month. Although working towards the same ends as Director Zhu, Zhiying does not utilise straightforward punishment and instruction, but is palpably informal and personal. Her way of working proves effective as Xu agrees to do the work. This suggests that formal instruction, in this context, is made functional only by using informal ways combining rhetorical respect and monetary incentive which may lead to a resident's submission in the form of co-operation. Thus, it presents another example of the necessary co-existence of the binaries of symbolic and material, formal and informal, and bureaucratic and non-bureaucratic.

This middle stage of Zhiying's intervention and Xu doing the work without the formal title of floor leader, in my view, is critical to the subsequent formal structural change. To some extent, this is the liminal stage between Xu as a problematic resident who returns late to the Home and as a resident staff member, which is made possible only

by co-presence of opposites. After this stage, when Director Zhu speaks to Xu a second time about being a floor leader, also using a tone of palpable personal affinity to make the request, the deal is successful.

Later, when Xu, as floor leader, finds himself unable to command other residents to do necessary cleaning, he draws upon his earlier experience as a brigade leader as well as his own feelings when he was deprived of his pocket money. He uses pocket money as a fine to punish those who do not satisfactorily carry out the cleaning work. In this way, he imitates Zhu in using state welfare for bureaucratic purposes, and also imitates the model of Zhiying in the sense of employing local experience to fulfill the new institutional agenda. At this stage, Xu is no longer a problematic resident, but instead functions as a floor leader, safeguarding the Home's intended order.

Xu's institutional credit accumulates in the process of disciplining and fining other residents to maintain hygiene. In disciplining other residents he deprives them of their vitality; and in fining them, he consumes the vitality they should have consumed from the state. Both result in Xu's personal institutional credit and the hygiene performance of the Home. Consequently, Xu is promoted to be a member of the EC and this completes his journey from the margin to the centre, i.e. from 'WuBao-Hu' to 'home people', and finally to 'home people manager', leaving the rest of the residents with fines and more disciplinary rules. At this point, the main structural opposition within the Home also becomes that between the new management - now including Zhiying and Xu - and other residents.

The structural change features the assimilation of care workers like Zhiying and residents like Xu into the management. Three points should be highlighted. First, it shows a trend of expansion of bureaucracy within the Home. Not only is the boundary between staff and residents crossable, but also necessary, in order to manage the Home effectively. Second, these expansive processes show that informal ways of working are necessary to the establishment of formal order, and that both symbolic respect and material incentive are necessary to bring about residents' submission to

the institution. Third, however the work is carried out, individual and institutional capacity, i.e. the credit of Zhiying and Xu and the improved hygienic condition of the Home all derive from consuming the native vitality of the residents on one hand and that of the state welfare on the other. In these exchanging processes, Zhiying and Xu are pioneers in submitting to the Home management and consuming other vitalities, and subsequently rank higher on the bureaucratic ladder.

In addition, I want to point out that though these phenomena seem to present an involutory process whereby the Home reproduces bureaucratic organizations within itself, Xu's ironic remark that the EC is like the 'Gang of Four' also discloses an awareness of the ambiguous status of these internal managing organizations. It is a self-disclosure from the residents which reminds of the 'in-between' status of the Home – it is neither 'a plate of sand' [*yipan sansha*] in which the residents are equal and autonomous individuals, nor a 'real' bureaucracy which wields power in terms of how Xu thought of his previous job as a brigade cadre; rather, it is a heterotopia that mirrors the form of state bureaucracy with the content being disputed.

Old Wu: From Proud Party Member to Unfulfilled Idler

Old Wu was then 74 years old.¹⁸⁵ He had worked as a domestic servant as a teenager and, like Xu, being a brigade cadre in the 1950s, became a brigade secretary in his twenties after being recommended to join the Party despite his illiteracy. He had lived in the village his whole life, married and had four daughters. His wife had died about ten years before. And his daughters married out to other places one after another. After the 2008 earthquake, Wu's house collapsed, and he moved to the Home. Unlike Xu, Wu was much more loosely connected with the Home management, if at all. The following ethnographic material helps explain the different condition of Wu and Xu in the Home despite their similar previous political status.

¹⁸⁵ I have mentioned about Wu in Chapter One regarding his decision to live in the Home instead of with his daughters' families (also see the appendix for Wu's oral history).

The Event: The Curse of Being a Party Member

Wu had initially told me that he suffered from rheumatism in his leg - a common disease in the area - an explanation which I did not even put in my field notes, let alone doubt. Much later, I discovered that Wu's leg problem had nothing to do with rheumatism, but was the result of a 'political feud' that happened shortly after he arrived at the Home, and which was arguably caused by his being a Party member. The following account of the incident was given mainly by Wu himself; it was also verified by a number of residents with various comments.

One day two years before, Wu was strolling around Fankou. Zhao Deying, who was infamous for being part of the group of 'gangster residents', approached him and asked about his political identity. Wu answered proudly that he was a Party member. Hearing this, instead of offering a compliment as what Wu had assumed, Zhao burst into a vicious laugh. 'Good! This is exactly what I am looking for,' he announced, 'I am a Kuomintang member and am dedicated to beating up members of the Communist Party.' Zhao then aimed a sharp kick at Wu's knees, pushed him to the ground and started punching him repeatedly. This sudden violence attracted a crowd of spectators and a message that residents were fighting each other in Fankou was immediately sent to the workers in the Home, who rushed to the site and stopped Zhao. They then sent Wu to the township hospital where he was told his leg was broken and he was admitted for treatment. The hospitalization cost more than 10,000 yuan (a significant sum), which was paid by the Home.

After three months, Wu was much recovered, though not completely. Director Zhu visited Wu to discuss his return to the Home, promising that he would receive the same nursing care at the Home as at the hospital, including care workers bringing meals and water to his room each day, and that he would be allocated a new room on the ground floor for easier access. Wu did not want to go back at that time, as he did not feel fully recovered and he interpreted Zhu's suggestion as purely a money-saving exercise. Wu's 'heart-matter' [*xin-shi*] was rather that though the promises concerning

practical arrangements were satisfactory, he would only agree to return to the Home on condition that the staff promised to make Zhao apologize to him in person. This seemed to have been agreed, as the staff responded by saying that they would try their best to do so, and so Wu returned.

However, neither the special care services nor Zhao's apology were realized. Initially, Wu continued to chase the workers about an apology from Zhao. The workers, however, sought many excuses to delay any action until they stopped mentioning it altogether. Wu also talked to several residents who notionally vowed to help him, but nothing ever came of this. After almost a year, Wu could walk again, but his injured leg seemed permanently crippled and was a source of constant pain; his quest for effective painkillers increasingly preoccupied him, and his calls for retribution gradually faded.

A Brief Note on the 'Gangster Residents'

As mentioned in earlier chapters, there were some residents who were known as 'gangsters' as well as 'resident workers' responsible for security matters. These gangsters helped enforce the Home's rules, for example, on dining and hygiene, by threatening disobedient residents with violence. As far as I knew, only a few residents were part of this group. Zhao Deying and Dumb [*yaba*] (the nickname of a resident) were more visible to me than others. Zhao, who attacked Wu, was known to be the head of this group. During my fieldwork, like Xu, Zhao was promoted to the 'EC' in charge of security. Dumb was joked about by residents as the 'little secretary' [*xiaomi*] of Duck, the same as that Duck was nick-named the 'little secretary' of the director (discussed in Chapter Six).

There were many rumours about how Zhao and Dumb beat up other residents in the early years, which circulated with ambivalent moral judgments among residents. At one extreme, there were residents who simply hated them; at the other, there was the opinion that without them, it would be impossible to control the 'mess crowd' of

residents. Generally speaking, the function of these gangsters in bringing about institutional order was not disputed, the anger at them, however, stemmed mainly from their abuse of position. The incident with Wu was one of those cases in which the gangsters beat up the residents for reasons unconnected with bringing about institutional order. Very often, this kind of incident was covered up by the management, such as Wu being hospitalized. It was common to hear residents complain that the management was deliberately tolerant of the gangsters. In my view, the ambivalent attitude of the residents towards the gangster residents, i.e. considering them useful yet hating them, mirrors that of the management.

