The London School of Economics and Political Science

Windfall Wealth and Envy in Three Chinese Mining Villages

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Declaration

I certify that the thesis I have presented for examination for the MPhil/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).

I warrant that this authorisation does not, to the best of my belief, infringe the rights of any third party.

Abstract

The sudden arrival of wealth in China – more specifically, the arrival of wealth for some people but not for others– offers anthropologists a good opportunity to revisit and modify their theories of envy. While most anthropological studies of envy have focused on slow-changing societies and/or on the question of reducing inequality as a way of reducing envy, in the Chinese case we find rapidly growing inequality and, it seems, a striking increase in the prevalence of envy. Certainly, the arrival of windfall wealth due to mining activity in the three villages in North-east China where I conducted fieldwork for this dissertation generated a wide and rich range of envy-related discussions and practices. However, unlike other ethnographic contexts where witchcraft, sorcery, the "evil eye", etc. are well-known ways of articulating and dealing with the problem of envy, no such cultural forms have up to now been identified and analysed for the case of China.

Three key findings are presented in this thesis. First, at the conceptual level I argue that red-eye (*yanhong*), a Chinese term/concept related to malicious envy (relevant to cases where people feel: "I strongly wish you did not have what you have"), is a unique cultural product in that it expresses a desire to destroy what others have, in that it implies an orientation towards acting upon this desire and in that it is intertwined with particular forms of political and discursive power. Second, in contrast with cultures where strategies to control envy focus primarily on the enviers (i.e. on those who envy others), in China the people who are themselves envied appear to bear a high degree of moral responsibility for this situation. That is, they may be held responsible for the improper actions of others that result from them having provoked envy in these other parties. Third, Foster's (1972) theory of envy argues that it is the perceived scarcity of desirable goods that makes the deprived most envious. In my study, I argue that what breeds envy in situations of windfall wealth is not the scarcity of desirable goods, as such, but rather the perceived scarcity of opportunities for upward mobility.

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Introduction: Emotion, envy and sociality

If I can't have it, nobody else should even try.

wo debudao, shei ye biexiang dedao.

During the time since I began research on my PhD, at various parties, seminars and other social occasions in London, I have been asked the same question countless times: "So, what is your topic?" Invariably, I would reply, "I'm working on envy and jealousy in a Chinese village". More often than not, however, the inquirers could not believe their ears on hearing this. Over the years it has almost become fun to observe the short pause, either induced by surprise, confusion, puzzlement or even, in some cases, fascination on hearing about the nature of my topic. More questions were often triggered by my initial reply. "Have you studied envy in the U.K.?" "What have you found out in your research?" "Are Chinese peasants envious?" Most common of all has been the question: "How did you come up with this topic in the first place?"

Apparently, envy is regarded as a somewhat unlikely choice for a PhD topic, particularly when this focus on envy is juxtaposed with China studies. However, people always seem curious to know more about the subject, perhaps in order to compare Chinese envy with envy in their own countries or just because they want to know more about something that is quite unheard of for them. What people had often heard about, though, was the striking economic development that China has achieved in the past 30 years and the far-reaching consequences of this which have

been a predominant theme in most contemporary studies of China. Of course, the focus in these studies has shifted from its previous attention to China's "transition" to the now well-established emergence of the new rich in China. More specifically, the political, socio-economic and cultural consequences of the uneven distribution of wealth have, to some extent, replaced the previous research focus on the transition from "socialism" to "post-socialism", from a "planned economy" to a "market economy", and from "shared poverty" to "the divergence between the rich and the poor". Because of this shift, questions about "how wealth (and poverty) is created", "who the relevant beneficiaries, individuals or groups, are, e.g. who are the new rich", "what these people do with their wealth" and "the impact of this wealth on other aspects of Chinese social life" have increasingly won scholarly attention (Davis and Wang, 2009; Goodman and Zhang, 2008). Although envy is the central concern of my research, it obviously must be explored against the background of these questions, and with reference to the many existing studies of "China's newly accumulated wealth".

To put this differently, my study is about a narrower, but potentially very interesting and important, topic which relates to China's economic transition: the range of *emotional* responses to China's newly accumulated wealth — and especially to the phenomenon of windfall wealth — experienced by ordinary Chinese people. The lack of focus on Chinese individuals and their emotional experiences in both the study of China's "transition" period and the study of China's "new wealth" has been identified by Yunxiang Yan in his compelling work

on love, intimacy and Chinese families (Yan 2003). As he rightly points out, "The individual remains at the margins in all three models [i.e. of three individual models of Chinese kinship and family life], and the emotional world of flesh-and-bone people has usually been overlooked"; given that "without individuals and their lived experiences the [Chinese] family would not have existed and family life would not have been possible", this is a very serious omission (Yan, 2003: xii). Similarly, without examining the more intimate and immediate personal experiences involved in the struggle to acquire, maintain and not forfeit wealth, the picture we have of China's "new wealth" cannot do justice to the reality. In my account, framed around the sudden and uneven arrival of wealth in three Chinese villages, I attempt to focus on the subtleties of individual experience, including emotional experience and its social consequences.

Public concern about envy and its relationship to the remarkable achievements of China's economic reform era first emerged in the 1980s. The issue of so-called "red-eye disease" (*hongyan bing*), a societal illness originating from envy, was widely discussed in Party newspapers a few years after the reforms began in 1978. By origin, the term *hongyan bing* simply means conjunctivitis, an inflammation of the eye characterised by redness and often accompanied by discharge. This is also, of course, a type of *infectious* disease— if one person gets it and it is not properly treated, many others will become infected. The widespread discussion of envy – which made use of the expression "red-eye disease", implying that envy was a sickness that might spread – was in itself an interesting phenomenon at the

beginning of the post-reform era. As I will discuss below, abundant examples of malicious gossip directed against the successful and even of crimes carried out by people who felt that they had benefited less or failed to benefit at all from the economic reforms were reported in newspapers. Editorial remarks condemning such behaviour were made to warn ordinary people of the dangers of misunderstanding the mechanisms of reform, exhorting them not to become infected with red-eye disease. The flood of discussion about red-eye disease eventually died down some time around the early 1980s; however, in the 1990s, the term was replaced by a new one, "wealth-hatred mentality" (*choufu xintai*), which was also obviously directly linked to the problem of envy.

Looking at the huge social transformations which have resulted from the economic reforms in China, envy might perhaps not seem to merit being a key subject for attention, e.g. it is arguably less important than the problem of rising economic inequality and the imbalance between rural and urban development. Envy does not seem to occupy a dominant part in everyday life either, as many people appear to avoid talking about it openly (as I will explain more fully below). Moreover, some anthropologists have suggested that emotion in general plays a relatively insignificant role in structuring Chinese social life and Chinese social relations (Potter, 1988; Kipnis 1997). Along with Yan, however, I disagree with this overall view. I want to suggest that the study of envy in China today can offer a novel and indispensable angle through which to understand the changes brought about by drastic social transformation by helping to illuminate issues such as

economic inequality, the urban-rural divide and social injustice. The seemingly hidden nature of envy in China today, the fact that it seems to slip somewhat below the radar, should not keep us from recognising that it relates to key aspects of social life, including relations both inside and outside of families and the general problem of morality and moral control (cf. Foster 1972; Woodburn, 1982; Schoeck, 1966 for comparative cases). In my view, the downplaying of emotion in accounts of Chinese social life is, for the most part, due to the lack of detailed ethnographic studies on Chinese emotions and their social significance in the transitional era. This thesis therefore aims to become one of the few attempts to enrich this largely undeveloped body of literature and to examine Chinese envy in a much wider cross-cultural context.

In an approach similar to that taken by Eves for the case of Papua New Guinea, my thesis aims to understand emotion as part of a local "response to the introduction of new forms of wealth into a specific cultural framework" (Eves, 2000: 453). In Eves' study, "the expansion of forms of wealth [in PNG] has led to a loss of control over the processes by which sociality was previously regulated" (Eves, 2000: 453). In China, the expansion of wealth and the uneven expansion of windfall wealth (this in particular) have produced a new and sometimes turbulent outlook on rural Chinese social life. In this study, instead of focusing on how emotion is socially and culturally constructed, emphasis is placed on how socially and culturally constructed emotions have reflected and mediated changing sociality and social relations in post-reform China. Moreover, my aim is to present, largely

through specific case studies, an ethnographically rich account of envy, looking both at sophisticated local understandings of it and the complex strategies through which ordinary people try to deal with it.

Envy and windfall wealth

According to Van Sommers, envy should be defined as pain felt at the good fortune of others (Van Sommers, 1988: 1). For Fernández de la Mora, envy is pain one feels in the presence of someone else's happiness (normally a superior, desired, inaccessible, and unreachable happiness) (Fernández de la Mora, 1987: 67). From these definitions envy can be seen to represent an unpleasant feeling, a pain caused by someone else although in reality, of course, this pain might take very different forms. As Salovey (1991) summarises, many theorists have tried to distinguish different types of envy and have suggested various categories, such as "malicious envy", "emulating envy", "emulative envy" or "admiring envy", to identify them (Salovey, 1991: 9). For Salovey, "the variety of envious experience can best be introduced by starting with a more general distinction, one between a sense of envy that is morally acceptable and one that is morally reprehensible" (Salovey, 1991: 9); that is, a distinction between "nonmalicious envy", as Salovey calls it, and "malicious envy". He further specifies the following.

> The focus of *nonmalicious envy* is "I wish I had what you have". It may be experienced in a variety of ways: as inferiority to the envied person, longing for what the other has, despair of ever having it, determination to improve oneself, or admiration of the envied person. The focus of *malicious envy*, on the other hand, is "I wish you did not have what you do" (Neu, 1980). ... The focus of malicious envy is the removal or destruction of the envied object or quality. To the person suffering malicious envy, the marvellous car should be stolen or damaged, the virtuous person corrupted or killed, the beautiful face covered or

> disfigured. In malicious envy it is not necessary to desire what the others have— only to desire that it be taken away from the other.
>
> (Salovey, 1991: 10, emphasis added)

Malicious envy, to borrow Salovey's terminology, is the main subject of this dissertation. It is a kind of envy that is well illustrated by the quote I used to open the introduction. "If I can't have it, nobody else should even try" (*wo debudao, shei ye biexiang dedao*) captures well the idea that if I can't get what I want then my preference is for nobody to have it. The Chinese term for this kind of malicious envy (or at least one of the terms that is commonly used to refer to it) is *jidu*, sometimes now colloquially known as *yanhong* (red-eye), as I have already explained. The quotation cited above (i.e. "If I can't have it ...") came from one of my informants as she tried to explain to me how bad and damaging this kind of envy can be. This way of articulating malicious envy was echoed by many other villagers when they complained about how the controversies over mining activity (to be explained below) had created huge local conflicts. As a result, they explained, "it's now very hard to achieve anything because everyone is ready to stop you" (*"xianzai zuocheng shi tainande, shei dou xiang gei ni daoluan"*); "it's all about hurting others and not even benefiting oneself" (*"zhe jiushi sunren bu liji"*). These uncooperative and troublesome behaviours which were encountered and reported in my fieldwork villages took different forms, these ranging from hindering mining production to initiating disputes or extorting money, all of which I will discuss in detail in separate chapters. Non-malicious envy will also be discussed and distinguished from malicious envy. The Chinese term for non-malicious envy (or at least one of the terms used to describe it) is *xianmu*. For ease of reference, the main

Chinese terms referring to envy have been listed in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Chinese terms for envy

Xianmu	Non-malicious envy, admiring envy
Jidu	Malicious envy
Red-eye (*yanhong*)	Malicious envy (colloquial term for *jidu*)
Red-eye disease (*hongyanbing*)	A term used in public discussion in the 1980s Origin: malicious envy Symptoms: gossip, hindrance to progress and crime directed at the successful
Wealth-hatred mentality (*choufu xintai*)	A term used in public discussion in the 1990s Origin: malicious envy Symptoms: crimes targeted at the rich

Of course, envy can be instigated by a variety of things, qualities or possessions. In the research presented here, however, the main focus, as I have said, is on the type of envy that has been or might be bred by unevenly distributed wealth and windfall wealth in particular. Windfall wealth (*baofu* in Chinese) refers to the kind of wealth that is acquired in large amounts and in relatively short periods of time, that is, sudden huge profits. In the three villages where I conducted my fieldwork, such windfall wealth was mainly the result of lucrative mining activities driven by the mounting demand for and subsequent rise in the value of iron ore. The acquisition of windfall wealth in general is not, however, exceptional in the context of the past 30 years of economic development in China. The *Southern People's*

Weekly (2006) carried a special report entitled "Farewell to the Proletarian — from 1976-2006 when we are no longer impoverished"[1] in which seven separate waves of windfall wealth accumulation (*qici baofu langchao*) are listed. The first wave was said to have resulted from the introduction of the dual price system (*jiage shuanggui zhi*) which allowed people with connections to buy things and sell them at vastly different prices.[2]

The second wave was caused by the difference in interest rates and exchange rates of foreign currencies imposed by state banks and those found on the "black" market. The third one came from real estate due to the privatisation of housing. The fourth was the result of rising prices on Chinese stock markets. Wealth derived from involvement in IT industries (along with their involvement with international companies), in the management and distribution of raw materials and natural resources and in state-owned monopolies were the ones to follow.[3] One of the end results of all these "waves" was a remarkable increase in the number of extraordinarily wealthy individuals. In the early 1990s, only 409 individuals were

[1] *Southern People Weekly*, 11 October 2006. "Farewell to Proletarian — from 1976-2006 when we are no longer impoverished", pp 21-30. Unless otherwise indicated, all the translations from Chinese into English are my own.

[2] To lessen the social turbulence of completely transforming the price system from one based on allocation to a free price system regulated by the market China adopted a unique dual price system in 1984 which led to the coexistence of two prices for identical goods, one for the planned economy and one for the market economy. The two prices differed to a vast extent. Take steel as an example: the price was fixed by the state at 700 RMB (in the 1980s, 5-6 RMB equalled 1 USD) per ton but the market price was 2,000 RMB. If tons of steel could be obtained at the planned price through officials' signing power and personal connections, when it was sold at the market price one could become a millionaire overnight. *Southern People Weekly*, 11 October 2006. "Farewell to Proletarian — from 1976-2006 when we are no longer impoverished", pp18.

[3] *Southern People Weekly*, 11 October 2006. "Farewell to Proletarian — from 1976-2006 when we are no longer impoverished", pp18.

identified by the State Industrial and Commercial Bureau as millionaires,[4] that is as having personal assets valued at over one million RMB (thousands of US$), while in 2009, according to the *Hu Run report* — the most popular list of the rich in China, edited by Rupert Hoogewerf (Chinese name Hu Run) — the 1,000 richest individuals in China were listed with a cut-off of 150 million US$.[5] It is worthy of note that the *2009 Hurun Rich List series* is made up of the *main rich list*, 13 *industry lists*, 31 *regional lists* and a *list of the richest women* in China.[6] The cut-off point of the rich list has steadily increased over the years as well.

The windfall wealth examined in my research falls into the sixth wave, to borrow the *Southern People Weekly*'s term, i.e. it relates to the management and distribution of raw materials and natural resources. Multi-millionaires had only recently appeared in my fieldwork region, this as a consequence of the booming iron ore industries located there. The three villages where I conducted my research from 2006 to 2007 are situated in Hebei Province, North-east China. Hebei Province is located in the northern part of the North China Plain and extends into the Inner Mongolian Plateau with Beijing, the capital of China, and Tianjin, the most important trading port in the north of China, being situated in the centre of the province (although they do not form part of it). Despite its proximity to Beijing, Hebei is a relatively poor province with hardly any coastal cities to share in the early advantages of economic development. It mainly consists of agricultural land

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[4] *Southern People Weekly*, 11 October 2006. "Farewell to Proletarian — from 1976-2006 when we are no longer impoverished", pp20.

[5] *China's Luxury Business Magazine*. www.hurun.net

[6] *China's Luxury Business Magazine*. www.hurun.net

with increasing numbers going to work as migrants in cities like Beijing or Tianjin as well as other provincial centres. As Powell points out, the North China Plain was traditionally known as one of the "granaries" of China. The short summer period limited cropping schedules to three crops in two years compared to the double-cropping common in the south, however. This lower productivity was, moreover, coupled with high rural population densities which the resource base struggled to feed. Opportunities besides grain were less abundant than those provided by the more fertile and varied conditions to the south (Powell, 1992: 1). The county where my three fieldwork villages are located similarly remained relatively impoverished until huge iron ore deposits were detected and the privatisation of the mining businesses began.[7] As the Party secretary of the township excitedly said, "the abundant deposits can be exploited for 100 years!" In 2006, the annual tax revenue of the township was 0.2 billion RMB while for the county it was 0.6 billion RMB,[8] these figures being ten times the figures for 2002. Black metal associated industries accounted for 68.07% of the overall tax revenue of the county and the output of iron ore powder was 3.66 million tons in 2005, this representing a 41.9% output increase compared to 1999.[9]

The growth of mining industries in China was, of course, given a huge boost by China's economic development and the surging demand this generated for steel. According to *The Economist*, steel production in China rose by 15% in 2007, this

[7] Natural resources and raw materials are state-owned and in the past could only be exploited by state-owned companies.

[8] At the time of my fieldwork 13 RMB roughly equalled 1 GBP.

[9] Resource: County Economic Brief, 2006, County Statistics Bureau.

representing much the same rate of growth as in 2006. Since 2000, China has roughly tripled its output, making it by far the world's biggest producer, with 37% of global output. In terms of the domestic production of iron ore, this has more than doubled since 2003, again making the country the world's largest producer. Nonetheless, this growth has not been nearly enough to guarantee a sufficient supply for its proliferating steel mills. The firm Shougang, for example, owns a mine in Hebei, conveniently close to its mills. The mine, however, does not provide enough ore for all of these and since other domestic supplies are scarce the firm has had to look overseas to make up the shortfall.[10] It was also the shortage of supply that made the price of iron ore constantly rise. Consequently the mining businesses in my field villages have effectively never stopped expanding. This trend could also be observed locally by means of the constant phone calls from steel companies enquiring about iron ore pellets[11] and negotiating prices. As my hostess in one village told me, the iron ore pellets were always all sold out in no time. All the machinery was operating at full capacity but the supply was still not enough. In this context, acquiring considerable (even great) wealth in a short space of time was a real possibility for local people and not just a distant dream.

Envy and inequality

Before giving more details about my fieldwork setting and about my research, I want to turn briefly[12] to the existing literature on envy and inequality showing how the two topics can be interlinked in important ways. As a type of emotion it

[10] *The Economist*, 15 March 2008. "A special report on China's quest for resources": 5-6.
[11] That is, the product resulting from the basic processing of iron ore: crushed iron powders.
[12] This literature will be explored more fully in Chapter 1.

will also be useful to first situate envy within the anthropology of emotions. It has been widely accepted that emotion is not only about internal mental states and bodily "feelings" but also about cultural meanings. As Lutz puts it, emotion is "culturally defined, socially enacted, and personally articulated" (Lutz, 1988: 5). Moreover, "the concepts of emotion can more profitably be viewed as serving complex communicative, moral, and cultural purposes rather than simply as labels for internal states whose nature or essence is presumed to be universal" (Lutz, 1988: 5). Research has shown how discourses on emotion can also serve as commentaries on the practices essential to social relations in a given community (Lutz and Abu-Lughod, 1993: 19).

The cultural constructionist view of emotions has radically redefined the focus and contour of emotion studies since the 1980s. Supported by ethnographic evidence, emotion has been increasingly framed as a cultural construct, indeed as a pre-eminently cultural phenomenon derived from the pragmatics of social life. Lutz claims that "although we may experience emotion as something that rises and falls within the boundaries of our bodies, the decidedly social origins of our understandings of the self, the other, the world, and experience draw our attention to the interpersonal processes by which something called emotion or some things like joy, anger, or fear come to be ascribed to and experienced by us" (Lutz, 1988: 5). What Lutz tries to demonstrate, through an ethnography of emotional life on a Pacific island, is that "the use of emotion concepts, as elements of local ideological practice, involves negotiation over the meaning of events, over rights and morality,

over control of resources — in short, involves struggles over the entire range of issues that concern human groups" (Lutz, 1988: 5).

Whilst the cultural constructionist view has usefully linked emotion to a wide range of social and cultural issues, it has also been accused of overemphasising the role of language and discourse and of ignoring the bodily dimension of emotions (see, for example, Svasek, 2005: 11). A further limitation of the cultural constructionist view, as noted by Lyon, is that while it usefully sought at base to understand "the ways that innerness is shaped by culturally laden sociality" (Lyon, 1995: 247), this perspective may "obscure our view of the phenomenon of emotion in the larger sense, that is, the understanding of the importance of emotion not only in culturally produced and mediated experience, but in social agency as conceived in terms of its foundation in social structures" (Lyon, 1995: 248). In other words, it is important to acknowledge that emotion stands beyond questions of specific cultural forms and varies according to a person's place in society and the social context of that society. As Stearns and Stearns point out, "it is incomplete to treat emotions as radically personal responses that are to be explained only with reference to the particular history of the individual. Rather, emotions are to be understood in terms of their communal context and in relation to the larger social history" (Stearns and Stearns, 1988: 35). Ignorance of the social connotations of emotions has obscured the understanding of the complexities and richness of emotional responses in recent studies (Stearns and Stearns, 1988: 35).

Overall, I am most sympathetic with Leavitt's approach because of how it

reconciles the longstanding dichotomy between feelings and meanings in studies of emotion.

> We would have to see emotions as primarily neither meanings nor feelings, but as experiences learned and expressed in the body in social interactions through the mediation of systems of signs, verbal and nonverbal. We would have to see them as fundamentally social rather than simply as individual in nature; as generally expressed, rather than as generally ineffable; and as both cultural and situational. But we would equally recognise in theory what we all assume in our everyday lives: that emotions are felt in bodily experience, not just known or thought or appraised.
>
> (Leavitt, 1996: 526)

Envy, like other emotions, is, then, of course social. More importantly, envy is intrinsically relational. As mentioned before, for Fernández de la Mora envy is pain one feels in the presence of someone else's happiness (Fernández de la Mora, 1987: 67), thus meaning that envy is not stimulated from inside but by another. Moreover, social envy may be amassed and aimed at a group, generally against a social class or social level, as Fernández de la Mora notes (1987: 67). In such a case, as he further points out, "envy may be shared and tacit, or expressed, associations may be formed of people who coincide in envying the same superiors as, for example, the bourgeois parties envying the aristocratic". Moreover, "concrete envious feelings are mixed because, in fact, there is a tight connection between what one is, the place one occupies and what one owns" and also "because the envious person establishes mental connections between being, power, and having" (Fernández de la Mora, 1987: 70). The three elements Fernández de la Mora indicates – the place one occupies, what one owns and the connections between being, power and having –can be both individual and collective. Collective envy of the new rich is, therefore,

one of the major themes to be examined in this study, this to be achieved by looking at how the three basic dimensions of an enviable objective are culturally and socially established.

It should also be noted that there are two things that make envy directly relevant to the study of wealth and inequality. Firstly, the fact that there is a preconditioned relationship between two (or more) parties and, secondly, that there is a relation of unequal possession between the parties involved; that is, the one having less envies the one who has more, whether the possessions envied be material goods or desirable qualities. Such a seemingly intrinsic correlation between envy and inequality has been debated by many theorists[13] but few have explored the "cultural matrix", to borrow Bloch and Parry's words (Bloch and Parry, 1989: 1), in which envy and wealth are symbolised and incorporated. The emergence of windfall wealth in China has in fact echoed what Comaroff and Comaroff (1999) suggest may be the common denominator of millennial capitalism, that is, "the allure of accruing wealth from nothing" (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1999: 313). As they go on to say, it has seemed inevitable for some time that we are entering a world that has "gone awry", "a world in which the only way to create real wealth seems to lie in forms of power/knowledge that transgress the conventional, the rational, the moral — thus to multiply available techniques of producing value, fair or foul" (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1999: 316). Envy, as a technique for controlling such transgressions, has been documented by many anthropologists around the world.

[13] A more detailed discussion will follow in Chapter 1.

Envy and social violation

Envy has traditionally been analysed by anthropologists as a way of getting the measure of and punishing social violation, especially the violation of reciprocity or of egalitarianism or of pre-existing hierarchies. As Foster (1972) points out, envy and the associated practices of witchcraft, evil eye and sorcery might be the only way for inferiors to constrain superiors in certain societies (Foster, 1972: 168). Reminick also points out how "Douglas, in agreement with Spooner, identifies the evil eye belief as a special case of witchcraft belief which becomes expressed at critical social disjunctions between persons who hold structurally generated enmity towards each other" (Reminick, 1974: 288). As Reminick further details vis-à-vis the evil-eye belief among the Amhara people, "the peasant who is especially good looking or whose child is considered beautiful, or someone who does something extraordinary, may fear the attack of the evil eye because of the envy believed to be kindled in the *buda* (evil eye people)" (Reminick, 1974: 282). According to Reminick, the *buda* is the projection of the fear or dread of the threat of an equal situation — an "equal status rivalry between kin and siblings outside of well-defined situations". Such a threat to the equal situation is thus projected onto outsiders, *buda* people, "thereby preserving the internal solidarity (what there is of it) of the Amhara people" (Reminick, 1974: 290).

Ghosh's study of envy in Egypt echoes the idea of a structural threat to presumed equality. As he points out: "envy is possible as a mode of relationship in Nacaawy because of the villagers' sense of equality and oneness and, as I have

noted, in relation to the outside world this sense of equality has real foundations" (Ghosh, 1983: 222). Similarly, De Montoya's discussion of hunger and envy in Bailadores in the 1990s also illustrates how commentaries on envy can be seen as "part of a larger discourse on changing economic customs and social forms" and how envy is manipulated in the moral dialogue of acquiring wealth (De Montoya, 1996: 226). As she specifies, "the concept of *envidia* might well be more of a statement about the processes by which wealth is acquired, than about wealth itself. ... It is the successful who complain about *envidia*, generally those who have had the most need to manipulate social codes, and who consequently have the most reason for retaliation" (De Montoya, 1996: 224). Another study focusing on the Mapuche demonstrates how newly built social connections have been subject to envy.

> The new ways of accumulating wealth and power through interaction with non-Mapuche challenged the local sociopolitical hierarchy and ideology of egalitarianism, creating great uncertainty. Community members who lacked access to the new systems of power were envious of those who did and accused them of using sorcery to gain their status and of undermining Mapuche identity and communal solidarity.
>
> (Bacigalupo, 2005: 322-323)

Wealth, or rather tainted wealth, is also subject to envy control. High's (2008) study of Mongolian gold mines shows that money earned in the mining areas is different from wealth earned from animals, motorbikes and the production of grandchildren. For this reason wealth obtained through mining is subject to malicious gossip which is induced by envy of a different degree. The only requirement for instigating malicious envy in the Mongolian context is in-depth information about the target in question. The covert quality of the mining process,

which has given rise to an income that is non-visible and non-comparative, is thought to help conceal the information needed for malicious gossip; that is, "by taking part in the gold rush, herders can achieve a higher status with fewer social obligations" (High, 2008: 10-16). However, the quality of such wealth is transgressive with respect to the herders' traditional ethics. Instead of accumulating such wealth, then, it is often quickly used up.

Envy's power in terms of social control largely lies in people's fear of envy. As Foster rightly points out, when people envy it is quite natural for them to fear the consequences of the envy of others. According to Foster, at one level this fear is dealt with in a straightforward and simple fashion: people simply attempt to conceal those things they suspect or know may arouse envy in others (Foster, 1972: 166). Envy and the fear of envy play significant roles in interpersonal relations and social ordering. In some societies there exist well-established or even institutionalised ways of detecting, commenting about or deflecting envy (expressed through gossip, evil-eye attack or witchcraft). The cultural expressions of envy and envy-deflecting strategies have been documented in different parts of the world. Sharma's fieldwork in an Indian village echoes how concealment (and even deception where necessary) is the better strategy for maintaining control over social relations (Sharma, 2001: 120). As Sharma argues, "jealousy and envy appear as major components of interpersonal relationships in peasant societies" because in peasant societies the shortage of material supply is more evident (or at least more evident to peasants). Therefore, tension and anxiety are consequently easier to

induce than in an open community (such as those found in cities) (Sharma, 2001: 120). Sharma also cites Schneider's (1969) description of honour and conflict in a Sicilian town to further demonstrate the anxiety that people experience in balancing the need to maintain useful alliances with the need to maintain ones reputation. As he says, "the issue is not only one of personal power — the control over people and things — but also the dignity and integrity of the self, and this is not to be taken lightly" (Sharma, 2001: 121). In this regard, envy has an added significance beyond the competition for goods in that its control serves as a possible means of self-realisation and to establish identity and status in interpersonal relationships in the community. At the same time, envy-avoidance strategies can also function as a means of cutting of social connections, as is suggested by High's example.

Another means to sustain stable relations in peasant society is provided by what Wolf calls institutional envy. As he states, "Paralleling the mechanisms of control that are primarily economic in origin are psychological mechanisms like institutionalised envy, which may find expression in various manifestations such as gossip, attacks of the evil eye, or fear and practice of witchcraft" (Wolf, 2001: 100). In such communities, witchcraft, as well as milder forms of institutionalised envy, has an integrative effect in restraining non-traditional behaviour, as long as social relations suffer no serious disruption. As Wolf explicitly points out, on the individual plane envy thus acts to maintain individuals in equilibrium with their neighbours. On the social plane, it also reduces the disruptive influences of outside

society (Wolf, 2001: 204). Buchillet (2004) and Berglund (1976) provide two examples of the invocation of sorcery and witchcraft as devices for explaining, controlling and responding to envy. In the course of his fieldwork, Buchillet was told about a man well known for his great ability to chant who, during a festival in another village, suddenly lost his voice. This man immediately blamed the headman of the other community for using sorcery on him because of the headman's jealousy of his great knowledge (Buchillet, 2004: 117-118).

> The Desana are rarely at a loss to explain why someone would want to cause harm to local group members or to anyone else with whom the relationship is close. Their explanations invariably centre on envy, jealousy, revenge for conflicts over theft in the manioc gardens, refusal to give or to lend something, meanness, insults, anger, or vengeance for some harm or injustice done by the victim. All these are motives for the desire to harm another or to suspect someone of using sorcery against another.
>
> (Buchillet, 2004: 116)

He further illustrates that prestige, status, wealth or success (material or political, for instance), however temporary or qualified (for example, depending on the person's work), inevitably arouses envy and ill will among neighbours, close kin and others not so lucky or successful. As Buchillet argues, because of this, a prudent person will never boast of his accomplishments or wealth so as not to arouse the envy and resentment of others (Buchillet, 2004: 117). Fear of witchcraft, which might be engendered by envy, is also documented elsewhere, such as among the Zulu. Envy and jealousy can cause hatred and attract *ubuthakathi*.[14] Different situations might awaken envy, such as an industrious man who has success with cattle, in town or in business; similarly, a woman might arouse envy by tilling

[14] *Ubuthakathi* is that which should not be done but which people do anyway when their heart is filled to capacity with anger (Berglund, 1976: 272).

overly large fields or spending more time cultivating them than others do (Berglund, 1976: 272). The anger, rooted in jealousy, slander, suspicion, envy and quarrels, expresses itself in practical terms through *ubuthakathi*, witchcraft and/or sorcery. In the Zulu case, because of the very great importance attached to witchcraft and sorcery, society offers opportunities when anger or its antecedents can be revealed in confessions and expressions of goodwill, which lead to restored goodwill and harmonious conditions (Berglund, 1976: 385). Concealment, institutionalised envy, witchcraft and sorcery are all ways of maintaining social control and ways of sustaining interpersonal relations. They all recognise envy as a dangerous force that does harm to people who might be or are suspected of being envied. The *envied* are both the superiors and the potential victims of envy. The *envied* violate the social contract by being superior in prestige, status, wealth, success or other aspects to their close equals.

Nash explains how society may, by failing to reward or validate material success, deflect envy. She describes how the fear of exciting envy can act as a brake on productive activity and the enjoyment of improved consumption resulting from wealth. In her study of a Mayan Indian community in the state of Chiapas, Mexico, Nash describes a case having to do with the *ejido* land grants made in the 1930s. Two brothers became "very rich" as a result of their careful management of their *ejido* and privately-owned land but the people of the town began to talk about getting them off the land. Indeed, they succeeded in this and the brothers at the time of the study did no more than go to work like the other men. They also lived in

poor conditions, then. Nash comments that the organisation of co-operatives is one means of diverting envy directed towards individuals and of permitting some increase in productive efforts, although in such cases society still lacks the means of validating higher consumption standards. In the Mayan case the richest man in town ate better than his neighbours but his style of living was otherwise indistinguishable from theirs (Nash, 1979: 95-96). In this case, what the *envied* had violated was co-operative ethics.

Foster's theory interprets social violation in peasant societies as involving in some sense the deprivation of others. In his well-known model of the Image of Limited Good, he argues that because desirable things in life are always in limited supply (as far as peasants are concerned), one can only improve one's position at the expense of others (Foster, 1967b: 305). Whether this model is applicable in the case of China, what windfall wealth has violated with respect to the social relations of the mining villages and how such a violation has bred envy will be the main questions to be explored in this dissertation.

Inclusive Chinese emotions

It is not difficult to see some resemblances between the Chinese case and those envy-related scenarios and practices described by anthropologists working in other settings; nonetheless, within the Chinese context, expressions of emotions and their social significance have never stopped puzzling anthropologists. Potter's (1988) essay, "The cultural construction of emotion in rural Chinese social life", was an important starting point for the anthropological study of Chinese emotion,

although it may have given a very mistaken idea about it. In this widely cited and questioned article, Potter asserts that in the social life of rural China "the emotions are concomitant phenomena, not fundamental ones", "emotions are logically secondary" and "emotional experience has no formal social consequences (it may, of course, have informal ones)" (Potter, 1988: 186-187). Potter further argues that emotion has little or no significance in Chinese social life because "the Chinese assume the existence of a continuous social order that requires no affirmation in inner emotional response, but only in behaviour, there is no need for them to treat emotions as inherently important" (Potter, 1988: 185).

In Kipnis' (1997) subsequent critique, it is argued that Potter almost entirely misses the significance of emotion in Chinese social life due to the "nonrepresentational" nature of Chinese emotions, namely "the concern is more with *guanxi* propriety [i.e. with the propriety of social relations] than with accurate emotional representation" (Kipnis, 1997: 105-109). In other words, the sincerity of Chinese emotions may not be of such central concern to the Chinese as it is for their Western counterparts. This does not, however, validate Potter's claim that "in China, the culture does not recognise itself as utilising the emotional life of individuals in the service of the social order" (Potter, 1988: 181). Kipnis says, "I would not reduce all emotional activity in Fengjia [his research community] to the single dimension of *guanxi* [social relations] production, but I believe that in many contexts the embodiment of emotion is interpreted in precisely this fashion" (Kipnis, 1997: 28). For Kipnis, "to convey *ganqing* (emotions), it must have a

discernible form. Gift giving, toasting, and serving food at banquets, and ritualised decorum like bow and *ketou* (kowtow) are all methods of materialising *ganqing* through its direct embodiment in specific human emotions" (Kipnis, 1997: 27). It is also noted that the embodiment of *ganqing* (emotions) was important to both ritual and everyday practices of *guanxi* production (Kipnis, 1997: 27). *Ganqing*, in Kipnis' view, is manipulated in ritualised occasions and "in Fengjia too, the ethical dynamics of this manipulation were more about relationships than about emotional sincerity" (Kipnis, 1997: 104).

Kipnis's account of Chinese "nonrepresentational ethics" has been convincingly challenged by Yan (2003) in his study of love, intimacy and family change in Xiajia village. In Yan's opinion, Kipnis (like Potter) falls into the trap of a contrasting supposedly sociocentric non-Western societies with an individual-centred West (Yan, 2003: 82). Based on ethnographic evidence from Xiajia village, in North-east China, Yan argues that "in the first place, it is highly questionable that Chinese villagers are incapable of expressing their emotions, including the most intimate and romantic affection" (Yan, 2003: 82). As he vividly demonstrates, even without uttering the phrase "I love you", villagers in Xiajia "successfully convey their affections to their loved ones in obvious, easily understood ways" (Yan, 2003: 82). The reason that both Potter and Kipnis missed these expressions of "real" emotions, according to Yan, is that "Potter and Kipnis defined the expression of emotions too narrowly and assumed emotions should be expressed vocally and directly" (Yan, 2003: 80). In other words, for Kipnis, the

indirectness of Chinese emotions partially leads to his conclusion that emotion is non-representational in this context. According to Yan, this conclusion is precisely due to the biased view that "Chinese villagers are not interested in the emotional aspects of interpersonal relations" (Yan, 2003: 80) which has led to the study of emotion in China being largely restrained and marginalised for a very long time. In my view, both Potter and Kipnis misunderstand, in varying degree, the social nature and the primary concern of Chinese emotions, consequently establishing a misleading connection between emotion and social life. For Potter the connection is secondary and insignificant while for Kipnis emotions do not represent their emotional meanings but rather their relational ones. However it should be mentioned that apparent discrepancies in Chinese emotional expressions and their social meanings continue to puzzle scholars working on the subject. For instance, at a wedding celebration, Liu (2000) observed a shockingly violent scene which took place as part of the supposedly happy celebration which led him to categorise the emotional reactions involved in these ceremonials as "pliable", by which he meant the following:

> First, on given social occasions individuals may display emotions that do not correspond to any collectively required mode of feeling; and second, individuals may show very different emotional reactions to those social occasions. To an outsider, individuals appear to react not with spontaneous emotions but with a performance, always with an eye toward its effects on the audience.
>
> (Liu, 2000: 156)

To clarify why violent actions were presented as part of wedding celebrations, Liu notes that "for the rural residents in northern Shaanxi, violence can be used to communicate both positive and negative feelings" (Liu, 2000: 149). In particular

contexts, "the messages conveyed by this means are dependent on situations rather than determined by a certain mode of emotion or a certain type of behaviour" (Liu, 2000: 149). The ambiguous channels for expressing certain emotions can also change over time. As Liu describes in his ethnography, when local people look back, even "fights in the past are not remembered as expressions of anger or hatred. Instead, they are often equated with having fun" (Liu, 2000: 150). As he argues, the point, therefore, is not "that the fights in the past occurred simply for entertainment, but that in the present violence is not viewed simply in terms of negative feelings" (Liu, 2000: 150). The pliable nature of Chinese emotion can only add to the complexity of approaching its social meaning and relational significance. Envy is a kind of emotion. Envy is also the kind of emotion that has only rarely ever been studied within the Anthropology of China. In order to provide the essential background information it is therefore useful to explore the basic assumptions that have underlined the anthropological understandings of emotions in China.

Firstly, it is crucial to clarify the Chinese words that have been used in discussing emotions in China as well as to look at their implications. Basically, *qing* provides the most straightforward parallel to the English words "emotion", "sentiments" and "feelings". When combined with *ren* (human), *qing* becomes *renqing* (human feelings) and when combined with *gan* (to feel) it becomes *ganqing* (felt emotions). Up to now both *ganqing* and *renqing* have been the core concepts for analysing Chinese emotions and there is no doubt that *renqing* is a very important element in Chinese social life. As Yan puts it, "the fundamental

principle of interaction and communication at the individual level is encapsulated in *renqing* ethics, which should be understood primarily as a set of moral norms that guide and regulate one's behaviour" (Yan, 2003: 39). In a way, *renqing* refers more to the ethical aspects of emotions, those aspects that provide guidance for the proper conduct of interpersonal relationships, than anything else. As Mayfair Yang also points out, "*renqing* is part of the intrinsic character of human nature. Human nature here is understood not as individual, but in terms of social relationships and interaction" (Yang, 1994: 67); that is, "*renqing* questions whether a person is morally worthy of being called human, where to behave according to *renqing* is to be a virtuous human" (Yang, 1994: 67). Moreover, Yang further specifies that "*renqing* is also the proper way of conducting oneself in social relationships" and that it "refers to the bond of reciprocity and mutual aid between two people, based on emotional attachment or the sense of obligation and indebtedness" (Yang, 1994: 67).

Ganqing is normally considered in relation to *renqing* ethics in these anthropological studies as it is often argued that although *ganqing* can be a crucial part of *renqing* ethics, it is not a prerequisite for them. Kipnis (1997) even goes as far to say that *renqing* is the materialisation of *ganqing*. The lack of *ganqing* and the materialisation of social relationships might be condemned by Yang's informants though she does further explicate that "it is true that a large part of *ganqing* involves interpersonal relationship and expression of it needs to make it right, but real affection may not be presented" (Yang, 1994: 122-123). As she

further explains, "not all personal relationships are imbued with *ganqing* (emotions). *Renqing*, the observance of proper social form, involves lesser degrees of affection. Whereas emotional sentiments are central to the notion of *ganqing*, the discourse of *renqing* articulates the moral and decorous character of social conduct" (Yang, 1994: 122-123). As we can see, then, most of the previous studies have made emotion (*ganqing*) secondary to relationship (*renqing*) production. What I want to show in this study, though, is how the concept of relationship (*renqing*) revolves around that of emotion (*ganqing*). While Yang and others claim that emotional sentiments might not be central to moral social conduct, Yan points out how important it is to care for other people's feelings and emotions in social conduct:

> *Renqing* is also the socially accepted pattern of emotional responses in the sense that one takes others' emotional responses into consideration. Ones failure to fulfil the obligation of reciprocity, or to show no consideration for others' feelings and emotional responses, is regarded as an immoral act and thus a violation of *renqing* ethics. Furthermore, *renqing* serves as an important standard by which villagers judge whether one is a proper social person.
>
> (Yan, 2003: 39)

In other words, what is important in proper social conduct is not the presence of ones own affection or real emotions but the fact of taking into consideration other people's emotions and behaving accordingly. Essentially, then, both ones own emotions and the emotions of others need to be taken care of in proper social conduct, this representing a reciprocal system that I call "inclusive emotion". This will inevitably involve multiple concerns: displaying ones emotion, reading other people's emotional responses and adopting the proper social conduct to be followed.

I will argue that all these are central elements for understanding Chinese emotions, envy included. Furthermore, the display and reading of emotions is based on a shared understanding of the social production of certain emotions, even though this does not mean that this is always unchanged.

Only two anthropological studies up to now have paid distinctive attention to Chinese emotions: Kleinman's (1986) study on depression and Yan's (2003) study on love.

In his study of the social origin of distress and disease in the China of the 1980s, Kleinman looked at three interrelated clinically identified diseases: "neurasthenia (one of the most common medical and lay diagnoses in China), depression (one of the most prevalent diagnoses of mental illness worldwide but not widely diagnosed in China), and somatization (the expression of personal and social distress in a language of bodily complaints and through a pathway of medical help-seeking)" (Kleinman, 1986: x). By probing the narratives of the patients in order to reach a deeper understanding of the cultural construction of depressive illness and the social sources of depressive disease Kleinman's book illustrates how Chinese patients have embodied severe political, financial and social (work and family) distress in the form of clinically recognised symptoms. Interestingly, the Cultural Revolution was typically the most disastrous event in individual experiences (Kleinman, 1986: 167).

As Kleinman further specifies, "the legacy of the Cultural Revolution was not only to disrupt lives and place each individual in the society under stress. [I]t also

created a delegitimation crisis unprecedented since the fall of the Qing, affecting the central values of the socialist state" (Kleinman, 1986: 123). Depression, communicated as a symptom but experienced as an emotion, is the kind of emotion that "poses a threat to social arrangements and symbolic meanings" (Kleinman, 1986: 178). As Kleinman argues, it was the social turmoil during and after the Cultural Revolution and the lack of the acknowledgement of and lack of a remedy for such a social problem that led to the high prevalence of neurasthenia. Despite the subtle analysis of the cultural construction and the social sources of depression, what I find truly constructive here is the methodological implications of Kleinman's approach for how to deal with local contexts, psychobiology, cultural variation and social process.

> The gravamen of this book is that it is these local contexts which mediate the effects of social structural forces on the psychobiology of the person, and that it is also within these contexts that cultural norms and personal orientations are negotiated in the experience of misfortune and disorder. For this reason, what is pan-human in depression and neurasthenia is the resultant not only of a shared psychobiology, but equally importantly of a shared social process which, despite great cultural variation in the particular meanings of events and relations, constitutes and expresses a limited number of ways of being human (expressing loss, threat, anger, and alienation).
>
> (Kleinman, 1986: 192)

This means that cultural variation and local contexts are played out in a shared social process when constructing emotion. Meanwhile, cultural norms and personal orientations are negotiated and mediated by the socio-structural forces, which all have effects on the psychobiology of the person. It is all these effects, centred on envy, that constitute the major focus of my study.

For Yan, "the increasing importance of emotionality and sentimentality in

family life is one of the central themes of my book" (Yan, 2003: 223). He tries to show how the rise of the "private" family could also, in fact, be regarded as "the transformation of the family from a disciplined corporate group to an emotional, and often sentimental, refuge for individuals" (Yan, 2003: 223). This has happened because, on the one hand, the subjective world of villagers has been enriched as young people consider the ability to express their inner feelings and affections to be an important quality in an ideal spouse and, on the other hand, "romantic love, intimacy, and conjugality have become irreplaceable in the villagers' moral experiences" (Yan, 2003: 223).

According to Yan, the increasing importance of emotionality and sentimentality in family life is the result of the development of individual subjectivity; the social space necessary for such a change has ironically been enabled by the socialist state (Yan, 2003: 223). This is ironic because it was unintended. By "directly initiating the transformation of private life during the collective period and indirectly facilitating the continuation of that transformation in the post-collective era" (Yan, 2003: 232), it is the state that has transformed the family by changing the local moral world where individual villagers live their lives, this, in a way, enabling the expression of emotion and desire or at least the expression and pursuit of such emotion and desire. This is deemed by some, if not all, to be morally justifiable (Yan, 2003: 232). The rise of individual subjectivity or, rather, the rise of a form of unbalanced and incomplete individuality has not only enabled the expression of love and intimacy among young couples but also "the

discussion of intergenerational tensions, contestations, and conflicts [that] are equally related to emotions, albeit less joyful ones, such as anger, jealousy, grief, and despair" (Yan, 2003: 223-226).