Throughout my fieldwork, the ‘gangster-resident-workers’ presented themselves to me as residents rather than as gangsters or workers. To be tacit with them, I never disclosed anything. While Zhao was plainly suspicious of me, my relationship with Dumb was more ambiguous. For my own safety, I was very cautious to mention the issue of gangsters to those who, either residents or workers, likely minded it. Furthermore, my close contact with Wu apparently did not go unnoticed by the management. One sign of this, as Wu speculated, was that he was finally given a room on the ground floor - the realization of a promise made two years earlier – but with a caution not to ‘say much nonsense’ [*luanshuo*] about his leg problem to me. As a result of this, I later distanced myself from Wu, as I was concerned about his safety particularly after I left.

After the Event: Autonomy and the Enduring Wish for Revenge

Wu’s daughters became particularly visible after he was injured. They played an important role in persuading Wu not to engage in any further revenge, either on Zhao or the management. During the year of my fieldwork, Wu spent four months in total visiting his daughters’ families. When Wu stayed in the Home, he was mainly busy dealing with his leg pain. Wu believed that eating well and finding the right medicine were the two keys to recovery; and for both he mainly relied on the help of his daughters who gave him money so that he could afford to *chi-guanzi* (eat

restaurant)¹⁸⁶ in Fankou and see folk doctors for alternative therapy.

Wu told me that he was grateful that the staff had swiftly sent him to hospital and paid the medical bills, but he owed his gratitude to the state, in his words, ‘if not (because of) the state, can they possibly do this for me?’ But he felt that the lack of any punishment for Zhao was entirely the Home’s mistake and this had been the source of Wu’s muted dissatisfaction with the management ever since. Moreover, Wu emphasized that having lived as long as he had, he actually understood everything in the Home very well, including the violence towards him and why the management was acquiescent to people like Zhao. Although bullied by him, Wu despised people like Zhao. This was because, in his view, all the residents working for the management were actually being ‘used’ [*liyong*] by the latter. Even though they were rewarded, had power and were prouder than other residents, these decorations were *xu-de* (vain, bubble, devoid of content). Compared to them, Wu regarded his own life as much better and *shi-de* (the opposite to *xu-de*, solid, concrete, with content), because he did not sell his labour to anyone, but just enjoyed his autonomy with the support bestowed by the state and supplemented by his daughters.

Wu became increasingly active in providing me with information that he thought I might be interested in, and I eventually realized that his motivation to do so had much to do with his wish for revenge, to which end he thought I could help.¹⁸⁷ Towards the end of my fieldwork, knowing that I was leaving, Wu asked me to visit him in his room. After I entered, Wu closed the door, then unlocked his cupboard and started searching for something inside. After taking out a pile of bedding and some clothes, he pulled out a small bag, opened it, and I saw many cards in it. Wu picked out a

¹⁸⁶ ‘*Chi-guanzi*’, literally ‘eat restaurant’, was the local idiom referring to having a meal in restaurants. *Chi-guanzi* had a negative connotation when used in the Home: when the residents talked about the workers *chi-guanzi*, the sub-text was that of suspecting them of misappropriating the wubao subsidy to satisfy their own appetites. When the workers talked about the residents *chi-guanzi*, it also implied the problem of flouting the order that residents should only eat in the dining hall.

¹⁸⁷ This sentiment is also reflected in the case of Laoshi-ren. In fact, many residents, as well as the staff (as mentioned in Chapter Five), had various demands on me to solve what they considered serious matters, and expressed explicitly.

two-inch black and white photo of himself and handed to me, saying ‘This is the only photo I have of myself. I want to give it to you.’ I did not immediately understand what was meant by this, so I replied, ‘The only photo you have? Give it to me? No. You should keep it for yourself, or you can give it to your daughters.’ Wu replied:

No, listen to me, keep it. You are more important than them. You may need to use it someday. If anyone wanted you to prove the things that you have been told about this place, just show them my photo. I am already of an age, I am not afraid of anything. These people should be punished.

This ‘photo gift’ was one of several ‘heavy’ gifts that I was obliged to accept during my fieldwork. It made me realize that Wu not only wanted an apology from Zhao, but also to fight with the management. He wanted me to take the matter to the Central Party which he thought would be the only way to realize this ambition. And if I could do this, he would not mind all the troubles involved of being a witness; as he said, at his age, there was nothing to be afraid of. This also revealed that his current life, whilst appearing autonomous, was rather a compromise of his unfulfilled desire for revenge, covering the seed of turmoil.

Analysis

Wu’s crippling by Zhao can be considered ‘the rite of passage’ of Wu turning from a villager into a ‘home people’. In sum, by being beaten, Wu is deprived of his native vitality; and by being subsequently hospitalized, consumes new vitality provided by the state, thus leading to his regeneration as a ‘home people’. Yet, as long as his leg pain lasted, i.e. his native vitality not being fully replaced by the new one, Wu keeps to be a marginal ‘home people’ who seems to enjoy autonomy but nurses the seed of revenge. In the following, I will discuss how this case shows bureaucratic refraction of state welfare and how the spirit of the state gift is eventually activated.

Firstly, this case presents the extant management in the Home, which features

successive repetition, rather than opposition, and thus contradicts the defining boundary of staff-resident identified by Goffman in his account of total institutions (1959). The successive management structure is illustrated below:

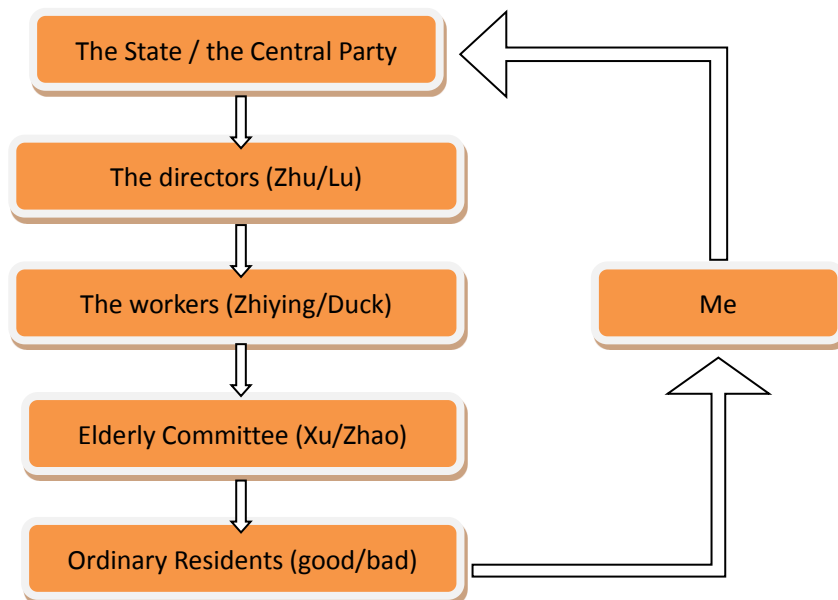


Figure 7.1: Managing Structure

Between the top and the bottom, there are multiple levels of agents organized in a replicating and successive pattern, which is also alluded to in the residents' ironic comment that 'Duck is the little secretary of the director; and Dumb is the little secretary of Duck'. Opposition is realized through succession. Amongst the staff, the directors are permanent employees of the state, and the workers are contractors. Amongst the residents, the EC members are ostensibly part of the management, and other residents are mainly to be managed, though also differentiated. The workers, combining the identities of local villager and employee, and the EC, combining the identities of resident and manager, are indispensable mediators in linking the directors to the rest of residents and enforcing rules. In other words, it suggests that state control is achieved, not through direct oppositional confrontation, but through this successive, diffusive and repetitive hierarchical pattern by which everyone is in a tendency of being subsequently assimilated into the bureaucracy.

Notably, at each level there is the pair of 'yang' and 'yin' manifested by multifarious

forms, such as director and deputy, male and female, civil and uncivil. For example, Zhiying and Duck as workers, and Xu and Zhao as EC members, represent structural oppositions. Xu brings about the order of hygiene by fining, which is received as good practice commensurate to a modern state institution; Zhao, by contrast, brings about order by resorting to physical violence which is received as something in need of disguise. Though both fining and physical violence are forms of violence, the former is considered a best practice yet the latter uncivil. To give an ‘uncivil’ role a ‘civil’ title is characteristic of the complicated situation in which the presentation of a civil image relies on using uncivil means. In this sense, civil and uncivil are indispensable to each other and both contribute to the Home intended order. Furthermore, while the task of bringing about order is made possible through this expansive management model, it also means proportionate disorder is included and generated in the same process, such as Duck and Zhao being employed to ensure order, yet at the same time also being sources of disorder.

Phases	Order	Disorder
Previously	Wu (brigade cadre)	Zhao (idler)
Moving Into Home	Zhao (security guard)	Wu (to be disciplined)
The Event of Attack	Home/State (benefactor providing free medication)	Zhao (perpetrator) Wu (victim; to be cured)
After the Attack	Zhao (on the ‘EC’)	Wu (idler)

Table 7.2

Secondly, as the above diagram shows, this managing structure allows a series of transfiguration between order and disorder shown by the attack incident. The earlier lives of Wu and Zhao are much in contrast. Wu, who used to be a Party member, a brigade cadre and had a ‘proper’ family with four daughters, thus represents ‘order’; Zhao was single throughout and rumoured to have been a ‘*hunhun*’ (a local idiom for someone who does nothing but cause disturbances, a thug) when he was young. After

they entered the Home as WuBao-Elderly, their respective identities as order or disorder is redefined by what they do to contribute to the overall order intended in the Home. To this end, Zhao's physical strength and his willingness to use it to maintain the Home order make him an order guardian; and Wu's reluctance to submit to the new order and his desire to continue to enjoy his previous regard as a village cadre potentially make him someone in need of discipline, thus potentially disorder. This is the first bureaucratic refraction which features a radical denial of the past for the sake of the present.

While Zhao is established in the Home as the symbol of order-guardian, the unruly violence he exercises goes beyond what the management expects him to do, i.e. beating up people for reasons other than bringing about institutional order. The fight with Wu is a typical case, in which he turns himself from order guardian to disorder maker; accordingly, Wu is turned from potential disorder to a factual disorder, i.e. a visibly injured resident who needs medical treatment. It should be highlighted that Wu is turned into a factual disorder by a person that the management relies on to ensure order. In other words, disorder, i.e. an injured Wu, is made in the same process by which the management makes its order. Acquiescing in this situation, the management contains the 'Home-made' disorder by covering the 10,000 yuan cost of Wu's treatment. This is the second bureaucratic refraction, in which Zhao as an order guardian turns into a disorder maker and Wu is turned into a factual disorder. The free medication provided by the state, as part of the five-guarantees is thus used by the Home to sort out the disorder it generates in the process of making order and thus to serve for the bureaucratic need. In other words, the gift from the state is activated because of the disorder created discursively by the management, and the state as a benevolent benefactor is magnified through the bureaucratic refraction.

After the attack, Wu's status is stabilized as an idle resident who enjoys autonomy by relying on his daughters' support and the state provision. His relationship with the management seems to be problematic. By failing to make Zhao apologise to Wu, the

management fails to show respect to Wu; and in return, Wu refuses to submit to the management. Lack of mutual submission is represented by Wu's marginal status in the Home. But this does not affect Wu's submission to the state, which sentiment culminates at the point when Wu resorts to an outsider (me) in an attempt to access higher authority in the hope of revenge at the local level, i.e. gives me his only photo as a witness to show his wish to submit to the Central Party so that the Home management can be punished. In contrast to Xu and Zhao, both of whom submit to the 'immediate' bureaucracy, Wu, though seemingly autonomous, is ready to submit to higher levels of bureaucracy, which he approximates to the state. And thus, he can also be interpreted as submitting to the authority of the state.

Qiu and Dai: A Tale of 'Real Love' to a Notoriously Disobedient Couple

Qiu Shuzheng was a female resident in her early seventies who had been married several times but was single when she moved into the Home. Qiu recalled that she had been very upset during the early days living there, often crying and feeling insecure. She also had trouble with her leg and needed help with activities such as fetching hot water. Some male residents volunteered to help her, among whom was Dai Baozhi. Dai later came to Qiu's room every day to bring hot water for her.

When I started my fieldwork in the Home, Qiu and Dai had already become a couple. Perhaps because they were the only residents to have married in the Home, many people had vividly described their wedding ceremony to me before I was acquainted with the couple themselves. In contrast, Qiu and Dai were not quick to mention the event. Rather, it seemed to me that the only topics in which the two had any interest were 'problems', ranging from how bad the 'overall social atmosphere' was to how poorly they were treated. Their accounts of the wedding were only given to me at a very late stage of my contact with them. The following description is a summary of other residents' accounts, with specific sources indicated where relevant.

Two years before, Director Zhu, having noticed that Dai was constantly helping Qiu,

suggested that the Home could help the two marry and arrange a wedding ceremony for them. Then he and the workers put the idea to the pair. Qiu told me that as she had been really moody at that time and had physical problems, she had been grateful to those residents who helped her, but that the idea of marrying any of them had not crossed her mind. She explained to the lobbying workers that Dai had only been offering help, that they were from different villages and she barely knew him. However, her words were not taken as a refusal because she did not explicitly say no and the ‘thought work’¹⁸⁸ on her was considered done. Dai told me that initially he was also surprised when he was advised to marry Qiu, but he fairly quickly agreed.

The very next day, before Qiu and Dai had a chance to think seriously about it, they were told that a car was waiting to take them to the Bureau office to register the marriage. Qiu recalled this experience:

Everything was done so fast. Before you could make clear what was happening, it was all finished. I was asked to change room, as they allocated a new room to the two of us and furnished it with a new king-size double bed. They told me that all I needed to do was sit on the bed cheerfully on the wedding day, and receive leaders’ visits and their ‘red envelopes’ [*hongbao*]¹⁸⁹.

Dai’s experience was more dramatic. He told me that although he also felt that the marriage was arranged a bit hastily, he mainly took it as representing the leader’s ‘care heart’ [*guanxi*]. However, his problem was that the marriage had put him in a very difficult position regarding his relationship with other male residents, many of whom felt that it should have been they, rather than Dai, who was selected as the

¹⁸⁸ This is another case in which people describe such communication as ‘thought work’. The wide use of this term may suggest how a working style invented during the Maoist period continues today.

¹⁸⁹ ‘Red envelope’ is a popular practice at wedding ceremonies in present-day China. It refers to the money gift presented by invited guests, which is often enclosed in a red envelope. On the wedding day, guests register their names at a table placed at the entrance to the ceremony venue and hand in the envelope. The money is counted and givers’ names recorded so that the gifts can be properly reciprocated in the future.

groom. Whilst moving his belongings from his old room to the new one on the second floor of building II, other male residents threw eggs and shoes at him.¹⁹⁰ Nevertheless, Dai did not retaliate, explaining:

I have good physical strength and am never afraid of fighting. I've had many fights in my life. I didn't fight back in that situation because I understood their jealousy, and I also thought I was so lucky to be the only one who *was given* a wife. So all I did was rush to my new room ignoring what they were doing.