In Kleinman's study the Cultural Revolution, among various other things, is identified as significant in the somatisation of depression while for Yan the combined result of the "socialist engineering of the local moral world" is the rise of the individual and their distinctive expression and manipulation of their emotionality. Putting the two studies together, it can be seen that it is the shifting boundaries of *expressing* emotions and the social causes and effects of such a change that are particularly interesting and significant in understanding emotionality in China and the social world of the locals. Yan's argument concerning the rise of individualism suggests that this has made the role of individual emotions more central although the stress on the reciprocity of attending to others' emotions has been in conflict with sudden social change as my research will show later on.

Three villages

Lanying and Xitai were my main field sites, where I lived for ten months from October 2006 to September 2007 and which I visited again in the summer of 2008. Lanying and Xitai were combined as one administrative village[15] but, due to the different development trajectories of the two villages, I have set the two apart presenting them as two separate places. Wang village was a model village in the same county as Lanying and Xitai known for its economic affluence and enviably high indicators of well-being – I stayed there for a month for comparative

[15] That means only one elected village committee for one administrative village.

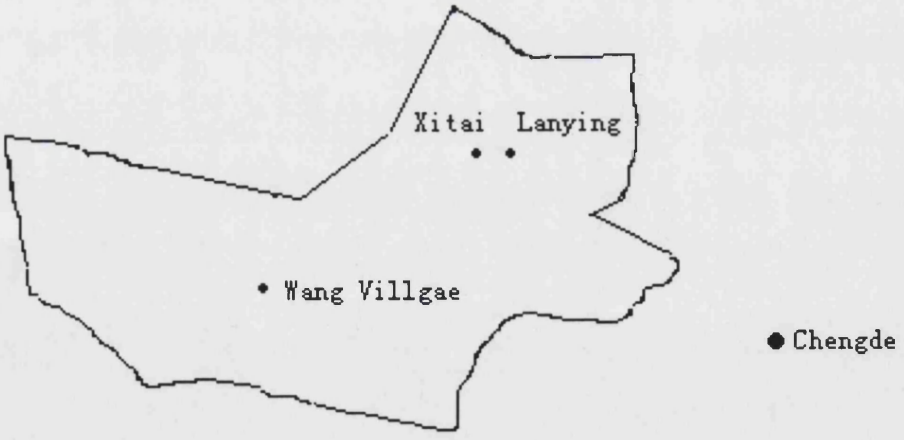
purposes. Wang village had been named "No.1 village" in the prefecture and the village had up to 0.16 billion RMB in collective assets and a revenue of forty million RMB per year. Lanying and Xitai only had revenues of several thousand Yuan a year or even less. The geographic location of the three villages is shown in Map 1 where it can be seen that Chengde city is the closest city to the three villages. All three villages are closely associated with and deeply influenced by the mining business in one way or another as described below.

Overall, there were about 647 households and 2,330 residents registered in Lanying and 130 households and 440 residents in Xitai. The two villages were separated by a main road, each village occupying one side of this. It should also be noted that the area to the north of the main road was dotted with other villages and 20 or so mining sites. While Lanying was situated on generally flat land, Xitai was in a valley encircled by mountains. In general, roughly 70% of males aged from 18 to 40 in Lanying had jobs in mining companies with monthly wages ranging from 1.5 thousand RMB to 3 thousand RMB.[16] The rest had failed to secure a job in mining due to lack of a connection, being physically weak or having other options like running a grocery shop or owning a truck to transport iron ore. Most of the people who used to migrate to the big cities as temporary workers had by this time returned to their village since they could now live at home (saving on rent and food) and be with their families while earning a roughly similar amount. There were around five to eight households rumoured to be particularly wealthy (that is,

[16] This might have been even higher including more skilled work such as that involving operating more complex machinery.

millionaires)[17] and these were among the newly wealthy households most of which were strongly associated with the mining business.

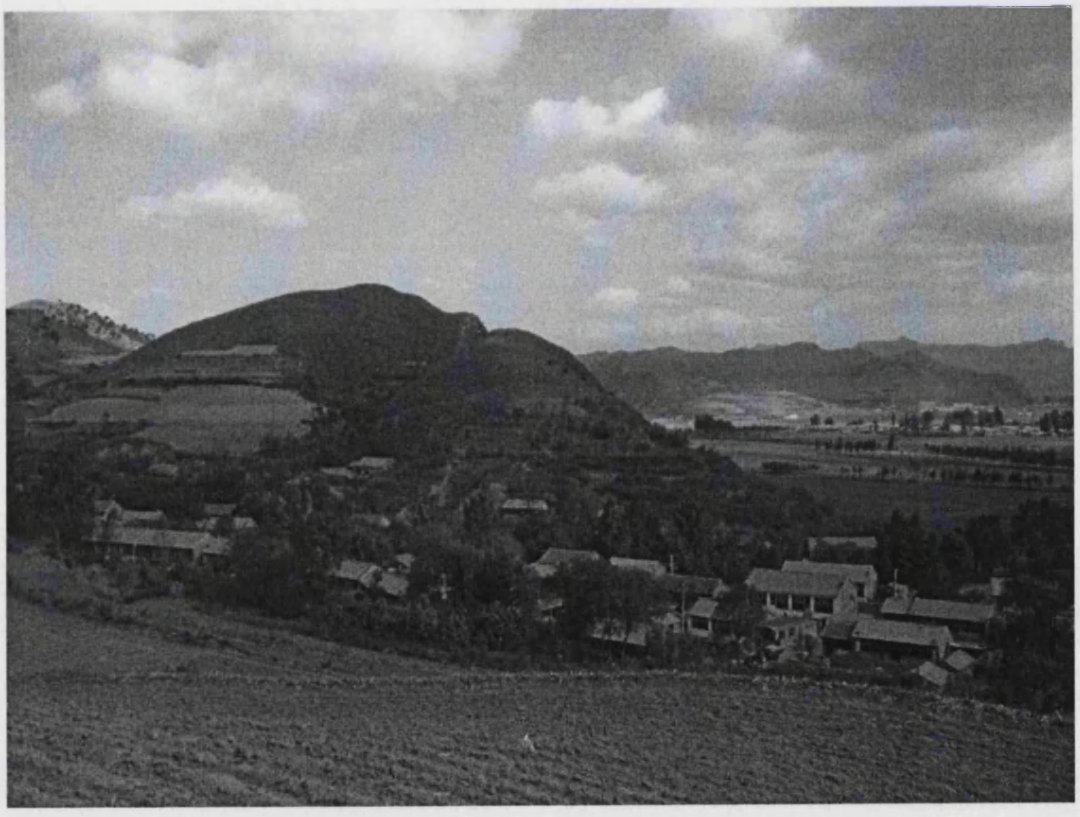
Materially, Xitai was not as well off as Lanying. It was located in a valley where agricultural land was distributed patchily and was somewhat barren. People were also far away from the market, restaurants and hospitals. Residents in Xitai had to walk about 4.5 km to the weekly market which was set up in the middle of Lanying village. Fewer people in Xitai had regular jobs in the mines because they were not as well-connected as the people in Lanying. They were, however, waiting in anticipation of a promising opportunity to be offered by a renowned mining company, Sky.



Map1: The three villages

[17] Even though they could not say for sure how wealthy they were or even though they maybe only had tens of thousands Yuan, the people in question would certainly never admit their wealth.

Picture 1.1 Lanying



Picture 1.2 Xitai

Picture 1.3 Tailing storage in Xitai

Picture 1.4 Lanying's Paddy field

Sky's original plan was to rent a valley in Xitai to store tailings.[18] However, the villagers of Xitai had rejected that plan because if they had accepted it they would only have been able to benefit from the one-off leasing payment. Furthermore, they had also been concerned about potential pollution. As a result of this initial rejection, Sky decided to set up a production mill in addition to renting a part of the valley to store tailings. This was seen as a more sustainable option by the villagers given that it would allow them to look for opportunities to work in the production mill or to buy carriage trucks to transport iron ore. Initially, the contract for renting the valley (about 5 km long) was settled at the price of 160 thousand RMB without informing the villagers. The villagers were infuriated when they found out, however, since 160 thousand divided by 440 meant each person only getting a couple of hundred RMB when they believed they could obtain much more. It was widely held that they had been deceived by the head of the village on this matter and the proposed agreement was therefore turned down. After this Sky was compelled to negotiate individual contracts with each household for any piece of land that needed to be requisitioned.[19] The price of requisition varied to an enormous extent, the cost ranging from 1.2 million Yuan to a couple of thousand Yuan, but invariably favoured the wealthy making the poor poorer and the rich richer (*qiongdeqiong, fudefu*). When I visited again in the summer of 2008 production mills had already been set up in Xitai and were operating on trial although some of the leases had

[18] As non-stop production continued long-term, more and more tailings (the remaining unused minerals/rocks etc. after iron extraction) needed to be stored. Mining companies would generally purchase tailing storage years ahead of production.

[19] Land is still in collective ownership but it has been divided into pieces and rented to individuals on a 30-year lease. For more details see Chapter 2.

still not been signed by a few villagers.

The exceptional status that Wang village had achieved was also due to the mining business. In contrast with Lanying and Xitai, where villagers mainly either worked for or possibly negotiated leasing contracts with external companies such as Sky, a company based in Inner Mongolia, the largest mining business in Wang village was actually owned by the village committee. Substantial profits therefore went to the collective,[20] not to outsiders. After successfully becoming the biggest shareholder of the former stated-owned mining mill in Wang village in 2006, the collective assets of the enterprise reached 0.16 billion RMB with a yearly tax revenue of at least forty million RMB. In Wang village, 400 households out of a total of 480 ran their own businesses while thirty had private cars.[21] Besides collective enterprises, seventeen enterprises were owned by individual villagers, ten of these being on a large scale, with a gross product value amounting to 0.1 billion RMB in total. The vast majority of the enterprises (but not all) were associated with mining.[22]

Envy as scenarios

I was introduced to Lanying through my father's connections.[23] He used to be a party secretary for the county in the late 1990s. When I decided to conduct

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[20] Even the allocation of such profits was questioned to some extent.

[21] The number of those with transport vehicles is not included here. Here I am referring to four-seater cars.

[22] The village committee used to run other business as well, such as a brick factory, a sugar refinery and a fireworks factory. However, they were not as profitable as the main business and have all now been closed down.

[23] I was introduced to Xitai by the village head of Lanying village after living in Lanying for a few months.

research on windfall wealth[24] in the region, my father arranged a few trips for me to help me select a suitable field site. Lanying attracted me immediately because it was where the offices for Lanying[25] township were situated. The township had more than twenty iron ore processing companies and Lanying village seemed to be right in the centre of all the goings on. People went there for negotiations, to make deals and to settle disputes and government officials, businessmen and petitioners were constantly coming in and out. The residents of Lanying and Xitai were in the process of witnessing the growth of wealth in the local economy[26] but were not sharing in the benefits in the same way as the neighbouring villages where large iron ore deposits were situated (Lanying and Xitai had much smaller iron ore deposits).[27] Witnessing windfall wealth but being deprived of it provided just the circumstances that might provoke envy. When the party secretary of the township described how their tax revenue had risen to 0.2 billion[28] RMB in 2006 (compared to only tens of millions RMB the year before) and how the abundant deposits had surprised everyone, I just could not help suggesting to my father that this was the place for my research. My father then let it be known that it was my intention to stay for half a year to a year to understand rural development in the area. I found

[24] The windfall wealth was only just noticeable when I started my fieldwork; now the tax revenue of the county has doubled or even tripled, however.

[25] Lanying village shares its name with the township. In the thesis, unless otherwise indicated, Lanying by itself indicates Lanying village.

[26] As described above, it was the mining companies who gained the biggest share of the profits. If the village had iron ore deposits or a valley to rent out for tailings, however, as in Xitai's case, considerable wealth could still be accumulated.

[27] Xitai has more iron ore deposits in the valleys under the barren land but these still seem minimal compared to the large deposits found in other villages of the Lanying Township.

[28] It accounted for one third of the county's tax revenue, there being 22 townships in the county.

that I could not simply introduce my research as being on envy or "red-eye" as it was hard to explain why I was not studying something grand and important like the local economic achievements. Envy just seemed too negative and insignificant a topic for government officials and villagers alike to take seriously. As could have been expected, the party secretary of the township was not sure why I intended to stay there for that long. Nonetheless, he called in the village head who quickly found me my first hostess. I moved in the following week.

The detection of envy in the discourse and practice of local people was, however, far more convoluted and difficult than finding a promising field site. There were lots of days when I could not find anyone to talk to about envy. Neither did people seem particularly keen to discuss this subject with each other. Nor, for that matter, could I identify any obvious signs of envy around me, be this in the form of gossip, arguments, real fights or minor offences. For quite some time, I was almost completely baffled by this state of affairs. It felt inappropriate and awkward to bring up the topic when people did not want to talk about it. As a Chinese person I was expected to respect this unwillingness. If I did not I feared that I could easily destroy the newly built relationships I was building up with people. Among other things, I felt it would be awkward if I raised the question of envy and if people then expressed their envy towards me – seeing I was better educated, came from a city (which implied better material conditions) and had even studied and lived abroad.[29] Then one day I walked into a noodle shop for no particular reason and

[29] I tried to play down my (or rather my father's) connections with the township officials as much as I could.

met a surprisingly incisive and candid lady who explained everything to me. She told me about the differences between *xianmu* (non-malicious envy) and red-eye (malicious envy), about how people would see me (in my role as a PhD student), under what circumstances they would envy others, under what circumstances envy would be out of the question, how she could detect envy, where to pay attention when looking for it, and so on. It was not until then that all my previous observations of weddings, informal gatherings, lunches, dinners, family visits and everyday conversations started to make sense. On the one hand, as a novice in rural life, I was not able to master the subtlety of their language use, their sense of propriety and their moral behaviours. On the other hand, I was unconsciously participating in the concealment of envy. It was not until I made my own concealment explicit and constructive that I could justify and begin to understand all that I had observed and recorded in relation to rural social life.

Emotional intersubjectivity has proven to be productive and fruitful in many ethnographies. As Lau's exploration of diasporic Tibetans' emotional experience and conceptualisation of shame shows, the entry point was gained by means of a key episode in his own emotional experience when he interfered in a violent fight, which caused him to feel shame. This experience, however, as Lau recognised later, "led to valuable insights into the role of emotions in local social hierarchies", sensitising him "to the importance of hierarchical boundaries and the gaze of others" in his informants' lives (Lau, 2008: 152). In my case, it was my cultural proximity (or at least the expectation of proximity to my informants) that made

envy unutterable for me in the beginning. This was not the most important reason for this unfortunate period of "idle" fieldwork in the first few months, though. It was not until talking to the noodle shop lady that the bits and pieces I had observed came together and it was not until then that I realised that if language, behaviour, social gatherings and narratives could not be put together into an envy-scenario, then they would just remain bits and pieces. It therefore became clear that the conditions, beliefs, behaviours, events and particular reactions to events that had made or had not made mundane happenings envy scenarios should represent the major sphere of my enquiry. As Lyon points out, "social relations tend to be acknowledged in terms of how they are part of an ethnographic context, the cultural circumstances that give emotions their expressive forms and their meaning, rather than as foundational in the genesis of emotion" (Lyon, 1995: 257). Moreover, "an important implication of a truly social-relational perspective on emotion is to see not only how emotion has social consequences, but how social relations themselves may generate emotion" (Lyon, 1995: 258). This being the case, my research sets out to discern the social conditions, beliefs, behaviours and events which are key to gluing together or dissipating envy scenarios.

The chapters

Chapter 1 starts with the public discourse on envy after 1978; more specifically, I provide a review of the discussion of red-eye disease (*hongyan bing*) and wealth-hatred mentality (*choufu xintai*) found in the highly influential newspapers People's Daily and Economic Daily from the early 1980s to the present. Whether

increased inequality leads to more envy has been the central concern for many theorists. This chapter follows on logically from this concern and examines the debatable correlation between rising economic inequality in post-reform China and the occurrence of envy. The chief question featured in this chapter concerns how the socialist state has tackled rising inequality by, in part, condemning red-eye disease and wealth-hatred in state-manipulated newspapers and how, in so doing, inequality has been successfully introduced and envy dismissed. The reason for beginning the discussion by looking at public discourses is not only to show how the problem of envy has caught the public's attention but also to demonstrate how the widely influential public discussion has in many ways impacted on discourses of envy at the local level. Chapter 2 moves onto the local definition of red-eye and its association with mining disputes in Xitai. It discusses how villagers distinguish *xianmu* (non-malicious envy, in my terms) and *jidu* (malicious envy, in my terms) and how they draw the boundaries between red-eye actions and other, perhaps more justifiable, actions. These boundaries have been contested and negotiated under different contexts and the attribution of malicious envy has therefore sometimes been applied and sometimes rejected. Chapter 3 is about everyday encounters with envy in Lanying. It includes key scenarios of envy that were experienced by my informants, more specifically those related to money, wealth and "culture". In this chapter, I further distinguish malicious envy from admiring envy and investigate the possible factors transforming non-malicious envy into malicious envy, which also leads to a discussion about ambivalent tendencies

relating to displaying and concealing ones wealth.

Chapter 4 further examines the dilemma arising because of the need/desire to display wealth and the importance of avoiding envy in the context of changing moral practices in China today. This chapter explains how it was largely deemed to be a sin to be envied in Chinese classical writings. The tactics my informants use to avoid committing such a sin, and in particular the role of having good *renyuan* (in brief, having good social relationships) in averting red-eye, are explained in this chapter. It is argued that if you have good *renyuan* malicious envy should in theory not be provoked in others. However, good *renyuan* can only function in this way when the envious have high-quality (*gao suzhi*) characteristics to begin with (that is, when they are understanding and "civilised"); otherwise, malicious actions may still follow. By examining the extent to which the sin of envy can be successfully removed, this chapter reveals the hidden moral dilemma arising from the conflict between the socialist ideal and pressing social realities. Chapter 5 is about cultural strategies used to placate the envier. The belief in auspiciousness, luck and fate seems to be crucial in fending off envy, justifying the windfall wealth other people have achieved and, most importantly, consoling those who have been less fortunate. On the one hand, by strategically attributing sudden wealth to ones auspiciousness, luck and fate, any actions motivated by envy can be construed as unjustifiable. On the other hand, the belief in auspiciousness, luck and fate can also console ones sense of failure and inferiority through feelings of envy. As I show in this chapter, by means of elaborating on the complexities and ambiguities of these beliefs, they

have significantly restricted the space in which envy and associated malicious actions can operate. Chapter 6 investigates the significance of the parent-child relationship for an understanding of envy in China today. Upward mobility is a central concern for both parents' and children's separate ventures. Hierarchical stops – i.e. the feeling that what one aspires to is unattainable – also represent one kind of feeling deprived that might arouse envy. As discussed by Vanessa Fong and others, the exceptional hopes one has for ones children in Chinese families complements the parents' own unfulfilled endeavours. In the conclusion, I review the most elaborated anthropological theory of envy, the one put forward by Foster (1972), and summarise how the case of China has revised our understanding of the condition of envy and how this new vision offers important alternatives for analysing envy in fast-changing societies.

Chapter 1: The public discourse on envy after 1978

> First in the countryside, then in cities, some people started becoming rich. This should have been a good thing. But some people caught the "red-eye" disease (*hongyan bing*) and "were happy when other people became impoverished while grudging others their being wealthy (*xirenqiong, yuanrenfu*)". When other people became wealthy, envy came into being and libellous talk was uttered (*xinshengdu, koushengbang*). There were also others who saw money accumulate in other people's pockets and who then earnestly began craving for equal wealth for themselves.
>
> *People's Daily*, 1984[30]

> Remarks on wealth-hatred[31] (*choufu xintai*) can often be seen in the newspapers. The hint seems to be obvious, i.e. our people have been accustomed to being poor and now that they see other people getting rich, their minds become twisted and their hearts hateful. This is supported by facts like millionaires being kidnapped, luxury cars being scratched. The criminals are subsequently referred to as "some or another poor person". I think we should be cautious about using the term "wealth-hatred", though. It may give out the wrong impression.
>
> *People's Daily*, 2005[32]

Envy, according to Van Sommers, is the pain felt at the good fortune of others (Van Sommers, 1988: 1). In other words, the pain is preconditioned by the relative position of inequality made evident by the comparison between the subject and the object of envy. This has led many theorists to regard envy as "the desire to eliminate inequality" and to therefore make subsequent claims regarding the envy-inequality relationship, such as the claims that "the basis for envy is a concern for equality" and "reducing inequality will reduce envy", as Ben Ze'ev has succinctly

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[30] Unless otherwise indicated, all the translations from Chinese into English are mine.
Fei, Zhi. 1984. "*Hongyan and yanhong*" ("Red-eye and eye-red"). *People's Daily*, 13 September

[31] It is also argued that this originated from malicious envy too. A more detailed discussion will follow.

[32] Lei, Shuyan. 2005. "*Manshuo 'choufu'* (Be careful when labelling it wealth-hatred)", *People's Daily*, 15 November: Supplement.

summarised (Ben Ze'ev, 1992: 551). Envy is also the subject's feeling of inferiority as experienced with regard to other people's good fortune. Unequal power relations may also, therefore, give rise to envy or intensify the envious feeling as "the feeling of envy is both a manifestation of this lack of power and a compensation for the lack of power suffered" (Schutte, 1983: 227).

It appears that envy is inevitably related to egalitarian concerns. As de Tocqueville and Douglas comment, envy can be seen as a motivation for acquiring goods and for economic development more generally; strategies and policies to address envy can, thus, positively lead to the better achievement of democracy (Douglas and Isherwood, 1996: 6-20; Llobera, 2003: 67). In other words, these authors, on grounds other than those to do with envy, advocate a reduction of inequality and the realisation of equality of opportunity. They are not arguing for equality of opportunity because of envy, rather they see envy as a motivation for change that brings about a reduction of inequality. Ben Ze'ev argues, on the other hand, that both the claim that "the basis for envy is a concern for equality" and the claim that "reducing inequality will reduce envy" are erroneous, suggesting instead that "the claim that egalitarianism is a central concern in envy should be rejected". He, moreover, argues "that reduced inequality does not lead to less envy - on the contrary, in most cases it raises the intensity of envy" (Ben Ze'ev, 1992: 551-552).

The strong disagreement over the correlation between envy and inequality mainly centres on three different approaches to the formulation of envy, namely: 1) that envy is concerned with the subject's inferiority; 2) that envy is concerned with

the object's undeserved good fortune; 3) that envy is concerned with the subject's undeserved inferiority (Ben Ze'ev, 1992: 551-581). In Ben Ze'ev's review, the interpretations of Smith, Rawls and others seem to be compatible with the first approach, that is, envy is not a moral concern for egalitarianism because envy is mainly induced by the subject's unfulfilled desire with respect to other people's fortune (Ben Ze'ev, 1992: 552). In de Tocqueville and Douglas's view, envy is more about the second kind of concern. Because of this taxation and other means of equalising societies were adopted to even out people's undeserved good fortune. Ben Ze'ev himself shifts the focus back to the subjective aspect of envy again (the third approach) suggesting that it should be the subject's inferiority that matters the most and that reducing inequality can only make inferiority less deserved and envy more intensified because, in conditions where equality of opportunity has been achieved, the inequality that remains is attributable to incompetence or incapacity and the feeling that this is undeserved is even more frustrating and inflammatory.

Different social settings have also been taken into consideration in the envy-inequality debate. Simply put, in a society where equality is commonly achieved and generally expected, envy seems to play a bigger role in the maintenance of rules of egalitarianism. As Woodburn's study of hunter-and-gatherer societies, and in particular the Hadza people, indicates, "inequality of wealth, power and prestige are a potential source of envy and resentment and can be dangerous for holders where means of effective protection

are lacking" (Woodburn, 1982: 436). In other words, when inequality is a potential source of envy, the malicious envy-motivated action can be dangerous and, furthermore, the corresponding punishment for this kind of action[33] is lacking; equality will, then, in effect be enforced. However, in a society that has a longstanding and structured hierarchy, envy can, in a way, serve as a means of strengthening existing inequality. As a study on envy among Hadhrami immigrants in Kuwait shows, in the cases where hierarchy among the Hadhrami and their hosts is widely accepted, instead of being an egalitarian tool of justice, Hadhrami envy is an individual mechanism for pulling down and pushing aside others with the same social status.[34] While most theorists regard the social settings as rather static, either being equal or unequal, Ben Ze'ev actually tries to examine whether reducing inequality would lead to less envy and comes to the conclusion that the answer to this question is no (Ben Ze'ev, 1992: 551). The case of China is the converse situation to that found in Ben Ze'ev's discussion, however. It provides a case involving sudden change and therefore offers an opportunity to investigate whether increased inequality has led to more envy. Dwelling on circumstances of inequality when envy is deemed unwarranted and therefore should not occur, the public discourse in China has produced their own theories about increased inequality and

[33] As Woodburn noted, with lethal weapons available to all men, the possibility of using them for the purposes of undetected murder, the likelihood that even if detected no action will be taken, the knowledge that such weapons have indeed been used for murder in the past, the dangers of conflict (in relation more generally to wealth, to power or to prestige) are well understood. Woodburn, James. 1982. "Egalitarian Societies" in *Man, New Serials*, Vol. 17, No.3, pp 436.

[34] Alajmi, Abdullah. 2006. "An image of a limited space: Envy among Hadhrami immigrants in Kuwait". Friday Seminar, Department of Anthropology, LSE.

envy.

The public discourse on envy in China is clearly visible in the discussion of "red-eye disease" and "wealth-hatred mentality" as the two excerpts given at the beginning of this chapter show. Relevant pieces that have mentioned "red-eye disease" or "wealth-hatred mentality" were first published in the 1980s and the early 2000s, respectively. Both terms were analysed as mental states and manifest actions that originated out of malicious envy (*jidu*). Take the *People's Daily* (*renmin ribao*) — the organ of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CCP), the daily newspaper that provides direct information on the policies and viewpoints of the Party — for example: red-eye discussion first appeared in 1980 while fifteen more red-eye related articles were published between then and 1989. In contrast, only three articles including the key word "red-eye" were published between 1990 and 2000 and none after 2000. As for "wealth-hatred", there were five articles published between 2003 and 2005. In the *Economic Daily* (*jingji ribao*) — the top economics and business newspaper in China — seven articles on "red-eye" were published between 1980 and 1989 and four from 1990 to 2000. It can be seen that the frequency with which red-eye or red-eye disease was mentioned was significantly greater in the 1980s than afterwards and that there has also been a significant spate of "wealth-hatred" discussion from 2000 onwards.

It should be noted that all discussions of envy, either from sociological, psychological or philosophical perspectives (as presented above), attribute some sort of feeling as being the core part of envy. My thesis, on the other hand, is not

concerned with identifying the feeling in itself but rather in attributions of such a feeling of pain in different kinds of discussion and the subjects who make these attributions, to themselves or to others.[35] In the case of public discourse presented through the two major Party newspapers, the attribution of envy is decided editorially. The editorial selection of red-eye and wealth-hatred is, therefore, an indicator of the level of envy-inequality concern in post-reform China and of the ways in which this concern was dealt with by Party newspapers.

The early 1980s was the time right after the economic reforms were initiated in 1978 during which China transformed itself from a planned economy to a socialist market economy and from an egalitarian society to a society that "let some people get rich first".[36] By the year 2000, the reforms had been underway for more than 20 years and a stunning amount of wealth had been created and accumulated by a small minority of people. Both economic and social inequality had by then become one of the major concerns of the Chinese government. As stated by Ash, "economic and social polarisation associated with China's growth-maximisation strategy has become the single most important domestic issue facing the Chinese government" (Ash, 2006: 177). It can be seen that in post-reform China the emerging public discourse on envy has in certain ways been in correspondence with the quickly increasing inequality. Keeping in mind both the "subject's inferiority" and "the object's undeserved good fortune" as the central concerns generating envy, I will examine envy-related scenarios, narratives and legal cases published in the two

[35] I thank Professor S.Feuchtwang for this point.

[36] From Deng Xiaoping Quotes.

major Communist Party newspapers, the *People's Daily* and the *Economic Daily*, and examine the implied and explicitly highlighted relations between envy-related scenarios, narratives, legal cases and the emerging economic and social inequality. In contrast to Ben Ze'ev, who examines the question of whether reducing inequality would lead to less envy, in this chapter I will begin to address the question whether increased inequality has led to more envy in post-reform China and how the public discourse has set out to tackle the correlation existing between inequality and envy.

Envy and *perceived* inequality

Envy, as briefly mentioned above, includes both the unfulfilled desire for other people's good fortune and the subject's inability to satisfy this desire. I believe both to be essential conditions for envy to occur and I also think that they are highly interconnected. On the one hand, the inability mentioned above can result from one's unjustified expectations, which can arguably be reduced by making social comparison less important and by people settling for less (Ben Ze'ev, 1992: 558); on the other hand, this inability can also be construed in terms of unequal power relations, in which case fluctuating equality or inequality (either in power, wealth or other possessions) will have an effect on the instigation of envy. Moreover, the subject's felt inferiority and the object's established superiority can hardly be separable. In the case of envy, the inferiority and superiority are by no means settled or taken as given; indeed, it is actually always the *perceived* inferiority and superiority that ferments envy. Similarly, it is not the actual inequality in terms of of wealth, power or prestige that instigates envy; rather, it is the *perceived* and

sometimes *imagined* inequality that makes certain differences unbearable for the envious.

The subject's inability to satisfy his desire for good fortune and the potential social conditions that might provoke envy are speculated on by many theorists. Schutte addresses the sense of powerlessness in the following way: "the sense of powerlessness might be further characterised as a sense of feeling trapped in one's immanence or limitations while at the same time perceiving the object of envy — i.e. the other person — as transcending the specific limitation with respect to which one feels frustration or shame". For Schutte, "it is not the occurrence of differences as such that contributes to the incidence of envy, but rather the feeling of being locked into a position where one cannot meet one's aspirations or expectations" (Schutte, 1983: 227). Fernández de la Mora (1987) argues his points in much the same vein. For him, economic inequality is not the primary condition for arousing envy, the primary condition being unreachability.

Unreachability can be a subjective mental state but one that is preconditioned and highly influenced by external social and cultural factors or transformations. Foster (1967a), as briefly mentioned in the introduction and alluded to through data collected from peasant societies, demonstrates the prevalence of envy in poor small communities ruled by the Image of Limited Good, that is, where "all of the desired things in life such as land, wealth, health, friendship and love, manliness and honor, respect and status, power and influence, security and safety, exist in finite quantity and are always in short supply, as far as the peasant is concerned"

(Foster, 1967b: 304). The primary corollary to the Image of Limited Good is the conclusion that if "Good" exists in limited amounts that cannot be expanded and if the system is closed it follows that an individual or a family can improve its position only at the expense of others. Hence an apparent relative improvement in someone's position with respect to any "Good" is viewed as a threat to the entire community (Foster, 1967b: 305). Although the peasant community is not completely closed to considering opportunities outside of its own limits (for example, wage labour) and although someone's access to Good need not inevitably be attributed to the deprivation of someone else, betterment of position is still likely to arouse the envy of those who consider themselves less fortunate (Foster, 1967a: 153). In this theory, it is not the inequality itself that brings out envy but the idea of being exploited (not necessarily with relation to Goods but always to opportunities) by others. Unlike Schutte, who stresses the vision of being trapped and powerlessness, Foster instead places the emphasis on exploitation by others.

Schoeck pushes this argument even further by pointing out that inequality does not in fact affect the incidence of envy because even in a supposedly "good society" or a completely "just society" people can still inevitably discover something new to envy. As he explains, even "in the utopian society in which we all would have not only the same clothes but the same facial expressions, one person would still envy the other for those imagined, innermost feelings which would enable him, beneath the egalitarian mask, to harbor his own private thoughts and emotions" (Schoeck, 1966: 11). It should be noted that envy can only happen when the object

of envy is comparable to the subject in some way; that is, "we may envy rich or famous people with whom we hardly compare and in any case do not think of competing" but this does not "contradict the contention that envy is typical of small subject-object gaps" (Ben Ze'ev, 1992: 569). Thus we tend to compare ourselves with people from similar backgrounds, people who are in closer positions in terms of status, salary or possessions and people who are relevant for self-evaluation. In this sense, perceived inequality, comparable inequality and even imagined inequality all weigh more than actual inequality in the incidence of envy.

In the case of China, I would argue, it is not only the rapid transition from an allegedly egalitarian planned-economy to de facto economic inequality that has generated various conflicts in encountering and accepting inequality; the uneven process of the economic reform has also contributed contradictory ideas as to how to acknowledge emerging inequality. The reform of the early 1980s was seen as the first stage of reform, with peasants mostly being beneficiaries at this stage. Not only were organisations of agricultural production altered, small-scale rural industry[37] also flourished during this period. As stated in *Income Disparities in Post-Reform China* (Maurice and Whiteford, 2004), the first stage boosted the rural economy, particularly through the implementation of the household responsibility system, the re-opening of rural markets and the spread of non-agricultural activities. In

[37] The scale of the industries varied from those involving less than 50 employees to those involving around 600 employees. They were run by the communes and largely devoted their efforts to the service of agricultural production. After people's communes were dissolved, these industries (known as *Xiangzhen qiye*) were taken over by parallel local government. The organization may change to private-owned or joint-stock industries during the reform process. See The American Rural Small-Scale Industry Delegation, 1977, *Rural Small-Scale Industry in the People's Republic of China.*

addition, the development of rural industry in the form of township and village enterprises (TVE) brought a new source of income: wages (Maurice and Whiteford, 2004: 98).

After 1985, when urban reform started, the whole emphasis shifted from rural to urban China and disparities between urban and rural areas widened. According to statistics for income disparity, between 1978 and 1985 the disparity decreased (Feng, 2004: 28-29). In 1978, the ratio of the annual per capita disposable income of urban residents to the annual per capita net income of rural residents was 2.57:1. During the period 1979-1985, the government increased the prices of agricultural products and reformed the agricultural system (changing it to the household contract management system). Farmers' income thus grew significantly and the gap between the incomes of rural and urban residents narrowed. The above-mentioned annual per capita income ratio decreased to 1.86:1 in 1985. The second stage of reform involves the period since 1986. The Gini coefficients of urban and rural residents were 0.16 and 0.23 in 1978, and 0.23 and 0.3 in 1989, respectively. The Gini coefficient of urban residents exceeded 0.3 in 1999 and that of rural residents exceeded 0.35 in 2000 (Feng, 2004: 28-29). The reasons for the rural-urban disparity were complex and, as Feng claims, might include the effects of resource endowments, historical heritage, economic structure, government policy and marketisation. Other factors were relevant too, these including the institutional system, the legislative system, individual differences and economic development. Nonetheless, the fact of inequality was apparent not only to scholars

but to ordinary people as well (Feng, 2004: 30).

Regional inequalities became more rather than less evident as the coastal areas continued to pull ahead of the still desperately poor central and western regions. Peasant discontent in some cases erupted into unrest, mostly in those poor agricultural regions of the country that had benefited little from the reforms. Incomes have, on average, increased steadily at around five per cent a year since 1991 but this also means that those who have failed to benefit from these increases feel poorer by comparison (Oi, 1999: 617). Ash also states that "one of the ironies of recent developments in China is that alongside massive poverty reduction and almost universal improvements in material consumption conferred by economic reform, there exists unprecedented social and economic dissatisfaction". It is argued that this has much to do with "changing perceptions of economic status: from a preoccupation with absolute well-being to concerns about relative well-being" (Ash, 2006: 179). According to findings in a study on China's progress combating poverty, although the overall level of progress has been huge, it has also been largely uneven. Inequality has generally been rising, although not continuously, and more so during some periods of time than during others (Ravallion and Chen, 2007: 1-2). It has also been remarked that the urban-rural gap and floating population have become one of the most critical themes for economists and sociologists. As Reutersward notes, the principal causes of income inequality in China were the following: low productivity in agriculture and uneven distribution of non-farm job opportunities and education (Reutersward, 2004:

118). Uneven economic development has also led to conflicting ideas about the real effects of the reform. In the following sections, using the cases of red-eye disease and wealth-hatred mentality presented in the 1980s and the 1990s, I will explicate how the changing perception of egalitarianism versus inequality has become closely bound up with the growing prominence of envy-related debates. More specifically, based on those cases of envious action, an internal theorisation of the relation of increased inequality to envy have been produced and advocated by Chinese commentators which in itself differs from the theories I have discussed before.

Red-eye disease

> It was reported that a 21-year-old young nurse committed suicide when she could no longer stand rumours and gossip spread about her success. This person was originally a nurse known by no one but who had done a great amount of good deeds and who was widely respected by her patients. A newspaper reported her good-hearted deeds which made some of "those who look askance" unhappy. They started to hawk rumours about the "hidden agendas" behind these good deeds, claiming that these involved "ambitious intentions of joining the Communist Party[38] and being promoted". The nurse could not take the malignant slander any longer, however, and poisoned herself. Even her unfortunate suicide could not stop these fabricated accusations, though.
>
> People with "askant sight" always see things in devious ways. They will regard "straight" as "askew", "right" as "wrong" and distort everything from its original form. This kind of "asquint disease" is actually rooted in *jidu*. When this ill-formed mind took shape, evil thoughts emerged directed at hating anything more sublime than what he has. "If you have what I haven't got, I will use every conceivable means to tear you down". People with jealous hearts have probably forgotten one important principle: disparaging others can only put suspicion on yourself.
>
> *People's Daily*, 1985[39]

Red-eye disease (*hongyan bing*) in Mandarin metaphorically means being

[38] At that time this was considered a privileged and honourable thing to do.

[39] Gao, Liu'an. 1985. "'*Xieyan bing' yu jidu xin*" ("Askant and jealous heart"). *People's Daily*, 27 October: Discussion.

envious or jealous of other people's fortune, success or achievements, as briefly explained in the introduction. As with the asquint disease or the disease of the oblique eye, when people get red-eye, it does not actually mean that their eyes will turn red; rather, it implies the distorted vision brought about by their "red" or "oblique" eyes, distorting right into wrong and rightful into resentful so as to suit their own interests. When red-eye is combined with *bing* (sickness), it then refers specifically to a type of social "sickness" similar to envy and jealousy (although this concept extends to include a wider scope as implied in the excerpt). Moreover, the manifestation of red-eye disease also externalises individual feelings of envy and jealousy into visible social actions such as spreading rumours, disparaging other people or tearing people down, as demonstrated in the excerpt above.

It should also be noted that unlike the English distinction between jealousy and envy, where jealousy is about what one possesses and envy is about what one desires and about what others possess, such a distinction is not clear in the Chinese usage of envy (*xianmu*) and jealousy (*jidu*). As Van Sommers has noted, "jealousy is not always easy to distinguish from envy, but the dictionary makes this separation: envy concerns what you would like to have but don't possess, whereas jealousy (from the same origin as 'zealous') concerns what you have and do not wish to lose" (Van Sommers, 1988: 1). Such a distinction, nonetheless, does not reflect the distinction implied in the equivalent Chinese words for envy (*xianmu*) and jealousy (*jidu*). As I have already classified *jidu* as a case of malicious envy in the introduction, the distinction between *xianmu* and *jidu* I would argue is more

one of the distinction between admiring envy and malicious envy. Red-eye is often discussed in close association with *jidu* (according to my interpretation, malicious envy), which includes unhappiness, self-torture, vexation or even more hostile feelings, and thus motivates real-world actions. Red-eye is also distinguished from *jidu* in the way that *jidu* can simply be displayed in people's bitter feelings while red-eye cannot be reconciled by addressing bitterness but inevitably involves the constant threat of attacking others.[40] *Jidu* is also metaphorically compared to a double-edged sword in that it hurts oneself as well as others. Moreover, as one article remarks, "*jidu* is a kind of abnormal mentality and its outbreak will lead people to spread rumours and bring false charges against successful people".[41] Successful people were apparently the distinctive targets of malicious envy in the 1980s. It is not unusual to feel *jidu* but different people may react differently in response to their *jidu* and not every incidence of *jidu* will turn into a case involving extreme hostile actions, that is, red-eye actions.[42] Various cases had been presented in newspapers illustrating that after the reform, when people become successful or wealthy in a number of ways that were unexpected or unseen before the reform, a certain amount of red-eye had been induced.

> The (reform) policy of the Party has mobilised the initiatives of thousands of millions of peasants, many of whom have become wealthy. However, a kind of red-eye disease is prevalent in society. People red-eye others who get rich and people who are already rich fear the

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[40] Wang, Qunsheng. 1994. "*Cu shi chibuwan de* (Vinegar [metaphorically means jealousy] would not be eaten up)". *Economic Daily*, 1 January: Lvyuan/ Wangfujing Teahouse.

[41] Shi, Jiao. 1986. "*Jidu, wugao ji qita* (Malicious envy, false Accusation and other things)". *People's Daily*, 4 June: Discussion.

[42] See Chen, Xu. 2007. "*Yanhong ye fengkuang* (Red-eye can be crazy)". *China Healthcare and Nutrition* 5: 60-61.

red-eye coming from others. If this disease is not cured, the process of modernisation will inevitably be hindered. To cure this disease, first of all we need to make the "patients" understand, in rural areas, that peasants who get rich are intrinsically different from the kind of exploitative rich found in traditional societies where "rich in one family, grumbling in a thousand families".

In the past, wealth was accumulated through exploiting and damaging the interests of many others while today the acquisition of wealth depends on ones talents and diligent efforts. Their extra gain is, therefore, based on their extra work and this complies with the principle of wealth distribution according to work done. There should be no justifiable reason for red-eye and people who get rich through hard work should not have to worry about other people's red-eye. Getting rich through hard work (*laodong zhifu*) is just and rightful.

It should also be noted that people's "red-eye" may not be entirely owing to *jidu*; some of these people might be worrying about "bipolar differentiation". But when they understand that the new practice of the household responsibility system is still a kind of socialist collective economy and that it does not represent a problem of bipolar differentiation but a problem of "getting rich first" and "getting rich together" (*xianfu, houfu*) they should not worry about it anymore.

Economic Daily, 1983[43]

This excerpt suggests three interlinked messages. Firstly, there is clearly a link between inequality (someone getting rich and some others remaining poor) and red-eye. Secondly, when a certain type of inequality is justified (becoming rich through hard labour) this should be accepted and there should be no reason for red-eye to occur. Thirdly, inequality should not be a cause for worry as "getting rich together" (being equal again) will only be a matter of time. It offers both public and political support for those becoming (and for those who will become) rich. The article manifestly implies that red-eye increased after the reform but that this was only because people did not understand the nature of this kind of inequality. When they do, red-eye will decrease. Therefore, the moral content of this article is

[43] Xu, Jiatun. 1983. *"Kaituo yanjie, laodong zhifu*(Widening scope, getting rich through hard work)". *Economic Daily*, 9 March: Economic Forum.

designed to persuade people to make the effort to discern different kinds of inequality and to bear justifiable types. In the 1980s, the foremost task of the Chinese government was to move forward the economic reform by incorporating the market-economy into the existing planned economy. However, all its efforts in this direction were both unpredictable and experimental. As reported in *People's Daily* in response to the suspicions about the reforms, the mayor of Tianjin affirmatively proclaimed that "we won't whip a fast moving cow (*bianda kuainiu*) and we will encourage enterprises to carry out experimental reformative initiatives". The mayor also stressed that "we should not red-eye people who are getting wealthy and we will not pity those going bankrupt" (*dui facai de bu yanhong, dui kuatai de bu lianmin*).[44] As reforms were propelled forwards, various types of inequality did, indeed, appear. The case below is an example of people with fixed salaries red-eyeing people who made "unlimited" amounts of money through private business enterprise.

> One self-employed businessperson (*geti hu*), who sells fruit for a living, told me that he wanted to write an autobiography. It will be titled "Hey, don't always stare at me!". He said, "some people always stare intently at our money [with red-eye] but they never think that, besides money, we also have anxiety and exhaustion. We are discriminated against by others. We are constantly worrying about bankruptcy, an unstable income and an unsettled life spent on trains, airplanes or steamers. But on their [the starer's] pay slip, besides money, they have labour protection (*zhiye baohu*) plus promotion every year, a free medical service, retirement pay, a stable working environment and social status. Compared to money, all these things they have are not trivial.
>
> People who have the courage to give up their "iron rice bowl" are

[44] Xiao, Di. 1991. "*Tianjin jinxing gaohuo dazhongxing qiye gaige shiyan niebichu biaotai juebu bianda kuainiu — dui facai de bu yanhong dui kuatai de bu lianmin*". *People's Daily*, 27 July: Economy.

> few. And even if they actually give it up, they are not determined enough to work like us anyway. They may well reminisce about the days of "a bit of newspaper, a cup of tea"[45] when the reality [after the reform] dismantled the distribution principles that were prevalent in the past, when people began to grumble about those who were not supposed to get rich but who nevertheless got rich. In fact, the state's policy did not rule out their options to choose the profession in which it seemed to be easier to accumulate wealth. But in choosing a better income, this will inevitably be accompanied by higher risks. There are no win-in-both-worlds solutions. Therefore, all they can do is not have the courage to give up their stable-but-less-well-paid jobs and be reluctant to work hard at their jobs as well.
>
> *Economic Daily*, 1988[46]

As we can see, apart from the income disparity caused by the uneven process of urban-rural reform, this situation has also resulted from allowing private enterprises to boom. Given that the reform was undertaken through a series of phased reforms rather than through a particular common practice applied to every social sector de facto inequality between public sectors and private professions has been salient even though the transition has been complex and unpredictable. Red-eye was apparently provoked to a certain extent although it is notable that remarkable inequality has also been largely tolerated. Principles of distribution were also altered as a result of the introduction of a market economy so that unequal distribution also resulted in grumbling and red-eye. The following case is also quite illustrative as it suggests that a greater number of special rewards should be given out to make other people red-eye in order to combat excessive egalitarianism.