The wedding was a high-profile affair, lasting three days and the Home was specially decorated to receive visitors. Invitations were sent to local media and officials in the Bureau. A 'visiting route' from the main gate to the newly-furnished room was marked out with threads, and some residents were told to keep their distance so that they would not unduly affect the scene. Many officials and journalists attended the wedding. As the key actors, Qiu and Dai had been prescribed respective roles: Qiu was required to sit on the bed to receive congratulations and envelopes, while Dai was expected to circulate, welcoming guests. Qiu recalled that she was initially very nervous: she sat on the bed as instructed, but did not know what to say to the stranger visitors coming from the city, except to give endless 'thanks for the Party and leaders' care heart'. The initial nervousness was soon gone, replaced by overwhelming exhaustion.

The impact of the event outside the Home was enormous. The wedding was later credited by the Bureau as a 'best practice' in providing care for the elderly and the Home was awarded additional plaques for holding a meaningful [*you yiyi*] event. Several local newspapers covered the wedding with affectionate headlines, such as 'The Elderly Find Real Love [*zhen'ai*] in a Respect-the-Elderly Home'. Meanwhile,

¹⁹⁰ In many places in rural China there is a tradition of 'ritual humiliation' of newly-weds, mainly to the bride, which may serve as an explanation for these actions. Dai, however, interpreted the events as an insult caused by envy rather than being celebratory.

the extensive press coverage also meant that the Home became known in wider society, attracting attention from all sectors. For example, a wedding photography studio provided the newlyweds with a free photographic service (worth seven hundred yuan), and a furniture factory sent them a ‘luxurious armchair’ as a gift to express ‘heart-meaning’ [*xin-yi*].

In contrast, the impact of the marriage within the Home ran a more unexpected course. After the wedding, the staff told Qiu that she should give them the red envelopes as the wedding had been arranged by them with much effort and financial outlay. Qiu refused, arguing that the envelopes had clearly been given to her and not to anyone else. This was the start of a generally tense relationship between the couple and the management. Among their many disputes, one was about the cleanliness of the couple’s room. Qiu and Dai refused to follow the hygiene rules (described in Chapter Three) as most other residents did. With their well-furnished room and newlyweds’ lifestyle, the couple refused to tidy away anything, instead leaving items strewn around the room. Their argument for this was that, ‘we are going to ‘live our life’ [*shenghuo*] here; we are not staying in prison as individual inmates’. Meanwhile, whenever there were any problems, such as the delayed dispatch of donated goods to residents, Qiu and Dai were often among the first to complain. The workers in charge of the floor of their room often complained about them - ‘the two people do not appreciate the many good things that we did for them. ‘Not only do they refuse to obey the basic rules, but they also find fault with everything’ [*bu’an guiding, hai zhaocha*]. Some workers suggested that I should not get too close to Qiu and Dai, because, in their words, ‘the couple often come up with words that normally people do not like to hear’.

Qiu and Dai, however, although initially having given me the impression that they had been ‘forced into a marriage’, seemed to have developed a rather intimate relationship over the years. Although they both appeared to have strong characters – argumentative, eloquent, often using radical words to comment negatively on people

and things – they rarely blamed or fought with each other, as far as I observed. They often went to the fields to set up a ‘wild stove’ and cook together, and it was clear that they had developed tacit cooperation, such as who should carry what, who cook and who tend the firewood. After I had become close to the couple, Dai enjoyed sharing with me his views of national and international politics. In particular, he liked to recall heroes of the revolutionary period who were reported to have died gloriously for the country, such as Jiangjie and Liu Hulan.¹⁹¹ While telling these stories, Dai would often burst into tears. Somewhat embarrassingly, as his main audience, I was not much moved either by the stories or his crying. But whenever Qiu saw Dai in tears talking to me, she would hand him a handkerchief and add admonishment but in a palpably affectionate tone, such as ‘Why cry [*ku sha*]? Superficially, everyone thinks you are crude, but who knows that you have such a ‘soft-heart’ [*xin-ruan*]!’

As time went on, I found myself constantly having to revise my understanding of this marriage. Initially, it appeared to me a blatant publicity stunt. However, as my observations accumulated, I realized this understanding to be largely inadequate, if not entirely erroneous. The way in which the marriage evolved involved the couple becoming closely united and constantly challenging the limits of the Home’s rules. Although it was true that the Home benefitted from the wedding, for example, by gaining wider publicity and more plaques to hang on the wall, in the long run, it was Dai and Qiu who actually reaped the benefits of this arbitrary marriage, and the Home management had to cope with the repercussions of a union that it itself had produced.

Analysis

The wedding ceremony organized for Qiu and Dai is largely independent of state welfare for residents. It is the Home management’s decision to arrange the marriage so as to increase the organization’s publicity. Therefore, I see it as a typical case of bureaucratic refraction of state welfare. By doing this for Qiu and Dai, the Home

¹⁹¹ Both were recorded as Anti-Japanese War heroes who were tortured to death in prison for refusing to divulge Party secrets.

management is performing the role of *pojia* (husband's family) for the two, independent of the state. Analysis of the development of this event, allows further insight of the consequences when the Home management does something largely independent of the state.

For Qiu and Dai, this is initially a proposal imposed by the management. It is clear that neither of them had intended to marry. Qiu meant to say 'no' to the proposal, which she expressed by not saying 'yes'. But her implicit rejection was ambiguously taken as tacit acceptance. Dai, for his part agreed, though apparently equally unprepared. Thus they were married in a psychological state of confusion and a political state of passivity. Everything was arranged by the Home; and the staff coached them in their parts in the ceremony. In all, Qiu and Dai's marriage was imposed by the management in the form of giving them exceptional care unavailable to other residents. And thus, imposition and care is intricately intertwined from the very beginning.

The wedding is, on the surface, an example of the Home being at the service of two residents. Again, the surface of care provision disguises the actual violence of absorbing the vitalities of two otherwise autonomous individuals. On one hand, largely unable to say no, Qiu and Dai were muted; and controlled on the wedding day - Qiu kept sitting on the bed and Dai being humiliated on his way to the new room and forced to circulate amongst the official visitors. These practices make Qiu and Dai no longer individuals but part of a couple relationship imposed by the management. No wonder, instead of considering themselves to have received exceptional care, Qiu and Dai recalled this experience as one mainly of anxiety, exhaustion and confusion. On the other hand, though the event was articulated by the staff as an achievement of providing exceptional care to the residents, its most immediate and evident consequence seems to be the extra credit awarded to the management. In other words, by turning two autonomous individuals into a couple and depriving them of their native vitality in the form of providing care, the Home

gains an honorary plaque displayed on the wall, a record of having provided ‘best practice’ and wide publicity.

After the event, the management expects the couple to reciprocate the services or favours it considers it has done exclusively for them. The request to hand over the ‘red envelopes’ shows that, by holding the event, the management considers itself to have a certain ownership of the marriage, which the couple disagree with. Not only denying this specific request, Qiu and Dai seem to become more disobedient than average residents, shown in their refusal to obey hygiene rules and claiming to ‘live their life’ in their new room no matter how messy it is, complaining about various things, flouting dining rules, etc. In all, as a couple, Qiu and Dai seem to become more powerful than as individuals. I would like to interpret this phenomenon, again using the vitality exchange theory, that, by consuming the special care the management provided to them, reified by marriage certificates, new furniture, red envelopes, etc., Qiu and Dai have become the other to their original selves.

In this transformation, apparently the management wants to establish its role as life-giver, which is refused by the couple. The staff criticizes the couple as unappreciative and ‘ignorant of the rule of reciprocity’ [*bu-dongshi*]. This criticism is revealing when compared to that of other disobedient residents: the latter are most often labelled as ‘uncivil’, implying a much lesser sense of defying the rule of reciprocity. Furthermore, in contrast to their initial status of being in the spotlight, the Home subsequently attempts to make Qiu and Dai invisible, demonstrated not only by my being cautioned that there was no need to get close to them, but also in that other visitors are no longer brought to their room which, now full of the items to ‘live a life’, is no longer considered to be *the* place to show off. Among other implications, this case seems to suggest that, though partially gained, the Home alone is insufficient to establish authority even though it presides in similar ritual processes, i.e. the wedding, as those intertwined with state provision such as dining.