> It is a good thing [to give out big rewards] because they can serve

[45] This is the vivid expression describing how easy work is in the public sector, spending your day drinking tea and reading newspapers.

[46] Zhou, Yong. 1988. "*Shouru tanfang lu* (An interview on incomes)". *Economic Daily*, 12 May: Latest News.

> as an effective challenge towards excessive egalitarianism (*pingjun zhuyi*) at work. The bonus system has resumed in recent years. To give out bonuses should fit nicely with the principle of the socialist distributive system i.e. distribution according to work done, "working more getting more". But in our country the mentality of "excessive egalitarianism" (*pingjun zhuyi*) is deeply rooted in people's minds and it is not easy to get rid of. Even giving out bonuses ends up like "eating from the same pot" (*daguofan*) in the sense that if one person gets one it is thought that others should get one too. Even in the case of those scientists who have made significant scientific and technological contributions, because of the enormous number of bonuses our state has offered, the money that has finally trickled down to them has sometimes been only a couple of hundred Yuan.[47] This is supposed to be called a reward although in fact it does not play any sort of rewarding role.
>
> *People's Daily*, 1984[48]

In other articles excessive egalitarianism (*pingjun zhuyi*) was more explicitly argued to be the root cause of red-eye. It was argued that when excessive egalitarianism cannot be achieved people disparage other people.[49] The Chinese term *pingjun zhuyi* actually conveys the idea that everyone should get an equal share of everything. This is different from egalitarianism which upholds the idea that everyone should simply have equal rights and be treated equally. Here, therefore, I translate this term as excessive egalitarianism. As suggested in the above excerpts, the incidences of red-eye result from either people's excessively egalitarian ideas or misunderstandings about the nature of the current inequality which make them less tolerant of the "good" inequality brought about by the economic reforms. As I have argued before, inequality itself cannot be the only essential condition for arousing envy. In fact, *perceived* inequality, *comparable*

[47] 1 Yuan was equal to 0.06 GBP at the time of my research.

[48] Zhong, Huai. 1984. "*Yao jiangde bieren yanhong* (More rewards to make others red-eye)". *People's Daily*, 8 September: Today's Topic.

[49] Gao, Zhanxiang. 1986. "*Jiaqiang pinde xiuyang fangzhi sixiangbing* (Strengthening moral education, preventing moral illness)". *Economic Daily*, 10 April: Party Life.

inequality and even *imagined* inequality all weigh more than actual inequality when it comes to inciting envy. Thus, when real inequality is evident at a particular time, people's perceptions of such an inequality are inevitably crucial in terms of how the problem of envy is considered. In the case of China immediately after the reform, it was the conflicting and competing notions of inequality that give rise to envy and red-eye.

In the 1990s, red-eye was much less discussed in both the *People's Daily* and the *Economic Daily*. More prominent in this period was the changing perception of the rich. Here is a collection of selected interviews about how ordinary people feel when they see other people carelessly spending money for pleasure.

> Knowing how to earn money and to spend money is normal. Let the rich be rich. That is better than being bound together to eat cabbage [to be equally poor]. There is no right or wrong when it comes to consumption. It is personal. If I had had money, I would have bought luxury goods too.
>
> A woman working in government
>
> I'm offering services to rich women every day. For cosmetics costing over 1,000 Yuan, they always buy several sets; for a 2000-Yuan electric toy, they just pick it up and pay. If you think I feel nothing that would be a bluff. But they have money. The only thing I can do is to pull every string I can to make money!"
>
> A salesperson
>
> Luxury consumption is not cancer but the goal of our striving. At a particular time, someone took the initiative for luxury consumption and that has simply shown us a new world.
>
> A journalist
>
> Nonetheless, the level of consumption should match the level of national productivity. It is not sensible to aimlessly compare oneself with luxury consumers and the unhealthy attitude of spending too much should not be encouraged either.
>
> Editors' Afterword

People's Daily, 1992[50]

In the 1990s, no one seemed to hate the rich. To put it differently, the *People's Daily* was not yet concerned enough about the issue to publish reports about hating the rich. At this particular time, being rich was seen as a sign of being capable. It was admired. People envied the rich and wanted to be one of them and this also seemed hopeful. It was not until after the year 2000 that the idea of wealth-hatred began to gain extensive attention both in the media and in academic discussions.

Wealth-hatred mentality

> "Chou" as in *choufu* [the hatred of the rich], namely "malicious envy" (*jidu*), commonly referred to as "red-eye disease (*hongyan bing*)", [51] is one of the pitfalls that comes with human nature and exists commonly. Not only the rich will be objects of malicious envy, though; the beautiful, the talented and people who seem to be lucky in politics will all also have experienced the feeling of being envied by other people.
>
> But *jidu* does not necessarily turn into hatred. Once hatred emerges, the object of the hatred will be seen as an enemy to be destroyed to make others happy. When the rich become successful, it is normal for them to be envied or even to become objects of *jidu*. But if we regard this kind of *jidu* as "wealth-hatred", then the Chinese not only hate the rich but also beautiful people, government officials, fortunate people and all people living without disasters or difficulties. If this is so, then what kind of nation is ours? To put it simply, if there is no *jidu* in the world, what kind of human beings are we?
>
> Therefore, when the rich person comes across predicaments, for instance that of being blackmailed or kidnapped, it cannot be concluded that these are all caused by the mindset of "wealth-hatred". The rich are just an easy target for criminals because they imply "small investment, high reward". Moreover, the harmful action is not necessarily perpetrated by the poor.
>
> Wealth is innocent. What affects human relationships is not the amount of wealth people have but the good or bad qualities induced by

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[50] Gong, Wen. 1992. "*Gaodang shangdian shengyi zenm zhem huo? Shenm ren yizhi qianjin? Laobaixing bu yanhong ma? — qingkan xiaofei 'guizu'*". *People's Daily*, 27 December: Economy.

[51] It can be argued that wealth-hatred is a particular type of red-eye, that is, red-eye directed at the rich.

> wealth. The morals of wealth depend on its beginnings [the means of obtaining wealth] and the ends it is put to [the ways of spending it]. These are the key factors affecting how people love or hate people with wealth. Therefore, one should not lightly dismiss wealth because if one does this would imply that one inevitably suffers from getting wealthy or that our society could not tolerate wealth.
>
> *People's Daily*, 2005[52]

The threat presented by wealth hatred (*choufu*) first became evident as a result of a series of murders reported by the media. On 21 January 2003, the vice chairman of the All China Federation of Industry and Commerce, the "Steel King" of Shaanxi, was killed. The following February, a billionaire in Zhejiang was found dead in front of his home; the body was found to have 14 wounds inflicted by a knife. Suspicions then turned into a popular belief that these crimes were caused by a kind of "wealth-hatred" mentality. [53] As Qin argues, it was evident that the biggest problem in China was the dilemma arising from unequal income distribution. On the one hand, after more than 20 years of economic reform coastal areas had developed faster than inland areas, urban areas faster than rural ones and some families faster than others and income disparities were widening. If this problem was not dealt with, society would find itself in turmoil. On the other hand, however, to promote the development of certain industries it was inevitable that private enterprises be allowed to invest and earn profits. Moreover, high investment return was the primary requirement for private investment. It was pointed out that the dilemma arose from the fact that income inequality remained inevitable for economic development but that, on the other hand, this caused

[52] Lei, Shuyan. 2005. "*Manshuo 'choufu'*(Be careful about labelling it wealth-hatred)". *People's Daily*, 15 November: Supplement.

[53] Qin, Pei. 2003. "'*Choufu xintai xiangxiang haishi shishi* (Wealth-hatred mentality: imagination or truth?)". *New West* 4: 66-67.

unsettling wealth-hatred. Qin argues strongly that apart from trying to narrow down the income gap we should also avoid dramatising "wealth-hatred" mentality. The wealth-hatred mentality is simply making society deteriorate since the problem in China cannot be solved by "killing the rich so as to help the poor (*shafu jipin*)" (Qin, 2003: 66-67).

A detailed definition of the wealth-hatred mentality existing in peasant societies has been presented by Sun. She suggests that, to define wealth-hatred, one should define both "wealth" and "hatred". "Hatred is the reaction to the psychological feeling of *jidu* and revenge, and wealth should not only be understood as the abundance of money but should also include advantageous living conditions, the adequacy of natural resources and effective aggregation of talent" (Sun, 2008: 43). [54] She further states that wealth in all these aspects is only a comparative concept and that it is the ideal desired position after comparison has been made. She argues that the feeling of hatred in "wealth-hatred" is deeper than *jidu* but less than real hatred. Two types of behavioural manifestation of wealth-hatred are provided in her paper. One is shown by red-eye disease in the form of unhappy feelings directed at the rich, always accompanied by verbal abuse, imputations or denigration. When people cannot stop someone becoming rich, they can only use these kinds of methods to relieve their *jidu* and anguish. The other type is uncooperative conduct driven by wealth-hatred, this including no longer offering reciprocal help to rich neighbours and no longer lending production materials that could possibly make other people rich (Sun, 2008: 43-45).

[54] All the quotations from journals articles are my translation from the Chinese texts.

When moving from "red-eye disease" to "wealth-hatred mentality", the target of *jidu* seems to narrow down the target of malicious envy from being successful in various ways to just being rich. While red-eye disease was forcefully dismissed and excessive egalitarianism abandoned, the hatred of the rich seems to be less easy to shake off. When inequality was largely tolerated in the 1980s, the growing number of extreme rich and the widening gap between the rich and the poor significantly complicated the problem. Public discourse seemed to call for a distinction between "wealth" and "the rich people", trying to persuade the rich to behave better and the poor to be more understanding. As Liu summarises the research on the ways how Chinese obtain their wealth done by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, the foremost way of getting rich that ordinary people approved of was through "cultural capital", namely by using knowledge, technology and other intelligible factors to gain wealth. The second most approved way was through "economic capital", namely through the expansion of capital and the primitive accumulation of capital. The way people could not tolerate and tended to hate was "power capital"; that is, achieving wealth through inappropriate "grey" transactions (Liu, 2008: 159). Commentaries also suggested that denouncing the wrongdoings of the rich would be a good substitute for wealth-hatred.

> Many fables are satirical about the rich and reflect people's general attitude towards the rich. But this results from the nature of wealth in traditional societies when wealth was gained by exploiting others. But under the market economy, the acquisition of wealth cannot be achieved without ones own ability and effort. Therefore, even though there may have been misconduct in accumulating wealth, the rich are in general creating prosperity for society and promoting social advancement. By and large, the rich in China are not as widely respected as their counterparts in the US. Even though most people

would have to admit that people getting rich is advantageous for society, wealth-hatred is still quite common. The reasons for this can be summed up as follows.

The first reason is the influence of inherited traditional thought; that is, thousands of years of resentment towards the rich, demonstrated by the popularity of the "Water Margin"[55] [people who become heroes by killing the rich and helping the poor *shafu jipin*]. The traditional way of viewing the rich is deeply rooted in people's minds and the broadening gap between the rich and the poor has further cultivated this idea. The second reason is the widespread belief in "original sin" [that of capitalism]. It is undeniable that in the process of getting rich some of the wealthy people, especially the "*baofu*" [those who get extremely rich overnight], might have taken illegal action or been involved in misconduct but this should not detract from the general image of all rich people. The third reason is that, in the case of some of the wealthy people in China, their morals did not improve in accordance with the growth of their wealth. Sometimes, it was their misbehaviour that provoked hatred among others.

Therefore, if a rich person is to be respected, he should first take note of the idea of equality; that is, he should not think of himself as superior to others and should not act only as he wishes. Secondly, the rich should have higher moral standards and act as social exemplars. They should be more cautious about their words and deeds, being wealthy and virtuous. Thirdly, the rich should also be more dedicated to social affairs, bearing in mind that their money comes from society and should be paid back in the form of charity. A normal society should not have either wealth-hatred or poor-hatred. People should respect each other in spite of the amount of money they may or may not have.

People's Daily, 2004 [56]

As is argued here, it is not apparent inequality that instigates hatred. If you are rich but still treat other people as equals, wealth-hatred should not be a problem. Envy, *jidu*, red-eye and even hatred seem to be inevitable in all eras and all societies. As Liu argues, the only difference here is that people tend to consciously search for reasons to equate with their envious mindsets. For instance, understanding that the rich have actually obtained their wealth only at enormous

[55] One of the Four Great Classical Novels of Chinese literature

[56] Liang, Xiaomin. 2004. "*Furen de zilv*" ("The self-discipline of the rich"). *People's Daily*, 3 August: Theory/Scholar's View.

cost, that they have inherited it from relatives or that they have worked really hard for it can balance out their envious feelings. However, when the reasons the envious find for someone being rich are not seen as credible or when the envious believe that the cost the rich person has paid for their wealth is far too low, the feeling of injustice then incites the *jidu* to turn into hatred with the mentality of "hatred of the rich" thus being generated (Liu, 2008: 157). This is so, it is argued, because what people hate is not all rich people but the fact of harming or reducing public property or the act of transforming national assets into private wealth through backstage deals.[57] The key distinction that makes wealth hateful is that made between legitimate wealth and illegitimate wealth, a distinction evidenced by the contrast between tax evasion (illegitimate wealth) and the "benevolent rich" (those who try to repay society).[58] Moreover, the prodigality of the rich has strengthened the mentality of wealth-hatred. It was reported, for instance, that when Bentley officially entered the Chinese market in 2002, 85 cars were sold within a year. Other luxury brands quickly poured into the Chinese market one after another.[59] There was also discussion about whether luxury consumption should be restricted in China since the rich were capable of spending hundreds and

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[57] New West. 2003. "*Gaibian choufu qingxu yao kao furen ziji* (Changing wealth-hatred mentality depends on the rich themselves)". *Xin xibu* (New West), pp 67.

[58] Wu, Zhili. "'*Renfu nanmi' yu 'choufu xintai*' (The rareness of the benevolent rich and wealth-hatred mentality)". www.cnki.net.

[59] Lin, A. 2004. "*Furen langfei jiashen le shehui de 'choufu xintai* (Prodigal consumption of the rich deepened the "wealth-hatred mentality")'" *Lianzheng liaowang* (Honesty Outlook): 7-8.

thousands of Yuan on one meal or ten thousand Yuan on just a bottle of wine. [60] It was therefore suggested that the rich must also be held responsible for the hatred, this since "for the new rich, although their wealth cannot match the wealth of Bill Gates, their expenditure is rarely seen elsewhere". The remarkable fact is exactly what one millionaire pointed out: "in China, no one will believe how rich you are unless they see you spend money".[61] Excessive expenditure has been argued to be one of the initial causes of wealth-hatred and what has made this worse has been the deliberate intention of the rich to show off and their oft articulated need to be acknowledged as having a superior position. Inequality has become evidently inevitable. What matters now, as the editorial suggested, seems to be simply how to make the rich less hateful.

> A certain wealth gap has remained due to personal differences existing at all levels. Different social status, practical experiences, knowledge or abilities as well as different cultural backgrounds, family environments or physical qualities consequently result in different income levels and living conditions. After the reform, parts of certain regions and some people have become wealthy through honest work and lawful management.
>
> Under such circumstances, both the people who got rich first (*xianfu zhe*) and the people who have not become rich yet (*houfu zhe*) should maintain a healthy mindset. People who get rich first should not "be rich but without benevolence". They should assist those who have not got rich as much as they can. People who have not got rich yet should not complain all the time (*yuantian youren*) or, even less, hate the rich. They should respect other people's wealth achieved through diligent effort and lawful business and strive hard to shake off their poverty in the near future.

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[60] Zhang, Hongqing. "*Furen de shechi gai bu gai guan* (Should we control the prodigality of the rich?)" *Lianzheng liaowang*(Honesty Outlook): 9.

[61] Lin, A. 2004. "*Furen langfei jiashen le shehui de 'choufu xintai* (Prodigal consumption of the rich deepened the "wealth-hatred *mentality*")'" *Lianzheng liaowang* (Honesty Outlook): 7-8.

People's Daily, 2005[62]

Apart from calling for high moral standards and self-discipline among the rich, two other types of representation were also used in official media stories. As a study of the articles shows, "the rich also provide symbolic resources for fantasies about the ultimate affluent nation". The article constructs a nationalistic frame and even invites its female readers to identify with rich males as heroes of national development and to fantasise about the ultimate rich life one could lead with them (Zhao, 2001: 118). The other way to frame the rich is to point out that although wealth is the source of happiness and status for the rich money is also related to misery and criminality (Zhao, 2001: 119). The rich are apparently a source of admiration but when they elicit others' self-inferiority they can quickly turn into hidden reasons to ferment *jidu* and hatred.

Conclusion

Emerging inequality in post-reform China has clearly led to more public debates on envy, *jidu*, red-eye and wealth-hatred. As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, envy is concerned with both the subject's inferiority and the object's undeserved good fortune. It can be seen that the public discourse on both red-eye and wealth-hatred has continuously argued about the object's (the successful or rich people's) deservedness. In the case of red-eye, it was explained that the advantages people had achieved by virtue of the reform were completely deserved and that no red-eye was justified. It was the envious who should fight against their excessive egalitarianism, embrace the benefits of economic development and

[62] Dou, Hao and Liu, Jie. 2005. "*Hexie shehui xuyao hexie xintai* (A Harmonious society needs a harmonious mindset)". *People's Daily*, 28 November: Theory.

tolerate inequality, something deemed inevitable in order to achieve economic prosperity. By contrast, in the case of wealth-hatred, certain rich people deserve less of their wealth and invite hatred by virtue of their wrongdoings. Nonetheless, in general, "wealth is innocent" and wealth achieved through hard work and lawful business is well-deserved. People with wealth may or may not deserve to receive hatred, this being highly dependent on how they cultivate themselves.

The subject's inferiority has only been implicitly addressed in the public discourse. In dismissing red-eye, the logic is clear: ones inferiority is simply due to ones incapability. It has been argued that the reform offered equal opportunities for everyone. If you had the courage and ability to undertake the necessary risks, you would be rewarded with corresponding wealth. For wealth-hatred ones inferiority is more difficult to tackle, though. On the one hand, the idea of equal opportunities for getting rich seems much less credible; on the other hand, the subject's inferiority is seen as largely undeserved. The opportunities for getting rich have, in reality, been open to only a minority of people. The rest have been left relatively poor, to the contrary of what the reform promised from the outset.

Envy, *jidu*, red-eye disease and wealth-hatred, as mentioned in the introduction, can be seen as representing a spectrum of feelings of envy. It starts with the slightest form — envy — and ends with the strongest — hatred. As one moves from envy to hatred, certain conditions change. As Ben Ze'ev clearly points out, "envy occurs when the wrongness is related to our inferior situation; resentment occurs when wrongdoing is perceived: it conveys an implicit

accusation" (Ben Ze'ev, 1992: 553); that is, "when unjust treatment, but not inferiority, is perceived, anger and resentment are more dominant than envy" (Ben Ze'ev, 1992: 553). From red-eye to wealth-hatred, the focal point of the conditions necessary to instigate red-eye or wealth-hatred has been almost entirely transformed from inequality to injustice. As Liu and others have commented, "Repairing the impaired resource allocation mechanism and fairness mechanism is necessary to combat the hatred of the rich" (Liu, 2008: 157).

As I have argued earlier, it is not the actual inequality of wealth, power or prestige alone that instigates envy; rather, it is more the perceived and sometimes even the imagined inequality that makes certain differences unbearable for the envious. The perceived inequality is significantly affected by both the subject's undeserved inferiority and the object's undeserved fortune, even if these perceived states are not founded in reality. The incidence of envy is also highly dependent on the condition of unreachability. The perceived inequality in certain ways corresponds with the actual inequality but other conditions, such as the moral condemnation provided by the media discussed in this chapter, greatly shape the level of envy expression in a society. Therefore, when inequality increased continuously after the reform, the incidence of envy did not seem to follow a strictly linear progression. The increasing incidence of red-eye in the 1980s can only be seen as the manifestation of the conflicting ideals of excessive egalitarianism and inequality, with wealth-hatred as the indicator of social tolerance of injustice. This was evident when one saw what these media were attributing to people's minds and

how they sought to change people's minds. By dismissing red-eye and wealth-hatred, the government in fact tactfully introduced and mainstreamed the social inequality existing in what had previously been a predominantly socialist state.

As Ben Ze'ev argues, reduced inequality will not reduce envy as it will only increase the subject's feeling of undeserved inequality. In the same vein, I have argued that both subject's undeserved inferiority and object's undeserved fortune are indispensible in considering whether envy will be instigated by increased inequality. In the case of China, as we can see, increased inequality has only instigated short-lived public debates (and public utterances) about envy but has, nevertheless, not steadily increased envy. This is not only because the media advocated the object's *deserved* fortune but also because they implied the subject's *deserved* inferiority. Moreover, by promoting the idea of "let some get rich first and then *we can get rich together*" the condition of unreachability has been forcefully repudiated. In the next chapter, I will explain how a similar practice was replicated and reproduced at the local level.

Chapter 2: Mining disputes and red-eye attribution

It was 4 o'clock one morning in the spring of 2007. Aunt Yang began to come in and out of my room to prepare the breakfast making the door squeak every time as she did so. The rice cooker was situated on the table right next to my bed. Although I desperately attempted to ignore her, this could no longer work once the aroma of cooked rice had truly woken me up. Sitting at the breakfast table at 4.30 a.m. Uncle Yang, his teenage son and Grandma were all freshening themselves up, getting ready to start the day. I was shocked to see plates being crammed onto the table; four big dishes holding fried eggs, aubergines and meat, peanuts and some leftovers from the previous day appeared. A big bowl of rice was forced into my hand while Aunt Yang was putting a hamburger-sized steamed bun on top of my rice. As politely as I could be, I turned down half the bowl of rice and the lovely steamed bun. The family did not stop trying to persuade me to eat more, however, telling me that lunch was hours away. It was generally thought that if men ate like me they would not be able to survive their hard work and this led them to tease me for eating as little as their cat. Soon after breakfast the men left for work leaving the women to complete all the chores involved in running a household. This was how we started an ordinary day in Xitai.

After breakfast I dozed off for a while before strolling down to one of the village's public open spaces to look for people to talk with. The open space I chose was at a key junction of the two main roads in Xitai. Whoever came in or out of the

village could not avoid being seen by the onlookers there. The space was circled by a five-story high mountain and several brick houses situated on top of a small slope. In the early mornings old men and women would come and sit on the huge stones scattered around. At about 10 a.m., housewives would normally turn up to enjoy the sun or to catch up with their neighbours. It would not be until early to late afternoon (3 to 4 p.m.), however, that men would return from work (from small peddling businesses, work at construction sites or manual mining, etc.) to gather for casual chats or poker games. They would typically exchange the latest information on Sky's land requisition plans or the updated iron ore prices or just share casual gossip. Here is one of the typical conversations to do with mining disputes that I overheard at one of these regular afternoon gatherings.

> Man A: I've consulted a lawyer. If their electricity lines pass through my woods, I should lease the whole woodland to them and cut down all the trees. Otherwise, if electricity lines are set up and get caught in any of my trees on rainy or windy days, I'll need to pay them instead.
>
> Man B: True. Now everything is like that. For the case to do with the water penetration, there are ones who were paid more and others less.
>
> Woman A: If you have the ability (*nengnai)*, you can ask for a lot more. If you don't have the ability you even need to go there and claim the money that's yours. If not, they won't even give that to you!
>
> Man A: That's certainly the case. If you don't understand the law, they will bully you. The burial ground issue[63] should be settled soon, otherwise, if anyone dies who needs to be buried in those burial grounds and the families take the dead to the mines, crying there, what are they going to do? [64] [Turning to Woman A] Why aren't you staying on your land today?
>
> Woman A: The Sky truck isn't there yet. I'll go when they pass through. If they don't pay, I won't let them continue.

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[63] Normally people will secure a piece of burial land for the old (before they die); some of this land is about to be leased to Sky, however.

[64] This means that it will be much more difficult for the company to settle this by then.

As briefly mentioned in the introduction, Sky was the company that planned to construct a tailing storage area at Xitai and ways of extracting money from them had been quickly learnt and this information shared among the villagers. In this chapter I will outline the background of these mining disputes and the local terms for envy. I will also present three narratives as examples of cases of envy attribution. The three narratives are mainly concerned with mining disputes and, as we can see, are similar to the public discourse on envy; the local discussion of red-eye was also a moral discourse to distinguish justifiable actions and unjustifiable ones. The malpractice of the mining companies had generated disagreements and mounting conflicts. As a means of societal control, red-eye was a reflection of the violation of common understandings of what was appropriate action in such cases.

Mining: the background

Lanying and Xitai consisted mostly of agricultural villages, generally with paddy and maize fields. The number of paddy fields has dwindled rapidly due to the over-exploitation of ground water and months of drought over the past few years. The annual income per household coming from agricultural production ranged from a few thousand Yuan up to ten thousand Yuan. Many villagers had at some point migrated away to work as temporary labours in cities but most of these people had come back to find a job in the mining companies over the last five years, money from these jobs forming a substantial basis of many households' incomes. The monthly salary in the local mining industry ranged from 1.5 thousand to three

thousand Yuan.[65]

Iron ore production was not new to the township but all the factories had been state-owned until the 1990s. By that time, however, all of the companies were running huge deficits. For this reason, when the urban reform began in the 1990s, all of the companies claimed bankruptcy, one after the other. The court was subsequently responsible for reorganising their collective assets, some of which were sold directly into private ownership. State-owned production factories have since become privately owned. In the past five years or so, the quantity of known iron ore deposits in the township has increased enormously, this attracting investment from both within and outside the township. Enterprises in the township have also accumulated significant amounts of wealth due to the increase in iron ore prices and the mounting demand for crushed iron ore pellets. The whole county's tax revenue was less than fifty million Yuan a couple of years before fieldwork while in 2007 the tax revenue of the township reached 0.2 billion Yuan and the tax revenue of the county as a whole reached one billion Yuan.

In general, throughout the production period, each mining company has a number of agreements that it has to reach with the local villages/township[66] where the mines are located. Before setting up mines it is essential to secure a certain amount of iron ore for future production, to requisition land to build production workshops and to reserve land to store tailings. During production itself resources such as water, electricity and transport services (road) are acquired from different

[65] These jobs were mostly for men.

[66] Permission is certainly needed from government agencies above the township level but this is beyond the scope of this chapter.

villages. Mining production can also damage the community through, for example, water pollution, flooding due to environmental changes, noise pollution and many other stipulated items, however, this leading to the need to provide subsequent compensation. To set up a mine the company needs to work with the government agencies at all levels in order to get various permits. In this chapter, however, I will only introduce the relevant regulations concerning land requisition, which are the most applicable to the three narratives I will talk about in continuation.

According to the land administration law of the People's Republic of China, "land in rural and suburban areas shall be owned by peasant collectives, except for those portions which belong to the State as provided for by law".[67] Generally, "The State formulates overall plans for land utilisation in which it defines the purposes of land use and classifies land into land for agriculture, land for construction and unused land". Basically, "land owned by peasant collectives is used under contract by members of the economic organisations of the peasant collectives for crop cultivation, forestry, animal husbandry or fishery. The duration of these types of contract is 30 years".[68] The land for crop cultivation is allocated equally to people in the village while land for other uses is contracted to the appropriate villagers. Thus, when a mine needs to use a certain portion of land, the agreement needs to be signed with those individual villagers who hold the 30-year leasing contracts; for land that is unused (which is the case in the first narrative), not allocated to individual villagers, according to the law, "within the duration of the contract for

[67] Land administration law of the People's Republic of China, 28 August 2004.

[68] Land administration law of the People's Republic of China, 28 August,2004.

the operation of the land, any permissible readjustment of the land between individual contractors shall be made with the agreement of at least two-thirds of the members of the village assembly or of the representatives of the villagers and submitted to the township [town] people's government and the agriculture administration department of the people's government of the county for approval".[69]

The State also enforces special regulations on the protection of cultivated land, something which has unexpectedly led to much malpractice on the part of the mining companies and which has arguably generated red-eye actions. There are clear articles stipulated in the land administration law about compensation for requisitioned land. "The State applies the system of compensation for the use of cultivated land for other purposes." The principle of "reclaiming the same amount of land as is used" shall be applied to any unit that, with approval, uses cultivated land for construction of non-agricultural projects, that is, the unit shall be responsible for providing the same amount and quality of the cultivated land it uses. Furthermore, according to the Law, "if conditions for such a provision do not exist or if the substituted land fails to meet the requirements, the unit shall pay expenses for alternative provision in accordance with the regulations set by people's governments of provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities directly under the Central Government with the money to be exclusively used for this purpose".[70]

Generally, "land requisitioned shall be compensated for on the basis of its

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[69] Ibid.

[70] Land administration law of the People's Republic of China, 28 August 2004

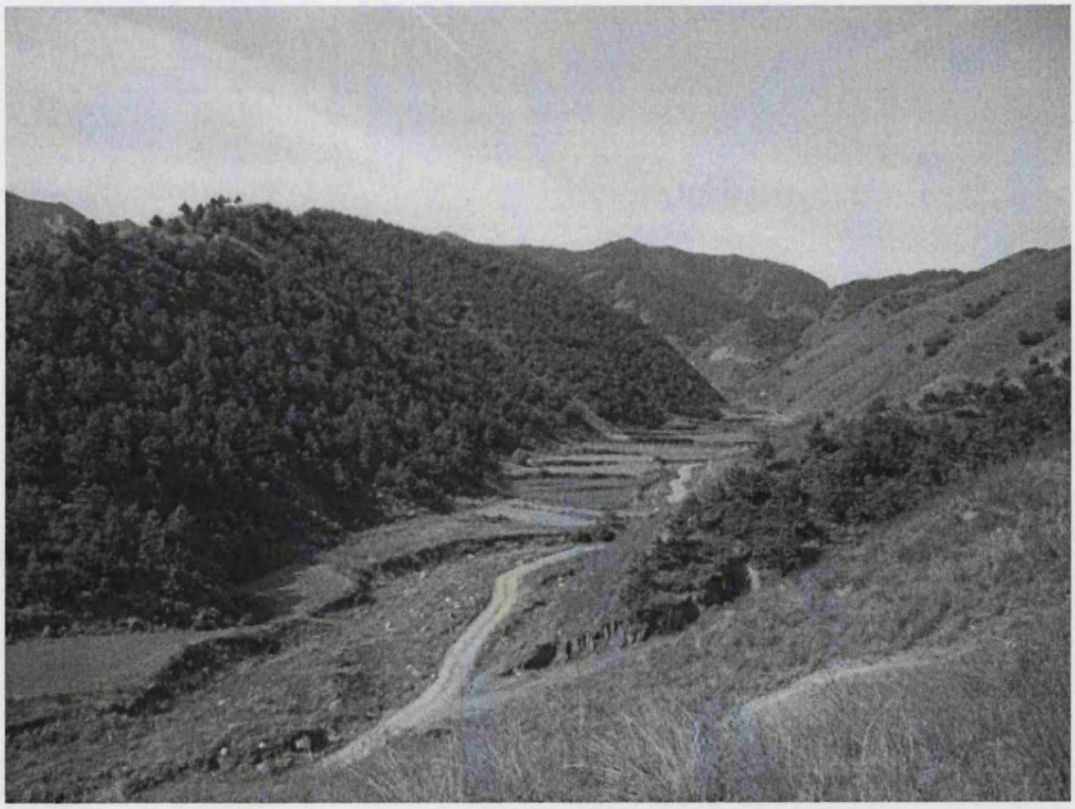
original purpose regarding its use. Compensation for requisitioned cultivated land shall include compensation for land, resettlement subsidies and attachments and for young crops on the requisitioned land. Compensation for the requisition of cultivated land shall be six to ten times the average annual output value of the requisitioned land calculated using the three years preceding such requisition." Two stressed conditions of the revised land administrative law in 2004 should be noted. One condition is that requisitioning agricultural land for other uses should be partially restricted and in cases where it has to be used the land needs to be reclaimed, with regard to its previous use, after the period in question (even if it is not the same piece of land). The other condition says that compensation has to include not only the land in question but also anything attached to the land and resettlement subsidies. The first condition has given rise to wrongful collusion between local government and mining companies because they both know that the amount of agricultural land is decreasing fast and hard to replace. At the same time, the profits of the mining business cannot be relinquished. The second condition has resulted in irreconcilable disagreements to do with the quality of the attachments and what is a reasonable amount of subsidisation.

In reality, the situation was even more chaotic than the flexibility generated by the law would have suggested. From the outset, the company failed to set up a standard rate for such compensation; instead, they would go to the poor or easy-to-negotiate-with households, promise certain amounts of money and get the contracts signed. When villagers became increasingly aware of the law or of others

getting larger amounts of money, however, the process of requisitioning land started involving more "obstacles". Given that certain amounts of money had already been paid to farmers who had signed contracts earlier, the company had to agree on a higher price for farmers who initially refused to sign the contract later on when the land in question was essential for its production. In addition to this, the companies were sometimes obliged to pay extra in the hope of getting things done as quickly as possible. To be fully in accordance with the law, the mine had to register some land as non-agricultural land so that its requisitioning could be properly approved. There were grey areas in the implementation and even certain illegal practices going on. Due to their initial malpractice, the amounts farmers later asked for were sometimes deemed to be unreasonable. Even so the company sometimes tolerated this type of extortion. Some farmers were also consciously taking advantage of this tolerance.

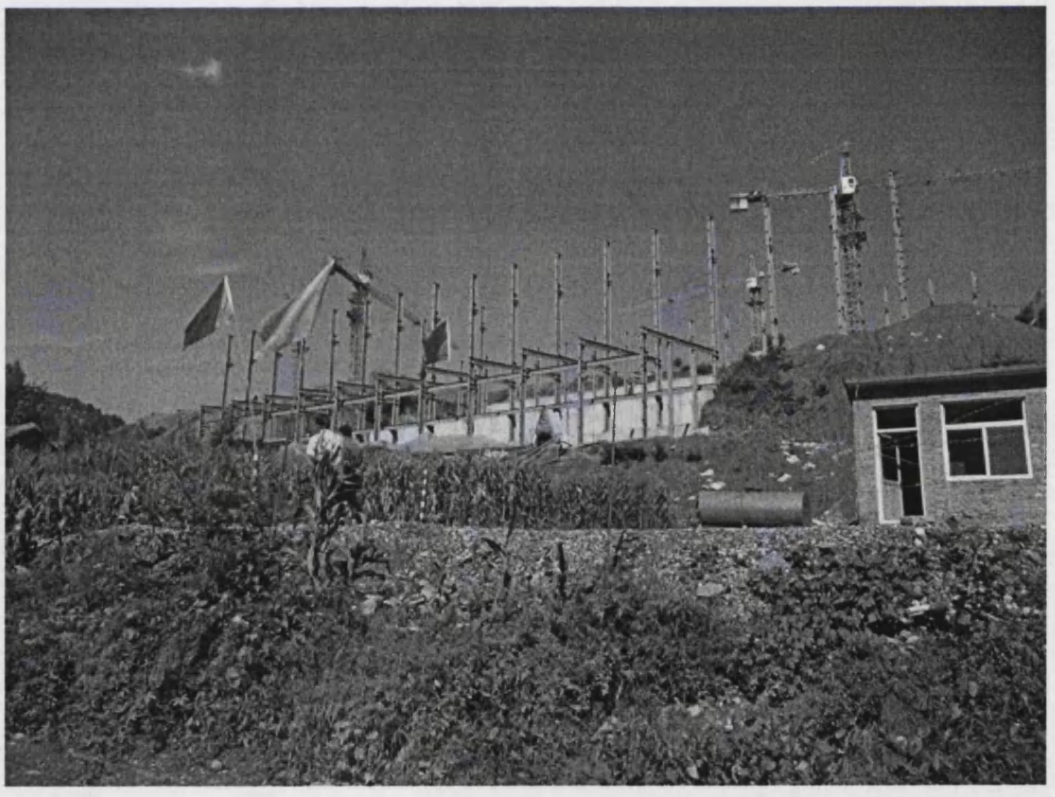
The mining companies would normally rely on village cadres or the township government to deal with these unreasonable requests. Some people succeeded in their claims, however, while others failed. As a result, the compensation fees were hardly ever consistent. In certain cases, extreme methods were also utilised. I was told, for example, that one farmer who had asked for a ridiculous amount of compensation had been mugged and threatened. Everyone was speculating that this must have been instigated by the mining company. In the meantime, what the villagers asked for and subsequently received was sometimes not the compensation stipulated in the land administration law but a one-off payment to "sell" the land

that they did not even officially own. This may cause further problems in the future especially when the 30-year leases expire and the land needs to be reallocated; this is not imminent enough for anyone to care about, however. The actual negotiations between the different parties involved can be more complicated but what is crucial here is that neither the company nor the villagers are bound by clear codes of practice, either in conventional or legal terms. The divergent views as to whether ones action is, or is not, attributable to red-eye depend on whether the request is justifiable, either in conventional or legal terms. People's idea of justice is not fully in compliance with the law and a set of conflicting values and ideas may well be in place for how to judge a case.



Picture 2.1 Xitai- before Sky's construction work in 2007

Picture 2.2 Xitai- after Sky's construction work in 2008



Picture 2.3 Sky's workshop in 2008

Local terms for envy

The village I was working in is a Mandarin speaking community with only a handful of dialectic words in usage. For example, people would call evenings *houshang* instead of *wanshang* and cooking dinner as *shaohuo (*burning fire*)* instead of *zuofan.* Educated people and image-conscious people — that is, those who had work experience in townships or cities — were more self-conscious about talking to me in standard Mandarin.[71] With respect to envy, there are three words referring to this concept: *xianmu* (admiring envy), *jidu* (malicious envy) and *yanhong* (malicious envy), all as briefly introduced in the introduction. In general, x*ianmu* and *jidu* are more literal and *yanhong* [72] is more colloquial. Similar to *yanhong (*literally, eye-red*)*, other colloquial words also include *yanqi* (eye-anger), *yanchan* (eye-covetous) and *qidehuang* (to be angered). *Xianmu* in its meaning is closer to "admire" as this is understood in English and is more appreciative. Y*anhong* (red-eye), on the other hand, my informants agreed, is the colloquial equivalent of *jidu* as both *yanhong* and *jidu* indicate the elements not only of pain but also of anger at the good fortune of others. Uncle Lin explained the distinction between *yanhong* (*jidu*) and *xianmu* in the following way.

> It occurs when, for example, I see you having something that I also want to have, but which I have no way of getting. If I think you deserve what you have and that you are well qualified for what you have (*you benshi, you nengnai*), then, this is *xianmu.* If I think, "Why the hell do you have it when I don't?" I can get it too and fight for it or try to take it away from you, then this is *yanhong.* Plus, this type of fight or

[71] This shows that they have the ability to talk in standard Mandarin; people will mock them if they use these words amongst themselves, though.

[72] *Yanhong* and *hongyan* mean the same thing. They can both be nouns but only *yanhong* can also be used as a verb.

> competition is not a fair contest. For example, if you are also capable of doing the job or getting the desirable things, then it's fair. But if you don't have the ability to obtain these and they [the job or money] have nothing to do with you but you want to get them anyway, then this is clearly *yanhong*.

For Uncle Lin, three elements are included in an envy situation: a desirable thing, the fact that it is owned by someone else and ones inability to have it. Moreover, for him, the key to distinguishing *xianmu* from *yanhong* (*jidu*) lies in the perception of whether the object deserves what he/she has or whether the subject should fight against the perceived unfairness of his/her inferiority. This distinction mirrors the definition presented in the previous chapter identifying the subject's *undeserved* inferiority and the object's *undeserved* fortune. Both are indispensable conditions for *yanhong* to be attributed. The direct outcome of *yanhong*, something to which Uncle Lin referred, is to fight for the desirable thing and/or to take it away from *the envied* person. For *xianmu*, however, the unequal situation is deemed to be deserved; therefore, no action is taken. A noodle shop lady I met at breakfast one day illustrated this point with more concrete examples. She gave the following information.

> *Xianmu* is when you think something is really nice, such as someone who used to have no money but because of the mines now has lots of money or someone like you who graduated from a top university and has gone to England to study. I *xianmu* for both situations. For *yanhong*, however, there is an element of ill-feeling (*bufuqi*); for instance, if we used to be in similar positions and you suddenly got rich, then I would have been truly red-eyed. But we are not at the same level. You have culture but I am just an ordinary peasant[73] so I will *xianmu* what you have but I won't *yanhong*. Or, for example, if someone was always rich we always say, "Money can produce money" (*qianneng shengqian*) and if you don't have money it is hard to do anything. In situations like this, I won't *yanhong* either. If people have money and

[73] Having culture or not was representing symbolically the urban/rural divide.

> invest [in business], more money will be earned and this is fine. *Yanhong* would only be initiated towards those who are similar to us and those who suddenly get something that I don't.

She confirmed that whether one deserves the good fortune is a crucial factor differentiating *yanhong* from *xianmu*. She further suggested that *yanhong* only occurs among equals. For her, equals refers to her fellow villagers, not to an outsider like me, in particular the fellow villagers who were in a similar economic situation to her own, not the ones who were already rich because of business investments. In her examples, making money from investment is not a situation leading her to *yanhong* (she applies *xianmu* instead) while sudden wealth was definitely subject to *yanhong*. Mrs Lin further explained how *yanhong* is manifested as a social symptom – *hongyan bing*, that is, red-eye disease. As she explained:

> *Yanhong* means someone owns something that you want to have but can't get. It is a sort of phenomenon. The symptom will be gossip or the efforts made to impede or obstruct [others from being successful]. For example, one person opens a dumpling restaurant and earns lots of money and then other people become red-eyed and want to open the same type of restaurant as well.
>
> If you *yanhong* someone but you do nothing [bad], it does not count as red-eye disease. For instance, if a family has something [valuable], you believe that they deserve what they have and people shouldn't make trouble. This [kind of attitude and behaviour] would not be taken as red-eye disease. Those who make up malicious rumours or condemn those who possess valuable things would, on the other hand, qualify as having red-eye disease. But those people won't naturally accept the imputation. Instead, they would just say bad things about others or make lots of trouble to sabotage others who have earned money or become government officials and so on.

According to Mrs Lin, the head of the Village Women's Committee for the past 15 years, the situation of red-eye had worsened since the village became wealthier. Seeing the opportunities to obtain money or others getting rich as the result of

mining activities, the desire to become wealthy had become increasingly desperate. There were two main groups of targets towards which red-eye actions were directed. One group was made up of their fellow villagers (as the noodle shop lady pointed out, those who were deemed equal but who had quickly obtained lots of money) while the other group consisted of the mining companies, this because some villagers believed that they should all share the mining resources of the region. With regard to the first group, envy originated from the pain felt at the good fortune of others; for the second group the concern was related to someone else having got what one was supposed to have. A government official at the township level who was quite sympathetic towards red-eye peasants in the village summarised the two kinds of red-eye in the following way.

> The issue of red-eye disease is not only aroused by the gap between the rich and the poor. The main reason is uneven distribution [of wealth]. Everyone sees this as unfair. People who earn money by their labour see people getting money by simply making trouble (*huda luannao*) as unfair, especially as the latter seem to earn more. How can they not be red-eyed? The troublemaker can ask for a couple of tens of thousand Yuan from mining companies while the villagers transporting iron ore can't earn as much no matter how hard they work. There are people getting money by working and there are still some who can't even earn anything. Not all households are able to get at least one family member a job in mining.[74] Those who can't get a job will red-eye those who can. The conflicts between mining companies and villagers have been following the same logic. When companies were first set up, there were not that many problems. When they requisitioned land, supposing peasants could get 200RMB per year out of farming, the companies would pay 500RMB. This seemed a substantial amount. Everyone was happy. When the companies started to make immense profits, though, the peasants then looked back on how little they'd got. The compensation was one-off. When they had used the compensation up, they couldn't sell the land again, while for the mining companies

[74] References from well connected people (*guanxi*) are needed to get a job in mines and there are age limits as well (preferably age 18-45). Women are hardly employed either.

the profits were fast increasing. How could it not feel unbalanced?

Red-eye originating from the mining business was an extreme manifestation of the desperate desire to earn more money and of the pain of earning less than their fellow villagers. Such a desperate level of desire explains why the villagers have become engaged in unreasonable fights to a significantly increased extent, something which Mrs Lin qualified as a manifestation of red-eye disease. She provided an illustration from one of her recent experiences.

> I went out to distribute wool thread.[75] This was part of the central government's "Sending out Warmth" initiative which was aimed at offering over ten thousand poor children sweaters in winter. We were allocated six rolls of wool thread [roughly three kilos altogether] which had been donated by a wool company in Beijing. To distribute them, I identified three impoverished households in the villages, households which also had children to make sweaters for. On my way to give out the thread, I was seen by women on the street who insisted on asking me about what I was up to. I knew they were always making up guesses, so I just joked about it, saying that I was selling thread. They were not fools and knew that it was part of my responsibilities as the head of the women's committee to allocate subsidies, though. So they knew the wool was not for selling and responded, "Don't try and fool us about who are the poor or the rich, we should all get a share!" I was irritated. "What? Everybody to get a share? Do you know how many people we have in the village? Over 2000! We have only six rolls so each person gets an inch? What is the point of that?" Then you know what they said? "You should throw them into a river!" It is just hopeless talking to them. Each village had poor children who had lost one or both of their parents or who were suffering from some disease or who disaster had befallen; if they were able use the thread to make a sweater, I won't be red-eyed [as other people are].

As Mrs Lin implied, the women who ridiculously wanted to obtain a share of everything and who would not even let pass the opportunity of an inch of wool thread were a perfect example of pervasive red-eye disease: covet anything

[75] It should be noted that the wool thread was donated by a rather well-known company from Beijing and it was of very good quality and not something people could purchase in the village.

desirable, attempt to acquire it and, if not successful, destroy it (as with the suggestion to throw the wool thread into a river). This, according to Mrs Lin, was no different to the mindset embedded in the conversation I documented at the beginning of this chapter. The intention to covet and sabotage (as a consequence of not being successful in acquiring what they coveted) was the principal sign of red-eye disease. Following this line of reasoning, the success the mining companies had evidently achieved and the money their fellow villagers had made, if not to be shared, should all be destroyed, just as the wool thread was to be thrown into a river. This kind of mentality and behaviour was not at all unusual in Lanying, Xitai and other villages in the township. As for the cases I was told about by the staff working at the Township Public Security Station and the Office for Letters and Visits,[76] an increasing number of disputes were being initiated and submitted for negotiation by the township government. Here is one of the stories that I heard there.

> An old man went to steal iron ingots from the mines. He was caught and chased by the security police. Unfortunately, he fell to the ground, which led to a problem to do with high blood pressure. He later died. His family was extremely upset and they insisted that the old man's death was the responsibility of the security police. We went to mediate and it was really insane. We said that the security men's job was to keep the company's property safe and asked how they could be expected not to chase a thief who had been seen. His family members said, "OK we can return things he stole and you return the man". Do you not think that this is being unreasonable? Nowadays, there are many cases like this. They simply want to extort as much money as possible out of the mining companies [by whatever means they have available].

[76] I was not permitted to look at these cases at my leisure. Given my special connection with higher level officials of the township, I was given a bit of time to read through the files but could not take anything out of the archive room.

In the following section, I will discuss in detail the kind of envy (red-eye in its local forms) instigated by mining activities. The section starts with Mrs Lin's red-eye attribution directed at a contract concerning a pine valley in Lanying and then goes on to balance this with two other examples of people in Xitai who might be considered both envious and malicious.

"They are over the line!"

> Now the situation with red-eye has gone far beyond just feeling *xianmu* or *jidu* and has started involving many extreme methods. This time, for instance, it [the dispute] is about the pine valley. The mining company wants to rent it for tailing storage. To discuss this, the village committee held a meeting with village representatives. At the end of the meeting an agreement was reached that the valley would be leased out at a charge of seventy thousand RMB.[77] In addition, when the company is in full operation, each ton of iron powder produced would suppose a return of 1 RMB for the village committee as shared benefits. Suppose the annual production was to be 500 thousand tons, then the village could get 500 thousand Yuan per year.
>
> After the contract was signed a number of villagers were so annoyed about it that they made a lot of trouble. Some considered that we had asked for much less than what it was worth; some said we should ask for one million Yuan and some said four million Yuan. There were all kinds of groundless requests. This is also a kind of red-eye. What exactly, though, are they red-eying? They are comparing the situation with those found in the neighbouring villages up north. In those villages, each valley the mining company rents is worth much more than this. But those valleys have resources. Those valleys are abundant in iron ore. Those valleys are very different from our valley which is to be used only for storing tailings. The price is higher for valleys in other villages because the price there is for the iron ore while ours is for using the valley. These villagers will not consider this fact, though. They are not only red-eyed, they also rob. They dispute things openly by asking, "Who the hell signed the contract?" The village mayor responds by saying that it was him. The villagers then challenge him by saying, "Who are you allowed to represent? You can only represent yourself!" They disregard village law completely. They just want to void the contract and negotiate for an alternative price.

[77] Roughly 5,400 GBP at the time of my fieldwork in 2008.

> Given that the decision-making process has complied with the legal procedure, these villagers cannot actually get anything extra out of the deal. The contract has been agreed by the two village committees. The village representatives have been consulted too. Three out of five of the village representatives have signed the agreement and the contract has therefore become legally binding. The disputes all began with red-eye. The troublemaking villagers are red-eyed about other villages making loads of money. They simply want it too and want to get it out of the mining companies [they know they are making huge profits anyway]. These villagers refuse to consider the actual situation of our valley; they just want to extract more money. For instance, the company originally intended to rent some forest land as well. But the farmer who was using the land asked for two million Yuan and refused to negotiate the price. The company has thus had to drop the plan.

For Mrs Lin, the red-eye actions all originated out of a desperate desire for money. The actions and requests were groundless, though, and the law and the regulations were completely ignored. The troublemaking villagers could not get what they wanted since this was unreasonable. The only thing left as a result of their actions was the trouble they had caused, trouble potentially endangering the relationship with the mining companies and the benefits secured with them (as shown by the case of the avaricious farmer).

"It is just unfair!"

The aforementioned troublemakers would certainly not admit that their actions were a result of red-eye, however. As was explained in the section giving the background about mining, well-accepted standards for requisitioning land have not been established. The variable standards employed by mining companies could also only encourage disbelief in relation to the handling of these contracts. I did not want to jeopardise my relationship with Mrs Lin by befriending the alleged "troublemakers" in the dispute over the pine valley but their way of arguing and

acting was not at all exceptional. Below is an example of a similar so-called troublemaker who was futilely trying to stop the earth-mover when her house was on the verge of being demolished, attempting to pull out of the contract signed with Sky a year before and demanding more money.

It was on one of those spring days, after my 4.30 a.m. breakfast, that a middle-aged woman, Tian, came to Aunt Yang's house to look for me. I had never met or talked to Tian before. She had simply heard that I, an outsider who could possess some kind of negotiating power or who might have something to do with Sky, was staying in Xitai and might be able to help her with her petitions. She told me that she had got a mere ten thousand Yuan for her land and a thatched house situated on it while her next door neighbour had obtained 120 thousand Yuan (although this was for a brick house). She argued that she had not signed for the yard and the piece of land in front of the house, however, and that even though the contract had been signed and the money paid, she should therefore have been able to negotiate for more money. She had not been successful, though, and the township land bureau had already assigned an earth-mover to pull everything down.

This case involves two interrelated disputes. The land belonging to her was located in the valley Sky had intended to requisition and it also had the thatched house on it, although this had, in fact, been long deserted. According to common practice in Xitai, when a son gets married, a new house has to be built for the new couple by the groom's parents. Nowadays, the young prefer to bid for a new house

site closer to the main road, however, and tend to move away from the valley that their old parents used to live in. For the case of Tian, then, she had moved to the new house along with her son and daughter-in-law years before. In theory, the site on which her old house was built should therefore have been returned to the village and reclaimed as agricultural land or reallocated to others who needed it. Of course no one would actually return their house, however, and as long as there were new house sites available to be granted to new couples (or even if new couples could at least redecorate their parents' old house) the village committee would just turn a blind eye. When Tian's land was requisitioned by Sky, the land bureau claimed to be removing the deserted houses and reclaiming agricultural land. Their true intention was to facilitate Sky's land requisition, however, as once these houses were demolished no one would be able to renegotiate their contract anymore. This was Tian's last chance, then.

The land bureau had granted Tian two more days and had agreed to start pulling down houses from the other end of the concession to leave her more days to renegotiate. But Tian's efforts had been in vain in this respect and, as a last resort, she had taken a quilt and pillow in order to move into the deserted house so that no one would dare to cross over it. Everyone said she was crazy because she might have frozen to death in the windowless house and because with the "black-words-on-white" paper (i.e. with contracts already signed), no compensation could be ever made. Tian said the following to me.

> It is really unfair! I was among the first to sign the contract, which helped Sky to initiate the whole process. Similar houses were paid eighty to 100 thousand Yuan while I only got ten thousand Yuan. My

> daughter-in-law has been grumbling all the time and I really cannot live like this any more. How can they [Sky] take advantage of me like this? There were also other people who got very little at the beginning and they got fifty thousand Yuan compensation in the end. Do you think it is worthwhile appealing my case?

I did not know what to say but promised to take the necessary photos or to write petition letters for her if needed. After she had left, Aunt Yang commented that this woman was just being unreasonable, however. She said, "If you didn't agree on the price, you should not have signed the contract". Aunt Yang's family did not get much compensation either but she was hoping to supplement this in the long run by means of her son getting a job at Sky once it was in full operation. Aunt Yang therefore did not want to "make trouble" or engender a bad relationship with Sky. The next door neighbour to whom Tian had referred turned out to be a school teacher I knew and she brought up Tian in conversation by saying how she had always been a red-eyed character and by explaining how Tian was always envious and less satisfied with what she had compared to others. The school teacher also thought the contract with Sky was unfair as her neighbour had got 100 thousand Yuan. However, unlike Tian, she had not done anything about it. She had accepted her money even though it might not have been the right amount as she recognised that it was already too late to change anything. So she had swallowed their pain. Despite the accusations levelled at Tian, which seemed to be prevalent, I heard some days later that she had, in fact, got more compensation. This unexpected result might just quickly turn Tian from the condemned subject of red-eye to an enviable object of red-eye.

Picture 2.4 Tian's house in 2007

"They are red-eyed, I am not"

Wu was in his early twenties. His parents used to work in Beijing so he had had the chance to finish both elementary school and junior high school there. When his family had returned to Xitai about five years earlier, they were well and truly one of the rich families. As Wu told me, he could ask his peers to do whatever he wanted as he was the one able to afford any type of luxury expenditure in the village. Nonetheless, after the mining business caused the local economy to boom, more super-rich people emerged and he was no longer so admired by his friends. He was peddling vegetables with his mother when I met him while his father was employed in a mining company. He often rode around on a roaring blue-striped motorbike after work as if trying to claim that he was still one of the coolest people in Xitai.

His family was among those few households that had not signed a contract with Sky to lease their land. He and his family were, according to some, well qualified as troublemakers. He told me the following.

> I won't sign. They [those who have already signed] don't know the law but I do, so I won't be cheated. Someone has received one million Yuan but others only several tens of thousands Yuan. Why? Because there are people who know the law and others who don't. Many are now regretting having signed the contracts, or having signed too early, but it is already too late. Black words on white paper, it is all fixed. So I'm not signing yet. Now nearly 90% of households have signed and Sky has thrown over twenty million Yuan into this. Why should they care about a couple of million Yuan more? I have to ask for money now, otherwise you lose your chance. After the mine is set up, they will exploit you to death to earn this money back. Whether I ask for money or not, they will exploit me in the future anyway. So, why not ask for more?

Wu further told me about how he enjoyed reading the biographies of successful men. For him, what was key to their success was their ability to seize the right opportunity and to discover the secret of how to turn stone into gold. As he explained, at the beginning of the setting up of the mining business, who would have ever assumed that this ore would be so valuable one day? It was the same with their land; it should definitely be worth more than what Sky had offered to pay. In a way, he had turned the negotiation with Sky into an investment to make a profit from; he might have been well aware that the amount he and his family had requested was unreasonable. However, as with Tian, this was the only chance he had. After hearing about his ambitious plan, I attempted to bring up the discussion of troublemakers and red-eye and told him that I was curious to hear his opinion on the matter. He had probably heard about the accusations regarding his

behaviour and told me without hesitation, "For others, it might be out of red-eye. In my case, I don't think so".

I turned to others to clarify how red-eye actions could be singled out from other actions. When the head of Xitai village's wife invited me to go for a walk and pick some wild vegetables the following day, I questioned her on this. Both her natal family and her husband's family were based in Xitai and she had witnessed most of the disputes during the time when her husband was hired by Sky as a mediator for negotiating individual contracts. She commented woefully on the fact that Sky had made some in the village "[very] poor and some [very] rich" (*qiongdeqiong, fudefu*), leaving some living in desperate situations and others restless. I then asked how one could differentiate red-eye actions from other actions in these mine-related disputes. She explained, "for instance, if for a piece of land someone has got compensation of one million Yuan, suppose you have a similar sized piece of land, asking for one million Yuan would be alright. But if you only have 1/10 of the size of the land in question and also demand one million Yuan then there's no doubt that this is out of red-eye". In other words, it is behaviour that is far beyond reasonable which leaves red-eye as the only plausible explanation for nonsensical logic. What is deemed as reasonable or unreasonable can hardly be decided by consensus anymore, though, and this definition of red-eye also cannot decide whether Wu or Tian had more or less of a case of red-eye, despite what they claimed. The elastic ambiguity that comes with the attribution of red-eye has made this both a disposable and powerful tool for interpreting what has happened in the

community and maintaining the order of things. In such a case whether Wu, Tian or other alleged troublemakers admit, display or deny their accused red-eyes actions is also of less concern to anyone compared to the attribution of envy as this has already exerted its power in making applicable moral judgements.

Moreover, what had been changed in Xitai, according to the wife of the head of Xitai village, was the general situation in the sense that, in the past, everyone was living in similar situations so there would not have been so many things to red-eye. Even if there were disputes between households in the past, then, it had not been so difficult to settle them. For instance, as she further explained, in the past when there were disagreements over land use, one might similarly have asked another person for money. If the amount was ludicrous, however, or like what people had been asking for recently, others might say, "You are ridiculous! How can you still call yourself human (*zenme zheme bushiren*)?" Local authorities might have intervened too. Those involved would have quickly dropped their unreasonable requests and the problem would have been easily resolved. The other difference, as she saw it, was that the disputes now involved a third party, the mining company. The situation was not like extorting money from your neighbours, in which case you had to weigh carefully the intricate relationships within the village. With the mining company, on the other hand, the more you extorted the better. It was no longer seen as despicable or shameless and might even be admired by some as it demonstrated ones abilities to negotiate or, to put it in an extreme form, the ability to make money. In a way, having money has become the paramount value to be

admired. The concern for moral propriety has allegedly been abandoned by many. This was precisely why even though Wu was aware of how unreasonable his request was he still believed it could not be the same as red-eye. Even if it was, such "red-eye" actions, as they saw it, would not harm any of their fellow villagers; for this reason they would not drop their cases as people might have done before.

Conflicting ideas of fairness and capability

Mining disputes and red-eye are clearly not the same thing as some disputes might be motivated by concerns for social justice. The red-eye discourse is only used for requests deemed "nonsensical". It was interesting to investigate at what point certain requests came to be seen as unreasonable and red-eye attributed. For all three cases, being unreasonable was the key to attributing red-eye to the identified "troublemakers". For Mrs Lin, the troublemakers were unreasonable because they had transgressed the boundaries stipulated by village law and regulations. As for Tian, she had contravened her own promises and pulled out of the signed contract; as for Wu, his uncooperative behaviour made him seem exceptionally avaricious and disobedient. All these ways of behaving were in certain ways a violation of commonly accepted rural behaviour; for some their behaviour was too ridiculous to approve of. The intention of the unreasonable requests was unanimously interpreted as being motivated by the coveting of the money that others had made. In all three cases, the attribution of envy also presumed the definite failure of the troublemakers, Tian and Wu's demands, given that these demands were all deemed absurd and shameless by others. If Mrs Lin, Aunt Yang,

the school teacher and the village head's wife were right when they foresaw that nothing could be retrieved, the three cases might have clearly satisfied the three conditions underlined in the definition of red-eye: desirable things, the fact that these are owned by someone else and ones inability to have them too. Ironically, however, with Tian indeed having obtained more compensation and Wu's demand still pending, it would be very difficult to accept this as an unquestionable conclusion.

When I returned to Xitai in the summer of 2008, however, Sky had finished constructing its processing factory and I was told that they would start a trial operation within a few months. By then, most disputes had been settled. Wu had still not signed a contract but his land was not that essential to the company so the deal was simply left unresolved. As I was told, red-eye had become much less of a problem at this point as it could only lead to waste and because nothing could be obtained from it (red-eye) anymore. Red-eye was just pointless (*yanhong ye bai yanhong*), as villagers in Xitai pointed out. The contracting procedures were no longer defective. Everything had an explicit rule and a process that had to be followed. No one could ask for a ridiculous amount of money anymore. Even if a dispute was deliberately initiated, nothing good could be achieved from it anymore. As I was told by villagers, "If you cannot find any reason to initiate a dispute, such as them using your land or pollution or anything, there is just nothing you can do". Red-eye actions seem to have quickly had an end put to them. I certainly would not deny that a proportion of (or maybe even the majority of) the mining-related

disputes might have been due to justifiable concerns given the malpractice of the mining companies but it was also true that "money extortion" from mining companies had also gone wild. Initially the mining company's treatment had been seen as unfair by many (or even most) of the villagers and the so-called "red-eye" actions, that is unfair responses to unfair treatment, had also greatly increased.

The conflicting ideas relating to civic justice in transitional China have been discussed in recent published research edited by Jing Zhang, a professor at Peking University. According to this research, a salient characteristic of people's sense of justice in contemporary China is that this is often formulated based on how they compare themselves with others or what they maintain as their reference points (Zhang, 2008: 7). The reference systems people are using are diverse, in the same way that the three cases in this chapter have illustrated different arguments on fairness. According to Zhang and her research team, there existed historical, generational and professional differences in people's reference systems and the systematic distinctions people have experienced have played significant roles in people's lives. As their cases were based on lawsuit archives, the interviews showed that when it comes to social justice people tend to evaluate events according to their experience or the system they are accustomed to; their reference points and their sense of justice are, thus, full of uncertainty (Zhang, 2008: 7). When it comes to social justice concerning land distribution in particular, the previous half century, as Zhang argues, has involved drastic changes; social principles varying from being unequal to being equal and back to being unequal in rural China have, therefore,

shaped and reshaped people's values relating to what is deemed to be just (Zhang, 2008: 5). More specifically, the land reform and the movement of the people's commune in the 1950s seemed to have erased differences overnight. Everyone was supposed to have an equal share in collective land and collective resources after this. After the economic reform of 1978 the principles of equal share and access to collective land were still ensured and individual households were still entitled to the benefits generated from allocated land. Gradually, however, the market principle gained surprising prevalence over the past 30 years in transitional China, this principle coexisting with many principles of social justice remaining from before, though (Zhang, 2008: 5). This fact might explain why all the characters in the three cases in Xitai reckoned that their beliefs and actions were fair and those of others unfair.

I do not intend to discuss people's ideas of fairness or justice encapsulated in the mining disputes in Lanying and Xitai. Rather, I see red-eye attribution relating to the occurrence of unfair responses to unfair treatment and to how such behaviour is encouraged, tolerated and imputed. As discussed in the introduction, envy is a manifestation of sense of social violation. Apart from the idea of what is fair being transgressed, as when Tian finally got herself more compensation, the notion of capability (*you nengnai*) has also been transformed. As Uncle Lin explained earlier, capability is a crucial factor for distinguishing between *xianmu* and *yanhong* (*jidu*). If one is convinced that people who have made more money are better than oneself then red-eye is not instigated. In the three mining disputes,

the troublemakers, Tian and Wu's abilities may have just been considered by some to be making trouble instead of being actually capable of achieving anything. It was also believed that they were initiating fights precisely because they could not make money any other way. If they could have, for example, found jobs in Sky or started small businesses when the factory was in full operation, this would have been regarded as better than shamelessly extorting money from Sky. On the other hand, the troublemakers, Tian, Wu and others like them believed that money only belongs to those who can manage to get it by whatever means. If you won't fight (*zheng*) for it, it will no longer be yours. If you succeed, it shows that you are capable (*you benshi*); if you don't, it shows that you are not (*wo ziji buxing*).

Conclusion

In the accounts my informants offered in order to distinguish between *xianmu* and *yanhong* (*jidu*) only the noodle shop lady explicated under what circumstances envy would be instigated and felt. For Uncle Liu, Mrs Lin and many others, their accounts served to delineate under what circumstances envy could be attributed. Mining disputes have led to occurrences of red-eye (*yanhong)* being posited, claims being strongly condemned by some and upheld by others. The inconsistent standards adopted by the mining company have generated such "troublemaking" behaviour in reaction to its malpractice. Companies have also encouraged bad behaviour by giving the green light to some of these actions.[78] Such practice has transgressed the boundaries of what is supposed to be reasonable and has in effect

[78] As I was told, given the amount of money they can make every hour, the disruption to its production can only cost them more. So sometimes they would just pay the "trouble making" villagers simply to avoid it.

challenged the idea of what being capable is deemed to be.

In Uncle Liu's and others' attributions of envy, desirable things, the fact that these are owned by somebody else and ones inability to have these things are three indispensable conditions for generating a case of red-eye. What troublemakers have done is to turn ones "inability to have" into behaviour involving making "nonsensical claims". The existence of conflicting ideas about "unfairness" and "capability" has made envy attribution questionable. The presence of mining companies and their ability to fulfil certain people's desire for money has also affected who is the target of red-eye actions. The common practice of envy would involve sabotaging the people one envies. In the case of the mining disputes, though, the alleged envier instead appeals to the mining companies. By gaining more money they can themselves become the *envied* ones. The accusation of envy can, then, be imputed to someone else.

What Sky miscalculated was how quickly information would spread within the village. When they negotiated the varying prices for land requisition, the individual contracts were supposed to be confidential. However, in a close community, like that of Xitai, no secret can be kept intact for long. For instance, at the beginning of the land requisition process, when someone was paid as much as ten thousand Yuan for deserted or infertile land, this represented quite a substantial amount for any farmer. Soon, though, people learnt that so-and-so had got fifty thousand Yuan because there were crops on the land or that someone had got their payment based on metre measurements instead of *mu*, these cases leading to compensation as high

as 1.2 million Yuan. In such cases, both the subject's inferiority and the object's good fortune are *undeserved.* Thus, everyone is red-eyed and the only difference depends on whether red-eye could help you to get anything or whether it would be just a total waste of time. Most of the time this emotion is deemed to be a waste of time and effort so people hide it carefully, especially so as to not make others suspicious of ones (potentially) malicious attentions. In the next chapter, I return to the ordinary scenes of village life and discuss how envy was carefully concealed and disguised. I pay specific attention, in particular, to the strategies used to compensate for the potential envy induced by the rich.

Chapter 3: Envy and wealth

On the very first day of my fieldwork in September 2006, my host happened to hold a feast with his mother and younger brother and their families. When the younger brother, who was in his late forties, proposed a toast to me, he said, "I only envy (*xianmu)* people who have knowledge (*wenhua)*, like you! I wish I could be more educated but it won't be possible in my lifetime!" I was thrilled, not by his compliment, but to hear him uttering the word envy. I could not wait to pencil it down in my fieldnotes later on. From that point on, I eagerly participated in the daily lives of local people, listened to their conversations and attended weddings and social gatherings; I was, however, quickly deflated by the rare occurrence of envy. No signs of envy emerged spontaneously for months and it was not until nearly half a year later, when I was sitting on the brick bed (*kang*) of Liu Jun's family, whom I had got to know very well, that Liu Jun's mother, who was in her early fifties, suddenly said to me something that was similar to what I had heard on that first day. "You know, I just envy (*xianmu)* people like you who have knowledge (*wenhua).*" I was surprised by the abruptness of the comment and asked why she felt like that. She explained as follows.

> I always wished my son would study for a few more years but he didn't. When we were working back in the *Dadui* period [the time of the production brigades in the collective period], during the breaks, those who were more literate and who could read could get work points[79] (*gong fen*) by reading newspapers to us. At that time, we worked one

[79] In the 1950s, peasants were divided into groups that worked for collectives. They earned a fixed number of points every day (for example, men 12 points, women 10), the points being redeemed for food at the end of each year.

> whole day to get just 1.5 Mao [roughly 0.7 of a penny] while those who read newspapers for half an hour could earn three points which could add up to a lot in a month. If my son were better educated, he wouldn't be *shoulei* [doing physically demanding and tiresome work] now.

Her comment indicated that what she really envied was not knowledge in itself but the better job prospects that went with knowledge and education. A neighbour of my host in Lanying had commented on my research in a similar way by saying, "Your job is very good [some of them assumed that I was working in the township].[80] You don't need to work hard and can earn money by simply walking around" (*zouzou jiu laiqian*). The essential logic applied here is the following: earning money is a necessity; having more money is certainly desirable; earning money without harsh physical labour is highly enviable. As mentioned earlier in the thesis, people may envy a wide range of desirable things, these ranging from material goods to agreeable qualities. The major concern of this study, however, is envy, especially malicious envy relating to wealth and money. In contrast to Chapter 2, which specifically stressed the malicious envy bred by windfall wealth obtained from land requisition and other mining disputes, in this chapter I introduce the kind of non-malicious envy that was talked about by my informants and discuss the possible factors that might transform non-malicious envy into malicious envy. This chapter will also start to introduce the ambivalent attitude people have towards *being envied*, especially when this has to do with wealth.

[80] I did explain what I was doing but even so people would think that I was doing some kind of paid job. Later on I had to conceal the fact that I actually had a scholarship in order to avoid being envied. I would normally emphasise that I was doing unpaid research as a college student.

Admiring envy

Spontaneous discussion of envy was extremely rare and at best I would hear people commenting on how they envied (*xianmu*) me. After my roundabout inducements and unremitting attempts to get people to talk on the subject, a typical discussion of envy (that is, if I could get one started at all) would go like this. I would ask something like, "Do other people envy?" and my informants would say, "Yes" with definite conviction; I would then ask, "Do you envy others?" and the answer would always inevitably be, "No". There was even one case when I was talking to a 28-year-old schoolteacher about the changing fashions among teachers, such as the change from buying motorcycles to buying computers, where this person denied that he was envious after telling me how nice it would be if he could have enough money to buy a car like some of the senior teachers in his school did. I had to shift my strategy by inquiring more indirectly about what other people might envy. Lao Wang told me the following.

> In the past it was a black and white TV. When you saw others with one, you needed to buy one too. You couldn't let your children go to other families' houses to watch TV [as this would be humiliating]. It was colour TV after this, and then from a 21-inch TV to a 24-inch and now up to a 29-inch. In village houses the sitting rooms will not be big enough to accommodate any TV bigger than 29 inches so this is almost the maximum size. There are fashions in house-building too but you can't always rebuild your house. Some families will spend a lot on interior decoration, though. Now every family has a motorcycle and when I earn some money from gambling I will buy a car too. Everyone should pursue something.

The reply Lao Wang offered was more about being inspired to do something than about true envy. Anyone might be inspired by their neighbours' achievements and want to emulate these. This process was instigated by the inevitable

comparisons made between neighbours, kin groups and other fellow villagers. Before explicating how such "inspiration" had been or had not been turned into envy, it is crucial here to elaborate on the special connotations relating to such comparisons, which were also a recurrent theme in Chinese social life. The word for this phenomenon is p*anbi.* As is explained in the first part of Chee's (2000) article, *pan* means "to climb" as in a person climbing up a rope or a wall. *Pan* also describes climbing in a social sense, though (Chee, 2000: 53). For example, as Chee explains, *gao pan*, or "to climb high", means to "make friends or claim ties of kinship with someone of a higher social position". The second part of this interesting term, *bi,* has the double meaning of "competition" and "comparison". In brief, then, *panbi* means "climbing and comparing". The term is clearly understood to refer to self-advancement achieved by competing and comparing oneself with other people (Chee, 2000: 53). Chee exemplifies this in his research on food consumption where he documents the harsh peer pressure resulting from *panbi* as a factor strongly influencing schoolchildren's consumption of "snacks" (*xiaochi*) (Chee, 2000: 53).

Such competition and comparison, climbing and comparing, were common in both Lanying and Xitai. People were constantly comparing what they had with what others had or what others did not have. This happened virtually everywhere, at weddings and house-building events, during shopping trips to the weekly markets or when eating, dressing or drinking or doing anything at all comparable. For instance, during the weddings I attended in Lanying and Xitai, at the wedding

banquets with the other guests or back home with their families villagers would invariably comment on the size of the plates, which dishes had been included in the banquets and what had been left out, how much money had been collected[81] for the occasion, what kind of dowry the bride's family had brought, how much the sofa or the TV or other things in the new couple's living room had cost, and so on and so forth. Ming's wife shared her inside knowledge of what had been compared at her wedding the year before with me.

> When I got married, we just invited our close kin and friends. There were around 20 tables [of guests]. Now people will even invite those who are only distantly related and the latest fashion is to have more than 30 tables [of guests]. Nowadays, rebuilding the house is essential for getting married. Nonetheless, this condition means quite different things to different households. Some can afford to finish building the house without taking out loans. Some may not have spare money to rebuild their house. But no bride will agree to live in an old house anymore. To be able to get married, many have already borrowed substantial amounts of money before the wedding. The basic requirements for weddings have undergone changes too. Sometimes, as a bride, you don't need to mention anything to your parents-in-law about what they need to prepare, as your in-laws don't want you to look inferior in front of others either. If other brides have jewellery but you don't, you will lose face (*mei mianzi*). My jewellery was all bought in Chengde. Pieces made of gold were bought in big supermarkets or shopping malls to ensure their authenticity. One of my neighbours spent four thousand RMB on gold jewellery which unfortunately turned out to be fake. We didn't want this to happen.

Meticulous comparison could be a potential source of envy and material wealth was among the most central matters compared. I once asked an old man who had been the head of Xitai from the 1950s to the 1990s, "What are the taboo subjects in the village?" He told me, "You can ask about anything but money matters" (*jingji wenti*). The most important secrets to be kept involved money. Ironically, even

[81] Every person attending is supposed to bring a money gift, called *fenzi qian* in Chinese.

though no one seemed to know the exact amount of money others had, everyone had a fair idea of how wealthy others were. As Mrs Cui, whose family was among one of the few better-off families in Lanying, said to me in a rather sarcastic way, "My neighbours know better than I do how much money we have! They have been calculating every sum of money coming into my family ever since we got married But they don't know on how many occasions we have had to spend!" The noodle shop lady also explained to me the tactics used to speculate how wealthy others were in the village.

> In rural areas,[82] the basic distinction is between having money (*youqian*, rich) and not-having money (*meiqian*, poor). It is easy to count the few rich people. The majority are in similar sorts of conditions. Not all have lots of money, but everyone knows who has money anyway. You can tell. [Why couldn't I tell? I asked] We have been living here for many years, and we know everyone's roots and origins (*zhigenzhidi).* We can roughly tell how much better off a family is and where they get their money from. The rich people can be singled out by the cars they drive, the places they eat or drink and where they spend money for the purposes of leisure activities. For instance, one person bought a Santana[83] but, after earning money from mining, quickly changed his car to a Honda, an Audi or a Benz. You can therefore guess how much money they've earned. It is not like in cities where there are so many cars and where you can't tell which car belongs to whom. In rural areas, it's still rare to have a car; for this reason, everyone is carefully watching all the time. Everyone knows to whom a car belongs.
>
> For housing, the basic structures remain the same but you can differentiate someone's level from the decoration and furniture; for instance, you might use ceramic tiles for exterior walls. Nowadays, weddings are almost all the same. Building a new house is a necessity and everything such as the TV or the sofa should be well made. The only difference might be that someone paid three thousand Yuan for their sofa and you spent five thousand Yuan but on the surface they

[82] They knew I was from Chengde city as I mentioned I came from there and I had never lived in a village. Through this I noticed that many conversations spontaneously made a distinction between cities and rural areas.

[83] A brand of car produced by Shanghai Dazhong.

> look almost the same. Another important indicator is the clothes people wear. People dress quite differently if they have money. One reason for this is that when someone has money he doesn't need to till the fields anymore. So he doesn't need to wear shabby clothes. The other reason is that he may need to go out to banquets, etc. and if he drives a nice car but wears clothes that don't go with it others may think that he is an employee and look down on him. I think that if there are 200-RMB clothes available then these rich people won't get 100-RMB ones. They are not like us, wearing ordinary clothes. As for eating, it is almost the same. The only difference might be that if they have more money, they probably always eat in restaurants. If it were not for the rich people, how could there be so many restaurants?! Rich people also travel to places like Beijing or Sichuan. Otherwise, the daily life in a village is almost the same for them.

The admiration of other people's wealth did not necessarily lead to malicious envy. As I discussed in Chapter 2, the two different words for envy, *xianmu* and *yanhong*, have quite distinct connotations. *Xianmu* is closer to admiring and appreciating, so no action tends to be taken. *Yanhong* often leads to disruptive actions though, which I have referred to as red-eye actions and which are colloquially talked about as making trouble. It should be noted that actions arising out of envy have to be disruptive and damaging to be categorised as such; otherwise they do not qualify as envy being thought of as emulation instead. Fernández de la Mora makes this distinction, saying that emulation is "the desire to neutralize the uneasiness at ones own inferiority by reaching for the standard of the best" (Fernández de la Mora, 1987: 68). Envy, unlike emulation, according to Fernández de la Mora, aims at suppressing the pain caused by ones own frustration by bringing down the other person (Fernández de la Mora, 1987: 68). In other words, emulation affects oneself while envy leads to trying to break other people. As Fernández de la Mora puts it: "The envious one does not find dominant the desire

to be more, but rather to make the other less; there is no will to improve, but rather to level all" (Fernández de la Mora, 1987: 68). Therefore, for Fernández de la Mora, what separates emulation from envy is the condition of unreachability. In a way, envy is caused by emulation that is virtually impossible to realise; that is, ones own *inability* to achieve what one desires can be seen as one of the crucial factors turning positive inspiration directed at emulation into negative envy. As I mentioned in Chapter 2, the "troublemaking" activities and the alleged red-eye attribution were an exception to the everyday life of the villages. Envy was largely regulated by local moralities that encouraged the *enviers* to understand and accept their less fortunate positions and the *envied* to not instigate envy. The noodle shop lady further told me about how rare it was those days for the poor to explicitly try to break the rich.

> It is criminal. Only profound hatred can result from this. If I desperately needed your help and it was really important to me and not only did you refuse to help me but you also tried to bring me down, it might be possible [to turn this into the kind of hatred aimed at revenge]. It is really rare nowadays. For instance, if you want to borrow money from the rich but they are reluctant to lend it to you, most people will understand. It won't result in red-eye actions or anything.

Unlike the attributed red-eye actions, when the subject's inferiority and the object's fortune were both seen as undeserved, the unreachability felt in everyday life was largely seen as deserved and understandable, as is suggested by the quote above. Nonetheless, Foster (1972) suggests that the deprivation of others is the primary condition for breeding envy. In a society where social climbing was undoubtedly central and competitive comparison was extremely significant in everyday life, a rise in ones social status might easily result in the envy of others.

However, the responsibility for controlling envy should fall on both *the envied* and *the envier*. As implied in the quotation above, the key to not making admiring envy turn into malicious envy and not inciting criminal offences is for *the envied* not to do anything unkind and for *the envier* to try to understand what has been done. Not admitting envy is, in fact, one of the strategies for avoiding envy and for making it less of an issue. It would also be interesting to investigate how subtle techniques of avoidance have camouflaged feelings of envy and helped to form the kind of acceptance and understanding *the enviers* are meant to adopt.

The social contours of *perceived* equals

Before proceeding to talk about the various strategies concerning wealth-instigated envy, it is important to explore the boundaries and the contours of unreachability and *perceived* equals. As discussed earlier, envy often occurs among *perceived* equals and inaccessibility eventually sometimes turns emulation into irreversible envy; that is to say, people will only compare themselves with others who are deemed to come from the same level. If the comparison is not between *perceived* equals, the unequal possession of wealth etc might be seen as deserved and understandable. In this chapter, I will use people's expressed envy towards me to demonstrate the shifting boundaries among *perceived* equals and to show how such beliefs play a critical role in instigating actions motivated by envy.

There was one girl I met in a park in Wang Village who is particularly relevant here.[84] We chatted for a while and I learnt from her that she was monitoring the gardeners' work in the park. After her work was finished, she invited me to her

[84] A more detailed discussion of this village will follow in the next chapter.

family's house to have tea. I was grateful to her for her hospitality and happily followed her home. Sitting on her sofa, we both revealed more of our personal stories. I started by telling her about my educational background and my family home in Chengde at which point she jumped up off the sofa and said, "Really? It is impossible! How can you have graduated from Tsinghua University? My sister was just on a tour to visit Tsinghua in Beijing. That's the best university in China!" I was somewhat shocked by her reaction as I had told people the same thing in Lanying and Xitai hundreds of times and no one had responded as she was doing. In Lanying and Xitai two people had mentioned that they were envious (*xianmu*) of me as I documented in the beginning of the chapter but this was expressed in way that showed it was not a big deal. The girl went on to say how she felt so envious (*tai xianmu le*), something which made her feel regrets about her own life. She had married and was six-months pregnant and she said how she should have studied harder. After a short while, she quietened down and said she could now only hope that her sister might excel at school and maybe study at Tsinghua one day.

The girl's envy, as she acknowledged to me, was induced by the fact that I came from the same prefecture. She had certainly seen similar stories about people going to top universities or studying abroad on TV but she had never expected to see someone so close to her in terms of origins who had in her view managed to achieve so much more. People in Lanying and Xitai had never perceived me as their equal because they believed that I was from a city not a village, this representing a distinction that, for them, could not be crossed over. Therefore, what they envied

were my good job prospects, given my education, and not the education itself. It should be noted that excelling at school is also something desirable for villagers, though. As I was told by one of my informants, "if your family has knowledge, if, for example, both parents are teachers and the children have gone to universities, you will be respected as well. In the countryside, most people do respect knowledge and want their children to be successful [in schools] (*you chuxi),* such as going to universities and having decent jobs afterwards". Given the rural-urban divide, however, they just did not see me as their rival. I did once ask my host's daughter-in-law whether she had dreamed of moving to a city. She just raised her eyebrows and replied, "Moving to a city? That's foolish thinking!" (*chixinwangxiang*, literally "idiotic heart and absurd thoughts"). This widely used word had set up a perfect boundary that ruled out what was a potentially imaginable expectation but an unrealistic dream.

Another significant and telling experience I had was with a schoolteacher in Lanying. I went to visit the local primary school and sat in the teachers' office to talk to several teachers. Out of the blue, one of them acted in an extremely mean and cynical way towards me. I learnt from the conversation that he had been sent down to this township school on a one-year exchange programme and that it was incredibly inconvenient for him. He had to travel back and forth every week between the county where his wife and son lived and Lanying. To make things worse, he knew no one in Lanying apart from one other teacher who had come on the same exchange programme. He had nothing to do every day after 3 p.m. when

school finished and he found village life extremely boring. He did not stop mocking me, saying, "How can you voluntarily choose to live in a village? How can you be treated so much better by the villagers?" He also complained about how he had to wear clothes with a hole burnt in them (he was being ridiculous at this point). Other teachers in the office exchanged looks but said nothing. They kept asking me questions in a friendly and amiable manner. On the way home, I set to pondering on this bad experience and wondered what had been bothering the teacher and what I had done wrong. In a moment of flashback, I wondered whether he had red-eyed me. He had clearly assumed there were similarities between us in the sense that we were both people who had studied for a long time, who were knowledgeable and who were living in a village but my seemingly pleasant and voluntary participation in village life had annoyed him. He was miserable in his situation while mine seemed to be enjoyable. He hated me for my good fortune.

The two examples presented here, those of the girl and the school teacher, might just be exceptional in that these two saw me as their rival compared to how other people I met[85] in the villages saw me. Even so, the examples were quite different from each other in terms of how I was seen as a rival. For the girl, it was the fact that we were from the same prefecture that was important, while the school teacher it was the assumption that we shared the same educational status. What I want to suggest here is that the *perceived* equal cannot be seen to be always fixed and stable as many seem to tend to believe. Foster (1972) distinguishes two types of envy: "envy between equals" and "envy between non-equals" (Foster, 1972: 170).

[85] Others might have felt envious but in a far less intense way.

For him, society has designated its members "who are deemed eligible to compete with each other for desired goals, i.e. who are conceptual equals as far as the goal is concerned" (Foster, 1972: 170). Similarly, societies also define "those who are not equals to compete, i.e. who are *not* conceptual equals" (Foster, 1972: 170, original emphasis). According to him, "Children and parents are not conceptual equals" and society is structured in such a fashion that members of other classes are not eligible to compete for desired things in order to minimise the disruptive effects of envy (Foster, 1972: 170). While Foster's distinction is mostly true the two cases presented here mirror the fluidity of the boundaries when it comes to people comparing themselves with one another and the kind of situation when the same object may induce very different kinds of envy in the envious subjects.

The need to conceal wealth

According to the Second National Agriculture survey[86] carried out in 2006, among the 777 households and 2,769 individuals registered in Lanying (Xitai included), the annual income achieved through selling agricultural crops[87] ranged from 0[88] to twenty thousand RMB. The majority of household's agricultural income per year was around a couple of thousand RMB after the price increase for sweet corn of 2005. Most households lived on wage labour. Those who worked in the mining business were paid from one thousand to three thousand Yuan a month

[86] This was conducted in December 2006 while I was in the field. I accompanied one researcher conducting a certain number of surveys and also managed to acquire part of the survey data for my field villages.

[87] Mainly sweet corn for which the price had gone up to 6-6.5 Mao per (roughly 50 penny) Jin the previous year.

[88] Some rented their land out either to mines or for other people to farm.

depending on the skills required by their work. Working opportunities in mining were almost exclusively for men and these men normally worked in three different shifts (8 a.m. to 4 p.m., 4 p.m. to 12 a.m. and 12 a.m. to 8 a.m.). The floor space of the houses ranged from 50 square metres to 200 square metres, this partly manifesting wealth differences (although whether there was an unmarried son in the household or not also needs to be considered here).[89] Savings were not included in the survey given that this was a taboo subject for enquiries and no reliably correct data could have been collected anyway.[90] Overall, there were 48 cars and 4 computers in the village. Motorcycles were very common as having one was a necessity for men travelling to work at the mines (it took roughly 20 minutes to get there by motorcycle). In the village there were a few rich people who were millionaires while there were also people living in houses built in the 1960s. On the surface, there were not many differences between the different households. Every new house looked almost exactly the same[91] as they were all built of bricks and had fenced yards.

One of the reasons, among others, for the rich concealing their wealth was to avoid becoming the target of petty crime. Some rich families were blackmailed and a series of planned thefts also came to light in the summer of 2008 in Lanying. The targets were those two-storey buildings which were generally seen to be rich

[89] They tend to refurbish their houses after the engagement of a son.

[90] My host had warned me not to ask how much savings others had since this might have raised suspicion and since they would not have given me the true numbers anyway.

[91] The land available for building houses is fixed and basically commensurate for everyone but there are a few two-storey houses that stand out quite a lot. Nonetheless, most of the new houses have been built in a very similar style.

households. Various ways of extorting money became prevalent when Lanying started to gain fame for being wealthy. One of the most recent schemes set up for swindling people out of their money involved a trick using a gold Buddha. It went like this: you found a gold Buddha lying on the ground but another woman saw it at the same time. You could both claim a share of it, then. The woman agreed to give up the gold Buddha in exchange for money or whatever valuable you had to hand. You assumed the gold Buddha would be worth much more so you happily offered the money though, in fact, this turned out to be made of stone instead of pure gold. The other type was called *paihua* (bat-and-dizzy) and this purportedly worked in a rather mysterious way. Someone put about a set of lies, for instance that your family or children would soon find themselves in a hazardous situation and that this evil could only be diverted by giving out money. The villagers speculated that the swindler must have used magical powers or drugs, though; otherwise, how could anyone believe in such easily exposed lies. Others fell for it, though. Liu Jun's mother-in-law had effectively been swindled out of sixty thousand Yuan after being told that some awful accident was about to happen to her children. She quickly went back home, withdrew all her money and gave the money to the woman whom she had seemingly randomly met at the weekly market. She was not "allowed" to tell anyone before handing over the money and consequently no one could persuade her to act otherwise. When she eventually realised the plot she was devastated. The neighbours, who had heard the story, commented that the swindler must have done some research within the village in order to know who the rich

ones were; otherwise, how could they have known to request the exact amount that Liu Jun's mother-in-law had saved in a bank! Enquiring about money may, then, have already given a clue as to the bad intentions of the enquirer. Such questions should, therefore, be carefully avoided. The head of Xitai, who told me not to ask about money matters (*jingji wenti*), also elaborated on this point.

> There is a reason for this. In the countryside there are many people who gossip a lot (*renduo zuiza*) unlike in the cities where you may have more than 60 households in one building and you may know nothing about them. In the countryside, if you haven't moved out and have been living here for generations, you know everything about everyone. Even though you don't ask about savings you often have ways to speculate about them. For instance, this family has five members, three of whom have jobs, so then people know how much money they earn. If you don't have huge expenditures, eat what you get out of farming and have a predictable number of occasions for gift-giving (*renqingfenwang*), people are able to guess the amount of your savings.
>
> In the past, when we only earned work points, there was nothing to hide [and it was not possible to hide anything either] but now it is different. Like the case with Sky when money had already been distributed to those who had signed the contract for requisitioned land. There was one guy living up in the valley. Someone followed him and threatened him with a knife, asking him for money. The attacker was detected by people in the vicinity and was caught by the police. But with cases like this happening, people became more cautious about how much money they'd got. If someone became extremely rich in rural areas, he wouldn't have lived in the villages anymore and would have moved out to live in a city instead [to avoid being a distinctive target for crime and potential red-eye actions].

It seems that this everyday encounter was representative of a general problem. It was a constant struggle for people to detect how much money others had and to avoid any financial information about themselves being leaked out. Mrs Cui jokingly said that her neighbours knew more about how much her family had earned than she did but added that their calculations were largely erroneous. Moreover, the assumptions people made about other people's wealth had, in fact,

raised their expectations about the public spending of the rich, something which had become an extra burden for these wealthy people. Mrs Cui told me the following.

> People are prone to believe that we have loads of money. They have "helped" us calculate our income ever since I married my husband. But these people can only see how much you've earned but aren't able to think about how much we need to spend.[92] We did manage to save several thousand Yuan not long after our marriage. At that time, that amount was quite substantial so my father-in-law was very unhappy when I only gave him two thousand[93] Yuan for my brother-in-law's wedding. Was he expecting me to give away all my savings? How could that be? I also had other occasions when I needed to spend. We have lent nearly ten thousand Yuan to relatives and friends up to now and we always give the gift worth the most at weddings. Generally, 100 Yuan is the norm to give at weddings or 200 or 300 Yuan to someone to whom you feel closer. Even though my husband does, indeed, earn more than others, we are frequently invited to various social occasions and each time this costs us at least 200 to 300 Yuan.