In addition, this case also demonstrates that surface phenomena in an organization

like the Home need to be observed with particular caution. The below diagram delineates the two-layer realities of ‘surface’ and ‘beneath’ respectively, which typically present opposite phenomena. Regarding these inversions, it should be emphasized that care always presents as the other side of violence. They are intertwined not only structurally but also sequentially. Qiu and Dai are deprived of native vitality but gain new vitality in their relationship as a couple which they use to undermine the Home’s intended order. This recalls the fact that the dilemma seems to be that keeping residents weak and dependent is a precondition to maintaining the Home intended order. It is at this point, that the agenda of the Home as a bureaucratic organization in its own right converges with the spirit of the free gift from the state.

		The Management		Qiu and Dai	
		Action	Interpretation	Action	Interpretation
Before Wedding	Surface	give a remarkable gift	care	accept the gift	cared
	Beneath	impose a gift	violence	reluctance and confusion	violated and submitted
Wedding	Surface	provide service	care	enjoy service	cared
	Beneath	gain credit	violence	disciplined	violated and submitted
After Wedding	Surface	blame	uncaringness	uncooperative	refuse to submit
	Beneath	marginalize the couple	no violence	intimate couple	empowered

Table 7.3

Conclusion

Both physical discipline of residents and the differentiation among them illustrate bureaucratic refraction of state welfare. At one level, they appear at odds with the state agenda of free welfare support of residents. Yet, a closer examination of the three cases in this chapter reveals that bureaucratic refraction actually ignites the spirit of the free gift from the state and obligates the residents to the state, through the use of

the double-edge sword of performing symbolic respect and providing material support. In the Introduction, I reviewed the expositions on the making and blurring of boundaries necessary for bureaucratic organizations to function, and proposed that the combination of the two dimensions may generate new insight. Here, the cases in this chapter provide illustrations: the state providing material support, a sign of making recipients the other, and the Home performing respect, a sign of denying them as the other thus blurring the boundary; both exist in this heterotopian institution so that the submission of the recipients is sufficed.

The case of Old Xu shows how pocket money, originally a free gift, is turned into a disciplinary tool to ensure the Home intended order. The use of welfare as punishment is activated by Xu, a resident who was punished, rhetorically respected and given extra money, and who subsequently submits to the management and then punishes other residents – consuming their vitalities. The case of Old Wu reveals that in order to contain internal disorder generated in the process of presenting order the Home magnifies the benevolence of the state when Wu is hospitalized for free. Wu's submission to higher level bureaucracy also reveals that indifference to the Home management does not necessarily equal indifference to that of the state. In both the cases of Xu and Zhao who submit to the Home management, and that of Wu who wishes to submit to higher bureaucracy, submission is the common character in their dealing with the bureaucracy. In this sense, they are all at its service. The case of Qiu and Dai illustrates the inadequacy of the Home management in controlling residents independently of the state even though it presides in similar ritual processes. Thus, all these cases show that the Home, as a bureaucratic organization, is intimately intertwined with the state: symbolic respect and material support are indispensable elements in residents' submission, which is to say that state provision can only be ignited by such bureaucratic refraction, and the latter only functions in the light of the former.

Care is a necessary form of violence, the receipt of which allows the native vitalities

of the residents to circulate upwards, which results in gains by those at the top of the hierarchy. Therefore, the state, as the perceived benefactor, gains the moral superiority of respecting the elderly - an important source of governance legitimacy in this era – and is also reinvigorated by making the recipients dependent on its provision. The Home gains plaques and awards by refracting the state welfare for its own ends and having the residents disciplined and differentiated, therefore conquering their vitalities. And the residents, by receiving the double-edged free gift - state welfare in the form of the Home - are deprived of their native vitalities in various ways and are in the service of both the state and the Home. In all, whilst theoretically being served, the residents are actually conquered; and the state and its bureaucratic organization, whilst theoretically being of service, gain their respective parts through these surreptitious inversions. Last but not least, if throughout these chapters we see the coexistence of opposites in the heterotopia, I claim that it also applies to the pair of bureaucracy and state, namely, no matter what each of them is, their respective functionality derives from their mutual relationality.

Conclusion

Before summarizing the main findings of this thesis, I return to the ethnographic vignette presented at the beginning of the Introduction about the local bus driver refusing to let Bai board the bus. Ascertaining the reasons for the bus driver's actions is beyond the scope of this work. However, the refusal itself is enough to present a reality in which, while the state project centralizes the further marginal group in the margin, i.e. hosts the WuBao-Elderly (WBE) in rural areas in the bureaucratic organization of CREH, local villagers, typified by the bus driver, who lie on the margin of the state while being more powerful locally in relation to the WBE, use the state's rhetoric of 'respecting the elderly' to effectively further marginalize the WBE within the scope of local society. Specifically, although the driver rudely refuses to allow Bai onto the bus, his refusal is articulated in the discourse of respect and care by deprecating his vehicle as being too shabby and unreliable to show respect to an elderly person. Thus, by ostensibly submitting to the state discourse, the bus driver prevents Bai from using local infrastructure and in doing so, also actually dismisses the state discourse. In other words, the state's advocacy on 'respecting the elderly' and its development of CREH are interpreted by the bus driver, instead of serving the original agenda, to justify the opposite by making a surreptitious inversion. Exclusion is therefore achieved through rhetorical respect.

The bus driver's obvious subversion of the state discourse to insult Bai does not lead to immediate confrontation, but rather is channelled into a conflict-free reality. This is achieved, firstly, by the driver's ironic use of the language of respect, and secondly, by Bai's further rhetorical reversal. Bai alleviates his humiliation by providing a further misinterpretation on top of that offered by the driver. He mutters that the driver is so stupid that he blinds himself to a potential passenger and thus loses several yuan in income. In other words, rather than admitting discrimination, Bai interprets his relationship with the bus driver as a 'buyer-seller' situation, in which the bus driver, as a seller, should actively promote his service to any buyer; and, Bai

himself, as a potential buyer, is in a position much less problematic than only being a WuBao-Household (WBH). In this way, Bai reverses his inferior position vis-à-vis the driver. The fact that Bai later blames the Home for having printed its logo on his jacket suggests that he understands the refusal/exclusion stems from his identification as a CREH resident, and so he vows to erase the mark of stigma (Goffman 1968). However, at the moment of the insult, the otherwise antagonistic forces of the state, the bus driver and Bai are nevertheless orchestrated into a conflict free reality through tactful interactions full of implicit consensus and rhetorical reversals.

As such, the symbols in the state intervention of the WBE in the form of the Home are interpreted and re-interpreted, subverted and restored. The result is a reality in which the residents are neither respected nor shamed explicitly. This bewildering status, i.e. being disrespected yet through the rhetoric of respect, is of similarity and change to their previous situation (without CREH), which I argue, also mirrors what happens within the Home. In the following, I summarize the three main findings that have emerged inter-relatedly in this thesis regarding the primary characteristics and the root function of the Home as a heterotopian bureaucratic organization.

Heterotopian Monad

The WBE, the Home, Fankou and Hongfan village are all identifiable heterotopian monads (Tarde 1893), which occur in the event of state projects. Each of them seems to be imbued with a range of ambivalent phenomena. I now focus on the Home to summarize the primary characteristics of such a unit. The Home neither functions as a formal bureaucratic organization nor identifies itself with the local place. It is neither the same as the past RREH, nor radically different from it. Epitomized by the diet board, the dining hall and the empty zone, the Home is neither entirely the local nor the alien, neither order nor disorder. It is in between these binaries and thus other to both. At the same time, it also fulfils the logically exclusive tasks of establishing the state expected order on the one hand, and of rooting itself on the ground – socially embedded - on the other. It is an REH in the rural area but managed otherwise. In

conclusion, it is neither, yet both.