What Mrs Cui said was true. People did expect the rich to give away more at special occasions. One instance of this was provided by *yangge* dancing which took place at every spring festival. This kind of folk celebration had largely died out a few years before this; nonetheless, after the flourishing of the mining business, *yangge* dancing had been widely revived. Apart from marching and performing in the main streets of Lanying and collecting money from local shops, restaurants and rich households or from whoever was willing to pay 100 Yuan or so, they would also drive up to where the mining companies were and perform there too. Each mining company would give a couple of hundred Yuan for the performance so, with nearly 20 companies, the troupe could easily earn a couple of thousand Yuan there. As the

[92] This way of explaining things has also been used as a strategy to avoid envy, something which will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

[93] This was also quite a substantial amount given the local standards for money gifts at weddings.

head of the women's committee, Mrs Lin was the organiser of such activities; her husband joked that these people instead of being a *yangge* dancing group (*yangge dui*) had transformed themselves into a money-collecting group *(shouqian dui).* I followed their three-day-long activities around the village and up to the mines and observed the harsh competition existing with other *yangge* dancing groups from adjacent villages over collecting money. I was startled by the strange conspiracy existing between mining companies and these self-formed dancing groups as in many cases there were no workers on hand to enjoy the performances. The dancing group would, nonetheless, still perform in front of an empty building and then leave as soon as money was given to them. In their cars or in the breaks between their performances, the groups would quickly exchange information about how much money they had received from which mining companies or from so-and-so's shop, commenting on how generous or parsimonious these people had been. Practical judgement would be used for each specific case too. For instance, if a particular shop had been seen to prosper the previous year but had given out very little, the groups would criticise the shop owner's stinginess. If a not very wealthy household gave them more money than they were expecting, they would perform longer[94] to pay off the unexpected generosity. As I was told, for the big mining companies giving out a couple of hundred did not represent a problem for them; for households within the village, though, being wealthy or not was an essential standard for evaluating how good or bad they were (in the view of others).

94 The performing of *yangge* in front of ones door is also seen as bring good luck and prosperous for the next year.

Picture 3.1: Yangge dancing at one of the mining factories

Picture 3.2: Mine workers welcoming a Yangge group

Somehow the most important secrets with respect to money matters were often kept intact. Such secrets included the following: Mrs Cui's husband had received a 20,000-Yuan bonus at the end of the year; Mr Qian did not often sell their iron ore to the processing factory to which they were attached as they were paid double if they sold it elsewhere; Wu's uncle had been paid 1.2 million Yuan as compensation for his land, instead of the generally accepted figure of 700 thousand Yuan. I managed to discover the information given above as in my role as both an outsider and a trusted friend. What I found out may well have only given a glimpse of the real figures hidden behind closed doors, though. What people seemed to care less about exposing was how much money they had spent. For example, a couple who had been carrying out some business in Beijing and who had returned to Xitai for the spring festival had happily shown off their car and a 3,800-Yuan motorcycle to everyone. The wife had also disclosed how much money they had spent on their son's education at high school (in a middle-sized town) and how expensive it was to raise their daughter in Beijing. People tended to be very open about their consumption which likely served as a corrective element to other people's watchful estimations, to avert envy and also as a way to secure their social positions in the village and to celebrate their success. Certain expenditures such as generosity in gift giving might in effect avert envy and other spending needs to be served as ways in which people maintain their social relations and avoid being despised.

The need to be envied

"If you are rich, people hate you; if you are poor, they condemn you" ("*fuhenni,*

qiongmani"). This phrase, Wu pointed out to me, was a spot-on summary of why people in the village were always striving for wealth and why being envied was also important. Another illustration of the meaning conveyed by the phrase was given to me by Mrs Li, a young woman in her late twenties: "If you have a decent life, people will be red-eyed; if not, people will laugh at you" ("*guodehao renjia yanhong ni; buhao, renjia xiaohua ni*"). Wu further illustrated how others tended to "hate" the rich. He said, "They will gossip about the rich or will be hands-off when the rich need help, deriding them by saying that they can hire people since they've got money". Wu had experienced these kinds of attitude when his family was one of the rich households in Xitai, as briefly mentioned in Chapter 2. He had withdrawn from an engagement with a girl from a nearby village not long before this time. He conceded regretfully that this had been because the girl had not been able to fully understand his ambitions to earn a better life. I gathered from his account that the disagreement had been about whether to build a two-storey house for their wedding. Wu and his family thought that they should save money to start a business when Sky began its full operation. The girl and her family, on the other hand, requested the new house be built as a condition of their marriage. Wu was clearly frustrated by the requests, believing them to be short-sighted, but also understood that such a request was the predominant ideal in rural areas. He went on to elaborate on the prevailing assumptions people have about others in the village.

I tell you, a well-matched marriage between people from equal

> economic and social backgrounds (*mendanghudui)*[95] is very important although it sounds quite old-fashioned. Look at the people in rural areas. If an ordinary guy brings back a tall, good-looking girlfriend, do you know what people will say? ["Something wrong with the girl?"] Exactly! Must be a prostitute. Similarly, if a good-looking guy has a short, ugly-looking girlfriend, the first thing that comes to everybody's mind is that the girl must have lots of money. People are like this. They constantly judge others. Look at the old woman over there [he pointed to a 70-year old woman who was idly basking in the sun]. If she was wearing a gold necklace and dropped it on the floor, no one would go to pick it up because people would assume that it must be fake. She is too old to work and probably does not have the money to afford real gold. Look, you wear a necklace too. If you dropped it, I would be the first to pick it up. This is the basic judgement used around here. If you are poor, for the same pair of shoes, yours will be expected to be the ones bought for ten Yuan, while for the rich, people would assume that they must have been bought for eighty Yuan from a supermarket. The countryside is like this.

The well-off households would be admired and the worse-off ones would be looked down on. According to some, this was also partly the reason why some villagers had become shameless about asking for money: it would be better to be envied than to be looked down on. Mr Qian and Mr Xu belonged to two of the rich families in Lanying. Every year at the lantern festival, people would gather in front of their houses (they lived opposite one another on the same street) to watch fireworks. It was well below minus 15 degrees Celsius on the night of the lantern festival in 2007 and every inch of the road was covered with snow that had turned to ice. Despite all this, though, my host still urged me to join his daughter to watch the fireworks in front of Qian's and Wu's houses. "They are rich and they always buy really good fireworks!" It had become a village tradition. Dressing in accordance with ones economic status and eating according to what one could

[95] Literally, door to door, gate to gate. It refers to the fact that a good match occurs when both people are from similar family backgrounds.

afford represented an important part of enjoying ones wealth. I was constantly being told that I dressed too humbly for someone coming from a city since, I was informed, people would not respect you if you were in shabby clothes. My neighbours would both boast about their experiences of eating in fancy restaurants and tactfully hide this fact from others. They wanted it both to be seen and not to be seen, to be envied but not to be hated.

The worst-off households, on the other hand, would gradually close themselves off from the social scene when they were no longer able to offer the same amount of money gifts that others provided at special occasions and their contribution to others might, thus, become increasingly trivial and insignificant. This was one of the scariest scenarios when living in a rural community such as Lanying or Xitai as no big events could be completed without cooperative assistance. In the constant *panbi* (climbing and comparing) situations it is, therefore, crucial not to lose face or look bad. However, as many villagers commented, *panbi* had become very severe and it was incredibly difficult for them to keep up with the constantly evolving fashions for weddings and other celebrations. There is no doubt that cash gifts had become a burden for many but weddings and other social occasions were also the places to show off ones new clothes, jewellery and other luxury items; I often heard people commenting on the new earrings or gold necklace someone else was wearing on these occasions. Therefore, in a way, complaining about how much you had spent was also a way of confirming how much you had and how well connected you were. Here is a group of women grumbling about their expenditure at

weddings.

> A: Why can't money last? 100 Yuan went in the blink of an eye and I thought I'd lost it somewhere. I've spent over seven thousand Yuan on wedding gifts alone [she had given four thousand Yuan for her brother's wedding].
>
> B: That couldn't be more true. I've spent two thousand Yuan this year so far. Now the amount expected for money gifts is too high. It must be that our living conditions are better. Otherwise, who could afford this? There will be another wedding on Wednesday and one on Friday. Last Saturday there were two. Did they invite you?
>
> A: How couldn't they? We are the same [surname] family. When we enter the lunar month of December, there will be even more people getting married.
>
> C: I just cannot afford to go to weddings anymore. Now fifty Yuan is the smallest amount you can give here and in the upper villages [where there are lots of mines and which are, therefore, richer] it is 200 or 300 Yuan. I used to have a relative there and every year I would go and visit. Now I just can't afford to visit, let alone attend weddings. It's such a difficult decision. If you don't go, it seems quite inappropriate but if you go and give 100 or 50 Yuan they will look down on the amount. But if you give a couple of hundred, it is just too much for our family. In the beginning I would still go but in the end I just gave up on them.
>
> D: It's not only that but now whoever gets married you'll get invited. Last week, the son of one township cadre member was getting married and they invited everyone they knew in the village. It's a bit embarrassing not to show up but if you go it'll be another couple of hundred.

The changing fashions at weddings and the absurdity of simply inviting whoever you knew was also echoed by a retired village cadre member who was often invited to preside at weddings and funerals.

> In the past, when you held celebrations, you would often consider the number of relatives you had, your relationships with your neighbours and your reputation in the village and then decide the number of tables[96] you wanted to invite. One more or one less wouldn't be a big deal. But now, if you can, you have to compete (*panbi*) and get the same as everybody else; otherwise people will say various things (*yilunfenfen*). In the 1970s and the 1980s, you only needed to give two Yuan or a maximum of five Yuan as a wedding gift but now the starting

[96] One table can roughly sit eight to ten guests and, due to limited space, there can normally only be 20 to 30 tables. These often need to serve two or three rounds of guests.

> point is fifty Yuan and it is more usual to give more than 100 Yuan. Also, people are extravagant with the scale of the wedding; it cannot have less than 15 tables and usually has 20 tables while there are also cases of 50 tables.

Competition is a huge burden for the worse-off but for the wealthy it instead provides confirmation of their success. The need to be envied and the need to be wealthy are certainly not the same thing but they are not unrelated. Money and wealth had become incredibly important in appraising other people's worth after the 1978 reform when economic achievement had been elevated to the status of paramount goal for development. In the village context, having or not having money was mostly discerned by where you lived, what you wore and how you displayed your wealth. One of the responses my informants offered to my envy (*xianmu*) question was, "Yes, they envy (*xianmu*) others.[97] What do they envy? They envy other people living well, eating well and having money". As was discussed in Chapter 1, when it was argued that wealth-hatred was the fault of the wealthy because of their relentless and prodigal consumption, one millionaire had responded to this by saying, "in China, no one will believe how rich you are unless they see you spending."[98] In a way, to be acknowledged as being rich is both vital and desirable and such a status is often achieved through reckless spending. In other words it is because of reckless spending that people know you are rich. Being envied thus confirms the status of being rich (and also ones self-worth).

A schoolteacher criticised this phenomenon by saying, "The poor suddenly get rich [so they obviously don't know what they are doing]". He further elaborated his

[97] As I mentioned before, no one will admit to their own envy so this is often illustrated from a third-person perspective.

[98] A, Lin. "Furen langfei jiashen le shehui de 'choufu xintai'". *Lianzheng Liawang*: 7-8.

point by saying, "Those rich people in the village are not like the ones in Western countries who are often thinking of reinvestment. Here, people can only think about getting the things they did not use to have in the past. They want to celebrate what they have (*xiangshou*). The people without money will look at those who have money and those who have money will look at those who enjoy and celebrate their wealth" (*"miqian de kanzhe youqian de, youqian de kanzhe xiangshou de"*). Not having money is embarrassing and looked down upon. On the other hand, having money and knowing how to spend it are things that other people pursue. By being envied because of ones economic achievement, the achievement is in a way verified by ones fellow villagers, something which is highly rewarding and desirable in rural communities.

Conclusion

Indicators of envy can be easily seen in well-known folk sayings and people's references to others' envy. However, ordinary cases of envy (apart from those alleged to be red-eye cases) were extremely difficult to pin down. It was rare to hear people talking about envy as this was mostly talked about as "the negative side of society"[99] or something that it was useless to think about. The whole village and the township were geared up to have the brighter and wealthier future that the abundant iron ore deposits had promised. For them, it was untimely and inappropriate to investigate something like the issue of envy that could not lead to anything valuable or productive. In the meantime, the pain that had been brought

[99] This was first brought up by a township official who asked me why I did not broaden my horizon and study something else.

about by the good fortune of certain households had made many restless and desperate. When their attempts to make money were deemed "unreasonable" and were therefore not successful their desire to catch up with others was consequently thwarted - nothing seemed to have changed. However, the pain at the good fortune of others persisted. The silence and negativity existing with respect to envy in a way manifested how the concealment of envy was deeply rooted in people's minds and how people were also trying to divert any attention away from things that might bring about the problem of malicious envy.

Nonetheless, the severe competition and the inexhaustible *panbi* (climbing and comparing) meant that hardly anyone was exempt from the possible attribution of being *the envied* or *the envier*. Having money and being wealthy have been seen as undoubtedly desirable. Everyone wants to be rich and to have such an enviable position. However, being wealthy can also result in disadvantages such as being subject to petty crimes and shameless extortion or to the unfair expectation that one should always pay more at rituals and celebrations. Wealth, thus, needs to be modestly concealed but not completely repressed. After all, ones position in a village is critically judged by how wealthy one is. Having money does not only imply that you can eat well, live well or get many other things that others only dream of; it also significantly affects how your fellow villagers see you and subsequently treat you. In a way, being envied is to further confirm your achievement in the community; that is, being wealthy means that you are capable of making money and, therefore, someone who should be admired and looked up

to. Lagging behind means that one will gradually become unable to chip in at momentous social occasions and therefore slowly lose both potential and influence in social networking and social relationships.

Most households were neither rich nor poor. The majority were in similar situations. As the saying goes, "less than the best, more than the worst" ("*bishangbuzu, bixiayouyu*") - this has long been the basic philosophy to be adhered to by the Chinese. Sudden wealth has apparently disturbed people's long-held ideas on this, though. It was especially hard to see those who had been in similar situations obtain large amounts of money. Many petty crimes were attributed to such changes in Lanying and Xitai. To some extent, it seemed that no secrets could be kept with regard to how wealthy one was. Nonetheless, the rich managed to hide the details of their wealth up to a point while, by disclosing how much money they had spent, subtly showing off their economic status and leading people to deduct their expenditure from the total amount of wealth attributed to them. Money is unquestionably an essentiality in rural life. It not only provides the basic security necessary for family life and the luxurious enjoyment of individual desires, it also serves as an important reason for being envied and for not being looked down on by ones fellow villagers. It is crucial both to brag (though maybe only indirectly) about ones achievements and to be careful not to instigate bad-intentioned envy.

In her study of gossip and envy in the Andes Van Vleet argues that "Envy arises from a sense that someone is gaining or advancing without proper attention to the

moral obligations of sociality and reciprocity" (Van Vleet, 2003: 506). In linking envy to women's gossip she also points out that gossip involving a number of interlocutors has, in fact, been a way to monitor the moral valuations of oneself and others (Van Vleet, 2003: 505). As I have already pointed out, the moral obligations with regard to avoiding the bad consequences of envy should fall on both *the envied* and *the envier*. The essential condition for admiring envy not to turn into malicious envy is for *the envied* not to do anything unkind and for *the envier* to understand what has been done. The need the rich have to avoid being the objects of crime cannot be easily separated from their need to avoid being damaged by other people's malicious envy. Nonetheless, the moral obligations necessary to avoid malicious envy after their enrichment and advancement have been distinctively stipulated, this constituting the main subject of the next chapter.

Chapter 4: The sin of the envied

Envy, according to Planalp, is, on the whole, seen as an "immoral emotion" in the Western tradition because "it is often malicious - wanting to deprive the other person of something you value rather than acquiring it yourself". Consequently, "people with advantages, of course, serve to benefit by demonising envy, whereas people who want a more level playing field serve to benefit from encouraging it" (Planalp, 1999: 175-176). Following Planalp, I want to distinguish here between the sin of envying other people and the sin of *being* envied oneself. As a violation of the Ten Commandments and one of the seven deadly sins of Judaeo-Christian tradition, the sinfulness of being envious could be characterised as an un-neighbourly desire for other people's possessions, the wish to deprive those other persons of them and the fact of acting on that desire. The sin of being envied, on the other hand, at least according to Chinese popular culture, comes from the failure to conceal desirable possessions, this providing a reminder of other people's inferiority and provoking these people to commit dishonourable actions out of envy.

To avoid committing the sin of envying others, it seems unquestionable that one should suppress the desire for things that are not yours, conceal any envious feelings and desist from any hostile actions based on this emotion. To avoid the sin of *being* envied, in Chinese culture, more subtle strategies need to be employed. A well-known Chinese saying drawn from classical literature alludes to a very

persuasive moral message, "If the tree stands out in a forest, wind will surely wreck it; if the sand spreads out from the shore, floods will wash it away; if your behaviour is more worthy than that of others, others will criticise it" (*muxiuyulin, fengbicuizhi; duichuyuan, liubituanzhi; xinggaoyuren, zhongbifeizhi*). [100] By suggesting the devastating results of appearing to be better than the ordinary, the adage warns us not to stand out. By drawing irrefutable examples from the natural world, the saying implies that the punishment for the sin of being pre-eminent will inevitably come about.

This, however, should not be read to mean that success is not culturally encouraged or that one should not aim to be pre-eminent. Rather, what the moral message implies is that one should be aware of the extra price one might have to pay for ones success. Lu Xun, one of the most famous writers and critics of the early twentieth century, recognised the existence of such an attributed sin but denounced it as narrow-minded and regressive. As he wrote sarcastically in one of his articles, "if something seems to be slightly eminent [standing out], there is someone holding a sword to cut it flat."[101] Public opinion was deemed to play a critical role in exerting such a form of moral punishment in China; as the saying goes "one can die under [the effect of] the tongues of others" (*shetou xiamian neng siren*). By placing moral responsibilities on behaviour that might foster malicious envy, China seems to have what Schoeck calls "a carefully institutionalised attitude designed to avert envy". That is, "anyone setting too high a value on his abilities or

[100] Li Kang （196－265）, *Three Kingdoms Wei* (*Yun Ming lun*).三国魏运命论

[101] 鲁迅早就叹息，在中国，"有什么稍稍显得突出，就有人拿了长刀来削平它" in Yu, Qiuyu, 2000, "*Lun Jidu (About Jealousy)*" (*Shuang Leng Chang He*).

his stamina perpetrates the social sin of regarding himself as better than his fellow men" (Schoeck, 1966: 55).

Yu Qiuyu, a well-known contemporary Chinese writer, has also pointed out that although someone might be talented and brave enough to fight thousands of enemies, they (as Chinese) were undoubtedly aware that once they were targeted by envy (*jidu*), everything could quickly turn to ashes. He further stated that the wisdom inherent in life in ancient China had much to do with the avoidance of the envy of others. Nonetheless, the more you avoid envy the more fierce it can become (something which might also endanger society). The hostile actions of envious people can seem socially acceptable while the objects of their envy are often widely condemned. Even today, he says, the targets of envy and jealousy can easily be rebuked as arrogant or ignorant while people who envy tend to be interpreted as representing society or public opinion. The end product of this was that people who were envied were often made to feel guilty and were often held in public contempt while, in contrast, the people who envied them felt self-righteous and supported by the masses.[102]

The immorality of being envied and the fear of the potential punishment meted out to people who are envied as stated in the classics and Lu Xun and Yu Qiuyu's writing persists in contemporary China. In other words, the moral obligation to not instigate envy remains prominent. Siu argues that at the core of Chinese culture is "a set of rites and mutual obligations within the cardinal social

[102]Yu, Qiuyu, 2000, "Lun Jidu (About Jealousy)" *Shuang Leng Chang He*, Writers Press. Unless otherwise indicated, all the Chinese texts are presented using my translation.

relationships (ruler-ruled, parent-child, husband-wife, older siblings- younger siblings, friend-friend)". What's more, "human fulfilment comes with the realisation of these relationships through moral self-cultivation and social practice. Cultural vitality emerges from this inner force and extends outward to order family, society and universe" (Siu, 1990: 8). The fulfilment of both mutual obligations and self-cultivation is essential but these two aspects do not necessarily come together without contradictions. For people who are envied, envy is a sin because ones self interests may have breached ones relational responsibilities to/for others, an issue that is not easily dealt with. In post-reform China, this difficulty is clearly manifested in the tension between people's urge to enjoy and celebrate their new-found success and the pressure of the moral responsibility to maintain socialist ideals, that is, "We are not meant to be this unequal and the widening inequality is only supposed to be temporary".

This chapter is therefore about how to avoid the sin of *being* envied by introducing the idea of *renyuan* (good social relationships) and discussing the *suzhi* (quality of people) discourse which has embodied significant political and moral standpoints in China since the late 1970s. I argue that to avoid instigating malicious envy people who might be envied have to actively cultivate *renyuan* (good social relationships). If you have good *renyuan*, malicious envy should, in theory, not be invoked. But good *renyuan* can only work when the envious are of high quality (i.e. they are grateful, understanding and civilised individuals), otherwise malicious actions may still follow. The exploration of *renyuan* and *suzhi*

will demonstrate the awareness of the people *being* envied of their moral responsibilities and reveal the steps they must take to eliminate their own "sin".

Good *renyuan*, no red-eye

In the summer of 2008, sitting in a Western-style cafe, Xu Shuming, a middle school teacher in her early thirties, seemed genuinely interested in discussing envy and red-eye with me. "If you do it [social relationships] right, there won't be any red-eye", she bluntly pointed out. For her, "*renyuan*" (good social relationships/ popularity in human relations) was the key factor in both avoiding and attracting red-eye. If you have good "*renyuan*", she said, even if you have things that people envy, red-eye will not be directed at you or, even if red-eye is present, if you know how to behave properly (*hui zuoren*), it will all be alright. If this is not the case, however, people with red-eye will look for ways to bring you down (*zhao jihui xiashou*).

For instance, Xu Shuming explained, suppose a teacher was privately tutoring 80-90 students during the school break for extra money while other teachers had far fewer students or no students at all. Paid tutoring and organised classes outside of official school education are strictly forbidden by school regulations. Therefore, this teacher could be denounced to his/her school. If s/he was turned in by someone, this showed two things: first, this teacher was bad at social relationships (*renyuan cha*) and, second, he or she was red-eyed by someone for attracting lots of students for private tutoring and making more money than them. Xu Shuming ran extracurricular tutoring as well. In fact, this is a growing

trend in Chinese cities as parents are fully occupied at work and have much less time to give their children extra coaching after school. Her strategies for cultivating *renyuan* and avoiding red-eye were as follows:

> If I am actually able to earn fifty thousand Yuan,[103] I make sure I only make forty thousand Yuan. You cannot be unjust to others (*duibu qiren*). I need to employ other teachers to tutor the students who have come to me since I am only a Chinese teacher and cannot teach all the subjects. I may give out 200 RMB extra to employ teachers over holidays or festivals. *Renyuan* is a long-term investment. You need to share some of the money you earn with others [to avoid red-eye]. Never forget the presents you are supposed to give and don't say bad things behind other people's backs. Place the right dishes for the right people (*jianren xia caidie*). For the people who like chatting, chat with them; for the people who like drinking, invite them for drinks. If you have good human relations people may envy you but they won't normally have red-eye. Red-eye will normally be directed at those who suddenly get rich and who despise other people. If you know how to behave, there won't be any problem with red-eye (*ren zuodehao, bu cunzai yanhong de wenti*). Be generous to others and then, even though you are raking in lots of money, others won't mind. Otherwise, you are encouraging jealousy and hatred (*jihen*).

Another example of red-eye in the teachers' community given by Xu Shuming involved mass appraisals (*minzhu pingyi*). Large-scale meetings would be held before grading ones professional ranking or accepting someone to join the Communist Party. If you could not pass the appraisals at those meetings, none of the important favourable decisions could be granted. If one had evidently performed well in terms of teaching and work abilities but received surprisingly few votes at those meetings, this was probably due to bad *renyuan* and red-eye. "It is important how others think about you, especially when candidates are under equal conditions. If you have good relationships with others you will win in those

[103] 1RMB was approximately equal to 0.067 GBP at the time of this research. All the figures are in RMB hereafter.

competitions", Xu added.

The art of social relationships in China has been thoroughly examined and elaborated on by Yang (1994). For her, "*guanxixue* (i.e. the explicit art of social relationships) involves the exchange of gifts, favours and banquets; the cultivation of personal relationships and networks of mutual dependence; the manufacturing of obligation and indebtedness" (Yang, 1994: 6). These practices and their native descriptions inform "the conception of the primacy and binding power of personal relationships and their importance in meeting the needs and desires of everyday life". Also, "such a conception can be found as an underlying cultural assumption shared by Chinese everywhere, on the mainland before and after the Communist Revolution of 1949" (Yang, 1994: 6).

Yang (1994) has illustrated the necessity, frequency and importance of practising *guanxixue* in contemporary China to "meet the needs and desires of everyday life" but she has arguably underestimated the importance of *renyuan* – an individual's level of popularity or success with others – in relation to the effectiveness of *guanxixue*, especially in terms of to what extent good or bad *renyuan* can be the "make or break" factor. In other words, for Yang, *guanxixue* is about people cultivating human relations by employing certain ethics, tactics and etiquette to actively and consciously get what they need while in this chapter it is argued that if people do not at the same time inspire personal popularity - *renyuan* - any of the gains achieved in this manner may yet be sabotaged by red-eye. Therefore, *guanxixue* is not only about actively acquiring but also about passively

protecting. To narrow down the focus for the purposes of the discussion here, we can assume that it is not the entire field of *guanxixue* that is at stake for this case but only the ethical dimension which Yang has analysed as "*renqing*" (human feelings). She illustrates three senses in which *renqing* is understood in contemporary China:

> First, there is the notion that *renqing* is part of the intrinsic character of human nature. Human nature here is understood not as individual, but in terms of social relationships and interaction, which are taken to be naturally infused with affect or *qing*. "Human feelings" towards other human beings are both ethical and emotional, and this is what distinguishes humans from animals. To behave according to *renqing* is to be a virtuous human, or "to know how to act like a human" *(hui zuoren)*. Otherwise, it questions whether a person is morally worthy of being called human. Second, *renqing* is also the proper way of conducting oneself in social relationships, treating each other according to the behaviour that their specific status and relationship to oneself dictate. Here the stress is on proper conduct, rather than natural predisposition. Third, *renqing* also refers to the bond of reciprocity and mutual aid between two people, based on emotional attachment or the sense of obligation and indebtedness.
>
> (Yang, 1994: 67-68)

Renqing, therefore, is about proper social conduct in response to both ethical and emotional norms within Chinese society. Importantly, "not all personal relationships are imbued with *ganqing* (emotions). *Renqing*, the observance of proper social form, involves lesser degrees of affection. Whereas emotional sentiments are central to the notion of *ganqing*, the discourse of *renqing* articulates the moral and decorous character of social conduct" (Yang, 1994: 122-123). Yang's analysis is still quite applicable in Chinese society today. As competition in all arenas gets increasingly harsh, *renqing* principles continue to play significant roles in securing much sought after resources and opportunities. As Yang also observes, "in the face of continued state control and an incompletely

rationalised market system in which social and material resources are still limited and differential access to them is still the norm, the form that a rebuilding of the social realm has taken is the revival of some pre-revolutionary non-state relationships and ethics." As a result, "the personalism of *guanxi* exchange created a social patterning in which people are juncture points embedded in webs of interdependent social relationships" (Yang, 1994: 172). *Renyuan* is hugely important in rural life, as one of my informants in Lanying explained to me. He went on to illustrate why good *renyuan* is essential and what devastating consequences bad social conduct can bring about.

> The Jiangs, whose house is just in front of ours, do not have good *renyuan*. Last year, three days after the Chinese New Year, their father died. I was there to preside over the funeral ceremony and we needed several people to carry the coffin to the burial site.[104] But it was terribly difficult to assemble enough people to do it. A few days went by and we still couldn't gather enough people. Why do other dead bodies have people to carry them while yours [your father's] just doesn't? I sent out several people to ask around and request help. But no one turned up. They all made up excuses but the truth was no one was willing to help. I've been presiding over funerals for years and it has never been this difficult. Funerals [known as white rituals, *baishi*] are not like weddings [red-rituals, *hongshi*] when you often need to send out formal invitations in order for others to attend. For funerals, people often turn up without asking and constantly check to find out what kind of support they can offer. Even if, as in some cases, you do need to ask people to come, no one refuses. It's very convenient to organise normally. It's never been like it was for the Jiangs. In the end, we had to pay 20 Yuan to each of the relatives who helped carry the coffin. Paying someone to do the job is really unheard of.
>
> The Jiang family has serious issues with handling relationships with others. Like what? Like, for example, I borrowed a shovel from you but I accidentally broke it. I offered to pay for it. People who are good at handling relationships (*hui banshi*) will just say, "No need to pay me back. It's worth nothing!" This way, people will be grateful and ready to

[104] Normally, it is a long march so substitutes are needed and, overall, more than 10 people might be needed. Moreover, unmarried men are not supposed to carry the coffin.

pay you back the kindness one day (*lingqing*). But the Jiangs just insisted on being paid back for the shovel.

As we can see, bad social conduct leads to bad *renyuan*. *Renyuan* (popularity) is the result of *renqing* (conduct). If you do *renqing* right, you have good *renyuan* and if you do not, you are more vulnerable to red-eye attack. As was asserted by Xu Shuming, "red-eye, in essence, is a problem of your relationships with other people (*renyuan weiti*)". In the following section I will discuss how *renyuan* is practised to fend off red-eye in a model village where, despite rapid growth in the prosperity of the community, the incidences of individual poverty create tensions and breed red-eye.

Wang Village was the envy of everyone. It was not only a model village[105] at the national level but had also been named as the No.1 village within the county in which the two other villages of Lanying and Xitai were also located. In 2006, the village committee invested 0.13 billion RMB in order to purchase a formerly stated-owned iron ore company; the annual gross product value of village-owned enterprises subsequently reached 0.3 billion Yuan in 2007. By contrast the assets of Xitai were valued at no more than a couple of tens of thousand Yuan. The collective assets of Wang Village were worth 0.16 billion Yuan in 2007 and the net revenue of the village was already 40 million Yuan in 2006 with the income per capita at eight thousand Yuan.

No doubt, the people of Lanying and Xitai villages would not have enjoyed reading statistics like these. Not many would have known about these figures,

[105] This village has been awarded many times a showcase of village development by governments at municipal, provincial and even national levels.

though. What they did know about and admire, however, was how responsible, selfless and successful the party secretary of Wang Village was, enabling everyone in the village to share the benefits of economic growth. Since 2003, Wang Village has invested nearly 0.1 billion Yuan in order to erect 49 multi-storey buildings with 480 sets of apartments. Each villager was able to purchase an apartment at a very low price, the village subsidising the overall cost. Nearly 90%[106] of the villagers now live in these multi-story buildings.[107] Today, a beautifully decorated plaza and a park adorn the centre of the village, complete with musical fountains, sculptures, a big electronic screen and sports facilities.

When I was staying in Lanying Village and Xitai for my fieldwork the villagers would tell me about how they envied the lifestyle of those in Wang Village where it seemed that the best possible solution had been achieved for rural dwellers - a city/modern lifestyle established in a rural setting. Wang Village was well-known in the region mostly because their party secretary, Wang, was a local celebrity accorded hero-like status. He was elected as a representative for the 16th and the 17th (this in the summer of 2007) National People's Congress which was extremely unusual for an official from village level.[108] Numerous awards were

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[106] There are still some who have not moved into the multi-storey buildings either because they are not accustomed to that kind of lifestyle or because they have just built a house and therefore do not want to buy a new flat.

[107] In Lanying Village and Xitai, everyone was still living in bungalows. The advantages of living in multi-storey buildings, according to the villagers, are that they are clean, warm in winter (with central heating), have flush toilets and, above all, that they are considered to be modern and more civilised.

[108] Each province has a very limited number of representatives for the National Congress. Normally, only people higher up in the government hierarchy (i.e. at municipal level at least) get the chance to be elected.

conferred on Wang in recognition of the exceptional progress he had brought to Wang Village, these awards including "National Model Worker", "Excellent Provincial Communist Party Member", "Provincial Ten Excellent Youths", to name just a few. Wang's story is widely known and he is often featured on TV broadcasts.

Wang was chosen to be the party secretary in 1987 when Wang Village had nothing but eighty thousand RMB of debts. His first action was to take back into village ownership certain exploitative mining companies and to make new contracts with new operators who could manage the business well and pay the rent. He then cleared up the debts and the bad accounts and even managed to introduce scientific ways of improving agricultural income. By 1991, Wang Village had effectively shaken off its poverty with 1,100 Yuan as the annual income per capita. In 1993, unfortunately, Wang was diagnosed with leukaemia. The whole village was determined to help save his life, though.[109] Every person donated money or food, anything they could afford. Municipal TV and other public broadcasters helped to raise money and eventually 0.1 million Yuan was collected. He had a bone-marrow transplant, his brother acting as donor. By the time he left hospital, despite his health situation remaining critical, he had already borrowed 0.4 million Yuan from banks and 0.7 million Yuan from villagers in order to set up their first iron-processing enterprise. Thanks to his wise investment and relentless hard work, the village recouped its investment of around a million Yuan within one year. Their

[109] While I was doing my fieldwork in Wang Village, I saw a piece of red cloth tied to every door handle and asked what these were for. Wang's wife told me that they were placed there when Wang wasn't in good health as a way to pray for him.

enterprises have since expanded into various other fields such as fruit processing, firework production and brick-baking. As the price of iron ore has significantly increased in recent years the wealth of this village, which mainly comes from iron production, has risen to unprecedented levels.

In the eyes of the villagers, Lanying Village and Xitai were lagging far behind Wang Village and whenever they saw news on TV about Wang Village they would comment that this was how villages should look in the future. I was told by some of those villagers who had worked in Wang Village or transported iron ore there that their dream was for their own village to be just like Wang Village in a few years, so that they could all live in multi-storey buildings, enjoy subsidies for festivals and have pensions for everyone over 60. The people of Wang Village were aware of their high profile[110] and of how other people envied them. They were proud to live in Wang Village and had a degree of self-confidence rare for rural residents given the rural-urban divide in China. Despite this success, Wang Village was the one place where envy was not evident to me and where I could not find anyone who would talk openly about envy. This could in large part have been due to my close connection with Wang, [111] though, a connection that also meant that I was unexpectedly able to observe the people who were enjoying most the benefits of the

[110] As it is a model village, there are many groups of visitors who come to share the experience of Wang Village's development. Sometimes there are as many as two or three groups a day.

[111] Since Wang was the most 'enviable' person in the village and I was closely attached to him, what I was supposed to do was to avoid talking about envy, for the benefit of his family, rather than bringing it up which might have invited unexpected malicious envy or hostile actions.

economic success of the village.[112]

Cultivation of good *renyuan*

In Wang Village, 400 households out of 480 ran their own businesses while 30 had private cars.[113] Besides the collective enterprises there were 17 enterprises owned by individual villagers, 10 of which were large scale, with a gross product value amounting to 0.1 billion Yuan in total. There were around 1,700 migrant workers in Wang Village, this almost being equal to the number of local villagers. As Wang later told me, in this village it was still a case of "*qiongdeqiong, fudefu*" (the poor get poorer, the rich get richer). In general, those working as wage-labourers were slightly higher paid in Wang Village than in Xitai, wages ranging from two to three thousand RMB a month there. For those who owned mine-related businesses, the price of one ton of iron ore was 660 RMB in 2007. About two months later they could easily sell up to 1,000 tons and the profits could be more than tens of thousands.[114] Lao Li, a middle-aged man who was staying in his daughter's[115] house told me,

> It is good here, but at the same time you need to spend money on everything. In a normal village, you may only spend 10 or 20 Kuai [RMB] per month on electricity but here it costs at least 100. You have more electronic devices of course, but they all cost money to run. Our

[112] I didn't dare mention to my host family in Xitai that I had been staying with Wang's family. They had expressed their envy of Wang Village and their admiration of Wang. My efforts to conceal the connection with Wang represented an example of conduct intended to avoid envy-instigation.

[113] The number of transport vehicles is not included here. Here I am referring to 4-seater cars.

[114] I was not able to ascertain the exact figures for their earnings.

[115] His daughter married in Wang Village. He and his wife had come to help with taking care of a new born baby and he was temporarily working as a security guard at an explosives storage site.

> refrigerator, for example, wasn't even plugged in. I said to my daughter that in winter we certainly didn't need to use it but my daughter told me that in summer they didn't dare use it either [because of the high cost of electricity].

New found wealth meant that the cost of living in Wang Village was much higher than in any of the other nearby villages. The price of vegetables, food and transportation, so I was told, was all more expensive. Sometimes the prices for things were even higher than in the nearest city. For example, there were many cars lined up in the main street for private hire; for a ride that in other places would cost 10 RMB, it cost double that in Wang Village. Wang's wife, Aunt Zhou, said to me that people knew Wang Village had money and hence many just came for the purposes of peddling and raised prices while they were at it.[116]

Picture 4.1 Wang village

[116] The locals are reluctant to run small businesses such as peddling food. Some products therefore rely on external supply at higher prices.

Picture 4.2 The plaza in Wang village

I lived with Wang's family.[117] They had a three-bedroom flat, fully decorated with a TV in each bedroom and a 32-inch TV in the living room which was also packed with jade, green plants, a leather sofa, gold ornaments and various boxed beverages. In fact, there were boxes everywhere - boxes of shoes, fruit, beverages, snacks and cosmetics. At the beginning, I thought that this was typical of the abundance of goods one would find in a prosperous village. Later, however, when I got the chance to visit a neighbour living downstairs, some relatives of Wang and other people I met in the park I was surprised to learn that this level of wealth was in fact rare. Despite the fact that Wang Village had a much higher cost of living, my

[117] Wang is a friend of my family. A close member of my family (I'll refer to him as Uncle Zhang hereafter) got to know Wang in the early 1990s during the "socialist re-education movement". Wang Village was the place where Uncle Zhang and his colleagues were receiving re-education through interaction with peasants. I was, therefore, closely attached to this family and many thought I must be a relative of Wang because otherwise how could I be living with them. I could only talk to strangers freely by concealing the fact of where I was staying.

host arranged breakfast, lunch and dinner for me in various restaurants nearly every day. Usually I accompanied Aunt Zhou when she went out and with her I often found myself surrounded by some truly wealthy people. They had their own businesses, they could earn tens of thousands in a day, they travelled, they chatted over the Internet, they went out fishing, they were talking about plastic surgery and, most importantly, they spent money "like running water" (*huaqian ru liushui*), as they put it. When I was living there knowing I could never earn as much money as they did, I felt envious of them. I envied them for earning so much, so quickly and seemingly with so little effort and for spending money just the way they wanted without having any concerns. This was a feeling shared by many others who witnessed this wealth, as one of the government officials I met when I was accompanying Uncle Zhang to dine out with his friends vividly expressed. He was the head of a county in the late 1990s when the privatising of mining companies was beginning to emerge as a possibility and stories of the setting up of new mines started to be told.

> You know, as a county governor, when you signed the bidding contract [to lease out mines to private entrepreneurs], you knew clearly that if you invested 20-30 million Yuan in the mine you could later become a billionaire. Your signature meant a great amount of wealth [for others] but there was nothing you could do [for yourself]. It's like helplessly looking on as other people get all the money.

Uncle Zhang and his friends also told similar stories about "earning 0.8 million Yuan in a day", about how "many accountants were hired to count the money but it was just uncountable" [118] or about "using a ruler to measure the thickness of [the wad of] money when counting was just too tiresome"; a number of

[118] At village level, it was still mainly a cash-based economy.

these stories were actually recounted in a somewhat derisive tone. Those who got money in this sort of way were normally described as having no culture (*mei wenhua)* and much of their behaviour was therefore simply seen as stupid. Stupid or not, though, they certainly got enough wealth for others to give them the red-eye.

Though I tried not to show my (moderate) envy or to comment on what they had, Aunt Zhou tried to comfort me and soothe my envy anyway, saying, "kid, when you graduate, never work in the field of politics as your uncle [Wang] did. I've asked him many times to quit and his job is just too hard. It is a laborious job and he has never got good things out of it (*shoulei bu taohao*)". Wang, to make me feel better, as enviable as he was, told me[119]:

> I envy (*xianmu)* you very much. You have been to so many places. I've never travelled further south than the Long River. You know, because of my health problems. I did have many chances, money was not a problem either, but I have heart disease as well and couldn't take a plane. Even though I do sometimes travel, I need to carry a number of medicines with me which is quite inconvenient.

He also admitted that attending the National People's Congress was a great honour that every government official dreamed of achieving and that Uncle Zhang might envy him for this amongst other things.[120] Apparently, when the person you envy has reason to envy you the feelings of inferiority existing on both sides can be cancelled out. This is what is called "*hui zuoren*" (knowing how to act like human). By using the tactic of pointing out how troublesome his work was and his poor state of health, Wang was able to reduce feelings of envy in others, the potential of which he was fully aware of.

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[119] I told him about my thesis topic.

[120] He smiled shyly when he said this.

Given the fame and wealth the family had, it was to be expected that they might be secretly envied by many, especially close friends. I was having meals with Aunt Zhou and her female friends almost every day; most of these people were quite well off and hardly ever cooked at home. Once, we were eating out with Lan and her husband and talking about the price of iron ore when Lan's husband suddenly burst out, "the money we earned in a year can't even be equal to what you earned in a month, no, 20 days. The money we earned is called "laborious money"(*xinku qian*), "tiresome money" (*shoulei qian*)". Aunt Zhou quickly replied, "The money we spend in a month is equal to what you spend in a year, why don't you count it that way!" Lan and her husband stayed silent for a while and then switched to another topic of conversation. What Aunt Zhou resented about the comment was the connotation that the money she earned was not "laborious money" or "tiresome money" as Lan's husband had bitterly suggested. She knew that this might imply that her wealth was not justified and that it could therefore be potentially red-eyed. Her reaction to the complaint was not directly to deny the point, though. By saying that they spent much more than the Lans, what Aunt Zhou was really suggesting was that, in a way, no matter how much or how easily one earns money, in the end we are still all the same. The proper conduct to cultivate good *renyuan* can be thought of as similar to what Western observers call "excessive modesty" or "self-deprecation". What Aunt Zhou did here was not exactly a case of "excessive modesty" or "self-deprecation" but it nonetheless shared the same spirit. By exposing how much she spent, she conveyed the

intended message that "after all, I am not as rich as you imagined, and I have my own worries."

Another day, there were 10 women around the table. One of these women said to Aunt Zhou and two of the other women, "Now, I'm no longer able to go out with you. Look what you eat and what you wear, I can't afford it anymore". Aunt Zhou responded in a deeply hurt tone, "If you put it that way, you are wrong. If I have things to eat, I won't let you starve; if I have cars to travel in, I won't let you walk." Another woman picked up the conversation and said, "You certainly shouldn't think of Zhou in that way. You know, once I was having dinner with the wife of the head of the county and she was really arrogant. I was thinking "Who are you, we are equal (*pingqipingzuo*) to the wife of our party secretary and our party secretary even goes to National Congress. Where did your sense of being special come from (*you shenmo liaobuqi*)"? The unequal living conditions and political status were clearly singled out in this conversation. What Aunt Zhou was evidently trying to achieve was the playing down of these distinctions and the merging of these differences. She did this by offering to share what she had; what her friend also did was to stress Aunt Zhou's nice gesture of treating everyone equally.

Aunt Zhou seemed to have very good *renyuan* and befriended many people in the village. She was extremely generous and outgoing. When we had breakfast, if there was someone she knew sitting at the next table, she would pay for them; at a banquet she once said to all her friends that if Wang was elected as the representative for the 17th National People's Congress again she would treat

everyone to dinner. She also once told her friends at lunch that she liked people to call her by her name and that if anyone called her "the wife of the party secretary" her heart sank as this showed that they were treating her like an outsider (*wairen*) and not with their true hearts (*jiaoxin*). Generosity, treating other people with overt respect and as equals, revealing the negative side of having money (such as having more occasions to spend it) and sharing wealth whenever possible (such as through giving gifts) could gain good *renyuan* and subsequently obviate possible red-eye as Xu Shuming and Aunt Zhou's cases have suggested.

Low quality (*suzhi*) undisguised envy

By cultivating good *renyuan*, malicious envy can be largely avoided. If the envious nonetheless still act on their envy despite the existence of a good social relationship, then it is they who should bear the moral responsibility for this. In the villages where I conducted my fieldwork, some overt disputes, arguably motivated by malicious envy, were not able to be averted through good *renyuan*; the local administrators were concerned that their privileged position would provoke the envy of others and that they would not be able to maintain social order because of the disruptive behaviour of the envious parties. It should be noted here that the direct involvement of the political authorities in the construction of society and its ethics is crucial in China. As Helen Siu has pointed out, "the realisation that the vast empire was held together more by a shared cultural heritage and less by military might or legalistic-political administration led the philosopher Bertrand Russell and the sociologist Robert Park, both visitors to China in the Republican

period, to comment that the 'Chinese polity is a cultural phenomenon'" . Certainly, this is not to deny that China lacked "despots who obtain compliance by force", though. The issue here is "the nature and the bases of that power and the means by which they exercise it" (Siu, 1990: 7). Most importantly, the responsibilities of the local administrators are not only political but also moral (that is, based on cultural norms).

Suzhi roughly means "quality" in English. As Anagnost points out, "*suzhi* is hardly a neologism but it acquired new discursive power when it became conjoined with the idea of population (*renkou*) in the economic reforms that began in 1976. The discourse of population quality (*renkou suzhi*) may have first appeared in the 1980s, in state documents investigating rural poverty that attributed China's failure to modernise to the 'low quality' (*suzhi di*) of its population, especially in rural areas. By the early 1990s, population quality had become a key term in the party-state's policy statements and directives to cadres, even as it began to circulate more broadly as a general explanation for everything that held the Chinese nation back from achieving its rightful place in the world" (Anagnost, 2004: 190). Kipnis's study has further shown that "reference to *suzhi* justifies social and political hierarchies of all sorts, with those of 'high' quality gaining more income, power and status than the 'low'. In rural contexts, cadres justify their right to rule in terms of having a higher quality than the 'peasants' around them" (Kipnis, 2006: 295).