In the very process of establishing the Home's intended order, disorder is correspondingly defined. For example, when set meal times in the dining hall are authorized as the intended order, any food consumption outside of this is disorder. When the edict that all personal possessions should be stored away at all times is authorized as order, peanuts on the table become disorder. Neither the Home intended order nor disorder is entirely 'state' or 'local'. Yet, as this ethnography has shown, such defined order and disorder nevertheless coexist in the Home, often presenting in a manner that the latter supplements the former by satisfying the needs of the residents dismissed by the institution's intended order. In this way, disorder becomes necessary for, instead of opposite to, order. This also means that, for the management, accommodating disorder actually enables the enforcement of order. Therefore, though falsified as disorder, these various forms of existence are nevertheless accommodated.

This accommodative capacity is seen by both staff and residents. It is reflected in the staff's rhetoric of 'open one eye and close one eye', and those of the residents, such as 'let it go', 'simply hide it', and the ironic address of female workers as 'elder sister'. To open one eye is to enforce the authorized order directly, i.e. the creation of bureaucratic boundary and order; and to close one eye, seemingly to defy order by ignoring disorder, is the twin of the former. It includes techniques of compartmentalization and invisibility. When the existences of disorder are put in designated places, they are acknowledged by the staff as order, while their existence itself is the order of the residents. Thus by conceptual, spatial and temporal classifications, antagonistic forces are orchestrated. Disorder is moulded so that order ensues; and both function towards the maintenance of the overall stability that mere enforcement of the prescribed order cannot achieve. This overall stability is what I call a higher level grand order which comprises both order and disorder.

Binary opposites are thus intertwined intricately, overarched by a higher level grand order. Formal work is typically achieved through informal ways of working. New

order is established on the premise of the old; management also means non-management, 'respect' disrespect, and a goal-driven plan a bricolage putting together available people and resources. The 'wild' stove supplements the 'familial' dining, and expressions of respect or establishment of personal relationships take place for the sake of more effective management. Exclusion is achieved through inclusion. Though the residents are, in theory, equal clients excluded from the management, they are actually assimilated into the latter in various ways. Bureaucratic rules both exclude, yet also allow the excluded to be included, and thus residents are included so that they can be effectively managed. These all suggest that the explicitly prescribed order is not equal to 'the Home order'; rather, the latter is a grand order which has all existences subsumed without affecting the priority given to the authorized.

For these reasons, I argue that the conventional priority given to planer binaries is constraining, and even misleading. The oppositional relation inevitably implied by the conceptual paradigm based on binary opposites has a strong cognitive effect to make their actual coexistence as conceived here peculiarly embarrassing. But as this ethnography has shown, it is exactly the accommodation of disorder, rather than the enforcement of order, that has the biggest effect in achieving the grand order. In other words, planer binaries such as order and disorder, or bureaucratic and non-bureaucratic, should be replaced by a conceptual paradigm which does not imply opposition in the first instance so as to be more intimate to the reality it seeks to represent. I argue that the concept of heterotopia merits this vantage point for its intrinsic otherness in between opposites and the capacity to absorb wider existences in microcosm, and in particular, to combine opposites. A heterotopian monad is thus characteristically order-less, boundary-less and plausibly inclusive, which attributes can only be conceived as ambivalence in a conceptual paradigm composed by planer binaries.

Structural Resemblance

The Home is a functional heterotopian institution. This statement is not simply a repetition of the official assessment fetishized by the many awards and plaques, but also evidenced by the remarkable phenomena of ‘early returnees’ and ‘early queuers’ which illustrate the extent to which the residents submit themselves to the institution and its rules. We may have to ask what gives the Home its attraction given all those, presumably, unattractive characteristics as a place to spend old age. To address this question, I argue that the explanation needs to be sought through a structural prism, namely, turn to the natural symbols – taken-for-granted assumptions - between state, family and bureaucratic organization in this particular context (Douglas 1970; Herzfeld 1992).

In mainstream western academic discourse, the analogy between state and family in Chinese culture, as the term of state-family indicates, is often challenged either because of the observable tension therein or on the theoretical premise of the opposition between them in western culture. But I argue that the resemblance between the Chinese state and family is not to be observed at the level of planer binaries such as public and private, or formal and informal. This ethnography suggests that there are multiple levels of structural resemblance between the two concepts. As shown in Chapter One, the Home brings about a chiasmus phenomenon of the statization of family and the familization of state. The state intervention regarding the WBE is articulated through the Confucian family principle of filial piety and its extension of respecting the elderly, and the Home, as a bureaucratic organization, is likened to a family in both official discourse and that of the residents. These suggest that the state action in hosting the WBE is premised on a cultural logic familiar to the local, specifically, those about family, such that the people reclassified by the state are exactly those loosely classified locally. In other words, there is no ‘cultural clash’ on how family, old age and sonless elderly are implicitly acknowledged by state intervention and stereotypical local perception. As the figure below illustrates, I also

argue that there is a higher level structural resemblance between state and family in this welfare provision context. Specifically, the Chinese state welfare for the WBE in the form of the Home can be likened to the triangle relationship of father-son-mother in a Confucian model. In this analogy, state to its welfare clients is like father to son, and bureaucratic organization, the mother. In a typical Confucian patriarchal family, the husband stands for authority and is responsible for providing material support, and the wife takes care of the children. This is also the case in the Home project, in which the state - the husband/father - is articulated to be the authority and provider of the Five Guarantees, the Home – the wife/mother - to give respect and care, and the residents - the children - are nourished by the state family and given ‘pocket money’. This may also further explain why the primacy of hierarchical relations and intimate violence noticeable in a Chinese family, as I discerned in fieldwork, also coincides with my observation of the Home, which suggests similarities at the levels of internal organization and everyday practice.

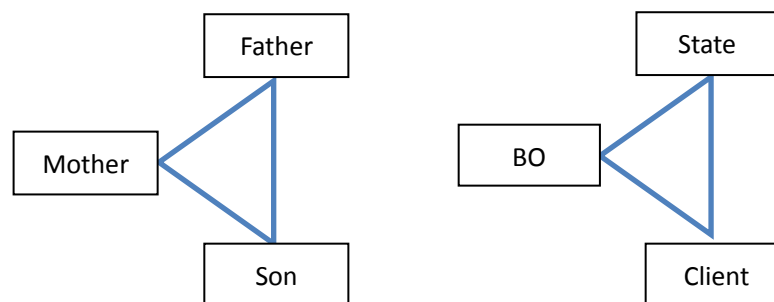


Figure 8.1: The State-Family Analogy in the Context of the Home Project
(BO: Bureaucratic Organisation)

It should also be noted that the role of wife in a Confucian patriarchal family (and so here, the Home) is often depicted as ambiguous, performative and fluid, in creating solidarity yet also precarious. In this sense, I am also arguing that bureaucratic organization may be seen as the feminine part of the state in this context, through which the state welfare is refracted in various ways as argued in Chapter Seven. State and bureaucracy depend on each other to ignite their respective functionality; and this emphasises the point that there is little, if any, value in worrying about whether a bureaucracy is formal or not, if the state it serves, and the cultural logic it is informed

by, are neither formal nor modern.

In all, I argue that structural coherence is prior to monadic ambivalence in that the latter is always transformed into functional entity by the former. And this explains why the Home functions, i.e. its functionality derives from the structural coherence the Home has with both the state and the local context. Specifically, the coexistence of respect and discipline regarding the residents within the Home, on the one hand, mirrors the inconsistency in government discourse which comprises respect to the elderly and assistance to the weak, and on the other hand, reflects the ambivalent attitude to the WBE in the local place expressed as tacit avoidance.