When it comes to red-eye, low quality seems to be another explanation for the outbreak of disagreements, uncooperative behaviour and overt conflict. As

Litzinger mentions in her paper, "the party encourages everyone to get rich, yet disparities in opportunity and income are fuelling all kinds of jealousies, creating an environment of intense competition and behind the scenes manoeuvrings. The party rants on about everyone becoming civilised (*wenming*), yet the party itself, with its corruption, frequent meetings, and elaborate feasts, is hardly a symbol of the frugal, an important attribute of the civilised, and the party dares to reprimand those who spend too much money on ritual practices, weddings, and funerals" (Litzinger, 1999: 308). The tension between the local government and the villagers was intense. Few people seemed to trust or have any faith in the village committee and it was not difficult to hear people complaining about how corrupt government officials were. The cadres at both township and village level received the harshest criticism. In general, local cadres had three charges levelled at them. First, that they were corrupt. Although villagers saw money coming in from mining companies and the overall economic conditions of the region greatly improving, frequent cadre meetings and elaborate feasts were also highly visible. It was widely believed that the mining companies were paying a certain percentage of their profits to the villages where mines were located but that the villagers themselves were seeing none of the benefits.[121] The second charge was that the cadres were selfish and did not care about the prosperity of the village. This linked to the third accusation which was that the cadres were generally quite rich themselves and

[121] The village head said that Xitai only had one related mining company which was not as profitable as villagers imagined. He also said that he had paid off the village's old debts and that the effects of his work were therefore much less obvious to ordinary villagers than they might suppose.

might well, therefore, have abused their power for personal gain.

The cadres, apparently aware of these accusations, constantly defended themselves by justifying their endeavours, listing things they had done to serve the villagers' needs and depicting the villagers' requests as never ending and nonsensical. For instance, the cadres would argue that the villagers' requests asking for money from mining companies that had nothing to do with Xitai village were illogical. If villagers' requests are depicted as nonsensical, it is easier to argue that they are motivated only by red-eye and, moreover, that it is the "low quality" of the villagers that is the root cause of actions motivated by malicious envy.

I encountered the attribution of *suzhi* on the first day of my stay in Xitai. During a semiformal meeting with the party secretary of the township, other county officials and the village head of Xitai, at which the start of my fieldwork was introduced, the village head of Xitai said,

> Compared to other regions, the *suzhi* [quality] of people in Xitai is pretty low. What they did was like swindling money (*eqian*). For example, their income based on planting sweet corn would be just two to three thousand RMB but now when there are people who want to rent some parts of their planting land for 500 or 600 Yuan per year, they don't agree. Think about it, 600 Yuan for doing nothing, what is there to be unsatisfied about? Our prime minister Wen Jiao Bao's *Qinmin* [close to peasants] Policy[122] has spoiled peasants too much and now no one dares to manage them properly (*meiren ganguan*).

He was complaining about how the problems he had in managing his own people might negatively affect the speed of mining investment. It was clear that there were constant conflicts and disagreements between peasants, deemed to be

[122] The *Qinmin* policy literally refers to being "close to people". It was the guiding principle under the current leadership (2004-) and in rural areas "*min*" was directly interpreted to mean the peasants.

greedy and short-sighted, and the investing entrepreneurs[123] who were supposed to bring prosperity to the region. The recent policy coming from central government gives greater support to the peasants through measures such as the abandoning of agriculture tax, the raising of prices of agricultural produce and public calls to protect peasants' interests. Peasants' rights have also been strengthened by, for example, new regulations and limitations on leasing agricultural land (which have been used tactically to negotiate with mining companies) and by the introduction of informed consent into family planning policy meaning that abortion and other coercive actions could no longer be imposed. These policies, from the local government's perspective, gave rise to extra difficulties when it came to the overriding pursuit of economic development. Clearly not all of the "troublemaking" was caused by red-eye but a great amount of this kind of behaviour was relevant as was detailed by the director of the Women's Committee in Xitai,

> Everyone is like this now, red-eye disease! They'll just try anything in their means to disrupt [any ongoing work]. For example, the rumours about village cadres, people will say they take money or that they misappropriate the money from the village. During the last election, since I normally don't drink [alcohol] or smoke, they had no reasons to criticise me [as they did for others]. Then they said that since I've been a cadre member for 13 years [more than two terms], my salary couldn't be coming from anywhere else but from the ordinary villagers. It was ridiculous. I said [to them], over all these many years have you ever seen me misappropriating your money? And there are so many others who have been cadre members longer than me and have you ever paid anything to support them? You'd be surprised by the absurdity of these rumours but villagers still believe them.
>
> The people who made up those rumours or condemn others

[123] Some of the cadres tried to conceal the conflicts by saying there weren't any but others said it was "alright for her to know" and that there was "no need to hide from her"!

won't think it's because of red-eye, instead they will just say bad things about others becoming government officials and so on when really they were red-eyed about others earning money. They always want to get above others (*churen toudi*). But why don't they consider their own capabilities?! Do they really think that someone who is illiterate can be a cadre member? They don't care. Even people like this want to be contenders [in the local election]. If they can't succeed themselves, their attitude is, "If I can't get it you can't get it either. I'll ruin your chances too". My rival was just a cook - what did she know about family planning or politics? She made up lots of rumours about me.

There were unproven suspicions and rumours concerning the current village head too; everyone was gossiping that he was a millionaire and that he was possibly embezzling money that different mines gave to the village. This village head used to be a manager in a mine company and was able to earn several thousand Yuan a year; in 2003 this figure was in the tens of thousands. He left that job because there was a fatal accident for which he was held responsible and thus fired. That was when he started to campaign in the election. Cadres at township level supported him, applying the underlying logic that, "We should have the rich as the village heads, and then at least they won't embezzle village money. If you find a poor one, he will only take advantage and embezzle money from the collectives".

A village head from an adjacent village defended himself against such allegations in this way,

> I don't want to be head of the village any more. The peasants are now so eager [to get rich] that they become red-eyed. Everyone wants to get 0.2 million Yuan or 0.3 million Yuan and move away [to leave their current home for the setting up of the mines]. You know, the salary earned by working as a village head is even less than what I earned from my own business. My own mine site could sell for up to several million. They just see me building a two-storey building, driving a crappy car and start calculating how much money I've embezzled. I heard that they have employed an accountant to look into the village

account, saying that there was 0.5 million Yuan allocated from the upper level and only 290 thousand Yuan in the account. It was fortunate that we had those meeting minutes and they eventually gave up with no evidence at all. The rumours are just everywhere. I don't want this job, my family doesn't want me to do it but those who supported me don't want me to quit.

Clearly, government officials at almost all levels are under pressure to resolve conflicts and deal with the dissatisfactions of their villagers and the *Qinmin* policy has apparently only made this more difficult. Many believe that the policy should be adapted to local conditions. As the party secretary of the township pointed out,

> The *Qinmin* policy is not completely right. Ignorant peasants should be educated while sly peasants should be dealt with (*yumin yao jiaoyu, liangmin yao guanli*). When we say we support the peasants, this should mean helping the kind-hearted ones but not those sly ones. Of the places I've been working, the *suzhi* of Xitai people is just about the worst. It doesn't match the economic development. Over the years, the economic figures have greatly improved, but this isn't reflected in the quality of life. What does it mean to be low quality? One is without culture (*mei wenhua*), having no experience or knowledge. These people have never been to other places and are not well-educated. What we did was to actually bring benefits for them but they don't think this way [and therefore oppose the government].

It was clear that when there were opportunities and money coming into the villages, there were more conflicts and disputes. Everyone understandably wanted to benefit from the economic development and the local government had the responsibility to make that happen. The local government also undertook the significant task of maintaining social order, that is, reducing the incidence of conflicts and disputes or at least solving them peacefully. The tension between the local authority and the villagers was quite evidently acute. Certainly not all actions were motivated by envy or jealousy, though, only the demands that were

unreasonable, such as what the village head called allegations of "swindling money" and the director of the Women's Committee referred to as "spreading unfounded rumours" or purely "making trouble". Those disparaging actions were seen as the result of the low quality of the villagers who were incapable of achieving satisfaction for themselves and who were unable to disguise their envy. Low quality can therefore be interpreted as illiterate, irrational, impulsive and ignorant of laws and regulations. Moreover, the type of actions engaged in by low quality people were seen as damaging to others but at the same time as not being advantageous for the person taking the action either, this making it difficult to find a solution to the general problem within the system of laws or regulations. "Low quality" was therefore a convenient way of explaining why these claims were being made; it was convenient, too, in allowing the cadres to avoid moral responsibility for provoking the misconduct and their failure to prevent it.

The moral dilemma

"If I had known that the villagers (*laobaixing*[124]) were like this, I wouldn't have taken this job", said Wang, who has been the party secretary of Wang Village for more than 20 years and who made Wang Village a miracle of economic development. He disappointedly admitted,

> It is just too difficult. I just feel I cannot serve them any longer. I know I shouldn't say this. I've been given so many honourable titles and awards. But their desires and wishes can never be fulfilled. After all these years, their ideas have changed and they are now not at all the same as before and it has become harder and harder for me. I have

[124] The connotations of *laobaixing* imply the ordinariness of villagers who have no status or anything as opposed to *nongmin* (peasants) and *sheyuan* (members of the commune group).

appealed many times to my senior saying I don't want to do it any more but this never gets ratified as I know my case is already out of the municipal level's control.

Wang agreed that the phenomenon of red-eye existing in Wang Village was similar to that found in Lanying Village and Xitai but not as bad in terms of public conflicts. Wang Village was in a much more governable and peaceful state. He further detailed the reasons for his difficulties, though,

> Now it is as if everyone is looking at the bowl of water to see whether you can hold it flat.[125] If not they may assume everything was grabbed by village cadres thought [wrongly] to have benefited a countless amount. Now, they are just moaning about not dividing up the collective fund between the households. Why don't they think about the fact that I have built all these buildings for them and have never tried to raise funds from them? They can only see how much money you've earned but never think how difficult it was to earn that money and how many occasions there are when we need to spend the money we earn. So, no matter how terribly tired you are you still don't end up with a good reputation.
>
> Another major issue is unemployment. The biggest mine in this village is a state-owned mine[126] and most of their workers are outsiders. Not many villagers from Wang Village work in the mine and the company isn't managed by our village committee either. For sure, I don't have any power to overrule them [the administrative body of the biggest mine] but the villagers won't understand this and now think all kinds of bad things [such as it's Wang's fault that not many villagers are working in the mine]. For example, we have been trying to recruit a successor for this village but it is very hard to retain a college graduate. If you manage to go to college, who wants to come back to a village? But if you employ someone from the outside, villagers can't stand it either. The situation now is that if the money you offer is little, no one will come but if it is more, the villagers will say, "Why don't you hire me? There are so many people in the village and you offer the money to outsiders?" They don't understand that they are not qualified for the job, preferring to simply complain that you don't offer them any opportunities. That's why I said there is really no way out. Now no matter what you do villagers end up glaring at you and not being satisfied.

[125] "Holding a bowl of water flat" means being equal because holding water in a bowl requires great balancing skills in order to stop the water from spilling over.

[126] Wang village had become the biggest shareholder of the company a few years before my fieldwork.

The main difficulty, as Wang stated, was not to make the village rich but to make everyone satisfied with what they had, something which, in my view, was just impossible.[127] As Schoeck rightly points out, the many well-meaning proposals for the creation of a "good society" or the completely "just society" will never work because "they are based on the false premise that this must be a society in which there is nothing left for anyone to envy"(Schoeck, 1966: 11). The reality is, though, he states, that people inevitably discover something new to envy, as was discussed in the introduction to this thesis. In Wang Village, an egalitarian ideology was still forcefully expressed since this was a well-established model with enormous collective assets. Collective income had also been used to build multi-storey buildings and a public library and an activity centre shared by all. Even so, in reality, the unequal distribution of wealth was easily discernible. The difficulty inherent in Wang's position was not about how to keep his own wealth but more about how to distribute wealth and opportunities among the villagers, that is, to be a good village cadre.

Unlike other cadre members in Xitai and Lanying, Wang did not elaborate his point on red-eye and only cursorily mentioned that, in this respect, Wang Village simply found itself in a similar type of situation to that existing in Xitai and Lanying. Having served the village since the end of the 1980s, he was highly imbued with the egalitarian ideal. His tireless efforts to bring prosperity to Wang Village was also highly influenced by his belief in collective economy. He was,

[127] He might not believe it is possible either but he was clearly living under the "socialist model" ideology.

therefore, hugely disappointed by his experiences as we can see from his statement that "If I had known the villagers were like this, I wouldn't have taken this job". Though he was fully aware that he would be envied, it was against his egalitarian ideals to attribute this to the envious being malicious or of "low quality". This was quite a moral dilemma for him.

The situation in Wang Village where there is a fear that local politics is being increasingly undermined by unsatisfied enviers might be argued by some to exemplify "the politics of envy". In Bandow's view, the politics of envy is when "people don't so much want more money for themselves as they want to take it away from those with more. But envy is far worse because it destroys not only individuals, but also communities, poisoning relations as everyone attempts to use the state to live off of everyone else" (Bandow, 1994: 302). As Bandow argues, it is true that "some people pull a gun and heist the nearest person's wallet or purse", but "for the otherwise law-abiding, the only way to take what is someone else's is to enlist one or more public officials to seize land, impose taxes, regulate activities, conscript labour, and so on" (Bandow, 1994: xviii). To accuse others of playing "the politics of envy" could, in fact, be a discursive device seeking to justify and defend accumulated wealth or privilege; it is certainly a tactic that can be used to misrepresent and dishonour egalitarians by making them seem to be acting only out of envy, not principle.

This might resemble the problem Wang faced, except for the fact that he was not able to draw the line between egalitarians and red-eyes. As the person

perceived to be the most influential public official, he was not able to fulfil the wishes of the envious villagers but strongly felt his obligations to them. The enviers, in Wang's words, "Those impossible-to-serve villagers", certainly wouldn't say openly that they wanted to take money from the rich but would argue only that they wanted a more equal share of what they were entitled to, namely the collective assets. For Wang, the collective assets were generated by capable people, himself amongst others, and other members of the village committee through their management and personal connections. Accordingly, he has a better understanding of how to use public money to maintain the model of economic development, to keep up the miracle of their exceptional collective economy and also not to dishonour his many awards, even if this went against quite a few villagers' wills.[128] To put it simply, the villagers who were against him expected Wang to divide the annual profits of collective economy equally among every household while Wang didn't think this was feasible.

Because of the size of Wang Village's collective economy and the fact that villagers were receiving considerable welfare benefits the disagreements occurring in Wang Village were not overt or fierce compared to those in Lanying and Xitai. But in all three villages moral obligations seemed to remain clearly defined. As the village heads of the villagers, these officials were in a position to fulfil the needs of ordinary villagers while in the minds of the villagers, untrustworthy and/or

[128] This might not necessarily have been his real intention but rather something which he was forced into. In fact, he was pretty exhausted from keeping this up but wasn't able to quit (as was indicated earlier) and therefore had no choice but to make the painful effort to endure.

ineffective as the cadres were, those cadres simply had not done their job right. The problem was how to make it right, though, or whether the "right" order was even achievable?

The contestation that there is a "right" moral order has been presented by a few anthropologists. It is argued that one of the significant changes in the post-reform era was the fact of this period being disordered and unsettled. As Liu's work illustrates, "in this time of transition, social life in northern rural Shaanxi was essentially characterised by the lack of any mode of moral economy. That is not to say that individuals were free from communal constraints; but the rules and codes of such constraints could not be articulated in any coherent way. In other words, there is no consistent 'moral order' to guide and determine social action or cultural meaning; instead, the 'order of things' rather than 'things' already in an order became the subject of debate" (Liu 2000:182). Litzinger has quite reasonably pushed forward this argument by making the order itself a powerful subject of discussion. As she points out, "it is not simply that post-Mao China is characterised by a contested moral order, so that calls for conformity fall on suspicious ears. Social order is itself an effect of power, not simply retained and managed by an enlightened reform-era party-state. It is an object of discourse and thus invariably opened up for critical engagement by social actors. This is why the reform period is never beyond reproach, as many see clearly the party's inability to act as an exemplar, or to contain the forces it has released" (Litzinger, 1999: 308). As was manifested by Wang's difficulties and moral dilemma, however, the order was still

forcefully persistent in people's minds, however confusing and easily dismissed it might be; the difference was that a growing number of people just did not mind taking the risk of breaking the moral codes in search of bigger economic gains.

At the time the state ideology was changed from the idea of all being "equally poor" to the idea of "letting some get rich first and achieving general wealth later", economic inequality was largely tolerated because people believed that inequality would be temporary and that they would eventually join the ranks of the rich. After 30 years of rapid economic development some have, indeed, become wealthy but the expectation that everyone will become rich is now seen as unrealistic. Many people are inclined to believe that wealth flows to those who are capable of acquiring it and, therefore, not to everyone. In the case of Xitai, Lanying and Wang Village, nonetheless, given the nature of the mining business which is largely dependent on natural resources, those who got rich could hardly be accepted as deserving when luck, opportunity and uncertainty were involved in the business to such a large extent. People believed, as the saying goes, "*kaoshan chishan, kaoshui chishui*" (literally, "Eat mountain when you live next to a mountain, drink water if you live near a river"). They believed, in other words, that they should all have a share of those mountains' rich deposits. Since equality could hardly be enforced by government, though, everyone needed to seize the opportunities for themselves, this situation often generating a desperate desire to succeed.

Conclusion

Envy- desiring something that is not yours – is unattractive and

dishonourable but it is a sin that should be avoided by both the potentially envious and by the people who can potentially be envied. For envious people, it is shameful to reveal their malicious envy in public, to expose their bad intentions designed to sabotage others or even to engage in overt acts provoked by envy. For people who can potentially be envied, it is also wrong to do certain things such as celebrating their advantages, either intentionally or unintentionally, so as to arouse envy in others.

The moral responsibility associated with envy weighs heaviest on those people who can potentially be envied. As Xu Shuming has bluntly pointed out, the damage caused by malicious envy was mostly due to the inconsiderate behaviour of the envied people. If they were careful enough about applying certain tactical strategies in order to cultivate good social relationships, the evil-minded envier and their subsequent vindictive actions could be significantly avoided. People who act on their envy take high risks – both of failure and of incurring public contempt. Therefore, when people do act on malicious envy it is generally the case that the people whom they envy have done something very wrong to provoke them. Envy is generally believed to be normal and controllable but it can quickly turn to hatred when the people who are envied are thought to have not deserved their success and yet still behave in such a way as to demonstrate that they clearly feel good about this anyway. This is what drives the envious to want to inflict hurt on those who they envy.

In the context of the village where I carried out fieldwork, things were less

black and white, though. The large amount of money pouring forth from mining activities in recent years had made virtually everyone envious. Certainly, not all cases of envy were malicious, though, and even fewer involved people actually acting on their envy. Most of those who had been categorised by local officials as "troublemakers" had been denounced as "red-eyes". The reasoning of the officials invariably went like this: the troublemakers were red-eyed about people getting rich but had themselves no means of making money (for instance, no skills, no connections, no knowledge) and therefore tried to get money through making trouble. The risk of being thought of as "bad people" was not of much concern to the troublemakers as they were not good people in the first place and so did not have much to lose.

It can be seen that the rich and the government officials who were the target of the troublemaking gangs not only bore the moral responsibilities of having made the "troublemakers" red-eyed but also feared the possibility of losing public approval. They, therefore, seemed to be in a very difficult position and when possible thus condemned the troublemakers in a ruthless and hostile way, invoking the well established *suzhi* discourse to rebuke and stigmatise the envious. The logic behind this behaviour was that envy-avoiding strategies involving cultivating *renyuan* only worked when one was dealing with grateful and well-behaved recipients (good quality people).

The head of the model village has achieved almost unimaginable fame, wealth and political recognition compared to any of his counterparts along with

general respect from his fellow villagers, a phenomenon rarely seen in other villages. His wife was tactfully fending off envy by showing her extreme generosity, kindness and unselfishness and by building up rapport with her friends. But even in Wang Village, this model of socialist civilisation where incomparable collective wealth and an outstanding infrastructure have been established, the envy of many remains a potentially dangerous force and an almost unbearable burden for the leader. The socialist ideal seemed to offer the envious justifiable reasons for claiming their share of the collective assets; Wang's difficulty was simply the impossibility of maintaining this ideal. In my introduction to this dissertation, I have argued that envy has been seen as a way of punishing social violation and a mechanism for maintaining good social relations. In this chapter I have explained in detail what the envied have to do to avoid envy becoming malicious, which includes acts of generosity and self-sacrifice, and in the case of Wang maintaining the socialist ideal of collective welfare.

Chapter 5: Conciliation for the *envier*: luck, fate and auspiciousness

The ideas of auspiciousness (*fu*), luck (*yun*) and fate (*ming*) were not uncommon in Lanying village. Wealth, having a marriage deemed a good match or having two children, one of each gender, could be a matter of luck or fate. The windfall wealth related to the burgeoning mining business in the village obtained by some but not others could also be regarded as a matter of luck or fate. Being lucky is not always a good thing if fate is not kind to you and you cannot keep the things you have come to possess, though. Similarly, being wealthy is desirable but may also result in disaster and unexpected harm if it is not sustained by means of good fate. Envy has been provoked by the unevenly distributed windfall wealth, as shown in Chapter 2. However, not all envious feelings have turned into red-eye actions. In fact, very few have. Some of these feelings have been suppressed because of moral concerns and the hopelessness coming from not being able to achieve anything good. In this chapter, though, I want to suggest another means of consolation allowing for the swallowing of the pain of envy. More specifically, I will talk about: 1) how people in the village have attributed inaccessible wealth to luck and fate (something which has, in effect, covered up and diverted feelings of envy); and 2) how the belief in auspiciousness and fate has been tactically used as an after-the-event explanation, validation and rationalisation of what has happened in the village (which has also subsequently consoled the pain of the envy that has been felt). Being lucky or fate being kind to one can also be enviable but the matter of

luck and fate seems to be just beyond ones control. Putting up with ones fate does not indicate that envy is no longer felt but it does mean that red-eye actions become seemingly impossible.

In this chapter, I first introduce the various types of windfall wealth relevant to Lanying and Xitai along with the allegedly increased gambling activities, all of which have respectively shifted and represented the changing ideas about wealth. People seem to be more susceptible to the idea of making money through luck, rather than anything else, and have thus been enticed by the uncertainties and opportunities resulting from the mining business. In the second section, I will then unfold the distinctions between auspiciousness (*fu*), luck (*yun*) and fate (*ming*) and how these concepts have been applied to distinctive wealth acquisition. I would argue that both auspiciousness and fate reside in oneself while luck is something that is found outside oneself. If you get lucky, it means you are auspicious; if you are always lucky, this in turn shows that fate has been kind to you. By attributing sudden wealth to ones auspiciousness and fate, actions motivated by envy are left seeming ridiculous and unjustified. This section will be followed by a more detailed discussion on the belief in fate and how this has worked in terms of calculation or speculation, superstition and rationalisation; that is, fate as intrinsically within oneself predetermining success and failure and fate in the shape of external manifest forces lifting people out of their failures. By elaborating on the complexities and ambiguities of these beliefs, I will conclude by showing how the disruptive actions of envy are significantly restrained by strategically claimed

auspiciousness, luck and fate and how the inferiority induced by envy is, in effect, soothed by such beliefs.

Mining and gambling

The mining business in Lanying village only began to thrive a few years ago, as discussed previously, thanks to the swift increase in the price of iron ore pellets and newly detected iron ore deposits in the region. This led to a substantial transformation of the ways of making money within the village. According to the Second National Agricultural Survey of Lanying village carried out at the end of November 2007, out of the 776 households researched, 223 households were involved in industries other than agriculture with 60%[129] of these 223 households directly or indirectly involved in the mining business either as wage labourers, transporters of iron ore or iron powder or as contractors for the mining companies' small projects. Money earned in these ways, however, will not be counted as windfall wealth. Windfall wealth, *baofu* as it is called, generally indicates some large amount of money acquired almost overnight and rather unexpectedly.

It is crucial to identify three types of windfall wealth obtained by ordinary villagers in relation to the mining businesses in Lanying and Xitai. Unlike the types I mentioned in the introduction where certain investments or personal connections were necessary to run highly profitable businesses, the types of windfall wealth mentioned here have to do with smaller amounts and the opportunity, therefore,

[129] The question in the survey was: What non-agricultural profession do you undertake? 44% responded by placing themselves in the mining industries category with 16% in transportation.

seemed to be open to most of the villagers. The first type of opportunity to be dealt with is realised through selling mine sites. These mine sites were normally detected by individual households that then leased out the right to exploit the iron ore to the mining companies who desperately needed to secure more deposits for further production. Given the high demand for iron ore and the need to maintain uninterrupted production, the mine sites could be sold for quite a high price, a couple of million Yuan, for instance. The second type of opportunity came through manually digging iron ore. Before any formal mining companies are set up, it is also possible for individual villagers to detect iron ore (with very basic machinery) in the mountains, to dig the ore out and then transport it down to the village. Given that the price of ore was normally rising, the short-term gain could also be remarkable for these cases. This type of mineral extraction required laborious work but considering the low level of income in the village this still seemed to represent money made for little or no investment. If you were lucky enough to find iron-rich ore in large concentrations the money made this way could also be considerable, a few hundred Yuan per labourer per day, for instance.[130] The third type of opportunity came through "selling" agricultural land. Mining companies often needed to requisition certain pieces of land to build workshops or to use for tailing storage and some households managed to negotiate millions of Yuan for this kind of land appropriation. All the three types of income coming either from owning an iron ore site, digging out ore or leasing out some parts of ones agricultural land

[130] As mentioned in previous chapters, the monthly salary for working in a mine is normally around 1,500 Yuan.

seemed to be quite unexpected and contingent on external factors. On the one hand, the seemingly unpredictable fluctuation of iron prices made some people bankrupt one day and millionaires the next; on the other hand, valueless stones, barren land, graveyards or mountains surprisingly turned out to be holding buried treasure. Money could be quickly made these ways but the opportunities seemed to be quite unstable and unpredictable.

The windfall wealth acquired within the village was certainly restricted to a minority of the villagers. Not all villagers had the same opportunities to access the precious iron ore that had made some so cursorily rich; even if they did have similar opportunities, sometimes there were reasons which held them back. What is certain, though, is that the realising of windfall wealth by some made others within the village impatient to get rich. As Lao Wang, who has been gambling for more than 20 years, pointed out, the logic behind crime, gambling and getting rich was as follows.

> Gambling [131] has the same logic as that motivating stealing or the committing of crimes. There must be more cases of comparing (*panbi*) in cities and of thinking why others are better off while I am not. There is less of this in the countryside. Lots of people are in conflict with the law in Lanying village but not so many in Xitai[132] and much less in recent years. People earn money through labouring. Those who commit crimes do not always think it through and their behaviour is always

[131] He used the word "pick up money" (*jian*) to indicate winning in gambling and "lost" (*diu*) as "lose" (*shu*) (these two are the same in English but very different in Chinese). His wife commented, "How can you sleep soundly whether you win or lose?" He said, "Why not, gambling is like a kind of consumption. If I win, I'll consider the money to be something I accidentally found on the street; if I lose, I simply consider I lost the money somewhere. Otherwise, you miss the fun part and are always worrying about winning or losing."

[132] As it is a much closer and smaller community in Xitai, any crime would be difficult to hide from others.

> because of money. The person who commits a crime starts to think that the usual way of getting money is too slow and then becomes impatient. When he sees others become rich while he has no other ways [of getting rich] then he will steal or rob. By behaving like this money can be made more quickly. When he succeeds once, he wants to do it again. If he gets involved in this in the long-term, he will be caught one day for sure. Gambling is the same. If you are lucky enough to have one lucky win (*languodi*)[133], you can get 20 to 30 thousand Yuan and it will be worthwhile. [I pointed out that there are times that you lose]. Gamblers wouldn't think that way. What is in his mind is that by some chance he will win and sometimes even with one win he can make lots of money. But certainly if you gamble over a long period of time you'll lose money. People like me, I have gambled since I was 20 but the stakes were small and I only gambled at festivals or New Year. If I lose, I will earn the money next year. And I always save the money I need for living; for instance, if I have 100 Yuan, I will simply only gamble 50.

Things certainly changed drastically once the mining business began to flourish. One of the significant changes was the increase in the amount of money involved and the scale of gambling; another significant feature was how this became a "profession" for some farmers. There was even an extreme case, recounted to me by my host, of a woman who used to cook for miners giving up her 800-Yuan-per-month job to become a gambler since earning money was apparently much easier this way. According to Lao Wang, people were keen on gambling because they were too impatient to earn money through labouring[134] and kept hoping they might get lucky one day, instead. The impatience to earn money reveals, on the one hand, ones zest for earning money; on the other hand, though, it actually reflects changing ideas about "how wealth is made". Given that wealth can

133 When people gamble everyone puts stakes in at the start of the game (not often during it). Cards and mahjong depend on who is out last, those who are remaining in the game getting all the stakes left.

134 Certainly not many can maintain a living by gambling although this case here only indicates a tendency.

be made overnight through selling mine sites or iron ore, the previously valued idea of making money through hard work or laborious farming gets quickly dismantled. When Wu lectured me on how to succeed, he said that success certainly did not come through accumulating wealth bit by bit but by knowing, as some successful miners did, "how to turn those yellow-grey stones into money".

Since the money gained through mining felt somewhat like the money gained through gambling, people minded much less about losing money through gambling. After all, they could just acquire a similar amount or, if they were lucky enough, detect even better quality iron ore which could then secure another round of remarkable wealth. As High's (2008) research in Mongolian gold mines also shows, money earned from gold mining is more easily spent and the "desire to 'consume money' is related to perceptions of ninja[135] money as dangerous, heavy and polluted" (High, 2008: 14). Perceptions about wealth have certainly shaped the ideas and behaviour of serious gamblers. On the one hand, money is seemingly easy to acquire and therefore painlessly gambled away, this benefiting others who are there to pick up the wealth "consumed" through gambling. Since not everyone is lucky enough to be involved in the mining business, gambling offers an important chance, or at least hope, for others to be favoured by luck as well. In a way gambling helps to redistribute wealth among villagers, a phenomenon that has also generated extra fervour for serious gambling. Moreover, when boasting about

[135] "[T]he term ninja refers to a person who mines for gold without possessing the legally required mining license and thereby evades state regulation with regard to taxation, environmental rehabilitation and land entitlement" (High, 2008: 2). This is quite similar to the mining situation in my field village.

gains and losses from gambling, those villagers with suddenly achieved wealth are, in effect, avoiding a certain amount of envy directed at their wealth.

Auspiciousness (*fu*), luck (*yun*) and fate (*ming*)

In the winter of 2006, not very long after my arrival in the village, I randomly walked into a house, desperately looking for someone to chat with, having discovered that winter in Northern China was unbearably cold, empty and quiet. The house was shabby compared to all the other surrounding brick and cement houses which had apparently been constructed not long before. To my surprise, it turned out to be the house of Meng's mother. Meng was a school teacher in the township primary school and since he was a good friend of my host's son I had often seen him about. Meng's mother was sewing a quilt while Meng's three-year-old son slept in the next room. The mother and I quickly developed a rapport and I learnt that she had another son, who was unmarried; they had, therefore, been saving money to build a new house in preparation for this second son's marriage. We also talked about who had money (*youqian*) in the village and how outsiders like me could tell. I then popped her my question about rich people: "Do you red-eye them?" She looked at me with obvious surprise, as if she was surprised at the stupidity of my question and then replied, "Red-eye? No! What is there to red-eye? (*na yousha ke yanhong de*), I don't have the auspiciousness (*mei nage fu*)".

It was the first time that I had heard this unusual logic connecting auspiciousness and red-eye: "I have no auspiciousness; therefore, I certainly don't

red-eye". For me and perhaps most readers, the reason for not being envious would be either that I am in general not an envious person or that I did not happen to envy the thing that you mentioned (being rich in this case) although I might envy something else or refuse, as many of my informants did, to admit their envy due to its unpleasant nature, insisting on the pointlessness of envy. Meng's mother adopted neither of these approaches; instead, she posed a new question. Why would I envy someone rich when s/he has the quality of auspiciousness? To clear things up, she further explained her point by telling me her story:

> We used to have a mine site (*kuangdian*) as well. We found it on our own. At this time, my elder son [Meng] was about to get married and we were short of money, so we sold the site for the price of 10 thousand Yuan. After only a couple of weeks, the price had gone up a lot more. How could we have known that the price would increase, so we sold to Zhangs. Not long after this, they sold it [the same site] for 0.4 million Yuan. Someone told me that the site is worth 1 million now. What could we do then? You won't be able to keep it anyway if you are not auspicious (*meifu zuobuzhu*). If we hadn't been short of money at the time, we might have just kept it. But now we need to rely on Meng's father's laborious work.

Auspiciousness (*fu* or *fuqi*) is something one possesses that brings luck. If one gets lucky, this is not as simple as one just being lucky; rather, one has the auspiciousness to accidentally get the luck (or to keep it or benefit from it) while others who do not have the same level of auspiciousness are not able to achieve the same thing. Auspiciousness can apply to a number of things. It can apply to important things such as getting rich or marrying a good wife and it can also be manifested in trivial things. For instance, if someone happened to have prepared a feast and you happened to walk in that day for the purpose of doing some errands you would be invited to eat. This would not only mean that you are lucky to be

there and have good food, it would also indicate that you had a certain auspiciousness for good food (*koufu*). As with luck (*yun*), such as luck for success in politics (*guanyun*) or money (*caiyun*), auspiciousness is something that offers someone more potential than other things to get lucky. In Meng's mother's words, "*meifu zuobuzhu*" which literally means one "cannot sit on it without auspiciousness". Auspiciousness, then, is also something that can secure and accomplish luck.

Fate, on the other hand, has far more complicated implications. Let me start with another story that I overheard in a conversation in the winter of 2007 when taking a cab back home. It was shortly after heavy snow and there was hardly any public transportation available. Therefore, when the driver said he had to go in the wrong direction to pick up two other passengers before heading to town, we could not say anything. The village he drove to was one of the richest in Lanying Township. It was a very small village with just a few hundred of people but each household was able to get at least several tens of thousands of Yuan each year from the mines. The driver and another passenger were commenting on and exchanging information about how rich people were there. While we were waiting, he pointed at different houses and talked about how so-and-so was rich and so on. He also said the following.

> I constantly pick up people living here. One girl's family has several million Yuan and the people of this village don't see one million as a big deal. This woman gave me 150 Yuan[136] for the taxi fare. They are rich (*youqian*). They don't care [about money]. I know a driver who married

136 Normally, the taxi fare is 10 Yuan per person or 40 Yuan for renting the whole car.

> a girl from this village and the girl's family gave him one million Yuan right away. Not cash, for sure, but the money to buy an apartment, a stall (*dishang*) and a truck, followed by hundreds of thousands more for other expenditure. Another one married a rich girl as well [the other guy mocks him at this point by saying, "Are you regretting getting married too early?"). No, it's just *ming* [fate].

Clearly, this driver had painfully witnessed how other drivers were getting rich through marriage. He had not married like this and he no longer had the chance. By contrast with those kinds of wealth that are continuously generated or which in order to achieve one has many chances, marriage, at least within the village context, is deemed as a matter that only happens once in a lifetime. People certainly do divorce but this is rare with divorcees being highly devalued meaning that people cannot bargain as much as they did for the first marriage in these cases. It can be seen that fate is also about being lucky, then, although it concerns things that last much longer (such as lifelong marriage). It is different, then, from auspiciousness, which is attributed for short-term or one-off events; fate has long-term indications. If you say someone has a good fate (*minghao)*, this person has to be at least middle-aged and to have been lucky in many respects, such as in terms of career, marriage, children and so forth. To prove someone has a good fate, one needs a much longer time in order to witness its effects.

Here, to distinguish fate from auspiciousness, I only introduce fate as something that is also intrinsically possessed by a person; other aspects of the fate belief will be further illustrated later on in this chapter. In short, when luck is something unpredictable, mobile and unsustainable, auspiciousness and fate are intrinsic personal features through which to obtain it, benefit from it and secure it

in the short or long term. Auspiciousness and fate do not seem to apply to similar aspects of people's lifecycles, however, although there are noticeable overlaps. In general, fate should be about the key lifetime events, such as birth, marriage, money and children, while auspiciousness can be about health, food, safety or other things besides birth, marriage, money or children.

Now I shall return to Meng's mother's point ("I don't have the auspiciousness; therefore, I certainly don't red-eye") and the driver's claim ("I don't regret it because it is fate") in order to discuss the relationship between envy, auspiciousness and fate. Schoeck argues that the belief in luck has the potential to take some of the envy out of human relations. He points out that " to have good or bad luck is something quite independent of effort, prediction or human intervention"; therefore, " by definition it is virtually impossible to envy him for being just lucky", although " it is perfectly possible to envy the other his serenity and happiness, because it is obvious how much this depends on his work and the way he behaves" (Schoeck, 1966: 238). He also remarks that when this idea is applied to inequality luck and fate can, therefore, be substitutive for understanding and accepting inequality, for "it is, of course, possible for any number of people in a society to be happy, since this depends largely on themselves, but they can never all 'hit the jackpot' at once, all be favoured by fate. This would be impossible from a space-time point of view" (Schoeck, 1966: 239). Thus typically, by nature, you cannot envy someone who is just being lucky as this is quite independent of ones effort. The irony here is that the gain without effort is precisely what makes people

envious because it is unfair and undeserved. In other words, auspiciousness directly undermines what is otherwise a prime reason for red-eye.

Meng's mother, as she told it, did not red-eye other rich people in the village because she did not have equal levels of auspiciousness regarding luck. She clearly expressed a sense of regret about not being able to keep the site in order to wait for it to become much more valuable and therefore end up being as rich as the other rich households she mentioned. What she believed, though, was that this was about more than just being unlucky. The more important thing was that "You won't be able to keep it if you are not auspicious"; that is, even if luck were well distributed and everyone had a chance, those who did not have the equivalent auspiciousness to sustain it would not be able to grab this "free-floating" and unpredictable luck and benefit from it.[137] The driver could easily have been provoked to envy when other drivers apparently acquired many things that he wanted as well[138] but by putting forward the *ming* explanation at the end the zest and excitement of making more money out of the rich and the subtle envy he had of other lucky drivers were covered up and quickly deflected. The passenger who mocked at him could not say anything else. When the driver said, "It's fate", this represented the end of the conversation. If it is your fate, there is nothing you can do about it; bringing up the explanation of fate obliges others to shut up and share your unfortunate pain at

[137] Certainly, there are practical reasons for selling a site at a particular time but in this case they could not know the price would go up so much.

138 I have heard many drivers complain about the severe competition they faced (especially with the growing number of taxis) and the hardship of the long hours of driving necessary to earn a sufficient amount of money for a better living.

having an undesirable fate. Unlike Schoeck, who believes that belief in luck has the potential to take some of the envy out of human relations, I would argue that in the Chinese context the internalisation of luck into ones auspiciousness and fate makes envy still clearly felt. The basic claim of my informants (that is, "I believe in auspiciousness (*fu*) or fate (*ming*), so I don't feel envy") is actually a way of diverting envy. The unspoken pain of envy can still be easily sensed but there is just nothing to be gained from confronting it.

Fate as an internalised entity

Fate, as calculated or speculated about, can be seen by my informants to be intrinsically within oneself. In this section, fate is treated as something that belongs to someone; that is, a particular fate is mine, his, hers or someone else's. This might be determined by unknown cosmological patterns or purely speculated about on the basis of certain events but it will inevitably be located in certain individuals. This type of fate-belief can, in general, be employed under three types of circumstances concerning wealth in the village. The first type involves utilising fate as a prediction; that is, whether you have the fate of having luck with money (*caiyun*) to smooth your wealth-acquiring activities or not. The second type has to do with wealth turning into danger if you do not have the equivalent fate necessary to maintain it. The third type is the fate that can be seen as an unknown strength that assists some, but not others, in getting opportunities for suddenly becoming rich. Fate is either calculated or speculated on; I would argue that the usage of fate certainly cannot simply reduce the desirability of wealth, then. Rather, it confirms

or justifies the inaccessibility of certain wealth on the basis of individual fate, something which makes wealth seemingly impossible to envy.

In general, *ming*, or fate, according to Chinese popular religion, resides in the eight characters (*ba zi*) of ones birth time. As Harrell (1989) points out, this system posits that an individual's fate is determined by four pairs of characters. The pairs represent, respectively, the two-hour period, the day, the month and the year of the person's birth; one member of each pair is drawn from the cycle of the Ten Heavenly Stems and the other from the Twelve Earthly Branches (Harrell, 1989: 95). In my field village, similar types of fate calculation were applied. Indeed, there were two fortune-tellers there, each one with a stall in the county.[139] I happened to run into one of them, Mr Lei, on my way back from the weekly market one day, while I was aimlessly observing farmers planting their fields with seed. Mr Lei also told fortunes in the county more generally but he was back for a week to help do the planting of the land. After learning about my background, he was keen to calculate my fate as he claimed that he rarely saw anyone like me who was so highly educated and who came from a city. I gave him my *bazi* and he asked me to visit him again in his house after a few days had passed. I went back as promised and he told me his calculation of my fate.

> There are three levels of metal[140] in your fate (*ming*). Metal is in charge of intellect, which means you are intelligent and also have a good memory. Your *bazi* is not lacking in any of the five elements;

139 It was said that it was easier for them to swindle strangers out of money as they were not widely trusted within the village.

140 Basically, there are five elements (*wu xing*) in ones *ming*: metal, wood, water, fire and sand.

> therefore, there is no need to add anything to your name.[141] In general, you have a very good fate and as you get older, your life will become better and better. You will have a rather late marriage; if you had got married early, there would have been more conflicts within the marriage, which could have easily led to a break up. Your shortcoming is that you can't save significant quantities of money and always spend all you have. You shouldn't marry anyone who was born in the years of the Tiger, Pig or Snake. The best should be those born in the year of the Ox or the Sheep.

Basically, according to Mr Lei, this type of *suanming* (calculation of fate) can tell you things about destiny, marriage, fate in terms of wealth, parents (or parent-child relationships in terms of *xiangsheng xiangke*, i.e. being synergic or inhibited) and so on, depending on what you ask. I did not ask any particular questions, so what I was told was quite general. When we chatted about other things, Mr Lei told me that people came to him for mainly three reasons: firstly, wealth (*qiucai*); secondly, marriage; and thirdly, work. No matter what the age or background of the person who came to ask was, these were the only things in their heads. I asked whether there were any cases of people red-eyeing other people's wealth and coming to him for help He told me the following.

> In cases like this, there isn't anything I can do. It is *ming* [fate]. Someone has it and others don't. For people who have it [good fate regarding money, *youqian de ming*], they don't need to do anything and money just pours into their pockets. How do millionaires (*qianwan fuweng*) become millionaires? If you want to earn the same amount as they do, even if you work really hard, the most you could get might be 120 thousand Yuan per year and that's with your whole life working; you still won't be able to have tens of millions Yuan. For someone who hasn't got money fate (*mei caiming*), even though they may have earned lots of money, they may get caught in accidents. If you don't have enough auspiciousness (*fu*), you can't sustain that amount of

141 Generally, the full possession of the five elements is considered to be good fate; if this is not the case, adding the element that is lacking in the fate into the name by using a particular character can be a way of adjusting ones fate.

> wealth (*cai*). Like for myself, I calculate my luck everyday and if it shows I will get 80 RMB today, I go home when I get this amount. If there is no wealth (*cai*)[coming], I won't even go to my stall. [But if you don't go, then you won't earn any money, I queried]. But if it shows I don't have wealth (*cai*) [coming] today even if I went it would just be a waste of time.

Mr Lei represents an extreme case of someone who uses fate calculations to guide his everyday money-making activities. Other villagers apparently do not and cannot afford to calculate their fate everyday although the idea of *caiming* (literally, money fate) can be prevalent. Even though it was not uncommon for people to deny that they believed in fate, these people still knew what their fate was according to this or that fortune-teller. Mrs Lin, for example, had a clear distrust of fortune-tellers but once casually mentioned that she had been told that her daughter had a fate of a "dragon circled with jade ribbons", this constituting a much higher expectation for her daughter's marriage, even though she said she wondered how far this was true.[142] My host's daughter-in-law, on the other hand, said she never went to fortune-tellers because she was afraid that they would say bad things and that she probably would not be able to help thinking about these (*fanxinsi*) afterwards.[143] Nonetheless, this did not stop her reflecting on her own marriage as her *ming* since she had had so many other options but had ended up marrying into this not-at-all wealthy family. This actually illustrates that she somehow believed in the calculation of fate and considered that it was a possible

142 Mrs Lin said that if Xiao Hua got into college, this might have been largely true; if not, though, she could hardly see it happening.

143 It is said that fortune-tellers do not normally calculate fate for those with a bad fate except for circumstances when the situation is critical, as in when someone might die if they were to marry a particular person; otherwise, the bad piece of news is concealed.

means of predicting ones future. Most commonly, however, she would use her belief in fate as a type of speculation after something had happened, attributing the event to fate, as is shown by the story of a couple whom she knew well,

> The couple were relatives of my stepfather. If they were not dead, they would be some of the richest people in my natal village. Before they died in a car accident, they had just finished building a new house and had done well in the mining business. There was a wedding they had to attend and the accident happened when they had left but then decided to return, something which was deemed quite unnecessary. How could the timing have been so spot-on (*zenmo namo qiao*)? They had given the *fenzi* [money-present] and had to leave for some business. In this case, it was quite unnecessary to return for the feast but they were doing just that when the car accident took place. It is *ming* [fate]. Otherwise, why would they have gone back and happened to have the car crash. It isn't good to have the wealth without an equivalent fate.

In this explanation one is not able to achieve a large amount of wealth without a good fate. The story does not say that the wealth brought them bad luck. Rather, it says that they were fated (*ming*) not to be able to enjoy their good luck (*fu*). If wealth is only desirable when matched with potentially good fate, one should, therefore, not desire something that is not predestined to be ones own. Similarly, coveting wealth that is not ones own can also bring down unfortunate incidents on oneself or ones family. According to such reasoning, the inaccessibility of wealth is, therefore, something to be accepted, whether willingly or unwillingly.

Fate, as speculation, is understandably more commonly inferred after things have already happened. Since fate calculation is not and never can be always credible, fate speculation is more commonly used to validate and justify things that have happened in the past. Nevertheless, when fate speculation is increasingly

readily accepted to explicate certain events, it starts to also be used to make predictions about similar events happening in the future. I was once asked the following question by the wife of the head of Xitai as we went up into mountains to pick wild vegetables.

> Don't you think our whole life resides in *ming*? (*Ren zhe yibeizi shibushi ming.*) Sometimes, I wonder whether we'll just get what we are destined to receive. Look at the valley over there. It was rented by Xiao Wang. He planted trees on both sides of the mountain and, given it was barren, it took him a great deal of effort to make it productive. After two years, he insisted on giving it back to the brigade (*dadui*), saying it was just too laborious and hard to manage. Normally, the lease on the valley should have lasted for ten years and, since at that time the valley was worth nothing, he actually didn't need to pay much for the lease. He gave it up anyway, though, and Wu's family took it over afterwards, and now you can see how much money Wu got [nearly a million Yuan].

As Stafford argues in his paper "What is going to happen next?", when predicting ones future, the Chinese tradition is "very strongly oriented towards both the past and the future", which is to say, "this tradition stresses not only the extent to which the historical past weighs upon and determines the present, but also the extent to which the future may be predictable, and in some ways even controllable" (Stafford, 2007: 59). Therefore, after ones "own experience of the brutal fatefulness of life", it is not surprising to see those anxious about risk-taking "turn to the cosmological system, that is the system for reading the patterns of the universe, for guidance" (Stafford, 2007: 61). Apparently, although my informants may have worried about their future, what they struggled with the most was to understand what had happened in the past and to figure out the disruptive "fate pattern" that thereby justified their own gains (or, more commonly, losses). It was difficult for them to grasp why some had obtained windfall wealth overnight when

the opportunity really duly belonged to others. They were also perplexed about why some people had achieved stunning wealth but lost their lives in unexpected and unnecessary events. For them, opportunities to become rich were not at all exclusive to certain individuals but the uncertainties and insoluble conundrum as to why some but not others seemed to be speculated about and located in fate could not be explained by any other identifiable factors apart from luck. The more disturbing and painful puzzle was why windfall wealth was achieved by someone else and not me? If the "someone else" was someone who did not deserve the good fortune or was no better than "me", envy was typically more strongly felt. However, as was expressed by Meng's mother's derisive tone and the driver's silence, the pain of envy could not be expressed to anyone. It tends to just be much better to simply end the story by saying, "It is just my (lack of good) fate". Somehow, it is easier to accept ones "allocated" bad fate than ones own more "controllable" failure.

Manifested fate

Fate can be manifested and read in many different ways, though, and can be generalised as the fate of the cosmos or society. Fate's explanation for things is not only individually calculated or speculated, as indicated above, but is also rationally applied. When various ways of reasoning still fail to make sense of something that has happened, "fate" is put forward as the explanation to lift individuals out of their personal failure. Furthermore, it is generally more comforting to believe that failure is not due to ones unfortunate fate in particular but to the fact that we are all doomed. In a way, fate is one of the ways to explain what has happened just as

rational explanation does.

I ran into Wu on my way back home after my consultation with the fortune-teller regarding my fate. Wu asked me what I had been researching that day and I told him I had gone to *suanming* (to calculate my fate). It was easy to see that he was outraged by this and he scolded me accordingly. "How could you believe that, being a college student (*daxuesheng*)? How much did you pay him?" I said that I had not had to pay any money and that it had just been a casual chat. He was relieved that I had not been swindled by the fortune-teller and decided to share his idea about fate with me.

> I don't believe in *ming* (fate). If their [the fortune-tellers'] logic is true, I know how to fortune tell as well. When they say that I could be engaged soon, I could say I could even get married if I want; do I need to be told? When they say I could encounter bloodshed (*xueguang zhizai*), I could say that if I don't drink or fight with others then I won't be carved up by others. It's all about relying on oneself. When they say I could be a boss with 300 thousand RMB, I could say I could be if I spent 300 thousand to buy a truck (*shilunzi*). What they say is pointless! ["If this is the case, why did you go to them?" I asked) No, I didn't go but this is what they told me anyway. I don't trust in *ming* at all. Can you go to university because of your *ming*? It should be because you study hard. They know what to say from the moment when they first see you. They know you come from a good family background. Have a late marriage? Even I can tell that. What they told you, I could just as easily predict as well.

He clearly claimed that he did not have any preordained fate and that, actually, none of us did. He rationalised everything. For him, there were always reasons behind what had happened. Why do some get the money and others not? According to Wu, this is because some people know about the law while others do not. If you are knowledgeable, you will not be easily deceived. This is also why he was on the

verge of being furious when he first discovered that I — a well-educated college student — could be so naïve as to seek advice from a fortune-teller. There were certainly things that he could not explain. He recounted his experience of working in Beijing where his former factory colleague had made a fortune by recycling abandoned steel from demolished buildings. He attributed his colleague's success to his having seized the right opportunity when others were unaware of the opportunity existing in the city's many reconstruction projects. Wu was seizing his own opportunity by refusing to sign the land requisition contract with the mining company; at the same time, he had been reading celebrities' biographies to learn where opportunities were most likely to be found. While Wu's endeavour was a still ongoing process, Mrs Gao, on the other hand, had failed to achieve what she wanted.

> You see, all the cadres have been corrupted. The mines have almost depleted the water supply needed for planting rice and the mining companies have all had to make contracts with our village to compensate [our loss]. We haven't seen a penny of this. He [the head of the village] has promised to exempt us from our TV licence fees but we are still paying for them. He has been the head of the village for many years and we still have tens of thousands in debts. There are so many mines now; where does the money go? There are villages that have sued the heads of their villages but it was hardly possible to check anything out. How could we have that much spare time to work this through? Hence, we would rather earn more money of our own. Every single mining factory needs to go through the village committee before they set up; can you imagine how much money they have embezzled? Well, if you don't have that *fu* (auspiciousness), don't think about that money; not everyone can get that. If you don't have the fate, just don't think about it!

Mrs Gao had supported another candidate[144] in the village elections. She did

[144] Her husband's brother.

not consider the current head of the village to have been elected through fair competition. She reckoned the head of the village had mobilised his network to effectively forge votes in the election and that, even after the forged votes were detected, someone from the township had disguised this so that the current head of the village could win the election. She undoubtedly would not have accepted that the election result was anyone's fate but not being able to share the prosperity of the mining companies as a member of the village where the mining companies were effectively situated was something painful that was beyond her control. This pain may have resulted from the incapacity to make a relative of her husband's the village leader, something which would have benefited her family to a greater extent, or simply the incapacity to bring down the current leader to ease her unexpressed envy. Although Mrs Gao said "If you don't have the fate, just don't think about it", it cannot be inferred from this that Mrs Gao was not actually thinking about this. The fact was, not only had she clearly thought about it (money and the power of the head of the village), she had also struggled to obtain both but had unfortunately not been successful in this. By ascribing everything to fate in the end, she could rightly conclude that the unfortunate failure was not due to anybody's inability. There was simply nothing they could have done in this instance. "Manifested fate", I would argue, is used to provide comfort for both the unsatisfactory past and the unpredictable future. By ascribing fortune or misfortune to fate, individual responsibilities, either contributing to success or failure, are subsequently taken out of the equation having to do with unchangeable events.

It should be noted that the struggle between accepting fatalism or adopting rationalisation is constant in the villages and possibly elsewhere. One of the important reasons behind this can be attributed to the state's discourse and practice. Under current state regulations, any unregistered or unorganised religious activities can be categorised as "feudal superstition". Fate calculation, geomancy and divination were all classified as feudal superstitions and officially banned by law.[145] Mr Lei, for instance, had been keen to calculate my fate and to inform me of the logic behind ones fate but he had still been wary about the dangers our conversation could have brought him. When he saw me off, I had to assure him quite a few times that I would not report our conversation to the police or think of it as feudal superstition. The general suspicion felt towards fate calculation is due, on the one hand, to the unreliability of some fortune-tellers who are merely keen on swindling people out of money and, on the other hand, to the strong influence of the anti-superstition discourse in China. I am not sure how far my informants' ideas about fate were coming from the actual calculations of fortune tellers. Whenever I inquired about the idea of fate, my informants would invariably respond, "Oh, that is just feudal superstition". Nonetheless, it was often later revealed that they had calculated their or their family members' fate but just would not share their experience of this with educated people like me. As Feuchtwang rightly points out, in mainland China, "superstition" is not just a negative category. It is portmanteau condemnation of the backwardness of several aspects of popular culture. The blanket condemnation is directed at anything that does not suit the

[145] Constitution.

ideals of scientific and democratic governance and its project for modernisation. Backwardness shames (Feuchtwang, 2001: 216-217). On the other hand, the *ming*, which people effortlessly used to partially rationalise other people's gains, was not deemed backward or superstitious at all. I often heard people saying, "Don't even dream of achieving something if you don't have the fate!" just as Mrs Gao did. Nonetheless, *ming* as something calculated or just as pure speculation did not seem to make much difference to those who were using it to comment on the gains or losses in life. The difference was, however, that people were inclined to treat the action of going to a fortune-teller as superstitious although not the belief in *ming* itself.

Fatalism, as defined by Cahn, "is the thesis that the laws of logic alone suffice to prove that no man has free will, suffice to prove that the only actions which a man can perform are the actions which he does, in fact, perform, and suffice to prove that a man can bring about only those events which do, in fact, occur and can prevent only those events which do not, in fact, occur" (Cahn, 1967: 8). Cahn tries to argue that, if one is to avoid fatalism and preserve logic, one should consider what Aristotle presented more than two thousand years ago; that is, "three metaphysical implications concerning the nature of time" (Cahn, 1967: 136). According to Aristotle's solution, not only is time real, time is also "efficacious" and "has an intrinsic sense of asymmetry"; that is, "certain events in the future are contingent, whereas all events in the past are, by virtue of their pastness alone, necessary, i.e. it is not within any man's power to prevent their occurrence. Time

alone can decrease a man's powers or abilities" and "the future differs from the past, and not merely in the sense that it comes later — I can exert some measure of control over what will happen in the future, whereas I can exert no such control over what has happened in the past" (Cahn, 1967: 136-137). In the Chinese belief in *ming*, as shown by my informants' commentaries, fatalism is essentially used to determine what has happened in the past, since there is nothing I can do about this; for the things that have not yet happened (things in the future), though, people can still be hopeful about these.

Harrell and Oxfeld have both studied the Chinese folk ideology of fate in the light of entrepreneurial spirits. For Harrell, the idea of fate can be either used as "simply another way of commenting, seriously or casually, on ones own or another's material situation in life" (Harrell, 1989: 94) or to explain failure as a "post-hoc rationalization, a catchall explanation when others fail, a way of acknowledging that even the most moral and diligent human beings cannot necessarily guarantee their own success in life" (Harrell, 1989: 101). In Oxfeld's study, "although the Dhapa Chinese clearly subscribe to the notion that through good behaviour and wise investments one can exert considerable influence over ones future and even ones afterlife, they also leave room in their worldview for the acknowledgment that sometimes even the best of efforts may result in failure" (Oxfeld, 1993: 110) or "in the worst-case scenario, people will hint that some misdeed in the past was the cause of the present bad fortune. They will point to the mistreatment of a child, sibling, or spouse in earlier years, for instance, and explain

that an individual's current hardships are retribution for such thoughtless behaviour" (Oxfeld, 1993: 101). In general, both Harrell and Oxfeld treat fate as ways of explaining the uncertainties and risks Chinese entrepreneurs faced, especially those who had "done all the right things — worked hard, invested wisely, saved money, and behaved properly — ... [but] still fail[ed] to prosper". In such cases, an individual's circumstances may be explained as the simple result of a bad "fate" (*mingyun*) (Oxfeld, 1993: 101). For both Harrell and Oxfeld, the idea of fate simply offers some kind of explanation and comfort for the often fruitless hard-working efforts undertaken by their informants. As Harrell argues, fate "was a tool in such a struggle, a comfort to those who lost and an admonition to others to keep trying" (Harrell, 1989: 107). I want to take the argument one step further, though. The explanation and validation of ones success or failure achieved by ascribing this to fate not only serves as justification or comfort for those who win or lose but also restricts the spaces available for envy since the past is not changeable and the future is undetermined.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have elaborated on the specific usage of auspiciousness (*fu*), luck (*yun*) and fate (*ming*) made by my informants to comprehend and justify gains and losses of windfall wealth in Lanying and Xitai. The villagers tactically applied ideas of fate to comment on other people's achievements or failures as well as to comment on those of their own. Certainly, fate cannot be seen as an overriding force that bypasses all other opportunities to get rich or remain poor

although it is commonly interpreted as influential, especially after any particular events or chances which turned out to be significant in acquiring wealth or power. More specifically, fate is used to justify the gains or pain involved in those events and to make those gains beyond ones control, thereby ameliorating ones sense of undeserved inferiority. This understanding should, at least on the surface, lead to the disappearance of the envy and red-eye felt by villagers. However, what I am actually arguing is that by putting a number of explanations down to fate, the folk beliefs of auspiciousness, fate and luck offer crucial means of making sense of things that have happened, of accepting that the gains acquired by others are just fortunate and, most importantly, of consoling ones sense of inferiority brought about by ones losses. The undeserved inferiority embedded in the feeling of envy often needs to be culturally addressed as, otherwise, this can either lead to harming oneself or to sabotaging the envied subject in the hope of redressing the situation. By attributing the possession of desirable goods to auspiciousness, fate and luck, efforts made to deprive the envied of their possessions seem much less probable.

Nonetheless, we cannot thus claim that these people are serious believers in fate. What they commented on, either not achieving what they wanted or the failure of certain of their efforts, did not need to be calculated by fortune-tellers. They made their own judgements and the explanations with regard to fate were, in effect, rationalised calculation. It was rationalisation in the sense of a strategic clarification of what they could do and what was beyond their reach. It was also rationalisation when they considered that certain opportunities for making money

had passed but that others were still to come in the next few days. Ones fate is not sealed by ones failure in life but it is often available to reconcile these two aspects. Ideas of luck and fate have been seen as interchangeable in other cultures since the distribution of opportunity has always been by and large unequal and sparse, as Schoeck points out (Schoeck, 1966: 238). In China, there is certainly a long tradition of calculating fate and the belief in auspiciousness and fate are deeply ingrained in people's minds. It is conveniently available in such a way that people can turn to it to reconcile themselves to their situation whenever they need to.

The windfall wealth obtained in recent years has very likely changed people's notions of how wealth is made. Now wealth is thought to come through luck and fate, that is to say, unpredictable factors now play a much bigger role in making big profits than in the past. It is certainly still rare for a "professional" gambler to get rich and the luck having to do with getting windfall wealth might also be just one-off. However, by internalising opportunities for becoming rich into ones predestined auspiciousness or fate, the chances of getting lucky or of achieving and sustaining extreme wealth are restricted to only a few individuals. This is thus justifiable too, though. Wealth remains desirable but access to wealth can only be ensured for some and not for others, especially considering the danger of not having a good enough fate to sustain wealth once obtained. Fatalism is generally merely used for things that have happened in the past although it is also sometimes used to demystify the pattern of the past and, therefore, to predict the upcoming future. Given that the past is already beyond ones control, the envy of what others

already have can only be pointless. The anger and pain of unspoken envy can still be felt but it is quickly diverted and concealed in the acceptance of ones fate. Luckily, fate is not completely doomed or unchangeable, at least not until the end of ones life. Opportunities do not entirely run out either. Therefore, everyone can still be hopeful. In particular, hope can be retained and reproduced by ones expectations with regard to ones children, something which will be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 6: Parent-child relations and transcending envy

When the news of my friend's death came, I could not believe it. Only a month before, we had been sitting on uneven rocks at the foot of the mountains in Xitai with Xiao Li refusing to tell me what he envied. Unlike others who might just have denied that they envied at all, he instead insisted *shuole youshayong* (What's the use of saying)? I kept on prompting, though: "Even though it's useless there is no harm in saying! Why don't you just tell me?" He smiled, shook his head and continued to say nothing. I could never have expected that this unanswered question would end up being his last words to me. He was 28 years old then.

Xiao Li was the neighbour and relative of my host in Xitai. He had migrated away to work in suburban Beijing for several years but had come back for the Spring Festival and decided to start working locally and settle back in the village considering the prosperous outlook for the township's economy and the burgeoning mining economy in particular. Most of the young men could at that point easily earn the same amount of money within the region as in the big cities while the living conditions at home were much better. Not long after his return and the end of the Spring Festival break, Xiao Li joined five young men from the same village to manually dig and sell iron ore. The mountains where they worked had virtually already been requisitioned by Sky as tailing storage and as sites for building production mills. Nonetheless, it would take Sky at least a year or so to finalise the contract and to start construction so many villagers took advantage of

this delay to exploit whatever there was in those mountains. By way of excusing their irregular "business", they would say that when the mountains and valleys were finally turned into tailing storage, those iron ore deposits would go to waste anyway.[146]

Despite the harsh and physically demanding working conditions, the money earned from self-employed ore digging was quite substantial and seemingly easy. The six young men shared the cost of transportation and, in some cases, the cost of renting indispensable machinery. The profits would be split six ways, mostly at the end of each day. Under normal circumstances, men could each earn over 100 or even as much as 200 RMB per day.[147] Given the much harsher living conditions in mountainous areas (the poor quality of agricultural land, lack of transportation and being excluded from business opportunities), my host and their close neighbours in Xitai were all quite impoverished compared to their counterparts in Lanying. Therefore, it was not until the emerging mining opportunities appeared that my host and other people like Xiao Li started to share the new good fortune and the dream of becoming wealthy. It was not difficult to spot the glimmer in their eyes when they gathered after dinner in the yard of my host to exchange new-found information, to plan and argue about what to do next to maximise their profits and even to boast about how much money they had gambled away on a previous visit to Lanying.

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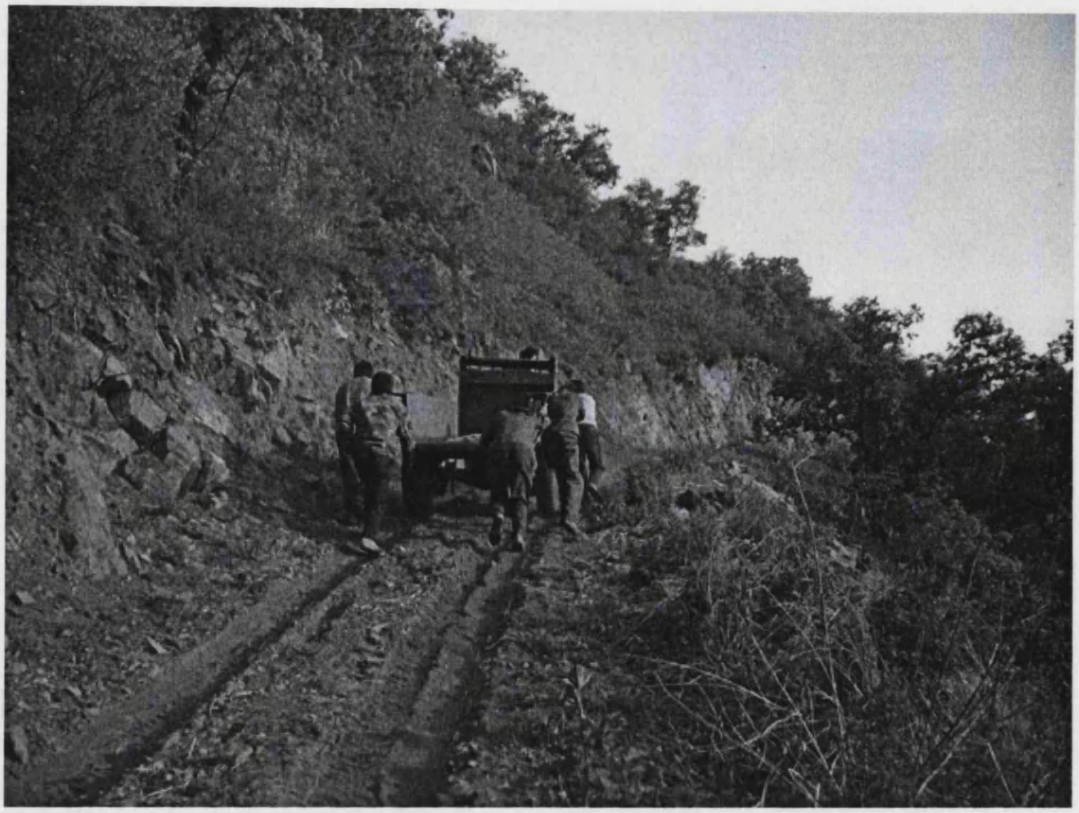
[146] The quantity of the deposits was not deemed large enough for machinery production.

[147] Iron ore was in very high demand and each ton was worth 120-130 Yuan.



6.1: Young men digging out ore in the mountains

6.2: Iron ore

It was widely believed that the level of wealth in Xitai would soon overtake that of Lanying and then quickly catch up with other better-off villages in the region, this once Sky began its full operation. A middle-aged woman told me that her fantasy was the discovery of ample iron ore deposits in the mountains enveloping Xitai, something that could mean everything to them. Holding well-founded and inspiring hopes in iron ore, Xiao Li and other young men got up at 4.30 every morning and worked in the mountains to dig rocks, extract the ore and shoulder this into trucks. Xiao Li, however, was crushed by a truck full of iron ore on one of the trips back home. He fell off the truck and the wheel passed over one of his legs. Although he was sent to the county hospital and had his leg amputated, after one month's desperate treatment, he died miserably. His death had sent the other five partners into financial disaster as Xiao Li's family demanded that they jointly undertake responsibility for the cost of Xiao Li's medical treatment and pecuniary compensation for his death. The amount demanded was quite substantial and was rejected by the other partners, however.[148] The disagreements between all the parties involved could not be settled and had to be handed over to be settled by a long and convoluted legal procedure. In the meantime, the other five young men dispersed, none of them continuing to work selling ore any more.

I still do not know what Xiao Li might have envied but he might have already

[148] The common practice for dealing with a death in mining companies was to pay a total of 220 thousand RMB to the family, which was agreed to be the fair amount for supporting the elders and providing education fees for children in the family under the age of 18. However, in Xiao Li's case, the other five partners argued that Xiao Li was not working for them. They were equal shareholders and should, therefore, equally share both the benefits and the consequences.

known that his ambitions could never be realised. It is this kind of unarticulated and barren ambition that will form the main focus of this chapter. Such unrealisable ambition, that is, the "subject's undeserved inferiority", combined with the "object's undeserved fortune" are the two undeniable conditions for the instigation of envy. Xiao Li's secret envy was unarticulated not only because his dreams could not have been achieved but also because they would have been subject to ridicule as they implied an unrealistic juxtaposition of the subject and the object's position. Boasting about ones ambitions, desires and dreams is not regarded as a virtue but is shameful because it can only serve to demonstrate that one does not know who one should be and what one can possibly achieve. The subject, namely Xiao Li in this case, was fully aware of his "misplacement" of himself with the people he envied and of the fact that this was useless for himself and laughable for others. Xiao Li's envy was barren because almost nothing could be done about it, just as his own words "*shuole youshayong?*" ("What's the use of saying?") expressed. Unlike red-eye, which inevitably indicates the anger directed towards other people, Xiao Li's envy was merely the desire for something else or for something others had achieved, with no one seeming to bear any responsibility for Xiao Li's own unachievable fantasies. It, thus, seemed to Xiao Li that no action potentially relevant to anybody else could be taken in this case and that it was, therefore, useless to discuss the issue further.

This kind of carefully hidden envy was by no means exclusively felt by Xiao Li. In fact, it was secretly shared by many of his fellow villagers in Lanying and Xitai.

As shown by the data relating to the three cases to be presented later in this chapter, similar kinds of unachievable fantasies were prevalent; some provide more easily identifiable subjects for envy but these were not absolutely infertile or useless as they were for Xiao Li. Xiao Li's negativity was not only put to an end by his unfortunate death but also by the fact that he had not yet married at the age of 28, something which had already deprived him and his parents of many hopeful possibilities. As Han points out, "Among rural Chinese, being able to marry and construct a domestic space is a manifesto of a man's social status, economic power and personal charisma" (Han, 2009: 49). More importantly, what sets Xiao Li's case apart from the three cases I will introduce here lies precisely in the importance of the emotional continuation imposed on the parent-child relationship in Chinese families; that is to say, Chinese children, to a great extent, are seen as a continuation of their parents' lives, especially as continuing hope for parents' unachieved fantasies — social mobility being one of the most important of these. This can certainly cause conflicts and tensions between parents and children. Fong (2007) theorises parent-child conflicts as the conflicts of the different cultural models Chinese parents and their children have separately and interactively developed (Fong, 2007: 226). Other reasons for such conflicts and tensions have stemmed from malpractice and the collapse of the system of support for the elderly, these representing parents' unfulfilled expectations and children's disobedience (Yan, 2003 and Fong, 2004). Here, I just want to add that parents' secretive envy and unachievable desires (unachievable for the parents themselves, that is, not for

their children) can also play a part in the increasing tensions between parents and children that many anthropologists have documented.

Unlike Yan (2003), who believes that "the most significant change with respect to elderly support is the disintegration and ultimate collapse of the notion of filial piety, the backbone of old-age security in Chinese culture" (Yan, 2003: 189), I would argue that the notion of filial piety is still largely alive and well, even if it has now taken radically different forms to before. Old-age security has become much less of an expectation for Chinese parents, this with regard to their children, especially in urban areas. Instead, fulfilling their other expectations, among these the desire that their children may fulfil what they were not able to achieve themselves, has become increasingly significant. I also want to stress that the tensions felt are not ultimately as irreconcilable as many might predict. As I will further explore in this chapter, it is the failure, shock and realisation enclosed in key life-changing events, death being one of the most extreme and devastating of these, that have constantly pulled the young generation back from their ambitions, fantasies and "unrealistic" endeavours and made them join in their parents' seemingly more "achievable" and steady plans for these, their own children. After all, the objects of desire and hope of many people can only be achieved gradually, generation by generation. Children not only represent hope in terms of old-age support but, most importantly, also hope for upward mobility in social terms or, to put it differently, hope for their success in social climbing, as discussed in Chapter 3. It is, therefore, the exceptional hope that parents have for their children that can

possibly transcend the kind of envy I am describing in this chapter as this type of hope has largely undermined the condition of "unreachability" in instigating irreconcilable envy.

Parent-child relations and the production of hope

Reciprocity is one of the most important features of the parent-child relationship in China. As Stafford (1995) succinctly points out, "Chinese parent-child reciprocity, in all its complexity, develops from this rather simplistic formula: first, parents *yang* (to support and provide nourishment) children, and then children *yang* parents", mostly through the transmission of food and money (Stafford, 1995: 80). Children acquire the obligation of *yang* through the receiving of the nourishment, education, material investment, care and love offered by their parents; in return, "producing grandchildren to continue the family line, providing life-long financial support and performing rituals to ensure that support is maintained in the next life" are indispensable ways to repay their parents (Stafford, 1995: 80). This formula is often represented by parents' investments and sacrifices for their children's benefit and by children's well-conferred filial piety and filial obedience.

To put it differently, the hopes and expectations entailed in filial piety and filial obedience have mainly been presented as twofold. One of the key aspects is delayed reciprocity for future support and care of the elderly. This is also seen as the most pressing and important one. As Yan's (2003) informants detail, "caring and emotional bonding, such as physical assistance with everyday activities, attending

to the sick bed, and moral support of and emotional attachment to ones elders" are the principle features of caring for the elderly (Yan, 2003: 172). The second key aspect is the hope for upward mobility. As Fong's book *Only Hope: Coming of Age under China's One-child Policy* captures well, "since the highest-paying, most prestigious jobs were reserved for graduates of the post-Mao educational system, many singletons were their families' last best hope for upward mobility" (Fong, 2004: 29). As one of the parents said to Fong, "we just have one child and all our hopes are pinned on her" (Fong, 2004: 51); that is to say, the investment people make in their children in the present are preserved as their hopes for the future.

For urban singletons caring for the elderly is just as pressing and stressful as it is for their rural counterparts. Fong (2004), in her intimate ethnography of singletons in Dalian, a coastal city in Northeast China, reports that "singletons are likely to bear alone the burdens of elder care that were once shared by many siblings" (Fong, 2004: 79-80). What is more, "state officials assumed that retired people would be supported primarily by their children rather than by medical insurance and pension plans, which were reduced, eliminated, or allowed to lag behind inflation as part of efforts to make state enterprises more competitive in the capitalist world system" (Fong, 2004: 79-80). As a result, "as the primary source of social security for the elderly, Chinese cultural models of filial duty and parental investment entailed a candid recognition that parents must be repaid in time and money as well as love" (Fong, 2004: 141). As a consequence of this, the expected repayment often met with the younger generation's rebellion and disobedience,

normally manifested as either unwillingness or inability to meet their parent's expectations. Such tension and conflict is said by Yan (2003), along with Guo (2001), to represent the alteration of the logic of intergenerational exchange for elderly support that has occurred over the last several decades (Yan, 2003: 171). Yan further points out that "it is clear that villagers in the two generations did not share the same notion of elderly support" (Yan, 2003: 177). While parents still believed in "the sacredness of parental authority and the superiority of parents at least in a moral sense", they had already retreated "in the face of the rising power of the younger generation" (Yan, 2003: 177). For Fong (2007), on the other hand, the conflict and anxiety she observed in parent-child interactions was essentially due to "the contradictions inherent in parents' dual desires for replication and improvement", something which has made it even more difficult for children to understand and fulfil their parents' wishes (Fong, 2007: 222). Moreover, "it was difficult for children to develop only the desirable aspects of the values their parents promoted, as these desirable aspects were inextricably connected with undesirable consequences" (Fong, 2007: 221). Such a mismatch between parents' and children's cultural models, according to Fong, initially caused the parents and children she knew in China the greatest anxiety and conflict (Fong, 2007: 226).

The different conclusions Yan and Fong reach, in my view, lie precisely in the unspecified hope and expectations placed on filial piety and filial obedience. For Yan, elderly support weighed much more than any other features found within the notion of filial piety while, for Fong, the desire for upward mobility was included as

a crucial part of parents' investment. This is also true in the rural context. I will argue that, apart from reciprocal support for the elderly, upward mobility, which is the continuation of parents' own lives, has gained increasing importance in parent-child reciprocity in rural areas. This rise in expectations seemed apparent in Fong's (2004) urban ethnography but few have considered the relevance of this to rural studies. "Parents lived vicariously through their children", as Fong documents, while poor workers told her that "they felt compensation and fulfilment when they saw their children enjoying luxuries they themselves never had". For some parents, "children were sources of hope and purpose in otherwise dreary, unfulfilling lives" (Fong, 2004: 141). Meanwhile, as for their children, "teenagers wanted to study and work in the First World, not only to fulfil their personal dream of upward mobility, but also to fulfil their filial dream of making their parents proud and enabling their parents to retire in luxury" (Fong, 2004: 79-80). Similar ways of reasoning are also reported by Kipnis (2009) in his rural study: "in sacrificing themselves for their children, Zouping parents are rising above bare life, giving their bare life meaning" (Kipnis, 2009: 216).

Continuing the life of ones parents was traditionally understood to involve producing grandchildren, as was pointed out earlier with reference to Stafford's work. The hopes and expectations related to this did not, however, simply bear out personal feelings; the production of hope and expectation also had to be shaped, altered and constrained by the existing social contours stipulated by the state and society. For instance, parents' expectations have been rewritten and reframed by

China's one-child policy, socialist reforms and the values attached to the market economy. As a result, the traditional parent-child relationship seems to have been continuously reinvented and recycled, as Kipnis has also indicated (Kipnis, 2009: 219). The younger generation were expected to continue fulfilling their parent's expectations, as well as responding to the changes, as expressions of filial piety. In the meantime, though, the restructuring of Chinese families has led to unprecedented burdens being put on the vastly reduced numbers of children. In consequence, the pressure of fulfilling filial piety has become concentrated on the only child (or in the case of rural areas, the only two children). One of the consequences spelled out by Kipnis (2009) was that "reducing the quantity of the Chinese population would lead to, or enable, an increase in its quality", something which also leads to "increasing educational investment" (Kipnis, 2009: 205-206). The impact on parent-child relations was thus revealed in "conflicts over the amount of time put into schoolwork, test scores, and how children should spend their free time". This, argues Kipnis, has also redefined the experience of childhood in Zouping, a county in Shandong province (Kipnis, 2009: 210).

Filial piety, I would argue, has not lost its importance in parent-child reciprocity. What I intend to demonstrate in this chapter is the growing importance of the element of this relating to continuing parents' desires and transferable hopes, along with elderly support and upward mobility, with respect to the expected filial piety. Hopes can be a hybrid of feelings including both best wishes for oneself and best wishes for ones children. The production of hope certainly should not be seen

merely as wishing for good things personally or as just concrete plans for the future. Miyazaki's (2004) work sees hope as "not an emotional state of positive feeling about the future or a religious sense of expectations, it is not even a *subject* of analysis" (Miyazaki, 2004: 5). Rather, he treats hope as a method for examining knowledge formation, as "an effect of and proof of the truthfulness of their [the Suvavou people] knowledge about themselves" (Miyazaki, 2004: 3), something which is achieved through accounting "hopeful moments whose shape replicates the way those moments are produced and experienced" (Miyazaki, 2004: 7). In the same vein, in this chapter, hope will also be seen as a specific kind of knowledge formation and as positive moments that designate a renewed understanding and judgement for and of oneself. As I mentioned earlier, children are, to a large extent, the embodied hopes of their parents, especially for those things that parents have not yet achieved or the kind of person they have not yet become. The need for care for the elderly and the wish for upward mobility remain important in parent-child reciprocity. It is also worth stressing that the hope imprinted in Chinese parent-child relations can go beyond material exchanges and emotional attachment and can have deeper implications for who the parents are and what they could eventually become.

Mrs Cui's plan for her daughter

Cui Jie was not well-educated herself and had, in fact, dropped out of school when she was in the first year of junior middle school. She was the envy of other women anyway, however, since her husband was capable of earning good money

and this made them one of the rich households in the village and also a household very devoted to the family. Not only did Mrs Cui not need to work in the fields, she also had the luxury of having time to read, write poems and spend time talking to various friends. She told me that sometimes her envious neighbours would sarcastically compliment her on her lifestyle, something which had made her become more careful about cultivating relations with them.[149] Her husband was a manager in a mining company but she told me that hard work could only ever be the entry point for making money. Getting rich required various abilities and accumulated capital. Mrs Cui had also helped her husband in making various important decisions and supported him by taking care of the family. She illustrated one of the crucial points that allowed her husband gain credit and establish authority among his fellow workers.

> One man was not satisfied with the work arrangements so he went up to argue with my husband, Cui Jun. Cui Jun explained how things worked and why the decision had been made. Nonetheless, the man was still unhappy about it and continued acting unreasonably. By this point, his fellow workers had started silently supporting him by stopping work altogether; they also wanted to see how the new manager would respond to such a dispute. The workers were all from the same region, whilst my husband was an outsider; they wanted to see whether he had the ability to override them. All of a sudden, the man who had initiated the dispute picked up a stick and hammered my husband so hard that he fell to the ground. It was quite astonishing and it isn't difficult to speculate that if others had joined the man to beat up my husband, he would have been in real danger. To everybody's surprise, though, my husband wasn't terrified at all and he stood up and fought back. In the end this worker was fired and no one else dared to make unacceptable requests again.

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149 She did not care about this at the beginning and said "Just let them envy me" but later decided that was not a good way to respond. By the time of my second visit to the village, her family had already moved out of the village and lived in the county town.

What Mrs Cui was trying to tell me was that her husband was a brave and tactical man. He knew at the crucial moment that if he failed to assert firm control over the situation, he would not be able to manage the workers anymore. Therefore, even though the worker was physically stronger than him, it was necessary to grasp the right moment and the right method to demonstrate his strength at all costs. This careful calculation and effective understanding had allowed Cui Jun to change from being an ordinary peasant to the contractor of a brick factory and to continue all the way to become the powerful manager he was at the time. It was this kind of knowledge and experience that Mrs Cui deemed essential to success. Mrs Cui had worked in Shandong Province for a couple of years as she had been desperate to leave the countryside and felt it was only in cities that someone as intelligent, civilised and sensible as she was could be properly accommodated in terms of her needs. The main reason for her coming back was provided by her daughters who certainly needed her care and support. Mrs Cui was reluctant to return but, when she started sensing the nonchalance with which her daughter treated her, she had no choice but to come back in order to win back her affection. After returning, she did not stop teaching herself the kind of knowledge and understanding that she deemed crucial for becoming a successful person, however, achieving this by watching educational TV programmes, reading magazines and befriending powerful and informative people, that is, government officials, local businessmen and female friends she had met in cities and whom she fervently aspired to emulate. In a way, she gave up the possible life opportunities to be found in cities and

returned to the countryside for her elder daughter. Because of the lack of educational and other opportunities necessary for herself to become as recognised and powerful as her enviable friends, the focal point of her life shifted to her elder daughter's education. She knew that she would not be able to be the kind of successful woman she wanted to be, even though she probably could have if she had had the chance, but there was still hope for her daughter. She told me the following.

> I always talked to her [my daughter] and asked why she believed in certain things. I want her to be a reflective person and not a puppet of education. When I go to parents' meetings, I always stay longer to talk with her teachers, pointing out my daughter's shortcomings and discussing ways she could improve. I don't just care about her exam marks like many others do. What I care about are her comprehensive qualities. I think my daughter is very good and has lots of potential. My hope now is — don't laugh at me when I tell you this — that one day a television station or a journalist will come to interview my daughter and she will say — just one sentence, one is enough — that all my achievements have benefited greatly from my mum's teaching and she is an extremely fine woman. This would be enough for me. Everything would be worth it. Oh, I'm going to cry just saying it.

Being on TV is one of the most important indicators for being seen by the locals as important and successful. For them, only those who have excelled at something appear on TV. For Mrs Cui, the idea of her daughter becoming prominent enough to be televised and transmit the message that "Mrs. Cui is an extremely fine woman" gives her hope. This moment alone would compensate for and pay off all of her sacrifices, the reluctance of giving up what she had aspired to and the alternative investment she had made in her own daughter. Children are often seen as the continuation of parents' lives. What seems exceptional about the case of Mrs Cui and the cases of other similar Chinese parents is the hope they have

of seeing their children realise *their* dreams and the concrete plans they devise to make these happen.

Xiao Hua's battling marriage decision

Xiao Hua was Mrs Lin's daughter. Mrs Lin had been the head of the village Women's Association for more than ten years and before that she had been a village schoolteacher. She once had the opportunity of becoming employed as an officially registered schoolteacher,[150] which could have been a lifelong job with a monthly salary and a pension after retirement. The precondition for that employment was to attend a normal school in an adjacent county, however, and she twice failed to enrol at the school. The first time around, someone who had better connections replaced her. The second time her father discouraged her from going by saying that it was not worth the trouble, given that nothing was guaranteed at that time. She heeded her father's advice, did not enrol at the school and thus missed the opportunity, which she deemed to be the most regrettable thing she had ever done. At the age of 50, it would have been so much better if she had had a secure job to subsidise her family income. Her job as the head of the village Women's Association was much less desirable because not only had she to go through the local election every three years, she also needed to chase up often delayed salaries coming from the village committee.

Mrs Lin had five younger siblings: three sisters and two brothers. The best-off

[150] There are two kinds in China: officially registered ones and those in rural citizen-managed schools who do not receive remuneration from the government.

and most enviable sibling was not Mrs Lin but the sister who married a man who later became a county official. Due to the successful marriage, Mrs Lin's sister was living in the county city/town and had the most prosperous and privileged life out of all the six brothers and sisters. At family occasions, it was this sister who always wore new clothes and jewellery and who had a driver to pick her up and drop her off. She also once casually mentioned how much money they had spent to get her son enrolled in the army,[151] an amount Mrs Lin and her husband would never be able to afford. Mrs Lin never said explicitly that she envied her sister but she would complain about how unaccustomed she was to living in their flat in the county town/city. Mrs Lin had a very good relationship with her sister, in fact, and her sister's husband had helped them in various family matters and had also helped with Xiao Hua's education.

It was not until almost the end of my fieldwork that Mrs Lin's secret envy felt towards her sister was revealed. It was the summer of 2007 and Mrs Lin's daughter-in-law happened to get know a young man whom she thought would potentially be a good match for Xiao Hua. To everybody's surprise, Xiao Hua seemed to like the young man and they started to chat regularly on the phone.[152] Neither Mrs Lin nor her daughter-in-law had anticipated that Xiao Hua would like the young man since Xiao Hua had often implied that she had no interest in getting

[151] This is seen as a privileged thing for young graduates because it can help them to climb up the ranks faster than in ordinary jobs and because it will secure them a better job after demobilisation.

[152] The man lived and worked in another location where Mr Lin's daughter-in-law used to work which is how they got to know each other. He was, however, transferred to work in another county soon after he was introduced to Xiao Hua.

married at such a young age (even though most of the girls her age were already engaged or even married). Mrs Lin was very upset, however, and made her disapproval of the match known to the family even though her daughter-in-law thought it was not as bad as Mrs Lin thought. For Mrs Lin, the young man was not well-educated and was only involved in unstable jobs while his family was too far away for them to get to know all the details about them. For Mrs Lin's daughter-in-law, the man had desirable qualities such as skills valuable to mining companies and the shrewdness to make lots of money. Therefore, for her, his educational level was not of such critical concern. All the family members became inescapably engaged in discussing whether Xiao Hua should see the young man again, however (I was asked to offer my opinion too).[153] Finally, they all agreed that the whole family should meet this man in person and then decide. The suitor came for dinner but after he left Mrs Lin's daughter-in-law showed herself to be deeply upset because of the cold and inappropriate manners Mrs Lin had used towards him. Mrs Lin made it very clear that the man was not the ideal husband for Xiao Hua. Mrs Lin's daughter-in-law told me afterwards, "For my mother-in-law, no one is good enough for Xiao Hua. I know what she wants, but how is it possible to find someone like her sister's husband for Xiao Hua?"

[153] It was actually slightly exceptional for everybody to be involved in such a matter. One reason for the involvement in this case was that Xiao Hua, at the age of 22, was seen to be too young to make such an important decision but too old to simply date a man. She was being pressured to get married in a year or two so there was no time to waste. The second reason was that Mrs Lin's daughter-in-law introduced the potential match although she was not actually supposed to, something which consequently caused tensions and generated lots of discussion.

It was not until then that I realised that every member in the family, in fact, knew of Mrs Lin's secret envy of her sister. This was because no one had openly talked about it before. Xiao Hua also knew exactly what her mother's ambition was, however, although she was too obedient to candidly confront her about it. She told me the following.

> I don't want to have a college student as my future husband. I have just graduated from high school and he might look down upon me. I now regret that I didn't study hard enough and I cannot do anything now but idle away my time at home. My parents found me a job in a glass factory in the city after my graduation but I came back after one-and-a-half days; I couldn't stand it. We worked so many hours a day and I was so exhausted after just one day. We lived in a dormitory shared by both men and women and I didn't feel secure living there. There were opportunities to work in Beijing as a waitress too. But considering that a couple of hundred in salary wouldn't even be enough for accommodation and food, how could I survive there? I don't want to marry early either. Look at those married women, either doing nothing or quarrelling with their husbands. It is not the life I want but I can't achieve anything either.

Xiao Hua often felt that she would inevitably disappoint her mother by not achieving what she wanted her to achieve. What was certain was that Mrs Lin did want Xiao Hua to marry into the county city where Mrs Lin's sister lived and that she believed that it would also be preferable for her to marry someone working in the government. Mrs Lin confessed the following to me a few days before my departure.

> I've never said this to anyone but my son has already been a huge disappointment to me.[154] I truly don't want my daughter to be another

[154] He was not able to get a good education and his wife seemed to be infertile at that time. They had been married for five years but did not yet have a child. This was seen as a big problem since in rural China at the time the primary "function" of marriage was still to "deliver descendants" to continue the family line (*chuanzong jiedai*). Not having a grandchild could also imply the termination of generational continuity.

> disappointment. My son's marriage was too hasty. But who could know it would turn out like this. Every time I think about this, I feel so upset (*nan shou*). I have high blood pressure so I can't afford to be agitated and there is nothing I can do anyway. I'm not satisfied with the young man my daughter-in-law introduced to us either. I have very high expectations for Xiao Hua. I even told her that one child had already let me down and that she should not make me feel let down again.
>
> I had hoped that she would go to university which is why I insisted on her studying in high school.[155] I would even offer for her to study for one more year to prepare for the university entrance exams if she would study harder. She didn't want to, though, and said she didn't have the talent to study (*bushi xuexi de liao*). At the least, if she can marry a nice guy working in town that would be great too. It is not that I'm just praising my own daughter but it is truly exceptional to have young girls like her these days in the countryside, someone who is good looking, well-educated [high-school education was exceptional for village girls], self-disciplined, understanding and not wild and who has a good family background too. So I do hope she can find a good match.