Resemblance is thus observed from all dimensions, which may suggest a fractal pattern. It is seen in the spatial layout at various scopes of observation, such as within the Home and in the village Centralization project, as well as in the similarity between the Home and Hongfan village for being situated at the conjuncture of self-contradictory state infrastructures. More significantly, resemblance is observed by the presence of multiple and repetitive levels of hierarchy. Instead of radical opposition between bureaucrats and clients, what we see in this ethnography are many hierarchical levels which replicate each other, through which formal opposition is undermined without affecting the hierarchical nature of the whole structure. In other words, opposition is achieved through repetition. When the management complains about outside inspectors, the residents complain of the management likewise. And when the management decorate the Home in a way meeting the expectation of outside inspectors, the residents do similarly to satisfy the staff to secure their positions in the Home. Far from being equal peers, both workers and residents are re-ranked along the bureaucratic spectrum according to similar logic. At each level there is the co-existence of the pair of *yang* and *yin*, who performs respective roles as well as mirrors each other in similar patterns. In all, the internal structure of the Home is characterized by the multiple hierarchical levels which resemble one another and make power-wielding appear unusually surreptitious and bewildering.

Realities of Inversion

This leads to my final argument: that a state intervention as such incurs a range of inverted realities. WBH are turned into WBE amidst public acclamation as evidence of state benevolence and, thus, their subsequent distancing from their previous primary groups goes unnoticed. A specific project is turned into systematic effect, in which process guarantee is tempered by deprivation. In the Home, emptiness is the surface presentation of precariousness. Motionless waiting is the expression of an agency working towards utopia. The care workers are managers and the aged the students. Technical clarity leads to dysfunction, and messiness defines orderliness. The wild (stove) is the intimate, and the familial – the dining hall - the other. Care and respect are necessary forms of violence and management. Part is magnified into the whole when the identity of WBE is equalled to, as it is, a person. To be ironic is to mitigate confrontation, and rhetorical reversals can go on endlessly.

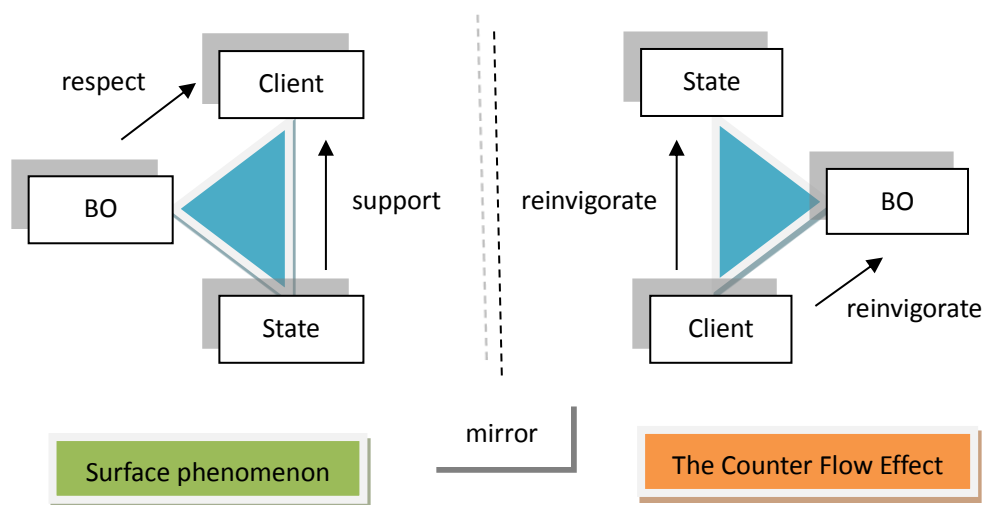


Figure 8.2: The Mirror Effect (Inverted Realities) in Observing the Home

Among them, the most disguised inversion is the bewildering relationship between the state and its welfare recipients for the ‘counter-flow’ effect of the proclaimed free gift from the state. I argue that refracted by the bureaucratic mirror, the spirit of the free gift is retrieved to reinvigorate the authority of the state through the replacement and

circulation of vitalities. As such, to nourish is to weaken, and the residents serve instead of being served, leaving the original benefactor - the state - the ultimate beneficiary. Returning to the analogy I proposed between family and state, this counter-flow effect is reminiscent of the Chinese familial nurture and support model proposed by Fei Xiaotong (1947, 1998), which emphasizes the ‘feedback’ [*fanbu*] of the younger generation to the older sanctioned by the moral law of filial piety so that the underlining logic of reciprocity in inter-generational relationship is completed. The task of elaborating on how state welfare recipients in this context reciprocate the benefactor and how that is linked to the cultural logic of familial reciprocity may open new fields of research. This thesis demonstrates that the clients are clearly not merely receiving; ostensibly the recipients of 'no strings attached' welfare, the way in which they reciprocate may go beyond what participant observation can decipher.

Overarching all these, there is the grand inversion, which stems from a fundamental alteration in the vantage point of perception from monads to the relationality between them. I argue that by studying the Home through the lens of the latter, its monadic ambivalence can be seen as one of consistence, i.e. consistently reflect the surrounding monads. Inversion creates endless realities which are refracted in one way or another yet also identify with each other in a certain manner. This is why the obvious confrontation between the bus driver and Bai goes conflict free – symbolic ambiguity is exploited by everyone to serve their own ends, which creates many reversed realities in one context, and this explains why the Home, while being order-less, i.e. comprising both order and disorder, is generally observed as orderliness.

All this takes place in the shadow of state intervention. Last but not least, I suggest that the Home, as a heterotopian institution, is a necessary step towards change, if change is to take place at all. The liminalities intrinsic in it are consistent with a context in transition, namely, the statization of family. The question left for the future may be, having rendered planer binaries secondary, whether it is still legitimate to ask

the classic structural question, what then is the opposite of a heterotopian institution?
If not, how should structural relations in a future full of heterotopian monads be
conceived at all?

Appendix I: Residents Workers and Managers

Position	No. of Residents	Payment (per person yuan)
Elderly Committee	5	15 /month
Floor Leaders	10	15 /month
Function Groups	5*5=25	15 /month
Production Team	30	1.5 /day 15 - 45 /month
Livestock Raising Team	20	1 /day 30 /month

Appendix II: Extracts of Old Wu's Oral Account

'I did not have much education, only primary school. If not for the Party, I may have remained a domestic servant for the rest of life. But I was chosen to serve as the brigade secretary [*dui zhuren*] for eight years when I was young... Yes, of course, in the 1960s. You know, I am a Party member! At that time it was not easy to become a Party member. One needed to have two persons to recommend and mentor one for a long time before one was officially accepted. I don't know why but they thought I was the right person to do the job... Of course you also need to prove that you can do the job... Before I was formally accepted as a Party member, they had assigned me real work to test my capability.'

'The most difficult thing was doing 'thought work', which meant that you had to go to each household to educate them about policy and to discuss their particular problems. For example, to convince people to join the brigade, I walked miles and miles to every household to tell them what it was and why they should join, and to help each household find solutions to potential disputes. If they were convinced, it was fine; however, if they refused to join, I would have to threaten them by telling them things like failing to join the brigade would leave them as a *danganhu* (one-person household), no longer part of the community and isolated forever. It was difficult. There was the quota institution to assess our performance. If I couldn't make a certain number of households join the brigade, it would be counted as my failure. To be an official then was just like this: there must be people who chose you and then you *chuqili* (input labour) to prove that you are able to do it.'

'At that time, we also had the Party School Study. It still has the same name today, but back then it was an entirely different thing. The Party School Study then was very serious and informative. We were given classes on international relations, domestic situations, the Party's principles and policies, and so on. They had to make sure that we understood what was taught so that we could go back to pass on the right *sixiang* (thoughts) to *dajia* (all). Many of us did not have a lot of schooling, but this did not

matter much, since we helped each other and exchanged notes... At that time, we needed to carry our own quilt and walk to Huangzhen. It was about one day's walk from my village. During my tenure, I went there three times for this study...'

'My previous wife had actually been a *tongyangxi* (adopted daughter-in-law) to the son of a rich landlord, in whose family I had been a servant for several years since my late teens. The son then decided to go to the artillery school to study. Before his departure, he said to his fiancée that he would stay in that school for at least three years and was not sure where he would go after graduation; this would be a very long time, and he did not want her to waste her youth. You see what this meant? It meant that he was in fact waving bye-bye to his fiancée. The woman was abandoned. After he left, she came to me and suggested that maybe she and I could get married. I agreed. At that time, the procedure to register such a marriage was very complicated. Among other things, we were expected to have a signed letter from the rich son acknowledging that he voluntarily gave up the relationship with the woman. Just for that letter, we waited more than one year. In fact, after several years, the man came back and said that he regretted his actions and wanted to get back together with her. But how can that be possible! A state has its law, and we follow the law and are protected by it. It is not like the old society, where the son of a landlord could do whatever he wanted. Needless to say, the man's efforts were unsuccessful, and he finally left again.'

'Later, life became better and I was chosen as the Party candidate and then as the secretary. I worked for the brigade, and we also had some land to cultivate. That's when we had our four daughters. I acted as the secretary of my brigade for eight years before small brigades were merged into larger unit and cadres were readjusted and reduced. Other people who were more capable than me started to take over my duties and leave me less and less to do. Later, I was assigned to manage forestry and *shenghuo* (logistics), a more menial job than secretary, who was in charge of land issues. I continued in this role for another few years before I finally left these services

altogether.’

‘About 10 years ago, she (my wife) became very ill, and I tended her in her bed for 11 months before she died. She said to me that she had not left anything to me but that she had given me four daughters, all of who were good and filial and that I could rely on. She also said that I should consider remarrying, but I did not. At that time, none of our daughters was married. I thought that if I married someone who did not treat them well, it would be worse than if I kept alone. This actually happened to another person in my brigade: after his wife died, he got remarried to a woman who also had her own grown-up children. Soon after, his new wife had transferred his money and property to her own children and left nearly nothing for him and his kin. You see, that was not good.’

‘At that time, my prospect was to have at least one *shangmen nvxu* (married-in son-in-law). I had built a house with six rooms spread along the village path, very smart and spacious. But the problem was that the location of my village was not good – quite far from the main road and up on the hill – and my land was not very good either. Despite these drawbacks, my youngest daughter did find a man who was willing to come and live with us. But after staying in my home for several months, they changed their minds. The man thought the location and soil were even worse than in his own village, and my daughter agreed with him. So they left to seek their own fortune. Not long after that there came the earthquake, and the rooms were almost devastated. So I sold out all my assets, including a very good TV set and a DVD player, and moved here. Luckily the state still remembers us and builds such fine housing in which to spend our old age.’

Glossary

Chinese Characters

爱心
安心
不打不相识
不老实
不人性
操心
吃饭
吃要有吃相
重阳节
村民
打牙祭
担心
党中央
刀子嘴豆腐心
得罪人
德育教育基地
懂道理
饭钱
哥老信
个人爱好
更新思想
工钱
工作方式
公家的钱
公示牌
公务员
公心
官菜
国家
核心柑橘生产基地
黑心烂肺
红旗示范单位
护工
灰心
将心比心
交心
经济不发达
敬老院
酒钱
聚餐
开心

Pingying

ai 'xin
an 'xin
buda bu-xiangshi
bu laoshi
bu renxing
cao xin
chifan
chi yaoyou chixiang
chongyangjie
cunmin
dayaji
dan xin
dang Zhongyang
daoizui Doufuxin
dezui ren
deyu jiaoyu jidi
dong daoli
fanqian
gelaoguan
geren aihao
gengxin sixiang
gongqian
gongzuo fangshi
gongjia de qian
gongshipai
gongwuyuan
gong xin
guancai
guojia
hexin ganju shengchan jidi
hei xin
hongqi shifan danwei
hugong
hu xin
jiang xin bi xin
jiao xin
jingji bufada
jinglaoyuan
jiuqian
jucan
kai xin

拉锯战	<i>lajuzhan</i>
狼心狗肺	<i>lang xin gou fei</i>
老百姓	<i>laobaixing</i>
老板	<i>laoban</i>
老辈子	<i>laobeizi</i>
老不死	<i>laobusi</i>
老大	<i>laoda</i>
老东西	<i>lao dongxi</i>
老根	<i>laogen</i>
老家	<i>lao jia</i>
老了	<i>laole</i>
老嬷嬷	<i>lao momo</i>
老年人	<i>lao nian ren</i>
老人	<i>laoren</i>
老弱病残	<i>lao ruo bing can</i>
老师	<i>laoshi</i>
老实人	<i>laoshi ren</i>
老头儿	<i>laotou'er</i>
老屋	<i>laowu</i>
良心	<i>liang xin</i>
临时工	<i>linshi gong</i>
零花钱	<i>linghuaqian</i>
领导的关怀	<i>lingdao de guanhuai</i>
泸州老窖	<i>luzhou laogao</i>
乱七八糟	<i>luanqi bazao</i>
面子	<i>mianzi</i>
民以食为天	<i>minyishi weitian</i>
难得	<i>nande</i>
娘家	<i>niangjia</i>
婆家	<i>pojia</i>
亲自	<i>qinzi</i>
热心	<i>re xin</i>
忍	<i>ren</i>
伤心	<i>shang xin</i>
上进心	<i>shangjin xin</i>
上楼运动	<i>shanglou yundong</i>
上心	<i>shang xin</i>
事业心	<i>shiye xin</i>
私房钱	<i>sifang qian</i>
私人的钱	<i>siren de qian</i>
私心	<i>Si xin</i>
思想工作	<i>sixiang gongzuo</i>
素质	<i>suzhi</i>
算了	<i>suanle</i>

贪心	<i>tan xin</i>
谈心	<i>tan xin</i>
听话	<i>Tinghua</i>
统一思想	<i>tongyi guihua</i>
投资项目	<i>touzi xiangmu</i>
土地老爷	<i>tudi laoye</i>
文化	<i>wenhua</i>
文明	<i>wenming</i>
乌合之众	<i>wuhe zhizhong</i>
五保老人	<i>wubao laoren</i>
西部大开发	<i>xibu da kaifa</i>
小心	<i>xiao xin</i>
孝心	<i>xiao xin</i>
孝子	<i>xiaozǐ</i>
心诚	<i>cheng xin</i>
心烦	<i>xin fan</i>
心寒	<i>xin han</i>
心累	<i>xinlei</i>
心里话	<i>xin li hua</i>
心事	<i>xin shi</i>
心术不正	<i>xinshu buzheng</i>
心态	<i>xin tai</i>
行政区划调整	<i>xingzheng quhua tiaozheng</i>
压岁钱	<i>yasuiqian</i>
烟钱	<i>yanqian</i>
研究讨论	<i>yanjiu taolun</i>
养老金	<i>yanglaojin</i>
养老卡	<i>yanglaoka</i>
养老院	<i>yanglaoyuan</i>
野灶	<i>ye zao</i>
用心	<i>yong xin</i>
有感觉	<i>you ganjue</i>
有人管	<i>you ren guan</i>
有心	<i>you xin</i>
鱼龙混杂	<i>yulong hunza</i>
院民	<i>yuanmin</i>
责任心	<i>zeren xin</i>
沾光	<i>zhan guang</i>
真心	<i>zhen xin</i>
睁只眼闭只眼	<i>zhengzhiyan, bizhiyan</i>
政府	<i>zhengfu</i>
中华民族美德	<i>zhonghua minzu de meide</i>
做人抬不起头	<i>zuoren taibuqitou</i>

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