It can be seen that Mrs Lin's preferred method for achieving upward mobility was through education. As she herself had failed in this and, in addition, both of her children had failed to go to university, Mrs Lin had to turn her hopes to her children's marriages. Her son's marriage had also failed as he had married an infertile wife, which almost excluded all the possibilities of having a grandchild to continue the line of hope. Xiao Hua's marriage was, thus, the best hope and the last hope. All that Mrs Lin had not been able to achieve for herself, she wished for her children. If they could fulfil some of these wishes for Mrs Lin, this would not only make her proud but would also be a great comfort compensating for her own failed ambitions. To put it differently, as long as there were hopes for Mrs Lin's children and future grandchildren, her sister's enviable position would not be exclusively

[155] The high school was actually a vocational school but Mrs Lin insisted on her daughter studying normal high school courses in the hope of getting her into a university. However, her daughter actually told me that this was a waste of time and that it would have actually been more useful to learn some vocational skills.

unreachable.

Liu Jun and his father's business

Liu Jun was a 28-year-old man who had previously been working in Shandong Province. He had come back two years before, was married to a girl from a nearby village and had a 1-year-old daughter. Most of the time, the family stayed with Liu Jun's parents in their rented storehouse where trucks could easily park and load and unload the bottled beers, beverages, snacks and other stuff they were selling. Liu Jun's father was mainly a beer vender but, upon Liu Jun's return, not only did Liu Jun join his father in the business, they also opened a retail store for the young couple to run.

It was one of those crisp winter evenings and we all squeezed into the undecorated bedroom/living room of the storehouse where Liu Jun's friends usually came to visit and hang out. We were chatting about random things when it caught my attention that Liu Jun's mother was claiming that she would have killed the guy if she had ever seen him. I was startled by the sudden infuriation in her voice and asked who and what this was about. It turned out that they were talking about a guy who had signed up Liu Jun to sell products for Tiger (this was one of the so-called Pyramid schemes, called *Chuanxiao* in Chinese[156]). It was further

[156] A pyramid scheme is a non-sustainable business model that involves the exchange of money primarily for enrolling other people into the scheme, usually without any product or service being delivered. It has been known to come in many guises. The Tiger operation had certain particular products to sell but it still relied to a large extent on enrolling more people into the scheme. When *Chuanxiao* was banned in China it started having retail stores in various cities.

revealed that Liu Jun had turned down a university offer because he had wanted to be included in this "business" in Shandong Province. At the beginning, he had had to pay four thousand Yuan to get in; he had then also recruited two other young men from the same village. At this point, all of them were quite convinced that the scheme would be profitable although none of them had, in fact, made any money. Rather, they had had to repeatedly ask for subsidies from their parents. It was not until a few years later that Liu Jun's parents became suspicious about what Liu Jun had been doing. They then refused to supply any more money and insisted on him coming back home. Liu Jun's mother was still angry at the business promoter because his actions had cost Liu Jun his precious university offer and had also wasted her son's money and time.

Before he had left for Shandong, Liu Jun had actually not wanted to enrol at college because it was not a special college and he did not like studying either. He had had no intention of helping his father with delivering beers either because this involved lots of physical strength for loading and unloading. However, after a few years of business adventures of his own, he had finally resigned himself to coming back to his father's business. On another day, he continued his own story from where his mother had left off.

> It took us [him and the other two men from the same village] a while to realise that we couldn't get into the higher ranks [of the pyramid] in order to be able to earn money with Tiger. To make it sell, you need to have very good social networks (*renmai*) which we don't have in Shandong. Outsiders like us can never achieve this. It was on the basis of this realisation that we all quit. We moved on to working in a restaurant, 300 Yuan per month, plus free accommodation and food. I saved for three months and finally bought a mobile phone. I lost it the

same day, though. Three months later, the restaurant was shut down and we lost our jobs again. I had about one thousand Yuan left at that time and started to look for another job. I didn't find anything for one and a half months and we had to eat steam buns everyday and cook for ourselves. To save money, we had two meals a day, one at 11 in the morning and one at 10 in the evening. The rest of the time was spent looking for jobs. It took us one and a half months to find a job in a bathhouse.[157] Wang's job was to be in charge of *xiaojie* (prostitutes) and I was distributing bars of soap and clothes. Not long after this, I went to another bathhouse to manage *xiaojie* as well.

The basic salary was 500 Yuan but we got more in tips than the salary and you could even ask for whatever you wanted [from the *xiaojie*]. It was not like in karaoke bars where clients directly picked one girl from a queue of girls. In the bathhouse, we chose whom to bring in. Each time a girl earned 400 Yuan and paid half to the bathhouse it still wouldn't be a big deal if they gave us 20 to 30 Yuan. The smart girls knew the advantages of maintaining good relationships with us. The more business they had the more money they could earn. Only twice was I on the verge of being caught by the police.[158] Once I was supposed to be on duty but, fortunately, was actually chatting in the other room. I escaped while the rest of them were caught. The second time was a gambling raid. When the police came in, it was only me in the room with all the *Xiaojie* in another room. The door was painted the same colour as the wall so they didn't know that their targets were on the other side of it. It was all very risky. I came back after less than one and a half years.

Liu had not come back from the city of his own free will. His parents had been persuading him for some time that it would be much easier for him to run the business at home since they had already had the necessary retail networks for years. He might have had other ambitions in the city but had known that these would have been very hard to sustain. He had finally come back to do what his parents had always wanted him to do. As Liu Jun told me, "Now I just wish I could employ someone to carry the beers. It's really tiring and I envy the

[157] His parents and other neighbors did not actually know about this job as it was shameful to work with prostitutes in this kind of bathhouse.

[158] Prostitution is illegal in China.

beer wholesaler a lot". What he envied, as he revealed to me, was the idea of scaling up the wholesale business in order to earn lots of money as the regional beer representative did. Liu described the enviable life of this beer wholesaler: "His wife just bought a new car. They already had two cars before. I hope I can be like him one day". Liu Jun and his parents' divergent plans for the future were, then, reconciled after Liu Jun's return. Upward mobility was what both of them wanted. Nonetheless, getting established and succeeding in the cities was much more difficult than Liu Jun had naively believed. Under the pressure of having to get married before a certain age and of having children, he had returned to his village and continued his father's business, now only wishing for a better life in the countryside. Liu Jun might have been greatly inspired to lead the city life but had nevertheless accepted the accumulated resources coming from his father for upward mobility, something which he could later also pass on to his children. Liu Jun's return had also rekindled his parents' hopes, this being evident in Liu Jun's mother's tone of relief when recalling Liu Jun's stories and in Liu Jun's father's concrete plan for helping Liu Jun to achieve a better life.

> Now both my children have married and others might think, "You've completed your life task (*wancheng renwu*)". But I don't think that way. You can't stop. When you have a full tank of energy you can't just use half of it. I still watch the government's work report on TV and pay close attention to recent market trends. If certain products are not marketable, you should know about this immediately. I am also thinking about building another house for my son to let them live comfortably. [Isn't it their house that has just been newly built?] Yes, but that house is not good enough. I have to build a better one for them.

Liu Jun's future was what mattered for his parents. The despair Liu Jun's

mother had felt about the guy who had possibly ruined her son's future was in sharp contrast to the hope she now felt for Liu Jun's family and, particularly, his child. As I have already argued, when unfulfilled ambitions and desires are accompanied by a sense of undeserved inferiority, hope can only be reproduced through family lines because of the belief that where they have left off can be picked up as a starting point for their children; together, they can strive for a much better future.

Social climbing and transcending envy

Social stratification and the changing mechanisms relating to this phenomenon (these ranging from a planned economy to a market economy in China) have been the subject of debate for numerous scholars. From institutional-based stratification to the legacy of the imperial past, conflicting factors have collectively been shaping class status and hierarchy in contemporary Chinese society (Davis and Wang, 2009: vii). The influence of hierarchy is pervasively everywhere, from the rural-urban disparities to the capacity to negotiate *guanxi* networks. Since the 1978 reforms, some of the world's most significant acts of economic inequality have been witnessed with the formation of different social groups having been widely documented across China. The peculiarity of Chinese society, though, is that the hierarchy in China has never been seamlessly fixed this meaning that one person, or a family, can (or at least so it is believed) raise their social status in various ways, such as through education, marriage or becoming rich as Mrs Cui, Xiao Hua and Liu Jun's cases have shown.

It is clear that economic reforms have opened up opportunities for farmers to get richer in many ways but different class backgrounds still carry particular implications for those who manage to get rich. Whilst China's large number of migrant workers demonstrated that there were more opportunities for villagers to earn a living outside their villages, this fact did not imply that upward mobility was entirely open to them. Besides Liu Jun's confession, another girl also told me the following to back this view up.

> I feel it is very difficult to establish roots in cities. Many urban dwellers look down on people from the countryside. I am very bad tempered. If you despise me, I despise you too. I'm also the queen *(chengwangchengba)* of this place [in the countryside]. Why would I want to be suffering there? If you see it from the other side, life is easier in the countryside than in the cities. My husband's flat has at least 150 square meters; if you want to buy it, it is worth at least 200 thousand Yuan. [You mean in Beijing?] In Beijing, it would be worth more than 1 million Yuan. If you have a house like that in Beijing, you don't need to work or anything, you can just make money from the house.

What the girl's commentary has suggested is the sharp rural urban divide and the very limited hope of crossing over such a divide. Studies have also shown that, besides inferior working and living conditions, the dual urban-rural system also stops most migrant workers from moving upwards within the existing social stratification.[159] Increasing disparities between urban and rural areas started to appear as early as 1985 when the whole emphasis of the economy shifted from rural to urban China and a series of urban reforms began to be implemented. According to statistics for income disparity for 1979 to 1985, the government increased the prices of agricultural products and reformed the agricultural system into the

[159] See Shen Yuan ed. 2001. *Tsinghua Sociological Review*. Tsinghua University Press.

household contract management system during this period. Farmers' incomes thus grew significantly, and the gap between the incomes of rural and urban residents narrowed. Since 1986, however, the Gini coefficients[160] between urban and rural residents have gradually increased, exceeding 0.3 in 1999 and 0.35 in 2000 (Feng, 2004: 28-29). Yang points out that China has experienced the largest increase in income inequality of all the countries for which comparable data are available (Yang, 1999: 306).

The reasons for the rural-urban disparity are complex and might include the effects of resource endowments, historical heritage, economic structure, government policy, marketisation, ownership, the institutional system, the legislative system, individual differences, wealth accumulation, economic development and so forth. However complex and contested the causes, though, the fact of inequality is apparent and not only to scholars but to peasants as well. Lao Wang explained the following to me.

> Some aspects of cities and villages are incomparable. For instance, in villages near Beijing, they can rent out an apartment for one thousand Yuan. Even if we have the same-size apartment, who will come to rent it? Economic development in different regions is unequal as well. Land in suburban Beijing is worth much more than the same-sized piece of land here. No one is willing to come to a remote village like this [that is, Xitai], if not because of the mines. Because of this even you see desirable things in the cities; you can't compare them and it's just impossible to compare (*bibu zhao, meifabi*).

As Croll describes, the peasants in general felt themselves to be disadvantaged as they struggled to maintain their livelihoods in agriculture. This meant that they

[160] Although the implications of Gini coefficients are arguable depending on the country, generally the higher the number is, the greater the level of inequality is.

continued to be the Cinderella of the economy and also that they felt left behind or marginalised by the speed of reform and change (Croll, 2006: 161). Given the rural-urban divide, the peasants used not to expect to acquire the same quality of life; now, however, especially the young, as Croll rightly points out, are more likely to feel that they deserve a better quality of life and even assert their rights to similar standards of living to those of their urban counterparts (Croll, 2006: 153). The aspirations for new and improved lifestyles are also apparent in the cases presented in this chapter even though these aspirations have not yet been matched by opportunities that can actually sustain such lifestyles. Moreover, the aspirations of the young have often met with failure, disappointment, stress and even death, as in Xiao Li's case. The realisation of the unreachability of their objectives was also in large part present.

What is interesting and distinctive about China's present wealth and demand pyramid, though, is, as Croll points out, that those at the bottom still believe that the whole nation is getting wealthier so the rich are simply seen as those who got there first with the reigning assumption still being that others will follow in their footsteps via hard work and further education (Croll, 2006: 321). This unfailing hope has been echoed by Mrs Cui, Mrs Lin and Liu Jun's parents' best wishes for their children and Fong's informants' explicit plan aimed at upward mobility. In a way, the seemingly permeable hierarchy has made the upper realms of social status achievable. More importantly, the continuation of life through ones child means that such a possibility can never be exhausted. As was discussed in Chapter 1,

unreachability is a crucial factor for instigating envy. It is often not the limitation on goods but the subjective inability to have them that can cause envy. In a strictly hierarchical society, as is shown by the case of Hadhrami immigrants in Kuwait, envy is an individual mechanism for bringing down and pushing aside others with the same social status,[161] while in the case of China moving upward from one social status to another is realisable with even ones own failure being reversible by ones children. The exceptional hope carried by ones child can thus transcend envy by turning it into wishful longings and future aspirations. The moment that Mrs Cui's daughter becomes successful or Xiao Hua marries a husband in a privileged position or Liu Jun expands his father's business and makes more money (or the moment any of these become feasible), hope for oneself is also reproduced and reconfirmed.

Conclusion

Envy is not only unspeakable, it is also suppressed. As one young wife told me, "I don't envy others. It is useless to envy. It can only make your life look worse". This, however, does not imply that people do not envy only that they do not tell other people that they envy. The reason for this seems clear too as the admission of envy can only spell out the disappointment felt about what they have and the association of this with their inability to move upwards. Xiao Li, Mrs Cui, Mrs Lin and Liu Jun's parents all have people to envy. Apart from Xiao Li, though, all the others have turned their negative feelings into more practical and aspiring

[161] Alajmi, Abdullah. 2006. *An image of a limited space: Envy among Hadhrami immigrants in Kuwait.* Friday Seminar, Department of Anthropology, LSE.

endeavours (and investment) for their children. Even so the implied inferiority embedded in such envy remains undeserved; such felt inferiority can, however, be transformed into the hope of superiority through their children. Once their children are able to achieve what they have yet to achieve, the things they find enviable become reachable. In a way, malicious envy can, thus, be avoided. It should also be noted that the three cases presented here are not exceptional in Lanying and Xitai. Such inspiration and hope for ones children was, in fact, capable of motivating many people.

As we have now seen, then, the parent-child relationship has played a significant role in undermining the sense of unreachability in Chinese families. Filial piety has been central in Chinese parent-child relations. Upward mobility has also been predominant in both parents and children's separate ventures. The increasingly acute desire for upward mobility might have further contributed to the unfulfilled responsibilities for elderly care and the intensified parent-child conflicts that had become observable. The dwindling number of children resulting from the family planning policy has, in a way, caused the hopes of parents to dwindle. In this chapter I have not distinguished between the different roles mothers and fathers undertake in educating their children and the varying influences they have on their sons and daughters. Harriet Evans' study (2008) convincingly points out the importance of mother-daughter relations in shaping gendered subjectivity in China, though (these kinds of relations had previously been overlooked by massive emphasis on the relations between father and son, mother and son or the relations

between mother and daughter-in-law). As she mentions, the relation between mothers and daughters is "a relationship that evokes powerful memories, longings, and angers, and that exerts an enduring influence on women's sense of gendered self, in China as elsewhere" (Evans, 2008: 1). In this study, I see the relations between the two generations, between both mothers and daughters (or sons) and fathers and daughters (or sons), as having equally important places in the production of hope and emotional continuity.

Hierarchical unreachability is only one kind of feeling of deprivation that might arouse envy. It is, however, one of the most important ones in the context of changing social inequality and quickly reshuffled social status in post-reform China. It is by means of key life-changing events, such as education, marriage and work, that villages are constantly detecting and readjusting their societal boundaries and hierarchical limitations. As discussed in Chapter 3, social climbing and comparable competition are evidently central in village social life with both their success and failure being undoubtedly significant. The sense of shock, failure and shame (as well as the anger and disbelief) experienced at certain times was not difficult to observe, especially when there were cases involving the loss of life, which was not uncommon after the flourishing of the mining business.[162] The younger generation were apparently less settled with what they had and wished for more whilst the older generation knew that there was not much they could do

[162] Xitai had roughly five to ten deaths every year from accidents in mines or car accidents and this number was steadily growing. Many more people were severely injured each year and great concern was expressed for safety at work generally.

except transfer their hope to the next generation. The learning and negotiation of being "realistic" was important for both generations. Hope for upward mobility is common to all parents but, in the case of China, the hopes one has for ones children also act as a way of overcoming envy.

Conclusion: Towards an anthropological theory of envy

In this concluding chapter I use the case of China as a new example in order to revise the comprehensive and inspiring theory of envy proposed by Foster (1972). In his paper "The Anatomy of Envy: A Study in Symbolic behaviour", Foster puts forward an anthropological theory of envy that serendipitously originated from his study of peasant society in Tzintzuntzan (Foster, 1972: 198). The framework for the social articulation of envy and envy-reducing mechanisms, as Foster acknowledges, was born out of the accidental observation of young Mexican students' attitudes towards food, which triggered what he calls a wheels-in-motion effect (Foster, 1972: 198). A fear-of-envy framework resulted from this, a framework that had the heuristic power to interpret much wider social phenomena such as the distribution of goods, ritual, gift-giving and so on (Foster, 1972: 198). Even decades after it was conceived, Foster's theory remains the only kind of complex theory of envy supported by ethnographic data with many of its arguments still being of great relevance in the present day.

I have divided the theory into three parts: controlling envy, expressing envy and breeding envy. For each part, I will discuss what the case of China can add to the original theory of envy. What emerges is that the case of China, in my view, challenges two of the central conditions underlined by Foster's theory: the division between pre-industrial/peasant society and complex/modern ones and envy in stable slow-changing societies. On the one hand, peasants still make up the large

majority of the population in China even though they are facing constant and forcible industrial intrusion. On the other hand, the enduring transformation coming after the 1978 reform has provided new outlooks for discussing envy; the arrival of windfall wealth as a sign of the transformation has been particularly revealing in this respect.

Controlling envy: the *envier* versus the *envied*

For Foster, envy is a "pan-human phenomenon" and is viewed "at least subconsciously, as a particularly dangerous and destructive emotion, since it implies hostility, which leads to aggression and violence capable of destroying societies" (Foster, 1972: 165). Seeing the threat envy poses to oneself and to society, people fear it. "He fears the consequences of his own envy, and he fears the consequences of the envy of others" (Foster, 1972: 165). Because of this particular cultural forms and symbolic behaviour serve to neutralise, reduce or control the dangers and undesirable consequences stemming from envy (Foster, 1972: 165). What Foster is especially concerned with in his work is "envy in its major dimensions, when both the envier and the envied are assailed by strong, often passionate feelings" (Foster, 1972: 168). For Foster, "real envy of another implies, if not the wish to change places with the person envied, at least the willingness to make a real effort to achieve what is desired or, if this goal is impossible, to deprive the envied person of the object of envy" (Foster, 1972: 168). It is this kind of real envy, that is, envy with a real impact on the "mental state and personality of the envier" and envy "which arouses in the person envied real feelings of fear,

discomfort, or guilt" (Foster, 1972: 168) that is subject to cultural control.

Three categories of cultural forms are used to cope with the problem of envy, as Foster summarises. The first category is made up of "cultural forms used by a person who fears the envy of others", forms which may include concealment, denial, symbolic sharing and true sharing. Thus, "when an individual fears envy he first attempts to *conceal* his good fortune; when this is not practical, he falls back on *denial* that there is reason to envy him; when this is not adequate, he *symbolically shares*, and only as a last resort does he *truly share*" (Foster, 1972: 186, original emphasis). The second category is made up of "cultural forms used by a person who fears he may be suspected of envy", these forms mainly demanding more subtle and proper social conduct such as "not complimenting or not praising" or, whenever you do, adding other comments to reassure others of your (non-envy motivated) intentions or to indicate your absence of interest in the possessions or attributes of others (Foster, 1972: 175-184). The third category is made up of "cultural forms used by a person afraid to recognise his own envy". Given that recognising envy in oneself is "acknowledging inferiority *with respect to another*" (original emphasis) and that "to admit inferiority, either openly or masked as envy, is neither pleasant nor easy" (Foster, 1972: 184), Foster suggests that "cultures must provide the envious person, the one who feels inferior, with rationalisations and other devices which help him continue to function as a reasonably well-adjusted individual". The concepts of "luck" and "fate" — "either in some generalised form, or as the will of a deity — is the most widespread form of

rationalisation that makes an inferior position bearable" (Foster, 1972: 184)

My research is also concerned with "envy in its major dimensions", that is, envy involving a strong intention to better or, if that is not possible, sabotage the envied person or the object of envy. Red-eye is the concentrated manifestation of such envy. All three forms of envy-averting strategies have been identified for the case of China in this thesis. To put it differently, the cultural devices used to cope with envy can be summarised as the ones used by the *envied* (found in the first category) and the ones used by the *envier* (found in the second and third categories). What makes the case of China distinct is the rather strong moral pressure placed on the *envied* and the extra strategies provided for the *envier*. Apart from the tactics of concealment, denial, symbolic sharing[163] and true sharing, more delicate strategies, such as cultivating *renyuan* (popularity in social relationships) and the discourse of *suzhi* (quality), have been developed and manipulated by those people who fear the envy of others. The high moral risk of being envied and of being responsible for the improper actions arising out of other people's envy has meant that the *envied* have sometimes had to manoeuvre various public discourses to justify their possessions and moral stance.

For the *envier*, on the other hand, envy is most carefully concealed. For this reason the social norms of not complimenting and not praising have been found

[163] Foster describes symbolic sharing as "sop behavior", that is "the symbolic offer to share". As indicated by the English usage "a "sop" is a token item given to assuage the disappointment of someone who has lost in a competition, or who has not had success comparable to others" (Foster, 1972: 177-178). In China, such symbolic sharing is often manifested by offering meals or giving small gifts.

very appropriate in Chinese culture too, which has been labelled as "excessive modesty" by Schoeck (Schoeck, 1966: 55). What's more, complimenting and praising can only be spoke out in contexts when certain compensation needs to be made, such as Aunt Zhou to my envy, or her friend to Aunt Zhou after she was "criticised" as discussed in Chapter 4. The attribution of events and outcomes to luck and fate also seemed to contribute to consoling those who unfortunately felt inferior and the application of luck has in recent times been further intertwined with the contingencies of the mining business and the unexpected acquirement of wealth in Chinese mining villages. What is essential for the *envier* to be availed of positive rationalisation in the Chinese context, however, are the hopeful moments produced by ones family and, most importantly, ones children. As long as people's children can carry on striving for the desired good things in life, the envious person, the one who feels inferior, can continue to function in a well-adjusted way.

Actions attributed to red-eye instigated by mining disputes were also exceptional cases of envy both in China and outside China. On the one hand, they were exceptional because of the manifest externalisation of such a negative emotion, this resulting from the odd possibility of actually getting something out of them; on the other hand, they were also exceptional because of their transient appearances both in public discourse and in mining-related conflicts. This echoes many of the previous arguments made about envy suggesting that it is a means of control in situations of social violation. In a quickly changing society, envy remains a powerful tool and a source of moral guidance for unreasonable behaviours.

However, in the case of China, as was shown in Chapter 4, such control has been greatly weakened by people's frantic efforts to pursue money and because of the desperate need to become better off, not worse off, than others.

In addition to envy-coping strategies at an individual level, Foster (1972) also presents formal institutionalised devices for coping with envy. One of these is a redistributive mechanism characterised by, for instance, ceremonial expenditures in pre-industrial societies or taxation in complex ones. The other device is called "encapsulation", this being "a device making use of the egalitarian principle to produce subsocieties within wider civilisations, in which all members ideally have about the same access to what are considered to be the good things in life" (Foster, 1972: 185). According to Foster, in such societies, given the condition that all or most of the people accept the principle of subsocieties, "envy seems greatly reduced between people of different status, at least in traditional, slowly changing societies" (Foster, 1972: 185). In the case of China, the economic reform and the subsequent transition of the redistributive system, i.e. the transition from a socialist welfare system to an increasingly market-oriented redistributive system have made controlling envy a challenging task at the institutional level. This, as discussed in Chapter 1 has in part resulted in the striking prevalence of envy, i.e., the documented phenomena of red-eye disease and wealth-hatred mentality. In respond to this, institutional control of envy in China has been presented as a moral education for both the *envied* and the *envier* by Party newspapers.

For Foster, envy can also be categorised into two kinds: "envy between

conceptual equals" and "envy between non-conceptual equals". The former refers to envy amongst people who are deemed as eligible to "compete with each other for desired goals" while the latter is talking about envy that occurs across class or hierarchy. The strategies for dealing with the two envies are different for different circumstances. For "envy between conceptual equals", society tends to "validate the winner's claim to superiority and protects his rights to the prize" whereas for envy between non-equals the concern of the society is "to structure itself in such fashion that the disruptive effects of this envy will be minimised" (Foster, 1972: 170-171). Both the "redistributive mechanism" and "encapsulation" seem to work better for envy between non-conceptual equals. This does not necessarily imply that envy is more likely to occur between non-conceptual equals although this type of envy may be more disruptive, as Foster recognises (Foster, 1972: 185); accordingly, different priorities should be set up to control the fear of envy depending on whether people are conceptual equals or non-equals. As discussed in Chapter 3, the danger of envy stimulated by quickly widening inequality arises precisely because this situation blurs the boundaries between equals and non-equals. Many different standards have been applied to different situations which has tended to make the controlling strategies lose their power and some unreasonable behaviours to come to seem reasonable.

Foster does not explore institutional envy-coping strategies in non-traditional, fast-changing societies where redistributive mechanisms are not yet fully-fledged and where subsocieties are emerging but are widely questioned which is what we

find in China. At the village level, peasants do not express strong envy towards their urban counterparts who are much better off than them although, admittedly, the urban-rural divide is only one of the indicators of class formation in China and, as Watson (1984) notes, "the Chinese terms for classes and status groups are very difficult to pin down" (Watson, 1984: 1). Despite the distinct and changing and changeable class formation processes in China, it is, nevertheless, safe to say that envy within villages seems to fall into the category of "envy between conceptual equals". However, because of cases involving the acquisition of enormous wealth, certain villagers may quickly come to possess exclusive resources and social status. As a result of this, "envy between conceptual equals" might become subject to "envy between non-conceptual equals" which is supposedly more disruptive. What has been done in China to stop such a process at the institutional level has mainly involved two things. Firstly, at the discursive level, as shown in Chapter 1, moral condemnation has been used to ease the situation; secondly, this condemnation has been used to provide hope for those who feel inferior. As Croll points out, what is interesting about China's present wealth and demand pyramid is that those at the bottom still believe that the whole nation is getting wealthier (as mentioned in Chapter 6) meaning that the rich simply represent those who got there first and that others will follow in their footsteps through hard work and further education (Croll, 2006: 321).

Foster's theory begins with a rather negative assumption about the nature of envy, that is, its disruptive consequences and people's fear. In other words, Foster

takes fear to be negative and something which needs to be prevented while other anthropologists argue that fear may also produce positive social consequences. Cappannari's (1972) comments about Foster's article indicate that "envy has functioned in more stable societies as a reaffirmation of values ... and it can be viewed in this context as an emotion which has contributed positively to the sanction and maintenance of a social system" (Cappannari, 1972: 189). Similarly, Van Vleet draws attention to envy's active effects on women. She specifies that "in contrast to men's capital, the value of which is established by the marketplace, women's symbolic capital must be evaluated in relation to community norms for their behaviour" (Van Vleet, 2003: 505). Envy "arises from a sense that someone is gaining or advancing without proper attention to the moral obligations of sociality and reciprocity" (Van Vleet, 2003: 506). Therefore, according to Van Vleet, through gossiping, Sullk'ate women constantly "monitor the moral valuation of themselves and each other", see certain moral values as being more privileged then others and re-value certain notions about local standards of sociability (Van Vleet, 2003: 505).

Building on the proposed positive effects of envy, I want to furthermore argue that what is opposed to the *fear* of envy is the *need* to be envied. Being envied can in effect confirm that the things possessed by the envied person are widely desired and socially encouraged and can also play a positive role in avoiding social exclusion in a rural community. As was discussed in Chapter 3, it is not only good to feel superior about other people's envy, it is also essential not to be looked down upon by your fellow villagers as this might endanger reciprocal social collaboration

and, therefore, ones ability to manage social resources. Wealth is, therefore, both desirable and dangerous. It needs to be both concealed and complimented.

From the expression to the attribution of envy: witchcraft, evil eye and red-eye

According to Foster, "envy is expressed in direct and indirect, overt and symbolic forms" (Foster, 1972: 172). More specifically, "in less complex societies envy usually seems to be expressed toward the person envied by means of direct aggression and its functional equivalent, witchcraft" (Foster, 1972: 172) while "in peasant societies envy is expressed to third persons by gossip, backbiting, and defamation, potent weapons for dissuading people who seek to rise above their level" (Foster, 1972: 172). In more complex societies, on the other hand, Foster suggests that "especially in Western European society and its overseas offshoots, compliments appear to constitute a principal avenue of expression of envy", this seeming to be a "culturally sanctioned device whereby in non-disruptive fashion envy of another may be expressed" (Foster, 1972: 172). [164] Moral indignation, "like complimenting, may also on occasion represent a socially sanctioned way of expressing envy, although the object of envy [in these cases] would appear to be more diffuse and less specific than with a compliment" (Foster, 1972: 173). As another widely documented form of envy expression, evil eye is also assigned by Foster to the kinds of situation where envy is present. Evil eye differs from

[164] When Foster wrote "in suggesting that praise and compliments in Western society have an underlying psychological base of envy" he was not suggesting that "everyone who compliments is even subconsciously displaying envy" (Foster, 1972: 173).

witchcraft and other forms of expression, though, because these other kinds of envy expression are "directed at the *possessor* of the desired object, not at the object itself" while evil eye is directed at hurting the object with the possessors thus being made immediate victims (Foster, 1972: 174).

While it has been established that witchcraft and evil eye have a solid connection with feelings of envy, the connection of envy with other forms of expression has been constantly subject to serious questioning. One of the apparent difficulties in pinning down envy is that feelings of envy, as Evans-Pritchard writes, do not often show themselves, even in the presence of witchcraft.

> Usually, however, a man who believes that others are jealous of him will do nothing. He continues to be polite to them and tries to remain on friendly terms. But when he suffers a misfortune he will at once believe that it is one of these men who has bewitched him, and will place their names before the poison oracle to ascertain who among them is responsible.
>
> (Evans-Pritchard, 1937: 100-102)

Feelings of envy and jealousy have occasionally broken out in the form of public scenes, as in the case of the Zande, sometimes with the involvement of witchcraft. Nonetheless, such displays are highly dependent on weighing up the situation of misfortune and the personal relations involved, as Evans-Pritchard's ethnography notes. In a way, as I pointed out earlier in the thesis, the expression of envy is largely interpreted through the attribution of envy, whether this be by informants or the speculative anthropologist. In the light of envy attribution, witchcraft, evil eye and malicious gossip have been convincingly presented as expressions of envy in certain social contexts while complimenting and moral

indignation have tended to be seen (this has been debated in several comments on Foster's article) as less accepted forms of envy attribution (Broger et al. 1972: 188). During the trajectory from expression to attribution, the focus of envy has been expanded beyond the *envier* and the *envied.* Not only is envy sensed, acknowledged, recognised or suspected by people who are directly involved in the presence of envy, a particular way of attributing such an emotion under specific circumstances also needs to be learnt and negotiated in such cases. Moreover, such attributions are subject to constant refashioning and modification.

Taussig, in a similar vein, interprets envy as a kind of implicit knowledge that is highly situationally sensitive. As he theorises it, envy is the kind of implicit knowledge that is "slipping in and out of consciousness as a constantly charged scanner of the obtuse as well as the obvious features of social relatedness" (Taussig, 1987: 394); envy is "acquired through practices rather than through conscious learning" (Taussig, 1987: 393). Taussig writes the following.

> Implicit social knowledge is not simply a passive, reflecting, absorbing faculty of social being; it should be thought of as an experimental activity, essaying this or that possibility, imagining this or that situation, this or that motivation, postulating another dimension to a personality — in short trying out in verbal and visual image the range of possibilities and near-impossibilities of social intercourse, self and other.
>
> (Taussig, 1987: 394)

For Taussig, it is envy that, through the discussing of its manifestations and ramifications, provides "a theater of possibilities in social life" and it is on this stage that "implicit social knowledge roams and scavenges, sharpening its sensitivity, its capacity to illuminate, its capacity to wound" (Taussig, 1987: 394). In other words,

the attribution of envy is one way of making implicit knowledge explicit in discursive, magical or behavioural terms. At the root of such attributions is social relatedness; the things that have been added to the expression of envy are the legitimacy and social contour of such expressions.

Red-eye, in its discursive and behavioural expression, is, therefore, parallel to witchcraft practice and evil-eye beliefs as attributions of envy in other cultural contexts. For instance, witchcraft in Zandeland is based on the belief that "a witch attacks a man when motivated by hatred, envy, jealousy, and greed" and when "others take pleasure in his troubles and pain and are displeased at his good fortune". Therefore, people know that if they become rich the poor will hate them and if they rise in social position their inferiors will be jealous of their new privileges[165] (Evans-Pritchard, 1937: 100-102). Evil eye, on the other hand, can also bring drought to crops, slay cattle, fell trees, pollute food and water and cause houses to collapse; it can even kill small children according to some people in Brazil (Ansell, 2009: 103). For Ansell, envy is "a system of social stratification based on visible and visually impressive forms of wealth, that is, to certain media in which people store capital" (Ansell, 2009: 103) while for the Amhara people evil eye is also believed to be motivated by envy although the attribution of evil eye targets the otherness of the envious people. As Reminick points out, "Those people who are believed to have a dangerous power are not a part of Amhara society". The evil-eye people are "a completely separate category of population of different ethic origin,

[165] Such a way of reasoning can be changed as can the attribution of envy.

with a rather minimal amount of interaction with the Amhara people". The term evil eye "designates the power to curse and destroy and reincarnate, harnessing the labor of the dead for ones own ends" (Reminick, 1974: 280). What I want to suggest with the two different types of envy presented here is that both Amhara envy and Brazilian envy (of the type discussed by Ansell) can be seen as ways of attribution, the first with reference to dangerously stored capital and the second to the otherness of their rivals.

The power of red-eye can, at worst, taint others' moral standing, create obstacles for others' success and sabotage other people's achievements through spreading malicious rumours or engaging in real physical conflicts. Red-eye was at first a colloquial word for malicious envy but then it gained political significance in the 1980s when it was referred to by the Party newspapers as an expression of excessive egalitarianism. Later on, in the 1990s, its significance gradually declined, giving way to a new creation, "wealth-hatred". The attribution of red-eye largely disappeared from public debate. However, this politically charged trajectory did not seamlessly match the folk understanding and expression of envy at the local level. The attribution of such a type of envy has also varied and fluctuated in accordance with people's changing perceptions of *perceived* inequality and *perceived* equals. The local discourse on red-eye has largely represented and reproduced the public discourse of the Party newspapers but it has also offered specific local understandings of what it is reasonable to attribute to red-eye and what is not. Malicious envy was believed to motivate red-eye action but generally

only when this was provoked by newly arrived wealth; the boundaries between rightful/justified actions and red-eye ones have also been subject to negotiation.

Foster's analysis sticks to the expression of envy, though. In a society where established forms of envy expression are largely absent, it is thus important to investigate the attribution of such an emotion. Moreover, as many cases have shown, expressions of envy are often alleged expressions. The fluidity of such a concept and the constant negotiation of the ideas underlined by envy have made the claiming of particular expressions of envy increasingly difficult and limited. Even for witchcraft and sorcery and other strategies that have been closely associated with envy, their application and, most importantly, the attribution of envy can also differ when these are responding to the intervention of new forms of wealth and social relations. Therefore, how certain instances are imputed to envy and its relevance to witchcraft should be the primary concern of anthropological inquiries.

Breeding envy: from limited good to contested hierarchy

"Envy is present when one person has something a second person would like to have", asserts Foster. "The desired property may be a tangible good, such as food or money, which the envier needs for his very physical survival, or it may be a quality, attribute, or recognition that his psyche craves, and which may be necessary for his psychological well-being" (Foster, 1972: 168). These desirable goods, "either material goods" or other types of goods, are always insufficient and in limited supply; therefore, their possession by some is felt as deprivation by others and will

inevitably cause envy. This means, according to Foster, that what breeds envy is the scarcity of the desired good things in life, whether these be in the form of food, health or children (to serve as the means of survival) or power, wealth, prestige and status (which indicate ones success) (Foster, 1972: 166-168). Limited Good, that is, insufficient quantities of the good things in life (whether defined as food in societies striving for survival, or greater honours in societies when everybody is competing for the evidence of success), seems to underlie a great deal of and possibly all envy (Foster, 1972: 169).

The Image of Limited Good, as Foster (1976) further clarifies, is a "cognitive orientation" rather than a social reality (Schryer and Foster, 1976: 710); that is, it does not necessarily suggest that the quantity of those desired things is actually in short supply but rather that people *believe* it to be so. People's behaviour is, thus, framed in terms of an orientation that Foster calls Limited Good behaviour. This applies especially to "situations in which many people are competing for desirable but scarce things, where they realize that another's success will diminish ego's chances of success" (Schryer and Foster, 1976: 710). The model, more than anything else, is "to make plausible, a wide variety of behavioural forms manifested by people who live under specified conditions" (Schryer and Foster, 1976: 710). It should be noted here that structural limitations are indeed observable and factual in many cases although this does not necessarily fully correspond with people's believed limitations.

The subject's undeserved inferiority and the object's (undeserved) good fortune

are considered to be indispensable conditions for generating envy, as discussed earlier in the thesis, even though different theorists sometimes prioritise one factor over the other. The Image of Limited Good serves both conditions well in terms of the perceived scarcity of goods and the belief in equal access to these goods. Under such circumstances, no matter who acquired these desirable goods, this would make both the good fortune and other people's inferiority *undeserved.* As a result of this, Foster also interprets the Limited Good behaviour as the tendency to *maintain the fiction* of being equal (Schryer and Foster, 1976: 711). Therefore, the rising of one member tends to give rise to inexplicable tension in others. In the same vein, witchcraft and other illegitimate means of behaviour could be seen as the (only) way for the inferiors to take their superiors down (Foster, 1972: 169-170) if no other empowering institutional mechanisms exist.

Similarly, Ghosh also suggests that envy is aroused precisely by the contradiction between the asserted equality "we are one" and objective conditions that make the realisation of this impossible (Ghosh, 1983: 222). In the case of Egypt, as Ghosh describes, the contradiction is located precisely in the control of land and the organisation of household production. The latter is subject to greater envy as it is "geared towards continuous accumulation in households (e.g. in livestock)" (Ghosh, 1983: 222). In a way, for both Foster and Ghosh, envy is the result of the invalidation of a certain image, be that the Image of Limited Good or the Image of Believed Equality. Ben Ze'ev's discussion on the reducing of inequality to reduce the incidence of envy, presented in Chapter 1, confirms such an argument.

As he argues it, reducing inequality will not reduce the incidence of envy because it will only intensify the subject's feeling of undeserved inferiority. According to similar logic, envy will not necessarily increase when inequality increases. It will only increase when a pre-existing egalitarian ideal has been breached by emerging inequality, as is demonstrated by ethnographies from Africa and South America as well as from China.

Inevitably, the conditions specified for the Image of Limited Good have changed, though this may not fully invalidate the model. One of the significantly altered conditions is the diminishing extension of the "classic" peasant societies on which the Limited Good model was based — the "socially homogeneous, relatively static, rural communities of the pre-industrial world" (Schryer and Foster, 1976: 711). As Foster himself acknowledges, "a good deal of Limited Good behaviour persists but it represents cultural lag"; that is, "present conditions of growing opportunity are creating, especially among the younger generation, an increasingly apparent Image of Unlimited — or, at least, Expanding — Good" (Schryer and Foster, 1976: 711).

In my view, the power of the Image of Limited Good to explain envy lies mostly in the resulting image of the deprivation of others, whether this be to do with undeserved inferiority or undeserved good fortune. Therefore, even though desirable material goods may not be seen to be in limited supply, what is still limited, I would argue, are the possibilities for upward mobility. As is made evident by the Chinese word *panbi* (to climb and compare), social climbing is both essential

and limited. Social climbing inevitably preconditions a sequence with respect to upward mobility; that is, if one gets higher up, this will inevitably make others who remain in the same positions as before comparatively lower. In other words, if one moves higher up in the social hierarchy, the others who perceive themselves as equals will inescapably feel deprived. The acquisition of wealth, which often leads to upward social mobility, is one of the keys to moving higher up (in terms of social positions) than ones equals. Therefore, even in societies where material goods seem to be in unlimited supply, the striving for high social status can still mean that earning lots of money is associated with the deprivation of others, a situation which consequently breeds envy. What windfall wealth represents in the case of China, then, is a sort of queue-jumping effect in the struggle for upward mobility. Those who acquire large amounts of wealth in effect skip the usual steps needed for wealth accumulation and upward mobility, this breeding, in many cases, unbearable envy.

Conclusion

Foster's model of the Image of Limited Good was based on closed, peasant societies while his theory of envy is set against stable and slow changing societies, he claims. In the case of China, it is a complex hierarchical society experiencing an unprecedented and fast transition that forms the backdrop for the study of envy. While many of Foster's insights still seem applicable and stimulating for such a case, a good number of the conditions and methodologies (as well as the theories) for the study of envy are evidently different. By examining envy and its attribution

in transitional China, I have been able to list culturally specific envy-coping strategies for both the *envier* and the *envied* which, I have argued, originate from both the *fear* of envy and the *need* to be envied. If we continue to explore only the expression of envy and its underlying logic we will, in my view, miss the social contouring of the connection between feelings of envy and socially tolerated actions arising out of envy. It should also be noted that such a social contouring is subject to constant challenge and negotiation, especially when moral behaviour has been disrupted by new forms of wealth. Investigating the attribution of envy could enlarge the scope of envy studies and enrich our understanding of changing sociality and the subjective strategies adopted to cope with such a transition. It is equally important to explore strategies that do not prevent envy as such but to prevent envy from turning into useless or malicious action.

As Foster and many other theorists have suggested, the deprivation of others is a critical condition for breeding envy. Such deprivation can result in both the subject's undeserved inferiority and the object's undeserved good fortune, both of which are essential for stimulating envy. When society seems to be significantly less governed by the Image of Limited Good, what remains limited and subject to severe competition, in my view, are the opportunities for upward mobility. Windfall wealth is not only a new form of wealth, it is also something that can substantially challenge people's ideas about accumulating wealth and about how to move higher up in the incessant process of social climbing. The emergence of windfall wealth is by no means unique to China as new forms of wealth have also been documented

by other anthropologists around the world. The recurring problem of envy and, in some cases, the obsessive discussing of envy has also started to surface in ethnographies describing Latin America and Africa. It can be seen, then, that envy can be a powerful tool for accessing people's subjective understanding of social relations, windfall wealth, widening inequality and social transformation. This thesis can only be seen as the start of such a collaborative effort.

List of characters

bazi 八字

baofu 暴富

bishang buzu, bixia youyu 比上不足，比下有余

bufuqi 不服气

chixinwangxiang 痴心妄想

chou fu xintai 仇富心态

dui bu qi ren 对不起人

eqian 讹钱

fanxinsi 犯心思

fenzi qian 份子钱

fuhenni, qiongmani 富恨你，穷骂你

fuqi 福气

ganqing 感情

guanxi xue 关系学

guo de hao, renjia yanhong ni; guo de buhao, renjia xiaohua ni 过的好人家眼红你，过的不好，人家笑话你

haodao (zhengdao) 好道（正道）

huaqian ru liushui 花钱如流水

hudaluannao 胡打乱闹

huibanshi 会办事

hongyanbing 红眼病

jidu 嫉妒

jianren xia caidie 见人下菜碟

kaoshan chishan, kaoshui chishui 靠山吃山，靠水吃水

kuangdian 矿点

laodong zhifu 劳动致富

lingqing 领情

mei caiming 没财命

mengdanghudui 门当户对

meifu zuobuzhu 没福坐不住

meiqian de kanzhe youqian de, youqian de kanzhe xiangshou de 没钱的看着有钱的，有钱的看着享受的

mianzi 面子

ming 命

mu xiu yu lin, feng bi cui zhi; dui chu yu an, liu bi tuan zhi; xing gao yu ren, zhong bi fei zhi 木秀于林，风必摧之；堆出于岸，流必湍之；行高于人，众必非之

pingjunzhu yi 平均主义

qiannengshengqian 钱能生钱

qidehuang 气的慌

qinmin zhengce 亲民政策

qiongdeqiong, fudefu 穷的穷，富的富

qiucai 求财

renduozuiza 人多嘴杂

renmai 人脉

renqing 人情

renqqingfenwang 人情份往

renyuan 人缘

renyuan hao (cha) 人缘好（差）

ren zuo de hao, bucunzai yanhong wenti 人做的好，不存在眼红问题

shfu jipin 杀富济贫

shetou xiamian neng siren 舌头下面能死人

shuole you shayong 说了有啥用

shoulei qian 受累钱

shoulei bu taohao 受累不讨好

shouqian dui (yangge dui) 收钱队 （秧歌队）

suzhi 素质

sunren bu liji 损人不利己

xia gu 下蛊

xianmu 羡慕

xianfu houfu 先富后富

xiangsheng xiangke 相生相克

xinku qian 辛苦钱

xueguangzhizai 血光之灾

yanchan 眼馋

yanhong 眼红

yanhong ye bai yanhong 眼红也白眼红

yanqi 眼气

yilunfenfen 议论纷纷

you benshi, you nengnai 有本事，有能耐

you chuxi 有出息

youqian (meiqian) 有钱（没钱）

yuantianyouren 怨天尤人

yumin yao jiaoyù, liangmin yao guanli 愚民要教育，良民要管理

zhaojihui xiashou 找机会下手

zhigenzhidi 知根知底

zheng 争

zouzou jiu laiqian 走走就来钱

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